

Persona and Shadow Notes

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Strong ego: flexible, meaning it can take in feedback or a differing view/opinion and consider it. A strong ego can look at situations and opportunities from an objective viewpoint and also be informed by the subjective viewpoint. Logic plus feeling, reason plus personal values.

PERSONA

Definition of Persona

The face, or facade, that we present to the world. The persona is usually made up of "ideal" aspects of ourselves. We put forward the features/characteristics of ourselves that are valued by our family, community, culture.

The persona is a functional complex that comes into existence for reasons of adaptation or personal convenience. (CW6:801)

At its centre is what could be called the social archetype, or conformity archetype. Every society devises a means of exchange and mores or guidelines for relationships, constituting an archetype around which a persona forms. The persona is like a PR expert, relating to the external world in a way that appeals to others. It can be likened a shop window in which the shopkeeper displays his/her best merchandise.

The persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is. (CW9ii:221)

Originally the word persona meant a mask worn by actors to indicate the role they played. The actor spoke through the mask.

An person's persona may look individual, but it is so shaped by the collective of which the person is a part that it isn't true individuality.

Development of the Persona

When we analyze the persona, we strip off the mask and discover that what seemed to be individual is at bottom collective; in other words, that the persona was only a mask of the collective psyche. Fundamentally the person is nothing real: it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be. He takes a name, earns a title, exercises a function, he is this or that. In a certain sense all this is real, yet in relation to the essential individuality of the person concerned it is only a secondary reality, a compromise formation, in the making of which others often have a greater share than he does. (CW7:245f)

In short, in modern language, creating a persona is called socialization. It is the duty of parents to socialize a child about behaviour that will help the child fit into society as an acceptable social creature and a good citizen. This process of teaching, disciplining,

rewarding and monitoring a child's behaviour has a big impact on the child's eventual persona.

As the child matures into and through the teen years, he or she chooses aspects of the socialization to incorporate into the face shown to the world.

The persona is, as its name implies, a mask of the collective psyche, a mask that feigns individuality, making others and oneself believe that one is individual, whereas one is simply acting a role through which the collective psyche speaks. (CW7:245)

The persona is a mask of the *collective* psyche and usually reflects what our society praises, values, holds in high esteem. Self-sufficiency, success, independence, beauty, slimness, cheerfulness, kindness, education, achievement, independence...

The ego attaches itself to some of these ideals, and incorporates them into the persona. This is necessary in the first half of life. This helps us become members of our society. The persona is joined with the ego; it is made up of ego-ideals. At some point in life, we are required to differentiate the persona from the ego, allowing it to reveal more of the Self, the core of who we naturally are.

Like the actor's mask, the persona reveals a person's role in a particular situation, and mediates expression (or the speaking of the role) through the facade/mask.

The common understanding of persona involves the person's outer appearance: style, dress, posture, body language, hair, makeup, fashion. It also includes career, credentials – in short, the marketing of ourselves.

But it also goes deeper than that, involving more subtlety.

- For instance, consciously choosing what we will reveal about ourselves in a situation, and what we will not reveal
- Attitude: choosing the attitude with which we go into something – will we let our mood determine our behaviour or our experience?
- Presence: how we fill our role in a given situation – overfill (leaving no room for others), under-fill (we leave gaps which others must fill), appropriately fill (there is room for others to contribute in the context of us doing all that our role requires); the quality of our presence is the most important factor in everything we do.

A healthy persona can:

- Show up
- Pay attention
- Speak your truth
- Let go of the outcome

The Role of the Persona

The role of the persona is to mediate between the ego and the external world. Due to this orientation to the outer world, the persona has a collective nature to it. Jung saw it

as a vital part of the personality because it provides a protective covering for the individual's inner self.

The psychological function of the persona is to provide a mask, or covering, through which the ego can relate to and mix with other people. Such **protection** is necessary for the ego to gain enough confidence, stability and strength to fulfil its task of making decisions, of following through, of discerning what is good and right and wholesome for the individual as he or she navigates the outer world. In fact, civilized society depends on interactions between people through the persona. It is therefore a much-needed part of the psyche.

A psychological understanding of the persona as a function of relating to the outer world makes it possible for a person to assume a particular persona at will, as when we go to work. This knowledge also enables us to drop the work persona while we're at home with our family.

By rewarding a particular persona, the outside world invites us to identify with it. Money, respect and power come to those who perform single-mindedly and well in a social role.

Persona Problems

If the ego identifies with the persona, we fail to have the kind of ego-flexibility that allows us to switch personas as needed. We are always in work mode, for instance, and fail to develop emotionally satisfying relationships or hobbies or playfulness. A sense of personal connection is lacking. The person may look good, yet it's like no one is home.

On a broader level, when the ego identifies with the persona, it is capable of only an external orientation. It is blind to internal events and therefore cannot respond to them.

There are people who lack a developed persona...blundering from one social solecism (faux pas) to the next, perfectly harmless and innocent, soulful bores or appealing children. (CW7:318)

Solecism means a breach of good manners, an instance of incorrect behaviour.

In other words, these people have not been adequately socialized into the outer world of people. Either the socialization didn't take, or it was deficient. When the persona is underdone and inadequate, the individual is left exposed and vulnerable. This sometimes comes through in the form of telling too much about oneself, or incessant talking with a blindness to normal social cues.

If the persona is overdone and insubstantial, the person pretends to be someone they are not. There is a shallow and shifting quality to their interactions with others. The persona then does not fill its role of protecting the individual's inner world because the persona is split off from the inner essence of the person. The ego then does not have an authentic ground from which it can make decisions that are aligned with the individuality of the person.

The best case is when the persona is appropriate and tasteful in the outer world while also allowing a true reflection of our inner individuality and our outward sense of self.

SHADOW

Definition

...that which we do not wish to be...(CW16:470)

The shadow usually has a decidedly negative feeling-tone...it is accompanied by more or less definite and describable feeling-tones. (CW9ii:53)

The ego-consciousness is able, by means of a considerable expenditure of energy, to repress the shadow, at least temporarily. (CW9ii:53)

Jung discovered the shadow through his work with psychiatric patients and the use of the Word Association Test. He identified the shadow as an archetype because, again, disturbances of consciousness have been around forever. The shadow has the most frequent and most disturbing influence on the ego. For the most part, it is made up of personal contents that have been rejected or repressed. It is therefore a relatively accessible archetype, and its contents can be integrated to some degree.

Fear of the Shadow

However, most of us don't want to touch it. The shadow challenges the whole ego-personality, for it contains elements of ourselves that have been socialized out of us. We have learned, often through experience, that these characteristics are undesirable or even dangerous.

Yet, this justified fear of the shadow, and our avoidance of the shadow, carries major consequences.

A man cannot get rid of himself in favour of an artificial personality without punishment. Even the attempt to do so brings on...unconscious reactions in the form of bad moods, affects, phobias, obsessive ideas, backsliding vices, etc. The social "strong man" is in his private life often a mere child where his own states of feeling are concerned. (CW7:307)

So, we are caught between a rock and a hard place. We created a shadow in order to develop a functional persona. And then, at some later point, life goes flat. We feel trapped inside an identity that is too small or that feels untrue. The shadow offers new life through bringing forgotten or undeveloped aspects of ourselves into play. As well, bringing shadow contents into awareness releases energy for the ego – psychic energy that has not been available for the ego to use.

The act of admitting the darkness within ourselves threatens the ego's perception and experience of itself. Why is the shadow so frightening to us? Partly because it contains things that society frowns on, or rejects us for, or punishes us for. Whatever is in the

persona often has its opposite in the shadow. Those aspects of being human that are not valued or accepted by the collective will often reside in an individual's shadow. Examples are vulnerability, spontaneity, dependence, unfocused attention (daydreaming).

Everyone has a shadow, whether they admit it or not. Think of a lamp, or the sun, or a flashlight. Any bright light casts a shadow. Always. Ego-consciousness is a form of light, and it therefore casts a shadow in one's personality. The density of the shadow will be equivalent to the brightness of the persona. Someone who insists on living in the light, who is always cheerful and bright and available and generous and good will have a shadow of deep dark neediness. Only vampires cast no shadow; having no substance of their own, they feed off the life force of others.

It is not uncommon for us to provoke in others what we do not recognize or admit in ourselves. Likewise, when someone draws out the worst in us, we may be enacting some strongly resisted aspect of their shadow that attracts a similar feature of our shadow. The same can happen in a positive way: someone can bring out the best in us, calling to some undeveloped part of ourselves lying dormant in the shadow.

Coming to Terms with the Shadow

This brings us to the work of coming to terms with our own shadow, which is a very individual matter. Generally speaking, the process involves three things.

Jung tells us what Step One is:

To become conscious of the shadow involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. (CW9ii:14)

1. Accepting that we have a shadow. Taking that fact seriously. Believing it. This step is not easy: "it meets with considerable resistance."

Jung gives us a clue for Step Two:

Closer examination of the characteristics of the shadow reveals that they have an emotional nature, a kind of autonomy (archetype), and accordingly an obsessive or even possessive quality. (CW9ii:15)

2. Become aware of what's in our shadow by paying conscientious attention to our moods, fantasies, reactions and impulses. In dreams, shadow figures usually show up in the form of the same sex, sometimes of a different race. Projections are huge pointers to shadow material. Over-reactions of annoyance or of admiration can indicate a projection of something rejected or undeveloped in ourselves. Those things are usually part of the shadow.

It helps if we can be curious about what bugs us in other people rather than simply being irritated. Being curious about what we deeply admire in someone else. What does

this tell me about me?? These give clues to shadow contents, whether dark or bright, negative or positive.

This step of attending to our own fantasies and reactions is a lifelong process, and while we are awakening to the realities that those things show us, we need to be pursuing Step 3.

3. Ego and shadow must negotiate around expanding the personality to include each new characteristic in a manner acceptable to the ego. Only in this way does the personality expand and increase in texture and substance.

Each new content has to go through this negotiation.

Sometimes integrating a shadow content means an ego-choice to develop some part that could bring more humanness to our personality, such as learning to make ourselves vulnerable at appropriate times, loosening up so that we can be spontaneous or playful. Or choosing to give room to our creative self and even allowing someone else to see our creative work.

Sometimes assimilating a shadow-content means only being aware of it, being aware of our ability to bully or shoplift or defame. Granted, a deep awareness of this part of ourselves often comes from unconsciously doing one of those things and then waking up to the pain/embarrassment of what we just did.

To become conscious of the shadow involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. **Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period.** (CW9ii:14)

This process of coming to terms with the Other in us is well worthwhile, because in this way we get to know aspects of our nature which we would not allow anyone else to show us and which we ourselves would never have admitted. (CW14:706)