Pablo Picasso's Painting from the Perspective of C.G. Jung's Psychoanalysis

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Abstract: The Jungian psychoanalytical thinking will detach itself from the common opinion that often considers painting as an expression of the plastic artist's critical opinions, as an image of what is supported by the lucidity of his consciousness. Jung will introduce in his own interpretation on the phenomenon of art the concept of unconscious, considering that the main source of inspiration and data that support the whole creational complex generated by an artist is the area of the individual unconscious and, especially, of the collective one. As a consequence, he will consider that the pictorial images elaborated by Picasso, as one of the greatest modern artists, have their origin in the dimension of the unconscious psychic activity. Therefore, they would not represent an exercise of pictorial satire, of critical caricatures of the spatiotemporal or exterior reality, as Jung calls it, but, on the contrary, it would reveal another type of reality, the one of the unconscious telluric. In this context, Jung will ask himself, what could be Picasso's pictorial characters that are representative for the unconscious drives? Who does the harlequin, the best-known of all these characters, the most represented subject in Picasso's work represent? What correlations could exist between him and Faust's image or that of Nietzsche's buffoon?(Goethe, 1995; Nietzsche, 1996) Does the opening of Picasso's art towards the unconscious prove to be a path breaker in relation to the subsequent developments of post-modern art? In its turn, does the Jungian psychoanalytical thinking not represent, in its turn, an inaugural endeavour for the whole post-modern cultural trend?

Keywords: Unconscious, pictorial creation, psychic interiority, psychic exteriority, harlequin's image, the neurotic type, the schizophrenic type.

1. Introduction

In the endeavour of approaching Pablo Picasso's artistic creation, Jung will state, from the very beginning, the distance that his analyses take from the aesthetic field and from the one related to art criticism. It is not the psychoanalyst's competence to rule definitively on these perspectives and to extend his competences in areas different from the nature of his main concerns. Of course, art and artistic achievements must be one of the major dimensions of the psychological analytics. But what must be of a greater concern here, notably in psychology and psychoanalysis, is not the axiology of the artistic work, its value and its aesthetic importance, but the psychic reasons that generated its elaboration and its proposal for the public and the specialized critique. Thus, considers Jung, like the psychoanalytic approach to literary works, and if the same type of approach is made over a painting or over an entire pictorial work, what is envisaged is related to the psychological dynamics and drives that led the artist to the realization of that particular work. Therefore, the psychoanalyst is interested in what the painting expresses as a window to the artist's psyche, as an opening to his unconscious. Furthermore, the pictorial symbolism refers to the collective unconscious as a basis where the mobility of the artist's individual unconscious is manifested. Thus, the telluric experiences, the frustrations, the complexes, the inner wishes of the artist can only constitute a part of the source of the psychic energy represented symbolically through the artistic creation. There is a significant range of generation for the inspiration of the painter belonging to the collective unconscious, with the artist performing, in this context, the role of an intermediate medium term, conveying, in a symbolic form, this information which arises from the collective unconscious. For Jung, archetypes, as moulds and primordial functional units of the unconscious, make their mark towards the conscious and express themselves symbolically in the work of art. There are, according to Jung, individual archetypes, which are formed as a result of the evolution of the artist's personal life, and that represent units deposited from childhood towards maturity. These archetypal shapes commonly find their form of symbolic expression via the work done throughout life, and a painting often gathers unconscious symbolic expressions of this type. At the same time, there are also archetypal structures which belong to the collective unconscious, so they have an ancestral dating, they belong to the unconscious of all humanity and emerge on the level of certain creative personalities, such as painters. They get through the scope of the artist's

individual conscious, exposing their data through the pictorial symbolism. Such unconscious information can surprise the painter's consciousness, who will consider that he has been inspired and dominated by the dynamics of the collective unconscious or, in Jung's terms, was taken into possession by the flow of the unconscious ancestral sphere, common to all mankind. What are these unconscious data, what is their nature and ontic scope, what can hide behind them and who or what can dictate their emergence through the psyche of a particular artist, remain dilemmas within the limits of which the psychoanalytic exploration stops, for the time being. Jung was at the expense of meeting such dominant unconscious factors when he wrote the Red Book, a confessional work that abounds in pictorial images and visionary messages, unconscious contents that Jung relates while confessing the experience of having known them, but without having the answer to queries and dilemmas regarding the nature, purpose and possible authority that would dominate the collective and individual psyche.

2. Jungian Perspectives on Pablo Picasso's Paintings

With regard to the case of Picasso, Jung will evoke the methods and techniques of approach that he has experienced in relation to his own patients. Thus, one of the methods recommended for lowering the unconscious psychic tension and for reducing the distance between conscious and unconscious is that of representing images graphically or pictorially, of sketching architectures that are made available by the overflowing imagination of certain patients. In essence, the consequences are not really imagined but recorded, described and exposed. They originate from the scope of the individual unconscious and, in particular, from the area of the collective unconscious mobility. This unleash has inaugurated the tendency of re-balancing and stress relieving of that particular patient's psyche, as well as the beginning of a re-approach between the individual unconscious and the individual conscious, a risk of a too high distension, likely to generate a serious mental illness, thus being dimmed, the relationship of the two psychological instances must be one of compensation and not of mutual exclusion(Jung, 2007a). Therefore, these images, these pictorial or graphical representations do not come from outside, they do not belong to the outer space at any level of correspondence. The entire symbolic baggage occurred here has its source in the dynamics of psychic inner dimension. The same, considers Jung, can be said about Pablo Picasso's paintings. They do not express an outer universe, in the sense of a description, a series of narrative and pictorial images, they

do not expose and relate aspects of the outer dimension. Their content does not involve significant correlations with the outer spatiotemporal environment. On the contrary, there is a real defiance in the imperatives of the real world, with a denial of the laws of space and time, a superposition over these circumscriptions of our physical universe. The situation is similar to the oniric condition, when the physical laws are ignored and the space and time are placed in a special register, incompatible with the mundane reality. The iconic factors that show no correlation with the enveloping outer reality, represent, from the perspective of the Jungian psychoanalysis, in Picasso's creations, elements emerging from the psychological inner dimension. But, according to Jung, this inner dimension is not governed by chaos, it cannot be thought as a flattened uniformity, which merges into a pulsatile content any possible form or determination. On the contrary, on the other side of the conscious there is, according to Jung, another type of order and structure, another version of ordering the psychic contents. The fact that the universe of a dream does not bend over the imperatives of the physical world does not equate with the absence from that universe, of an organized harmony or advancement. In the same way, the images exposed through Picasso's paintings do not indicate an area of chaotic derives, but of another type and of another architectural configuration than the elements of our spatiotemporal reality. They are the expression of the unconscious individual and collective archetypal universe, a world that cannot be identified and measured according to the standards of the conscious and the outer world. Furthermore, as stated by Jung, the major decisions and choices that are postulated to be an election of the consciousness are, essentially, the resultant of choices made at the level of the unconscious, with this latter being the authority that controls, from the inside, the dynamic and the complex activity of the consciousness. Therefore, from this pole of decision-making psychic power emerge the pictorial images rendered by the work of Picasso, the outer world is not a part of these images. The fact that we do not retrieve the reality in Picasso's paintings tends to support the idea that his representations are a distortion and even a satire of the outer world. In fact, it is not about a deconstruction of the elements of reality, followed by a tendentious and malevolent rearrangement, with the purpose of mocking the mundane inserted into the spatiotemporal dimension. According to Jung, it is not in this way that Picasso's works should be interpreted. What is expressed in these works represent data of the individual and collective unconscious, data involving a different logic and essential constitution. This differentiation in relation to the external reality can result fallaciously in the impression that we would experience a deformation of reality and a mockery

of its configuration. If such a version was truthful, then the inversion of the data could lead to a paradoxical situation in which the outer reality could be understood and seen as a caricature of the inner reality. Then the spatiotemporal mundane could be posited as a satire of the inner world. For Picasso, considers Jung, this perspective has not been a positive option, that he could have chosen unconditionally. On the contrary, as an artist, he set the torrent of the individual and collective unconscious free to flood the conscious, in order to generate these exceptional pictorial images. Therefore, in his work one cannot talk about a caricature or a deformation of reality, but about the symbolic interpretation of another reality, the one that defines the area of the dynamics of the unconscious.

From Jung's perspective, patients suffering from psychiatric disorders can be divided into two broad categories. A first class belongs to neurotics. Images drawn by these ones are characterized by a clarity and coherence of the forms, by an appropriate succession of normal parameters. The archetypal symbolism emerged from the unconscious is here expressively uniformed and the feeling of the doctor who examines these visions is one of balanced rigor. What is missing, in the context of the formulation and exposure of these images is affection, the factor of sentimental outbreaks. We are witnessing a cold, uniformed confession in images, where there are not any nuances of an inner vibration or modulation, from which the psychic radiation of an appealing wave is missing. It is the sensation of a rigid image, without references or detours towards the plan of emotional exacerbation, without the gaps or brackets of some falling or disturbing spiritual ascendancy. The second class is represented, according to Jung, by the category of schizophrenics. The images evoked by them abound in divisions, snags, reversals and distortions, all these modulations occurring amid an intense emotional disorder. Basically, in this case, what dominates is the extreme excitement and fever of the sentimental factor. It is about, in Jung's opinion, the supremacy of de-fragmentation. The images presented by schizophrenics are the exponents of a new harmony, of an absence of coherence and pictorial narrative successions. What is described does not have any compatibility with the fluency of harmony or of the mundane logics. If in the case of neurotics, one can talk about a similarity between reality and the vision of a neurotic, in the pathological situation of the schizophrenic, what characterizes the images, narrated in this context, is defined by Jung through the term of *fissures of the psychic rejection*. We are witnessing here, therefore, an archetypal outbreak, transposed symbolically, that emerges on the background of some intense mental blockages arising from frustrations, multiple complexes and,

last but not least, from the extreme narrowing of the content of the active consciousness, reduction which allows unconscious contents to be raw and unrestrained. These ones seize and dominate the psychic surface of the schizophrenic, generating the symbolic outbreak of fractional, decomposed and recomposed images. Thus, the doctor is confronted to a universe which is very distinct from the spatiotemporal reality, with the Jungian psychoanalysis considering these productions not a distortion of reality, but a portrait of the extremely active telluric dimension at the level of the individual unconscious, and, especially, at the level of the collective unconscious. Here, the drastic reduction of the conscious function in being the barrier of selection and blur of the unconscious flow, allows its expression and its outpouring in symbolic formulas, forms that present another reality, without having to refer to the exigencies that circumscribe, from a temporal and a spatial point of view, the profane universe of the outer world. Images rendered by the schizophrenic involve a brutal impact, a sincere development of a direct expression that brings to the fore the unconscious reality without the reserves or restrictions of ethical codes. Thus, these visions can transmit to the doctor or to the one who examines them an anxiety and an emotional disorder by their often grotesque nature, which is frontal and deprives of inhibitions of the iconic information given. Asserting that Pablo Picasso belongs to the schizophrenic typology, Jung attracted various critics and has detailed his position in this both aesthetic and psychological matter. Thus, he stated that one can speak of a pathology of the disease and of a pathology of the genre of artistic creation. Picasso is a schizophrenic of the pictorial creation, he represents the typology of the schizophrenic cultural genius, that is the generator of brilliant symbolic expressions of unconscious contents. When Jung refers to Picasso's *schizophrenia*, he never refers to a clinical mental illness, but to the features of creation and artistic vision through which this exceptional creator marked the universal history of the painting. Basically, his genius shows signs of mental abnormality, which can point to a location beyond the normal parameters of the human soul dynamics. It is a situation encountered in the case of clinical mental illness, but here the nature, the architecture and the finality of the genius' abnormality is different from those of sanatorium patients.

From Jung's perspective, both categories, both the neurotic type and the schizophrenic, have in common *the symbolic content* of the data represented. The major difference here comes down to the way of reporting of the two classes to their own images described, visions coming from the unconscious. Thus, the neurotic constantly tries to interpret and to translate

the vision experienced by the doctor or by the auditor. He wants to define and regulate his own image coming from the unconscious, he wants to clarify and classify this image coming from the telluric dimension of his individual psyche or, through it, from the sediment of the collective unconscious data. Therefore, the neurotic hopes to be understood by others and strives to grant to his account a coherence capable to produce the understanding of that particular vision. In this context, he may be aiming at his own understanding. Thus, trying to clarify the message of those particular visions for the others, he actually intends to crystallize his own in-depth knowledge of images he lives as unconscious eruptions represented symbolically. Instead, the schizophrenic, called like this by Jung in the sense of a person belonging to the class of individuals with a schizophrenic personality type, does not show any indication of a desire to explain and understand his own unconscious images. Basically, he leaves the impression that he is a victim, a tool of these visions, more precisely, a simple medium term that is taken into the possession of the flow of unconscious images. The plastic and symbolic elements, on which the neurotic gives the impression of exerting his control, become, for the schizophrenic, makers of intense rule and supremacy in relation to the authority of his conscience. Thus, he does not intend to give an explanation or make a presentation that would provide the possibility of multiple classifications and definitions of the components of his visions. Jung highlights the fact that the schizophrenic, understood in the broad sense of the term, leaves the indefinable, the mystery to characterize the images that he describes as states coming from the unconscious. He even gives the impression that it would contribute to the enhancement of this mystery of visions represented symbolically. All these features of the schizophrenic typology, postulated as the representative of a particular mental orientation that excess normal limits, so not only as an exponent of schizophrenia can be found, from Jung's perspective, in Pablo Picasso's artistic personality. His art unleashes without circumscriptions capable of control, the unconscious flow, wrapping it in an obscure and mythical symbol. Thus, the pictorial themes of Picasso appear as diurnal and nocturnal characters, the telluric blue or the face of the Moon. These topics remind, according to Jung, of the Egyptian mythology which, in its turn, expresses the important data of the collective unconscious. The teenage prostitute, the horse or the woman with the child are other characters that find their place in Picasso's artistic expressions. All these individuals are rendered as they emerge from unconscious images, so they are characterized by other dimensions and other parameters than those active in the daily spatiotemporal world. The focus of these pictorial

descriptions, considers Jung, focus, however, on the dynamics of the obscure, of the sobriety of shadows from the unconscious, of the dangerous attraction towards the modulations of evil and psychic negativity. The fact that Picasso represents these components of the unconscious, therefore a different world than that of the outer space and time, does not indicate a lack of contact or correspondence between his work and this universe exterior to the psychic area. On the contrary, if at the core of the conscious lies the unconscious, then the images arising from this latter represent pulsatile grounds bearing and deciding the evolution of human consciousness, therefore of the spatiotemporal world. What Picasso plays symbolically represents another dimension which is beyond or behind the spatiotemporal dimension, influencing decisively the activity of the conscious inserted into its frames. From that dimension shrouded in the reality of the conscious emerge, as symbols, in the work of Picasso, characters like Eva, Elena, Maria and Sophia, as ancestral representations of the eternal feminine or Kundry as quiescence of the prehistoric ugliness, of the infernal grotesque. Jung will ask himself, in this context, through which symbol-character is represented the aesthetic attention of Picasso, his individuality, which descends into the unconscious in order to meet these telluric psychic realities and in order to allow them their symbolic surface eruption? According to the Jungian analytics, this character is the *harlequin* (Jung, 2007b, pp. 142-146). Not coincidentally, his image, the buffoon's portrait represents a frequent theme in Picasso's paintings. The harlequin represents, in the extensive history of his symbolism, the witness by excellence, the one that combined the millennial experience from the ancestral beginnings and from Antiquity to modern times, when he dissimulates his presence, but remains the same careful and lucid observer. His peregrination through human history makes him resemble Goethe's Faust, figure constantly in search of truth and telluric power (Goethe, 1995, p. 100), and beyond their chromatically loud clothes, beyond the cup of wine or the lute, as items of clothing, lurks the sediment of an ancestral wisdom, developed through time and tested for millennia. Picasso is trying to assume the role of a Harlequin who assists in the dynamics of the unconscious and in the evolution of telluric drives of the human psyche, drives that decide upon the outer mobility of the conscious and of the spatiotemporal world. Pondering over the ultimate goal, over the ultimate destination that Picasso's harlequin envisages, Jung will consider that we can talk about a target-landmark that has a psychological, but also a mystical character. It is about uniting opposites, about the symbiosis between opposed poles, about interweaving of extremes and instituting the divine balance between

opposite factors. Picasso mixed up *the mania for eternity* and anchoring in the voluptuousness of the beauty of the matter (Apollinaire, 1992) the road for the joining of loud colours and the Jungian psychoanalysis will assume that each colour in Picasso's paintings represents a feeling of the painter. Therefore, the evolution of his artistic work towards representations showing intensely contrasting colours brought together, reflects the trend of unification of opposed feelings, unification showing the orientation of the conscious towards the approach of restoration of the unitary psychic harmony. The tragic duality of the harlequin's performance does not come to negate the symbolism of the mental evolution that it represents. Moreover, as Jung states, the diamond formations that are presented graphically on his costume indicate a perpetual development, despite the inherent difficulties and tragedies occurring at the meeting of the harlequin with multiple disorders of the heart dynamics. Looking at him in Picasso's paintings, Jung will testify that he experiences the feeling of an awe in front of the concentration of significance of this character, entity who recalls the buffoon from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, charismatic figure that addresses to the wire dancer with the formula *your soul will die faster than your body*. In the Jungian psychoanalytic interpretation, this dancer can only be the conscious walking through life above the ontic void, and the buffoon represents the unconscious or the mental attention focused on the unconscious, that superior alter ego from which may occur the redemption or the collapse of the entire individual psychic complex (Jung, 2007b, pp. 146-148). The image of the buffoon is often used by Nietzsche to indicate a superiority of knowledge, a holding of some additional data, which essentially gives a decisive advantage in the face of the superficial science of the man trapped in the everlasting daily routine ((Nietzsche, 1996)

3. Conclusions

Picasso's paintings opened the levels of the post-modernist vision of the world, offering an insight into the reality that does not intend to be loyal to this one, but to its metaphysical springs and grounds. So, what indicates the work of Picasso, as deemed by the (Jung, 2007b) Jungian psychoanalytical thinking, represents the journal of a travel through the area of the individual and collective unconscious, dimension from which emerge the foundations supporting the entire universe of the human world. In terms of artistic techniques, Picasso was one of the first users of the collage, a practice that was considered as an anticipation of postmodernism. At the same time, his ideas transposed in images, found, later on, their

materialization in the field of the design and clothing industry. All these clues are coming to highlight not only the importance of the artistic value of Picasso's work, but also its correspondence with a generally valid psychic human reality, dimension that the modern man tends to discover from other conceptual positions and from other interpretative perspective than those offered by past centuries. The postmodernism does not try, in essence, therefore, to bear away from reality, but to overrun its surfaces, overcome that could lead towards the revelation of a different founding dimension. Picasso's work indicates nearly always this dimension, this chasm of the unconscious being also appealed by psychoanalytic explorations, explorations that have Carl Gustav Jung as a representative.

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