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Transcript of Podcast

Hello, and welcome to the third lecture on the Nigredo programme. This lecture explores the theme of complexes. This is the first lecture of two on The Complex Theory.

Complex Theory, Part 1: Identifying the Zombie

Historical context

The history of complex theory is quite interesting. Going back to ancient Greek philosophy, both Plato and Aristotle speak about something which is a precursor to complex theory - the concept that the soul has the paradoxical qualities of being a unity, while also having parts. This is explained by Socrates in "The Republic", where he says that the soul has three parts: the thinking soul, the feeling soul and the willing soul - or the spirited soul.

Socrates talks about different parts of Greece as representing a cultural norm - the different parts of the soul: the Athenians as the thinking soul; the spirited soul as the province of the Thracians; and the Phoenicians representing the appetitive soul. Aristotle, in "De Anima", talks about the different aspects of mind and of soul. So this idea of the psyche having - not only different characteristics, but - in a sense - different parts, was already being spoken about in ancient Greek philosophy.

In psychoanalysis, Freud and Breuer were the first to articulate a definition of complexes and to use the specific term, “complex” - or what we’ve now translated as “complex” - in 1893. They spoke about:

“A cluster – of interrelated and usually repressed ideas with a strong emotional content, that may compel an individual to adopt abnormal patterns of thought or behaviour.”

Freud was talking about complexes way before Jung, so it’s not as though Jung developed complex theory. He adopted complex theory from Freud and from Pierre Janet.

Freud, as a matter of interest, moved away from this idea of complexes; not that he specifically denied it, but Freudian theory developed later on more around drive theory than complex theory. There’s quite a nice distinction – I’ll try and illustrate it for you – between thinking about the psyche as being principally governed by drives or instincts which are autonomous, functional, animating impulses; and complexes which immediately invoke this idea of autonomous personality. Complexes have a more mythological or imaginative quality, because when you think about complexes you’re imagining a chorus of different beings that populate your psychology, as opposed to drives and instincts, which tend to be more functional in the way we imagine them. So it’s an interesting distinction.

Now, other than Freud, the person who influenced Jung in adoption of complex theory was Pierre Janet. Pierre Janet was a French psychologist, philosopher and psychotherapist, with whom Jung spent a fair amount of time

studying. Janet did some really interesting work on complexes, although he didn't refer to them as complexes; he referred to them as autonomous personalities which exist in the psyche. Janet's idea was that there is a competition that happens in our psychologies, between distinct personalities which exist in our psychologies. So, once again, there is this notion of unity and this idea of us – the way we typically like to think of ourselves, as unified beings. Now, without saying that is untrue, we must note that there is some tension around that idea, in the sense that there are competing personalities within our psychologies.

We can have this splitting, or fragmentation, of our psychologies, and we can have disassociation. Very significantly, I think that's the key idea, that we can have disassociation. This is something we can all relate to. We can behave in a particular way, with a particular emotional quality, with a particular mind-set, with a particular set of values if you will, and then, at other times behave wholly differently. And if we are on the right side of sanity then, of course, we're not totally disassociated in the sense that we know that we behaved differently, and we're aware of the behaviour and we're probably able to rationalise it somehow. We'll speak about it like, "You know that is how I am at work," or, "that is how I am at the office, but I'm different at home and I'm different with my friends," for example, or, "I'm different when I go hunting with the boys". So there's this way of explaining it, which is that this personality is appropriate to a specific context.

But you are aware of this ability within yourself to behave quite distinctly and almost, I think, with a different value system as well. It's as if the set of ethics

or normative values seems to subtly shift according to these different ways of behaving and being in the world. In any case, that was Janet's idea, and Janet coined a phrase that the Jungians have adopted, "*Abaissement du niveau mental*" which means in English, "lowering of the tensivity of consciousness". Janet's idea was that, the time that one of these personalities would emerge and usurp the ego identity, would be during a time of lowered consciousness as a consequence of stress, distress, disease, lowered inhibition (alcohol, narcotics - the classic things that lower inhibition). So this moment of *abaissement du niveau mental* is the opportune moment for one of these autonomous personalities to spring forward and take the reins of consciousness.

Jung did his PhD dissertation on his cousin, Helene Preiswerk, who was a medium. This was during the time of séances; when séances and spiritualism were in vogue. The medium, during the séance, would embody or channel a wholly different personality. This was quite mysterious when viewed from a secular, scientific consciousness because the presence of actual spirits seemed a bit far-fetched, although I think Jung personally always had his suspicions that they may exist, but he was trying to describe these things within scientific paradigms; within a scientific framework.

There was a very good book (I think the Gold Standard) written by another psychologist by the name of Théodore Flournoy, called, "From India to Mars and Back"¹ or something along those lines, and it was also an analysis of a

¹ The actual title is "From India to planet Mars".

medium. Jung studied his cousin – or his second cousin –, Helene Preiswerk, who, by historical accounts, had a crush on Jung so, of course, she was really motivated to perform these séances when he was there. And what he inferred – the way he read it - was that what was going on wasn't a conscious act or a conscious contrivance; that she was just pretending to be someone else; putting on another voice. Rather that, there was really a shift; there was really a change.

And so instead of reading it in this sort of classical, spiritualist sense - that there's in fact some spirit that is 'occupying' - the idea was, that **this is unconscious content that is being allowed to come forward during the séance**; that in the state of the trance, consciousness is lowered and something that is typically unconscious can come forward and can temporarily take over the behaviour of the person - take over the consciousness - and can present itself. And so he did his dissertation on her, and that was really a study of medium-ship, if you will, through the lens of complex theory.

Then, finally, Jung really made a name for himself and got a tremendous amount of mileage out of a particular experiment that he developed whilst he was at the Burghölzli Psychiatric Clinic. And that was the Word Association Test or Experiment. It was actually developed originally by a man named Francis Galton, but Jung adopted it as a tool for depth psychology or psychoanalysis, and as a way of investigating the presence of complexes – unconscious complexes.

The psychologist who's leading the session says something to the effect of, "A huge part of rehabilitation is about giving up on this notion of being perfect; of getting everything right; of being right, and coming to terms with who you actually are," which, of course, from a Jungian perspective, fits in very much with our Jungian ethos. When he comes out of the rehabilitation centre, he's talking to Mr. White, and he says, "I really took that to heart, and I really thought about it, and you know what I realized? I'm the bad guy. Look, I've cleaned up; I've stopped using, but I realize that I am a dealer. That's what I do."

So there is a thing of saying, "Look, that's what I am, and I accept it, and that's what I'm going to be, independently of the normative value system out there in society." But, that's not always the case. So there might be this thing that repression comes from society, but there may be situations where you feel you recognize in yourself that you have some sort of compulsive behaviour; that it's not about the fact that it's immoral, or immodest, or inflated, or whatever it is, but it just detracts from the quality of your life, it detracts from the quality of your relationships, it erodes your humanity in one way or another. And you might say, "Look, it's not about moral or immoral - I don't want this; this is not something I want in my life. I choose - I'm making a conscious choice - that I do not want to live like this." So, there are going to be situations where the repressive impulse is, superego; societal, but there're other things - that it's really something that lives in you, that you don't want. It's not a way that you want to experience yourself.

Okay that noted, there are three points that I want to illustrate in terms of our journey into complex theory.

1. The merits of an obsession.²
2. The idea of a complex being analogous to a zombie.
3. What would the contrast be between complex-consciousness and ego-consciousness? So if one is not acting from the perspective of a complex, then what is the alternative? Is there consciousness that is not consciousness of the complex? What does that look like?

I'm going to try and unpack those three for you but let's talk specifically about number 2, first because it speaks quite nicely to our conversation so far. I want to suggest that a very useful way of visualising complexes and the way complexes behave in our lives and in our psychology is provided in popular culture by, the image of the zombie; the idea of **an undead creature that behaves unthinkingly, and unreflectively, and compulsively**. I'm sure you've all seen plenty of these zombie scenes. A good example for me was World War Z. If you think of this image of the zombie, I think it really provides a useful image about the idea of a complex. A **complex is analogous to the zombie inside me, an inner zombie**.

These are some of the qualities that you find in zombies and in complexes.

- Zombies tend to be mass-minded. Have you noticed in the zombie movies how they're all moving in the same way? None of them is going, "Well, I

² This is dealt with in part 2 of Complex Theory

don't know, you know. I'll go this (alternate) way." They're all going in the same direction.

- And they're pretty unreflective. You never see a zombie sitting down and wondering, "Mm I don't know, you know. Should we kill him? Don't you think there're enough zombies?" It's all like, "Aargh. Let's go and get some more zombies. Let's go and bite the humans and turn them all into zombies as well."
- They're instinct driven. They seem to be motivated and driven by the lowest common denominator, and I'll talk a bit about that now but they seem to definitely be drive or instinct driven. I don't know what zombies usually want – to create more zombies it seems, in the zombie movies. Anyway, to kill everyone who is not a zombie.
- Amoral; they tend to be pretty amoral. Why I say amoral as opposed to immoral is that – and I think that's an important point – I don't think one can really speak about morality or immorality in relation to a zombie. It would seem to be an unfair charge to lay at a zombie's feet; to say the zombie's immoral, because surely only somebody with a capacity for moral behaviour can be immoral. So they're amoral, they're not immoral. And I think that it's the same thing with a complex; while something is a complex we might accuse the person who has the complex of immoral behaviour,

but psychologically it would be very unfair to accuse the complex of being immoral. Morality is a property of consciousness; it is a property of someone who is able to reflect on their behaviour. As long as the complex acts out compulsively, it has not really reached the stage of development at which we can properly speak about morality. It exists in another domain, which is the domain of compulsive, instinctive behaviour, not the domain of morality or immorality.

- It is obviously compulsive. Well a zombie is obviously compulsive. I'm not sure if every complex is compulsive but I think it's an important defining characteristic when we consider our complexes; that frequently – not always, but frequently – they will have a compulsive character.

So those are some of the qualities that I think complexes share with zombies, and they're probably about as ugly as well, actually.

In terms of drives, I think let's just take these two basic drives: the sex drive and the will to power; the Freudian and the Adlerian keystones. And I think that both of those are – they certainly are - complexes; in Jungian terms they are archetypes, but let's just talk about them as complexes for the moment. They're experienced as complexes inasmuch as an archetype lives in me, and I think they fit in with all of these qualities: mass minded, unreflective, amoral and compulsive.

Thinking of the sexual act; it's hard for me to imagine anything more zombie-like than sex. I really think the sexual act – the act of copulation – is the perfect image for the behaviour of a complex or compulsive behaviour.

The very act of animal-rutting is the most absurd thing. There's something so primitive and mindless, about the sexual act and, I'm not talking about love; I'm talking about sex.

But the truth is we all have a sex complex. The 1999 movie, *Romance*, is about a young woman (Marie) who was exploring the limits of her sexuality, and there was a great scene where she talks about the experience of her sexuality. She talks and she shows this image – she's trying to describe it to someone, and she shows this image -, in which her body is sticking through a wall. So the top part of her torso is on this side of the wall and then the other half, from her genitals down, is on the other side. And where her top side is, she's being wined and dined and it's romantic; and there're roses, and there's this stimulating conversation. And of course, the bottom side is in this dungeon and there's this guy wearing leather and chains and it's just, pure carnality; pure animal sex; very primitive.

What she is illustrating with this image is that she finds these conflicting drives in herself, that at one level her sexual drive is so primitive and basic, and then at the other side of her is this idea of romance, and love, and so on. As long as we're having sex I really don't think we should take ourselves too seriously because I can tell you now, no one else is. If there are any aliens watching us, trust me, they're laughing their asses off.

So that's the one. Then the other thing is the will to power. In a way, more – well I don't want to say more malevolent; that's the wrong description, but it's more – insidious, in a sense, because it's more hidden. Sex is kind of obvious, you experience the sex drive; you know about it; you know you're grappling with the sex drive.

But the will to power is quite nefarious because it manifests in subtle ways. You justify it as, "I have ambitions; I have aspirations; I want to do something in the world; I want to make a difference." Yes, maybe you do or maybe you're just trying to elevate your status because what lives in you is the will to power. You want to move up in the ranks. Like every other imbecile on the planet you're trying to get to the top of the pile, and you'll trample on other people's throats and heads, compromise morals and ethics, cheat, and steal and lie, and do whatever it takes, to get there. Not all the time, but my point is that when this will to power is compulsive, and when it lives in us, we desire power at any price.

An analyst was telling me - and I think this illustrates it quite nicely - about how he works with some men who are really old, very late in their lives and these are men who have done amazing things in business and they've travelled, and they've climbed mountains, and they've done all these things that men and women – but particularly men – are often obsessed with. They've got to do all these things, and he says a lot of them get to this stage of their lives and they say, "You know, to be honest with you now, I don't know why I did all that stuff. It just seemed like the right thing to do at the time." It's a really sad idea, but it's this idea that often we do things because we're driven to do

them. It's a compulsive urge to do, do, do – without ever really necessarily understanding or knowing why we are doing it, other than, “I need to get ahead. I need to stand out. I need to get noticed.”

So these two I think, are obviously what we talk about as basic drives, not just in the Freudian sense but in the sense of complex theory. There could be a multiplicity of drives, but I'm just choosing the two most archetypal human drives. Although, of course, Freud would probably say – well, Freud and Adler as a team – that of course, at the heart of every complex are these two drives, but we don't have to be so reductionist. My point is just that complexes have that quality; they have a telos; they're trying to go somewhere, and they're like zombies in that sense. They just keep going.

What we're looking at here is that where the behaviour has a high degree of compulsiveness, it reflects some of these characteristics: **unreflective behaviour, 'drive' driven behaviour, amoral behaviour, compulsive behaviour**. Now, the one distinction here is that if you look at what you've consciously chosen, of course, it's also motivated by a drive. That's why you've chosen it - because it has a meaning. But our belief is that there's a distinction, where you've made a choice; where you've said, “Look, I'm going to act this out but I'm acting it out within a particular personal paradigm with a set of personal beliefs, within a global frame of who I want to be in the world, etc.” As opposed to behaviour that you are doing and acting out that may be diminishing your quality of life and diminishing the quality of life of other human beings around you. And you're not even aware that you're doing it or, if you're aware that you're doing it, you've got no control over it. It drives you;

it is compulsive. So that's the sort of distinction that we're trying to map out here. We're looking at complexes as being predominantly unconscious in that sense.

In terms of psychological health, we should distinguish between complexes that act through the ego – in other words, you become aware of a particular desire or prejudice, or some sort of an impulse, and you are able to reflect on it and make a choice whether to actualise it or not, okay - and motivation, or desire, or behaviour, that acts through you and somehow bypasses your consciousness in the process.

Let me give you an example. It's a personal example - and I don't mean to suggest that I am conscious, because I think I'm far from conscious - but it illustrates the point quite well. One of my complexes is around food. I've got a tendency to overeat and it doesn't serve me very well – I mean I get lots of pleasure from it but it doesn't always serve me very well. So on the weekend I was in Bloemfontein and I stayed at a Protea Hotel. I had a cold and I wasn't feeling very well, and I had a bad night on the Friday night, and a full day of lectures on the Saturday. In the morning I didn't want to go driving around Bloemfontein trying to find something to eat so I just went into the breakfast buffet that they have at the hotel and which I knew would be overpriced, but I thought, "It doesn't matter; it's convenient, I'll go there".

Now, I love breakfast. It's one of my favourite meals so I went inside and you know what it's like with these things; it doesn't matter if you have one egg, or you have one glass of orange juice, or you clean them out, they still charge you

the same - R125, or whatever it is. So if you're anything like me it's carte blanche; it's like, have a full go! Of course – you should see some of those guys; they have that plate loaded to the brim – some of those big farm boys; you know they've loaded that plate up!

Anyway, I come in and these are all the thoughts that are going through my mind as I'm coming in to have breakfast. And somewhere and somehow it emerges for me to try and be conscious of what I'm doing. One of the ways that I try to become conscious is that I first walk around and I look very carefully at the food. I look and I look, and I walk around, and I look at the food, and I look at everything, and of course as I'm doing that I'm trying to formulate in my mind, "Now, what am I going to eat?"

So already as I'm doing this, of course, this in itself is an act of consciousness. I didn't just pick up my plate, and walk and just start unreflectively ordering food. I'm trying to be conscious of what I'm doing. And then I ended up having a small bowl of fruit salad, which I hate. I mean I hate fruit. I had this tiny little bowl of fruit salad and a glass of orange juice – a big glass of orange juice. Now the complex said to me, "Eat", because I was feeling down. I had, had a bad night. I was anxious – I had this class to teach. It was a big class - a big group. I had to perform, I wasn't feeling good and my response to anxiety is to eat. A lot of people don't eat when they're anxious. If I'm anxious I do eat - so there's a drive; there's this compulsive drive to have a full go because I know that lunch is going to be short and I won't have time for lunch. I need to have a substantial breakfast so that I've got energy when I lecture. You know, this is all the rationalisation. But of course, on another level I know that I'm

going to feel bad if I have overeaten. I mean, my system's already flat, it doesn't need the additional stress of having to process twenty-six eggs and fifty slices of bacon.

The point is that although I experienced this desire I was able to reflectively make a choice that I believe was in line with what was best for me in the situation. Reflecting on the whole thing I believe that it was the right choice to make. I think that's the distinction; that in a sense all desire comes from complexes but where consciousness is able to intervene and make choices, and reflectively process what is coming up, then you are not acting compulsively or acting out the complex, so to speak.

What I'm saying is there's a specific complex acting through me and the complex that's acting through me is a tendency to eat inappropriately; to overeat when it's not going to serve me, and by being able to enter into a reflective state I was able to oppose the complex.

The unconscious component – I wouldn't be able to tell you where it came from or what lies at the heart of it. Is it fear? Is it anxiety? Am I worried that if I don't eat I'm going to somehow disintegrate? You know, it's going to be unconscious, primal fears that are embedded in the complex, that are unknown to me, but symptomatically I am aware of how it lives itself out in me. So there is an awareness of the complex, although there's a substantial portion of the complex that remains unconscious and hidden. But that awareness is sometimes sufficient, as it was that day, to allow me to step outside of its compulsive nature, outside of zombie consciousness.

Okay that's it for this month's lecture. I'll leave you to get on with the application. This is part one of a two-part series on Complex Theory, the second lecture in this series (The Merits of an Obsession) will follow next month. The application next month builds on the application this month, so please take your time and apply yourself to this month's application. This is a central theme in Jung's work and one that is foundational in terms of many of the applications to follow during the course of this programme.

Adieu,

Stephen.

Application:

1. In the lecture, specific reference is made to the cinematic metaphor of the zombie as an image or symbol of a complex. In this regard these were the defining characteristics shared by zombies and complexes:

- Mass minded
- Unreflective
- Compulsive
- Instinctive
- Repetitive (pay particular attention to this idea of “repetition compulsion”)
- Unconscious

In addition to the above, classically identifying complexes would include reflecting on:

- Primary patterns; events, thoughts, emotions, fantasies and behaviours that you typically encounter and that follow typical, predictable paths.
- Personal talents and challenges.
- Fantasy and dream material.

- Strong emotional or “affective” reactions and responses in your behaviour.
- Any characteristic that you define yourself by, that somehow sets you apart from others.

With these guidelines in mind identify six primary complexes in your own psychology. Avoid those that are shared by everyone i.e. the instincts in their natural form. This does not mean your complexes are not instinctively driven but that it is that which is different about them rather than generic, that is of value in this application.

2. Once you have identified these six complexes:

- Name each one.
- Describe them in as much detail as possible.
- Consider their (each one individually) trajectory and purpose.

3. Now consider where and how these individual complexes form alliances or oppositions in your psychology.