



MAGNUM OPUS: RUBEDO

Module 3: Authentic Personification

QUOTE

“The situation which is more common and more familiar to the average man is that in which the ego identifies itself with the ethical values. The identification takes place by means of an identification of the ego with the persona. The ego confuses itself with the façade personality (which is of course in reality only that part of the personality that is tailored to fit the collective), and forgets that it possesses aspects which run counter to the persona. This means that the ego has repressed the shadow side and lost touch with the dark contents, which are negative and for this reason split off from the conscious sector.” (A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity, Carl Jung)

Authentic Personification

Compiled by The Centre for Applied Jungian Studies



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Transcript of Podcast

I am going to be dealing today, with the issue of the persona. Naturally, as always, I will contextualise it within the Jungian framework. When Jung talks about the persona, he understands the persona as an archetype, not unlike the other archetypal presences which he describes in the psyche. The most common, of course, being persona, ego, anima/animus and shadow.

The persona forms a couple along with the anima/animus. So the ego and shadow form a personal couple, and the persona and anima/animus form a transpersonal couple. The significance of that, very simply, is the idea that the ego and the shadow, being personal, are easier to work with, to change or to transform. The persona and anima/animus have a more transpersonal character, and consciousness is less able to significantly shift or alter their basic constitution.

Now I realise that this is immediately counter-intuitive, because one naturally has the sense that – more than anything else – one is able to manipulate and/or change the persona. But I will explain, during the course of this talk, how that intuition is, to some degree, not true; particularly when we come to the idea of an authentic expression of the persona. I will try to explain what that is, as we go along.

We will start off by very simply defining what we mean, when we talk about the persona. The persona is the public face – the mask, if you will – that we turn towards the world; the face which we show the world. The idea comes



from Greek theatre. The word “persona” originates from the Greek word, “prosópon” – which was the “face” or “mask” which Greek actors wore in the ancient Greek theatre. As you may recall, what happened in ancient Greek theatre is that the same actors would act out a number of different roles in the play. They would assume the different roles, or different characters, by donning different masks. If one imagines that, one gets a fairly good idea. It is a good image or metaphor for what we are dealing with, when we talk about the persona, because the persona should have this element of being dynamic, or what we can refer to as plasticity. We are able to adopt a different persona, depending on the role which we are called to play at any point in time.

Now, let me start off by saying that Jung was not a fan of the persona, or at least, that was his official stance. In his private and public life he carefully cultivated his own persona; but officially, and in his work, he was not a fan of the persona. He seemed to denigrate the idea of the persona to some degree. Let me read two quotes from Jung on the persona, which illustrate this point quite nicely:

The first one, from *Collected Works: Volume 7, “Two Essays on Analytical Psychology,”* Jung writes,

“The persona is a complicated system of relations between the individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand, to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.”



So right there you get the idea that Jung sees the persona as a mask in a rather negative sense, in that it is used to hide who one truly is.

In another quote from, “The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious,” he writes,

“One could say, with a little exaggeration, that the persona is that in reality which one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is. In any case, the temptation to be what one seems to be is great, because the persona is usually rewarded in cash.”

(So Jung wasn’t above some humour there!)

Let me start off by saying why I think Jung had this take on the persona, to try to contextualise it for you. It is important to remember that Jung was writing much of his work in the early to middle part of the twentieth century, particularly in the earlier part of the twentieth century. We are talking about Northern Europe in the 1920’s and 1930’s where – unlike much of the world today, including South Africa – the persona was a highly developed cultural artefact, if you will. The development of the persona was of major concern for families, for parents and for the educational system, to develop a particular way of behaving and being in the world. It had great normative value.

That, I think, is no longer the case.

That is a big part of the issue here. This idea of the privileged status of the persona – the reification of the persona – is certainly a lot less evident in most of the Western world today. I would say most of the world, in toto, but let me



limit my claim to the Western world, with which I am more familiar. It is certainly a lot less evident in South Africa, and I think that applies generally to the Western world.

For most of society, the persona has a pretty bad rap. It is seen very much in the light in which Jung paints it, as being somehow inauthentic; somehow a less-than-honest representation of oneself. The movement in contemporary society is away from a cultivated – and to some degree, a contrived – persona, to the idea of being real, of being authentic and of being oneself.

So the context in which Jung was writing was very different from the context in which we live today.

Another important aspect to consider is that the work which Jung, Freud and other depth psychologists at the time were doing, was to expose to the light of day – to bring into consciousness – the in-authenticity of the persona. That was the very project, with which they were busy. People, a lot more than than now, were invested in the belief that their persona was just ‘who they were’. The idea that the psyche had different layers, and that the persona was only one dimension of their being, did not have the same uptake. It was not understood, in the way which it is today.

This is an important point to bear in mind. A lot of the work that Freud and Jung, in particular, were doing was just in reaction to the identification with the persona, which was so evident at those times.



The pendulum has swung the opposite way. The persona has now been relegated to the role of an artefact by much of society. The idea of civilised, cultured behaviour; the idea of acting out a specific, public personality – unless one is in the public eye, say a politician, or in the entertainment business, or has some sort of high profile role in society – is not generally regarded as important. Not only is it not regarded as important, but it is denigrated in very much the same sense in which Jung denigrated it. I think that one sees in many public roles (certainly in entertainers), that much of the persona is the idea of somehow acting out “being authentic”; of somehow being honest, so the persona of the contemporary entertainer, I think is very different from the entertainers – the actors and the singers – of yesteryear.

Now, all of that being said, the point that I’m coming to here is that, I believe that this is a mistake. If we are going to take the Jungian work seriously, and if we are going to work with the archetypes of our psychology, the persona plays a very important role in our psychology. It should be taken seriously. It should not be denigrated. It plays a pivotal role in many aspects of our lives, about which I’m going to elaborate, but I include in that, the individuation project.

I believe that the project of individuating, and of realising one’s most authentic and conscious self in the world – in contra-distinction to what Jung is claiming – involves the cultivation, and the development, of a conscious persona. The persona should not be relegated to the side-lines.

Let me try and justify that claim, and talk a little about what the persona is and what we use it for.



So, the persona is the face which you show the world. The world, and the people in it, are not generally psychic. They do not get to know who you are through some sort of process of psychic osmosis. People with whom you interact, and with whom you come into contact with, understand you and come to know you, through your behaviour; through your persona; through the way you come across. The persona is who you are in the world. It is the acting out – the actualisation or the public representation – of your values, your beliefs, your prejudices and your ideology. It is your public brand.

Let me just come back to this first point quickly. I think there is something ironic in this idea of being yourself; and that to be authentic just means that I should be myself, and not make any effort to mask who I am, not pretend to be something that I am not, and not focus on behaving in any particular way for the purposes of manipulation or communicating that which I wish to communicate to you. There is this idea – this very popular idea – that I should just be myself.

Now, I think that there are some serious problems with that. Let me try and explain what I think they are. First of all, it's entirely unclear – both to me and to you – what I mean when I say, “I'm going to be myself”.

But I guess it means something along the lines of, “I'm going to behave as I want to behave – as I feel the spirit move in me – irrespective of the appropriateness of that to the situation, to the communication, or to you.” And straight away, I think if one reflects on that for a moment, you recognise that, that is a limited and problematic way of behaving. The very ideas of



culture, and of civilisation, involve the fact that I take you into account in my behaviour; that I don't disregard you and I don't disregard the situation in which we are. I don't disregard the social context, in the way in which I behave towards you. These paradigms – these contexts – should necessarily inform my behaviour.

The other point here is: how do people get to know you, through some sort of psychic osmosis? I think that to the degree that I want to communicate who I am to you, it is incumbent upon me to make some effort in that communication – to have some sense of clarity both in who I understand myself to be, and in my communication of that to you. That involves holding some sort of definite self-image. It involves holding some sort of a value system. It involves having some sort of consciously constructed notion of who I am. This project of communicating who I am to you not only involves consciousness, but it involves the construction of a personality. It is not the spontaneous behaviour, or spontaneous product, of the unconscious. It is a communication. It is a brand.

So this, for me, is an important point, that I utilise the persona to communicate, to you and to the world at large, who I am. The greater the degree of clarity and articulation of that notion of who I am, the better the communication will be. But the process of clarifying and articulating who I am in the world, as distinct from who I am in my private life, is just a creation of the persona. Hopefully, that will become clearer as we go on.



Let me say a little bit about what we use the persona for – some of these I’ve mentioned already, but I’m going to repeat them.

To tell others who you are, what you are and what you stand for.

To tell others who they are dealing with. Let me just pause there, and say something about that; this idea of telling others who they are dealing with. Very often I think that we, through some sort of misplaced modesty, are reluctant to communicate to others what our values, prejudices and boundaries are. Consequently, when the other then behaves in a fashion which is not to your liking – which you find offensive; which you find to be a boundary violation – it seems somewhat ridiculous to lay the blame at their doorstep, if you have failed to communicate from your side, what your expectations of them are, and what your value system and boundaries are. I think this is an important aspect of the persona; that it is the communication to the other, not only about who you are, but about what the conditions of social engagement with you are: what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

Now a lot of this is done unconsciously, and one only has to think of the dating game, for example. There are a lot of subtle and only semi-conscious signals communicated between people participating in the dating game, to let the other one know where they stand. But I think the more you make this process conscious for yourself, and clarify it for yourself, the more honestly and effectively you can communicate what your expectations are in relationship to those with whom you are relating.



Persona is the medium whereby you speak your message from the inner world, including your most heartfelt, inner being. I think I've made this point already, but it is the idea that who you are – even your most authentic, private and essential self – doesn't just sort of jump out of your head, as it were, into the public domain. It travels via the medium of the persona. It is only the persona that is able to communicate your essence to the world.

Persona is what you use to communicate with others. It is what you use to establish relationships publicly, professionally and privately; and, very importantly, (I'm going to focus on this point), it is the tool whereby you actualise who you are in the world. I want to use two brief examples to try to illustrate the value of the persona socially. I think there is a useful comparison between the persona, and the idea of branding in the public space.

So, I want you to think about a coffee shop. I think that constitutes quite a nice example. Think about how it is that a coffee shop, to some degree, individuates itself, but maybe more significantly, for our topic in this module, how it communicates that which it is to the world. And it seems that a coffee shop has certain typical ways of being in the world, which let us know that it is a coffee shop: It serves coffee (obviously, but I don't think that is sufficient); it is generally a place where one sits inside, so there are generally tables and chairs; there are coffee machines; there are waiters; there is the smell of the coffee being made; there is a certain ambience; and usually coffee shops would sell (I think maybe always) some sorts of eats or snacks, to go along with the coffees. It also has, let's say, a more casual character than a restaurant, so



although the lines do blur between a coffee shop and a restaurant, we can meaningfully distinguish a coffee shop from a restaurant.

So, what I'm trying to allude to here is that, a coffee shop uses certain images – it uses certain symbols – with which to communicate to the world, that it is a coffee shop. Just *being* a coffee shop is not sufficient. The idea that it is a coffee shop needs to be communicated, and is communicated through these universal symbols – coffee shop symbols. The more effectively those symbols are communicated, the more effectively those symbols are utilised, to communicate that it is a coffee shop, the more confident you are – and that confidence may not always be conscious, sometimes it may be a bit unconscious as well – that you are in a coffee shop; and that you are where you want to be if you want to have a good cup of coffee in the typical atmosphere, in a typical, sort of relaxed ambience, of a coffee shop.

So, I hope that is clear. The point is, that to the extent that the coffee shop owner is not herself clear on what her shop is – whether it is a coffee shop, or a coffee shop and an ice-cream shop, or *sort of* a restaurant and *sort of* a coffee shop, or *sort of* a coffee shop and *sort of* a night spot – then the message becomes confused.

Now, this is not to say that you cannot have hybrids – that you cannot have shops which are not just coffee shops but are, in fact, coffee shops come, let's say, night spots, as well. I mean that happens, but the point that I'm trying to make here, is just that the simplest and clearest of messages is that the coffee shop is a classical coffee shop. And to the degree that this message is



communicated, you have confidence that you are dealing with, and are in, a coffee shop.

Now, if we think about coffee shops both internationally and locally, by virtue of chains – in other words by virtue of franchises – a lot of money is invested in particular coffee shop brands. One just thinks of some of the local brands like Starbucks, Seattle, Mugg & Bean, etc. Money is spent in marketing around those brands, to establish the brand identity. For smaller coffee shops, for example, there is more effort put into, and greater requirement for, the classical symbols of being a coffee shop, in order to communicate its coffee shop character.

In any case, I don't want to labour the point too much. While it is not a perfect analogy, I hope that the value of the analogy is clear. My point is that communicating the coffee shop brand is not entirely dissimilar to communicating a persona. If you are intending to represent yourself in the world as a particular somebody, your branding – your representation of yourself – is dependent upon the clarity with which you represent it, and also the convergence of the elements of that representation.

So, applying this idea of brand identity to something a little closer to the persona example I consider, hypothetically, the case of an entertainer. I think an entertainer constitutes a useful example. Let's, first of all, think of an entertainer with a very clearly defined persona. I think a good example would be someone like a ballet dancer. So imagine someone who has been trained as a classical ballet dancer; is part of a recognised company – is maybe part of a



leading company, someone who maybe dances for the Bolshoi, for example. There seems to be little ambiguity in the characterisation or the persona that is being communicated to the world, to the extent that the dancer fulfils a public role in the world – that of being a dancer, being a prima ballerina and being a member of a recognised company. It is very clear what they stand for, and the message that they communicate to the world through that persona – through that personal brand identity – is unambiguous, clear and clearly articulated.

Of course, today that tends to describe, I would think, the minority of cases. For most of us, the complexity of being a human being in the world, and even in our professional capacities, has a multiplicity and plurality which doesn't allow us to communicate our message quite so simply.

So now let's imagine someone who has a passion for singing – being a singer; someone who really has a musical talent, has a voice, has ability and has an aspiration to sing on stage. However, they grew up guided by well-intentioned parents into training for and getting a 'real' job, having a real skill in the world, and something which was not as fickle as being a professional singer. So, let's imagine that this person went and studied to be an electrical engineer. Now, there's a real tension, not only in the inner world (that's obviously the primary stuff, that we deal with in the Jungian conversation), but there is a tension in the persona as well. This electrical engineer who does well in their studies goes out into the world and obtains a job in their profession, and then in their private time they start longing to be back on stage, wanting to sing and wanting to be recognised as a singer. They start to send a confused message



into the world. It becomes increasingly difficult, potentially for both their employers and their colleagues, as well as for people with whom they hope to engage with, in their aspiring singing career.

One sees many cases of this, I think, in the world.

It's a humorous example, but I'm thinking of a lovely story from Rian Malan, the very accomplished author, about his very unfortunate and deleterious entry into the world of being a professional muso. And there's something confusing about it; one is not quite sure how to respond to this individual who is displaying very diverse interests. It's not that we don't recognise it in ourselves – I'm not suggesting that we need to judge them, or think any less of them. The only point which I'm trying to make is, that it sends out a confused brand identity, and when it comes to the persona, the notions of simplicity, of clarity, and of convergence, are very useful in communicating the message from the inner world to the outer world.

So, the idea that I want to express here is that the persona is the vehicle in the world, whereby the individuated self is communicated to the world, en masse.

The Individuation Project, for those who have worked on individuation with me previously, is not only an inner project. It is a project that has its seeds in the inner world, but it comes to fruition in the outer world. It is an expression of my authentic self in the world – not only within the confines of my soul – and that expression happens by virtue of the persona. The persona is the vehicle in



the world, through which the individuated message is communicated to the world.

To the degree, then, that the persona is ambiguous, is undefined, has tensions or lacks clarity, so too, the individuation project, in its communication to the world, is similarly impeded. And that is the point that I really hope to bring across to you in this module.

Applications (Introduction and Background)

Anyway, possibly that is enough theory. Let me give you some applications that I think you may find useful in working with these ideas. Some of them are a little bit more light-hearted or fun than others, but I think they are all useful, and I encourage you to work with all of the applications I'm going to give you now.

- The first one that I want you to try is: try to clarify your own persona very much in the way that I was, using the example of the entertainer. I want you to think about:
 - What are the elements of your persona?
 - What message is it that your persona communicates to the world?

- The next question that I'd like you to consider is: do you think that your persona is functioning optimally? Do you think it sends a clear, unambiguous message to the world about who you are? You are going to possibly come to the conclusion that your message can be improved. I



would like you to consider how you could increase, and improve, the clarity of the message that your persona communicates to the world.

➤ And then in a more light-hearted spirit, but nevertheless, I think useful, I'd like you to try and answer three questions – just for fun:

1. First of all, if your persona was a coffee shop or restaurant, what would it be?
2. If it were a movie, what would it be?
3. And if it were a song, what would it be?

➤ Then another application: I would like you to describe a 'comic book style' characterisation of your persona. I'm talking about a super-hero version of your persona. What qualities would your character possess? What are its super powers? What are its weaknesses? What allies and villains does it have in the world? This is a kind of metaphorical symbolisation of the persona, and it is an exaggeration, of course. One needs to play with it, but it is this idea of characterising the persona as a comic book style character. And immediately, what comes up for me is this idea of a super-hero, but maybe it needn't be a super-hero – it could be somebody in the funny comics as well.



- Finally, the last application that I would like you to do: I'd like you to think about and reflect back on the previous module we have covered. I'd like you to think about how the persona differs from your ego. What are the differences and distinctions between your persona and your ego?

Those are the applications that I would like you to do. Finally (in thinking about your persona), to give you a few elements which you can consider in the process of evaluating the persona:

- How appropriate are you?
- How appropriately are you able to engage with others?
- How effectively are you able to engage with others?
- How authentic is your persona? Is it an authentic expression of who you are, or is it somehow less than authentic?
- And if it is, in what ways is it less than authentic, and why?

And then two ideas – there is some tension between them, but both are important questions.

- The first one is, what is the stability of your persona? Is your persona relatively stable or do you change from week to week or month to month?
- And conversely, what is the plasticity of your persona? Are you able to effectively move and change and adapt yourself to different situations? What intention or intentions are expressed by your persona? How do you communicate your message to the world?

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I wish you all the best with the applications, and I look forward to hearing your feedback on the forum. (Applications Follow Next Page).

Applications:

Please refer to explanations on voice file at the end of the exposition. You can also read the Transcript of the voice file to see a more detailed explanation on these exercises on pages 15, 16 and 17.

What does my persona relay to others?

What messages are you sending with your persona? Try to identify the elements of your persona. Consider the following aspects of your persona:

- your physical presentation (clothes, hair, etc.)
- what you talk about or focus on during conversation
- the efficacy of your persona in social, business and family relations
- whether your persona is coherent, i.e. whether all the various elements work together

Is your persona functioning optimally?

Is your persona functioning optimally? I.e. does it send out a clear unambiguous message to the world? What is this message and if you could improve it, how would you do this through your persona?



A light hearted exercise:

- If your persona was a coffee shop or restaurant, what would it be?
- If your persona was a movie, what would it be?
- If your persona was a song, what would it be?

Your persona as a super-hero:

Consider your persona as a characterisation of a super-hero. This is a metaphorical symbolisation of the persona, and meant to be an exaggeration. But it does point out to you, what the main qualities you want, or have, in your persona.

- What qualities does your persona possess?
- What are its weaknesses?
- What are its super powers?
- Who are the allies and who are the villains in your persona's world?

Comparison between the persona and the ego:

In a previous module, we looked at the ego. Reflect on the differences between your persona and your ego. What are the differences and distinctions? Are these important and if so, why and how?



Evaluating your persona:

1. How appropriate are you?
2. How appropriately are you able to engage with others?
3. How appropriate and how effective is your persona?
4. How authentic is your persona?
5. If it is less than authentic, how and why? How can you improve it?

Now consider your presentation of your various masks. Identify their names, mission statement and attire/image:

- Professional
- Social
- Intimate friend
- Lover

Stability and fluidity of your persona:

- Is your persona relatively flexible, or do you change from week to week or month to month?
- What is the plasticity of your persona? Are you able to adapt yourself to different situations?