



Module 1

MAYA'S LABYRINTH

The Mechanics of Illusion



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THE MECHANICS OF ILLUSION

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THE ILLUSION

This course deals with the psychological function called projection. Projection is probably the most misunderstood yet fundamental concept in psychology. In Jungian psychology it is the root to personal transformation.

Projection is a function of the psyche which allows us to connect with the world and others. We cannot relate to anything unless we project onto it.

Although projection generally is seen in a negative light, it also has a more agreeable face. Projection oils the wheels of social interaction, creating a bridge between people, facilitating friendship, falling in love and communication. It is the basis of our choices and connections to others and the world. It influences our choice of partners, careers, friends, food, living environment and clothes. Everything that is dependent on a decision is made based on projection.

Projection allows us to engage with qualities that lie unconscious within us, so you can project positive and negative qualities onto the outside world. It can inspire us and motivate us to exceed what we think we are capable of. It can also cause great distress and cause us to engage shadow qualities in others over and over again.

It is through projection that we create a series of imaginary relationships to all that is external to us, that often have little or no basis in reality. Here Jung warns us:

“The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment, since instead of a real relationship to it there is now only an illusory one. Projections change the world into the replica of one’s own unknown face.” [CW 9ii, par 17]

Projection lies at the foundation of our irritation with others, our challenges within failed relationships and the repeating patterns in our lives. If we don’t become conscious of our projections, we are doomed to keep repeating the pattern, to keep projecting. This truth is the foundation of Jung’s words:

“The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves.”

[CW 9ii par. 126]

WHAT IS PROJECTION?

Projection's general use within psychology came to mean the placement of an anxiety-inducing internal mental substance—a thought, feeling, or behavioral propensity—onto the external world. Or to use other words, projection is a type of defense mechanism whereby unacceptable feelings and attributes or inner conflict within an individual are cast out of the psyche and attributed to someone else. For example, if you are anxious about how you appear to others, worried that you're not wearing the right kind of clothes, you might be the first to criticize someone else for the same reason. In this basic example, the key act of projection is taking internal worries and casting them out onto the social world.

Freud first used the term, projection, in an 1895 letter, in which he described a patient who tried to avoid confronting her feelings of shame by imagining that her neighbors were gossiping about her instead.

Jung saw projection through a slightly different frame of reference:

“The general psychological reason for projection is always an activated unconscious that seeks expression”. [CW 18, par 352]

Projection then, from a Jungian point of view, is seen as the involuntary transposition (casting out) or displacement of something unconscious in ourselves into the world—onto people, animals, objects and ideas. In other words, whatever

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is in the depths of the unconscious is initially experienced and seen outside of ourselves in projected forms. For Jung, any unconscious content rejected is then projected from the conscious viewpoint.

WHY DO WE PROJECT?

In *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*, Andrew Samuels and co-authors define projection in two main ways:

“Firstly, projection is a defense against anxiety, where difficult emotions and parts of the personality that are unacceptable to consciousness become attributed to another person or institution or external object to provide relief and a sense of well-being.”

Projection then is an unconscious automatic process; in other words, we are unaware or unconscious that we are projecting. It happens automatically and occurs because something has happened in our psychological history that has caused us to feel fear or anxiety or insecurity or shame and so when these feelings of fear or anxiety or shame are activated, we project them, cast them out into the world onto someone or some object or institution. This occurs equally when we experience inner conflict regarding a situation, and as it is unconscious, we are often not even aware of it.

THE SCAPEGOAT

Those who rely too heavily on projection to shield themselves from their shadow, who never strive to question whether the image they hold of themselves is perhaps too perfect, go through life forever in need of scapegoats or people on whom to blame all their problems. Often a friend or family member is chosen as one's scapegoat, but the problem with this choice is that it irreparably damages and, in many cases, forces an end to the relationship. After driving one's scapegoat away, it is usually discovered that one's problems persist nonetheless. This spurs some to look within and to face up to the elements of their personality they have for so long tried to deny. But rather than partaking in this internal reflection, most people merely look for another scapegoat. In this process, it is often discovered that the most effective form of scapegoat is not any individual in particular, but rather entire groups of people.

Projection can also be collective. Those unwilling, or unable, to face up to their shadows, are easy prey for collectivist movements which have ready-made scapegoats in the form of political opponents, members of different ethnic groups or socioeconomic classes. Scapegoating at the level of collectives, or in other words projecting our problems onto groups of people who differ from us, proves attractive for several reasons. It allows us to avoid the damage to our personal relationships which occurs when we use someone close to us as a scapegoat.

Furthermore, given that our interactions with members of the scapegoated group

are usually limited, we do not risk awakening to the realization that these people are not nearly like the distorted image of them we hold in our psyche.

THE GOLD IN PROJECTION

When we assume something about another person and then discover this to be an illusion, we are obliged to realize that the world and those in it are not our own creation. If we are reflective, we can learn something about ourselves. This is called withdrawing projections, the first step to seeing through the illusion.

In this way projection is both a psychological invitation and a moral task. If I'm going to have self-worth, respect, compassion, then I need to become aware of what type of traffic I'm creating between us. I need to become conscious that you are my mirror, and I am yours. This is the first step towards healing myself and clearing the obstacles towards a more meaningful, honest and authentic relationship with myself and with others.

Projection can also be defined as a means of growth, where contents from the unconscious world are made available to the ego-consciousness. The encounter between the ego and the unconscious contents has the potential for psychological growth. The external world of persons and things serves the internal world by providing "carriers" of the projection.

Bringing consciousness to what we project, to what we are casting out, is a path to liberation from illusion, self-knowledge, and a transformed relationship with both ourselves and the world. As Jung says:

“People generally confuse self-knowledge with knowledge of their ego-personalities. Indeed, those with any awareness at all take it for granted that they ‘know themselves’. But the real psychic facts are for the most part hidden, since the ego knows only its own contents. Without some knowledge of the unconscious and its contents one cannot claim to know oneself.” [CW 10, par 491]

The recognition that there is an unconscious side of ourselves, has fundamentally altered the pursuit of self-knowledge. It is apparent now that we are twofold beings: we have a **conscious** side we more or less know, and an **unconscious** side of which we know little, but which is generally no secret to others. Projections contain our blind spots. Projection always contains important information about us, what we value and how we feel. Projection then becomes a valuable tool in the pursuit of uncovering what lies within the unconscious. It highlights our individuality and authenticity and here we are reminded of Jung's words:

“We meet ourselves time and again in a thousand disguises on the path of life.” [CW16, par 534]

THE VALUE IN PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

Jung stressed that projection is both an inevitable and necessary component in our psychological development as it is one of the primary means by which we can gain an awareness of elements residing in our unconscious. After projecting an element of our unconscious, the healthy thing to do is to recognize the subjective origin of the projection, to withdraw it from the external world, and to integrate this element of our personality into conscious awareness. Only by withdrawing our projections and becoming aware of the faults we previously projected onto others, can we ever hope to take corrective measures. This process of withdrawal and integration is a difficult task, because it takes courage to face up to one's weaknesses and dark qualities. But while difficult, this task is crucial in the battle of life, for failure to confront one's shadow leaves these elements free to grow in scope and influence.

WHAT DO WE PROJECT?

When we project, we relate to our values and essence through another person, object or institution. This can be a movie, book, person, company, concept or anything that captures our unconscious. Projection can attract or repel us. We project both the “positive” and “negative” qualities within ourselves. Projection can be experienced as wonder, joy, or a positive connection or alternatively as repulsion, irritation, or a negative connection.

Much of what we project lies within our own personal shadow, the hidden or unconscious aspects of ourselves, both good and bad, which the ego has either repressed or never recognized—our repressed desires and uncivilized impulses, our morally inferior motives, childish fantasies and resentments. Here Jung asks:

“But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all the beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very enemy himself -- that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness -- that I myself am the enemy who must be loved -- what then?” [CW 11, par 520]

This shadow side is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego and makes projection a double-edged sword. Acknowledging your own projections means defeat of the ego as it realizes that it is not perfect and in control, but only through facing these shadow qualities can the ego become stronger and more robust, which is psychologically essential for personal growth and living an authentic life.

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The process of identifying our projections presents us with the opportunity to make conscious decisions and create our own destiny.

Projection doesn't always look the same. In some cases, the individual attributes their negative qualities or emotions to someone or something else. In other cases, they attribute their positive qualities or emotions to someone or something else. Over the next few weeks, we will explore our projections in more detail, but by way of introduction, below are some forms of projection:

- Attributing one's own bothersome qualities to someone else, e.g. arrogance.
- Attributing one's positive qualities to someone else e.g. charisma.
- Attributing one's values to suitable authority figures or organisations, e.g. integrity.
- Assuming other people share your beliefs, opinions, and priorities (i.e., complementary projection) e.g. slogans "Just do it".
- Assuming other people have the same skills and abilities as you (i.e., complimentary projection) e.g. expecting everyone to have the same level as you in consideration
- Attributing our passion and love onto objects, organisations, stories and movies, e.g. environmental issues.
- Attributing our aversions to objects, organisations, stories and movies, e.g. political parties.

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- Projecting our feelings about ourselves onto our bodies, e.g. not good enough.
- Scapegoating, e.g. it's the other's fault.
- Irrationally believing in the projection and its consequences. (i.e., delusional projection or paranoia) e.g. you are either for me or against me.
- Beliefs about objects, organisations, religions, science and institutions, e.g. they always do x.
- Our relationships to money, success and our careers, e.g. money corrupts.
- Our relationships to our partners, children, siblings and parents, e.g. they dismiss me.

APPLICATIONS:

The applications will run for two weeks on the Facebook Forum. We have two applications we would love for you to share on the Facebook Forum.

Week 1:

What brings you joy? Describe it in detail in your journal. Reflecting on your answer, what values and desires do you think it highlights?

Week 2:

What country/place do you yearn to visit? Explore your feelings, thoughts, memories and associations with this country or place. What is this projection trying to tell you about yourself?

Self-Reflective Exercises:

These exercises do not need to be shared, but please do them for yourself. Capture them in a dedicated journal.

What are you wearing today? Do you like it? What is it that you project onto your outfit or uniform? Reflect on how it makes you feel, what you think others think

when they see you in your outfit and what it represents to you. Is there something missing in your outfit or uniform that will express your personality more appropriately?

Reflect on a ritual or habit that you perform every day or often. It can be anything from the way you drink your coffee, make your bed, or what you do before you sit down to study or work. What is the meaning of this ritual or habit? How does it make you feel if you are unable to perform it? What is it that you enjoy or don't enjoy about his habit or ritual? What can you do to make this more conscious and meaningful?

What is more annoying than not being able to find the start of the sellotape roll? Capture your answer in your journal. Reflect on your answer and identify the projection that you have onto this frustration. What is the value within yourself that this answer illuminates?

If there was one thing that you could change on your body what would that be? How would your life be different? What value does this projection highlight? What do you project onto the current situation? How could you incorporate the desire you have into your current situation?

CONCLUSION

This was your introduction to this course. Please share your ideas, thoughts, insights, and questions on the Facebook Forum. The next module will focus on the unconscious and how this affects us in profound ways.