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An intentional pre-reflection: the prospective unconscious

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ABSTRACT. – The author explores the divergence between Sigmund Freud's and Carl Gustav Jung's conceptions of the unconscious, emphasizing their differing views on the nature of the unconscious and its role in the human psyche. Freud interprets the unconscious as a container of repressed impulses and desires, while Jung proposes a more dynamic and creative model, in which the unconscious serves as a source of evolutionary potential and individuation. The article also discusses the concept of the "implicit unconscious" in modern neuroscience, highlighting how these approaches compare to traditional psychoanalytic ideas. Specifically, a "prospective" conception of the unconscious is presented, capable of influencing decisions and guiding behavior toward new forms of self-knowledge and creativity. Through clinical case studies and references to modern physical theories, it is proposed that prospective unconsciousness can catalyze processes of change and transformation within the individual, reflecting a much more integrated and relational view of the human being in the context of their environment. The author suggests that psychotherapy should embrace this prospective dimension of the unconscious to facilitate a deeper understanding of the self and relational dynamics, promoting a creative dimension of the human subject.

Key words: unconscious, intersubjectivity, psychoanalytic process.

"*Where Freud argues that to cure neuroses it is sufficient to make the unconscious conscious, I say that it is necessary instead to harmonize with consciousness the expressions that flow from the unconscious matrix. I try to channel the fantasies of the unconscious towards the conscious psyche, not in order to eliminate them, but to develop them.*"
Carl Gustav Jung (in McGuire & Hull, 1995)

Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, although initially thinking they were in accord on the principles of the newly born psychoanalysis, actually had two very different conceptions of human beings, of the patient's suffering, and, inevitably, of the unconscious. Freud attributed suffering to repressed drives (Freud, 1915) and conceived of the unconscious as a con-

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tainer of what the patient had removed from their consciousness. As is well known, in his homeostatic conception of the psyche, he followed an entropic principle of seeking the most economical energy state. In his explanation of the death drive (Freud, 1920), alongside that of libido, he saw living systems yearning for quiet and absolute rest, for a return to that original state in which the wasteful life impulse had not yet emerged.[1] Jung, on the other hand, saw in the emergence of life an anti-entropic drive, an accumulation and expenditure of energy that teleologically yearned for a greater unfolding of all its evolutionary and creative potential. For this reason, he rejected Freud's energetic view of libido as sex drive and, in *Symbols of Transformation* (Jung, 1965), he marked his break with Freud by conceiving a more general and broader psychic energy, aimed at an undetermined future goal, through increasingly complex vital forms. In fact, Freudian drive theory described unconscious dynamics as the result of a radical conflict between nature and culture, between the drives of the Id and the superegoic demands of the ego's adaptation to society. Jung conceived unconscious dynamics as a tension between opposites – rather than a conflict – a tension that was, if anything, teleologically oriented towards making a personal contribution to social development. The opposites would, in fact, "transcend"[2] thanks to symbolic activity into a new attitude on the part of the individual, which would express an improved integration with lived reality. For this reason, Jung believed that dreams did not "hide" the unconscious conflict that would inevitably awaken the dreamer, but, on the contrary, revealed – through compensatory representation – the dreamer's rigid and unilateral attitude that manifested itself in neurotic symptoms.

This substantial divergence highlights two distinct views of human beings: on the one hand, a conception in which they are always in conflict between nature and culture (Freud); on the other, an anthropological interpretation that considers conflict as originating from the repression of the natural dialectic between opposites (Jung). These differences also give rise to a profoundly different view of the unconscious. For Jung, the personal unconscious, rich in possible individuative developments, not a repository of intolerable repressed conflicts, arises as an offshoot of the collective unconscious,

[1] In this, he had misunderstood Sabina Spielrein, who was the first to introduce the death drive and who, following Jung, conceived it as the loving transcendence of the ego into the You, in which the ego and the You lose themselves in a We as a third position signifying the evolution of a vital erotic desire.

[2] Jung, in analogy with the transcendental mathematical function, which brought together real numbers and imaginary numbers, attributed to symbols the ability to hold together the tension between opposites to resolve it in a new psychic position. "The transcendental function describes the mind's ability to form connections between mental contents, a fundamental process in the creation of meaning" (Knox, 2011, p. 124).

the potential matrix inherent in reality and life as a whole that forms the basis of all vital and material expressions. The collective unconscious, which we could more modernly refer to with different names based on certain psychological and modern physics theories (will be pointed out later), informs living beings about possible relationships with reality (Jung, 1947-54). The archetypes of the collective unconscious are "*patterns of behaviour*" (Jung, 1928, 1934-54) and "*internal working models*" (Knox, 2003), which tell us how to connect with the reality around us, with others, and with our evolved situation as human beings. They are potentialities of knowledge, not content-based acts or inherited knowledge. Based on this potential, in the course of the process of identification, each individual Subject will find their own way of taking action in life, their own forms of personal knowledge, and their own creative expression. Thus, Jungian analytical psychology has explored the changing kaleidoscope of our inner selves; according to Jung, the unconscious is not just a repository of the past, nor is it solely an implicit force that guides our automatic and unconscious actions. The unconscious is, in continuity with consciousness, a source of creativity and renewal that our consciousness constantly draws on to transcend our rigid identifications. It is older than consciousness and represents the "original data" from which personal and subjective consciousness emerges.

Freud describes an unconscious *topos* consisting of content that has already been given, content that has already been experienced and then repressed, while Jung's archetypal unconscious envisages the formation of potential content that is still developing, that is not yet fully in the field of consciousness, and that gives it prospective potential. We will see that the unconscious described by Jung is more in line with complexity theories and certain developments in current neuroscience than the one originally conceived by Freud.

In reality, when we talk about neuroscience here, we are referring to the interest and epistemic position of various neuroscientists regarding the phenomena of consciousness; we are therefore discussing the interpretations that various researchers give to the results of their research. As a result, the positions are multiple and not unambiguous. However, it is also true that everyone recognizes the role of memory processes that occur outside conscious awareness and that involve subcortical brain systems rather than the higher cortical ones. In other words, all neuroscientists now recognize continuous brain activity, which they describe as the "*implicit unconscious*". The implicit unconscious is very different from the dynamic unconscious conceived by Freud; it had already been described by the physicist and physiologist Hermann Von Helmholtz in the mid-19th century. He introduced the concept of the implicit unconscious to explain the automatic mental processes that occur without conscious awareness. Helmholtz observed that many of our perceptions and actions are the result of unconscious processes operating

below the level of consciousness. For example, visual perception involves complex unconscious calculations that allow us to quickly and accurately interpret the world around us (State of Mind, 2018). This concept has been taken up and explored in depth by cognitive neuroscience, which relates the unconscious to the functioning of memory processes. In fact, two memory systems have been identified: explicit (declarative) memory and implicit (non-declarative) memory. Implicit memory, which includes procedural and emotional memories, operates outside of consciousness and involves structures such as the amygdala and basal ganglia. The development of functional neuroimaging (EEG, PET, and fMRI, hyperscanning techniques) has made it possible to monitor brain activity in real time, confirming that large portions of our brain operate outside of consciousness. In fact, many of our decisions are influenced by automatic and unconscious cognitive processes, and seem to confirm, at least in part, some of Freud's psychoanalytic assertions about the unconscious. Even current psychoanalysis often refers to the implicit unconscious, identifying it also as the pre-reflective unconscious.

Much more controversial is the other unconscious described by Freud, the so-called "*dynamic unconscious*". It is well known that Freud proposed the concept of the repressed unconscious to describe libidinally repressed thoughts and drives that influence behavior and emotions. The dynamic (or repressed) unconscious is the result of defense mechanisms that protect the individual from unacceptable thoughts and drives. However, these unconscious contents can emerge through dreams, slips of the tongue, and neurotic symptoms. Here, however, neuroscientists are divided. Those of a neurocognitive belief strongly question Freud's dynamic unconscious or, at most, accept the process of repression limited to traumatic events. Traumatic emotions and memories can be repressed and influence behavior without the individual being aware of it. Neuroimaging studies have identified areas of the brain, such as the amygdala and hippocampus, involved in the repression and retrieval of traumatic memories (Mancia, 2006; Neuroscienze.net, 2018; Panksepp, 2012). For instance, the implicit dimension of memory supported by the hippocampus is the basis of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) techniques for "dissolving" traumatic experiences. Other neuroscientists, such as Mark Solms and Allan Schore, seek instead to validate Freud's dynamic unconscious, but offer an explanation that, in my opinion, largely alters the original idea of repression (Schore, 2019; Kaplan-Solms & Solms, 2000). For example, Solms, recalling that consciousness is activated by the brain stem, states that consciousness arises from emotions and is only secondarily conceptualized as the subject's experience. Therefore, in the first 2-3 years of life, we act only on the basis of non-declarative processes, because the process of reconsolidation of consciousness has not yet matured, and this shapes internalized attachment styles. Solms posits the dynamic unconscious (which develops later) as the resolution of a conflict (a choice

made by the ego) that has been stored in non-declarative memory in an automated manner and will be repeated in adulthood. The repressed material does not yet constitute realistic predictions, and in adults, this mechanism of automatic repetition cannot function adequately in relation to reality. Referring to Freud's "compulsion to repeat", he posits the repressed (displaced) as a prediction that is acted upon and repeated, but which can never be remembered. Repressed predictions remain in non-declarative memory and thus become a problem: new predictions on the same theme are associated with the repressed ones and generate symptoms. Solms argues that psychoanalysis should point out the repetitions to the patient and help them choose new predictions. Defenses act as an adaptation against the failure of repressed predictions.

> "Only when defenses fail does the patient become ill; defenses themselves do something good. Defenses are what shape our personality, but if they fail, the patient becomes ill." (Solms, 2021; Solms &Turnbull, 2002)

While acknowledging the importance of defenses – conceived, however, in a modern way, in line with attachment theory – we are here far removed from the original theory of libido, the cornerstone of Freudian psychoanalytic metapsychology.

Allan Schore places the unconscious dimension of consciousness in the right hemisphere, and, following Bromberg (2011), considers the process of repression a defense against anxiety, while the process of dissociation is considered a deeper defense against trauma. From a neurophysiological point of view, repression would then involve a "horizontal topographical regression" caused by the inhibitory action of the left hemisphere on the right hemisphere. At the same time, dissociation would be a "deep structural regression" between the right cortical and subcortical structures (Schore, 2003, 2019). Psychotherapeutic treatment, which Schore believes requires dual "synchronization" between the right hemispheres of the patient and of the therapist in order to be effective, has a special use for "structured controlled regressions". Here too, we are a long way from Freud's theory of libido; the importance of repression in the genesis of mental distress, especially for current pathologies, is greatly relativized.

In fact, these neuropsychodynamic positions, even if they aim to validate Freudian theory with neuroscience, depart from the conceptualization of the dynamic unconscious or, in any case, radically reinterpret it. The reinterpretations of the dynamic unconscious based on the findings of current neuroscience seem to me to be attempts to update Freudian concepts, which in part distort them (Solms goes so far as to invert the Ego-Id hierarchy, placing the Id at the cortical level and the Ego in the subcortical emotional areas) and partly accentuate the processes of dissociation rather than those of repression. Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber (2018), for instance, is very critical of these

Freudian reinterpretations in light of neuropsychoanalysis, and concludes by saying that:

> "I cannot entirely agree with Eric Kandel's firm conviction that modern neuroscience can truly save the future of psychoanalysis. However, I unambiguously share his opinion that curiosity and openness towards scientific developments are indispensable for innovation and creativity. In order for it to remain a science of the mind, psychoanalysis needs to renew and further develop its concepts and theories, repeatedly demonstrating that psychoanalytic theories are 'externally consistent' with the state of the art of other disciplines."

As we have said, Freud conceived the unconscious as a strictly personal and individual dimension, enriched by anxiety-laden content where instinctual conflicts with the Id were relegated. In the neurotic personality, the Ego was the jockey who had to control the Id's runaway horse (Freud, 1922). Perhaps it would be better to distance ourselves more decisively from the "Master" and delve more resolutely into a revision of the unconscious that allows us to imagine more open and meaningful spaces. This would not be to the detriment of Freud; as a pioneer of the nascent field of psychoanalysis, he described human psychic reality according to the tools at his disposal and his cultural and personal dispositions. His thinking was groundbreaking and creative, but if we wish to introduce a scientific basis into psychoanalysis, then his concepts must be revisable and falsifiable, as befits any science (Kuhn, 1996; Popper, 1934).

The emphasis on the traumatic origins of conflicts and dissociation (and less on content that is distressingly unacceptable to consciousness and repression), and on the mechanisms of non-declarative memory, once again highlights the unconscious as an implicit process of consciousness, making the dynamic described by Freud less significant.

Yet the implicit dimension is not the only unconscious function discussed in today's neuroscience. The pre-reflective unconscious processes information, makes quick decisions, and influences our emotions and behaviors. Efrat Ginot (2015) considers the unconscious a flexible structure, no longer just the guardian of repressed or inaccessible content, but also of "interconnected neural networks consisting of innate emotions, the conditioned learning they have produced, a myriad of automatic defenses and countless associations among them."

The unconscious is therefore an instrumental system, actively interacting with the outside world and capable of learning through perceptions and actions. These experiences then converge into procedural learning – emotional, cognitive, and behavioral – that does not require conscious attention. This continuous dialogue between consciousness and the unconscious is fundamental to our ability to adapt and survive.

In the view of many authors, unconscious processes can influence creativ-

ity and innovation (Damasio, 2010; Gallese & Morelli, 2024; Northoff & Schaefer, 2017). Georg Northoff distinguishes between a conscious self and an unconscious self, which are interconnected. The conscious self is mainly expressed by the structures of the cerebral cortex in the median areas and is characterized by feelings of agency, feelings of belonging to one's own body, autobiographical memory, a unified experience of self, self-attribution of perceptual stimuli and, neurofunctionally, overlaps with the activity of the *default mode network*, the incessant activity of the brain at rest. The unconscious Self is an "embodied" self, a physical self that extends the "*stream of consciousness*"; it reveals itself in those processes that are defined as "automatic" because they are not conscious when we think of ourselves as the Self and fall within the realm of "*embodied cognition*".[3] The unconscious self is mainly represented in the activity of the primary somatosensory and motor cortex (Lakoff, 2014) and is related to the processes of "embodied simulation" (see below, Gallese). These areas include social perceptions and empathy, thanks to the brain's neuroplasticity activity called "neural reuse", whereby neural areas originally developed and used for one purpose become available for multiple, similar, and different uses. Areas dedicated to the processing of perceptual sensoriality and actions can therefore expand into neural functions that regulate the perception of others and sociality. The sensorimotor "embodied metaphors" described by Lakoff are examples of how the brain uses old strategies in new ways: for example, physical cleanliness (*e.g.*, the action of washing one's hands) becomes a metaphor for "moral purity", involving the same brain circuits. Northoff and Schaefer (2017) highlight how the unconscious self and the conscious self are in constant interaction with each other, without any space-time discontinuity with the world. They thus arrive at the functionally unified concept of the "embodied self": the self or cognition are not exclusively mental activities, but are distributed throughout the context of life, including mental processes, the body and the environment, where the self is situated. This idea of the Self leads to a very different paradigm of consciousness, understood as a closed, self-referential individual system. The Self is an open system in an autopoietic sense: only its "way of working" is closed, while it is constantly open to information "coming in" from social interactions and the world. The conscious Self is therefore both closed and open, while the unconscious Self broadens our view of mental processes to include our relationship with others and continuous interaction with reality; in this sense, it is radically intersubjective. Northoff therefore concludes that there can be no Self without the world; indeed, it is the world

[3] The theory of *embodied cognition* argues that cognitive processes are not limited to brain operations, but also involve the body and its interactions with the environment; the mind and body are closely interconnected, and bodily experiences profoundly influence the way we think, understand, and interact with the world (State of Mind, 2023).

that creates the Self. Could we then say that *res extensa* precedes *res cogitans*? A Copernican revolution within Cartesianism?

Consciousness, therefore, arises from the unconscious that precedes it, and it is not consciousness that creates the unconscious through repression. This view seems to confirm Jung's claim that individual consciousness proceeds from the collective unconscious, as he wrote in his Preface to *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963):

> "My life is the story of the self-realization of the unconscious. Everything that lies deep within the unconscious tends to manifest itself externally, and the personality, in turn, wishes to evolve beyond the unconscious factors that condition it."

In the 1990s, Giacomo Rizzolatti (2006) and his team in Parma discovered the so-called "mirror neurons" that make up the "Mirror" system. On this basis, Vittorio Gallese formulated his theory of *embodied simulation*:

> "A crucial functional mechanism of intersubjectivity whereby the actions, emotions, and sensations of others are mapped by the same neural mechanisms that are normally activated when we act or experience similar emotions and sensations." (Gallese, 2012, 2018)

The Mirror system is therefore able to provide immediate information on the meaning of the action we see performed by one of our fellow human beings, even when the action is only imagined. Furthermore, the Mirror system allows us to imagine the emotional meaning that accompanies that action. This function of the cerebral organization of consciousness is radically relational, and is not originally conscious: we can therefore consider it implicit, unconscious, like a "genetic endowment" of consciousness. Once again, the first level of interaction with the world is bodily; our knowledge is *embodied cognition*, where the sensorimotor dimension precedes cognition, while intersubjectivity forms the foundation of individual development.

> "From the primacy of the subject, we discover the centrality of the relationship; the relationship precedes identification and configures a dimension of the self in which the subject is identified." (Gallese & Morelli, 2024)

Intersubjectivity originates from intercorporeality. "Everything happens as if the other's intention inhabited my body or as if my intentions inhabited theirs" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). All this takes place without requiring any explicit cognitive operation. A correspondence is established in the reading of the intentions manifested by the two bodies involved, which in turn creates another correspondence that we could define as "harmony among intentions". In other words, a congruence with the mental state of the other is determined, without, however, being a mere mirror imitation, but rather favoring the pos-

sibility of one's own growth and that of the other (Cozzaglio & Cutrale, 2022). With embodied simulation, we are faced with a mechanism that unites us with the others, while safeguarding otherness.

> "We are similar even when we coincide with each other to a very high degree. Even in that case, we are never able to neutralize the distinction and uniqueness of the subject, even though the subject is possible, or is capable of identifying themselves, only thanks to the fact that they are in relation to another." (Gallese & Morelli, 2024)

Like Northoff, Gallese emphasizes the inseparable informational relationship with the world for the development of the subjective self. He therefore prefers the neologism "becomingness" to the term "identity" to indicate the continuous becoming of the subject's consciousness and the creative relationship with the other and with the world. In accordance with the theory of complexity, Gallese emphasizes the transcendence of emergent properties, whereby if the constituent properties are a *conditio sine qua non* for something new to emerge, what emerges cannot be reduced to the original constituent properties. "We exceed ourselves, in other words we never coincide with ourselves and tend towards the beyond with respect to what exists".

Thus, even in this case, we no longer limit ourselves to describing only an implicit or dynamic unconscious, but consider a prospective unconscious that stimulates consciousness towards new and different forms of knowledge.

> "Schemes and implicit knowledge are present from the prenatal stage, perhaps in proto-forms and in potential. Knowing is recognizing by combining and recombining implicit knowledge with experience and validated knowledge, composing and recomposing endogenous schemes and knowledge with exogenous knowledge and schemes in different and non-deterministic ways." (Gallese & Morelli, 2024)

So, where does revisiting the unconscious lead us? Certainly, to an implicit preverbal unconscious. But that's not the end of it. We also recognize a prospective unconscious that is in constant dialogue with consciousness. This unconscious helps us express our being as Intersubjective Subjects and fuels our constant creative tension in relating to the world. Unconscious brain activity can facilitate the resolution of complex problems and the generation of new ideas,[4] supporting Jung's intuition that the unconscious is also an incessant source of creativity.

[4] A prime example is that of the physicist Wolfgang Pauli, who, while developing the "exclusion principle" that caused him to be awarded the Nobel Prize in 1945, received insights during his nighttime dreams. These insights were then developed during the daytime as he tackled complex mathematical calculations (Pauli, 1992; Tagliagambe & Malinconico, 2011).

Confirming an implicit intentionality inherent in human beings to recognize themselves in their knowledge of the world, even modern physics seems to require a perspective vision and, in some way, the potential unconscious. The paradigm of an objective reality rigidly defined by the laws of classical physics has been profoundly challenged by the development of quantum physics, which instead presents a reality consisting of relationships, potentialities, and subjectivity. The revolution in quantum mechanics, starting with Schrödinger's "wave equation" and Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle", tells us that reality is not predetermined, deterministic, and predictable. This only appears to be the case at the macro level of our common experience, but if we delve into the micro level, *i.e.*, the atomic and subatomic level, or the super-macro level (stars, galaxies, or the entire universe), the reality that presents itself to us is potential and in constant relation.

> "The vision of the universe that emerges from the description of quantum states is very strange, because variables only take on a definite value when two particles interact, but none of the variables are defined before the interaction. Furthermore, reality is based on indeterminacy and granularity rather than on continuity." (Faggin, 2022)

Ultimately, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle tells us not only that it is impossible to predict a phenomenon with certainty until it is observed, but also that there is a continuous and inseparable relationship between reality and *the Observer*. The concept of *entanglement* shows this continuous relational property of matter even more clearly. In fact, through mathematical necessity, entanglement argues that a change in the state of a particle that has entered into a close relationship with another particle also occurs instantaneously in the other particle with which it is interconnected. This occurs regardless of the distance separating them and without the need for any communication between them. These peculiarities of quantum mechanics suggest the existence of a potential dimension, in constant motion and change, which lies beneath the material and manifest reality of the universe as we know it. In other words, matter is the result of a potentiality that has stabilized into reality, but is still supported by a continuous dance of possibilities that remain underlying. This is the so-called state of "quantum vacuum" or "zero-point energy", *i.e.*, where the minimum energy value is encountered. In classical mechanical physics, the concept of vacuum state is much less significant than in quantum mechanics because, classically, the vacuum state is that of a system in which neither particles nor fields are present. Alternatively, the classical vacuum state is one in which the particles that make up the system are all at rest, *i.e.*, they have zero momentum and kinetic energy. In quantum mechanics, this is not possible due to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and the vacuum state actually consists

of a continuous production of particles and antiparticles (*e.g.*, a proton and a positron) that annihilate each other in a very short fraction of time ("zero-point field fluctuation"). The peculiar aspect is that in this quantum vacuum dance, particles always retain the information that makes them what they are: "A pion dematerializes as a pion and always re-emerges as a pion; it never becomes a photon" (Paolelli, 2014). This is why some physicists have conceived a holistic reality that underlies the expression of the material universe, which constitutes the intentional potentiality of what happens in reality in a manifest way and which they define as a non-predetermined and constantly moving "field of consciousness".

The physicist David Bohm wrote:

> "Space is not empty. It is full, as opposed to a void, and is the ground for the existence of everything. The universe is not separate from this cosmic sea of energy." (Bohm & Hiley, 1993)

Bohm therefore distinguishes between an "implicate order" and an "explicate order" in the universe.

> "In the implied order, space and time are no longer the dominant factors determining the relationships of dependence or independence of the various elements. Rather, another type of basic connection between elements is possible, from which our ordinary notions of space and time, together with those of separately existing material particles, represent abstractions as forms derived from a deeper order. These ordinary notions actually appear in what is called the explicated order, which is a special and distinct form contained within the general totality of all implied orders." (Bohm, 1980)

The explicit order is that of the current material universe, as we know it. The implicit order, on the other hand, could be seen as an "unconscious consciousness" not yet expressed, in all its prospective potential.

Other authors have given different names to the implied order – or *quantum potential* – hypothesized by Bohm: "Field A" (Laszlo, 2007), "Unified Field of Information" (Paolelli, 2014), "One" (Faggin, 2022).

Federico Faggin, together with theoretical physicist Giacomo Mauro D'Ariano, developed the Quantum Information-based Panpsychism (QIP) theory, which integrates consciousness and free will into the context of quantum field physics. Furthermore, QIP uses the mathematical concept of pure quantum state to describe our conscious experience in an analogous way.

To explain the reality that originally contains consciousness and free will, Faggin conceives a principle that gives purpose, meaning, and direction to the universe, which he calls "One". One is a teleological principle that constitutes the holism and dynamism of the quantum field, whose fundamental properties are consciousness, free will, and the creative principle

in continuous dynamism. Reality is thus conceived as "One that wants to know itself in order to realize itself", and man "is one of the countless conscious perspectives through which the One knows and realizes itself" (Faggin, 2022).

How can we fail to recognize here Jung's conceptualization of the collective unconscious or the philosophical-psychoanalytical and perspective position of Silvia Montefoschi (1986a, 1986b), who wrote in *Essere nell'essere* [*Being in Being*]

> "Being exists insofar as it manifests itself, and in manifesting itself, being recognizes itself in the forms it assumes. The universe itself is a form of knowledge that being realizes of itself in the forms that compose it. Among these forms, man is the one in which being reveals the highest level of knowledge."

And again:

> "The collective unconscious is the cognitive heritage of humanity as a whole, or rather the culmination of the universal cognitive process that has been realized in humanity and which brings with it the prospect of further development. The unconscious is therefore identified with the attainment of self-knowledge; and this process can only be realized through the individual cognitive process." (Montefoschi, 1985)

But how do we experience the perspective dimension of the unconscious, and how does this manifest itself in psychotherapy in the relationship between patient and analyst?

In psychoanalysis, we discover the perspective dimension of the unconscious when we distance ourselves from an exclusively individualistic and solipsistic approach. The problems faced by the patient, reflected in their symptoms and the discomfort that torments them, are then presented to the analytical couple as open questions about the search for meaning in their life experience as human subjects. These are open questions for both the patient and the analyst.

Dreams often convey a forward-looking message. Freud described dreams as a "royal road to the unconscious", meaning that dreams allow us to access the hidden and repressed contents of our minds. However, we could also say that dreams act as a "royal road from the unconscious", *i.e.*, a way through which the prospective unconscious expresses itself and allows us to explore new paths. Let us consider, for example, these two dreams in a prospective sense: *Many human beings around me are preparing to leave this reality and move into a parallel reality, where the categories of space and time have nothing to do with ours: what happens there does not reflect our concrete and sensory experience, but is something else. I witness these transitions, amid pleasant lights and colors and bod-*

ies undergoing surprising transformations. I wait to make the transition myself.

I was in a square, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. I saw that it was full of people, whom I approached with curiosity. As I got closer to them, I realized that the square was familiar because it was part of my world, but it was also unfamiliar because it was set in the future rather than the present. In the middle of the group of people, there was a man I did not know, but who seemed familiar to me. I got closer and closer and felt that I had something in common with this man. Suddenly, he turned around and smiled at me, saying: "It's me, dear Engineer Claudio!". I understand that that man is myself, but in my presence beyond my individuality located in the space-time of the five senses, and at that moment I feel that my matter dissolves into him to coincide with him. I am seized by the anguish of dying, but at the same time, I feel a sense of liberation of my being, beyond the professional role I have given myself in life.

In such cases, an individual interpretation of the two dreams cannot be ruled out. However, if we limit ourselves to this, is it not somewhat incomplete or reductive?

The clinical vignette I am about to describe aims to highlight the prospective potential of the unconscious, beyond mere individual intentions.

Esther is a 40-year-old woman who, in her analytical journey, seeks to come to terms with her conflictual relationship with her mother and, more generally, with her problem with motherhood. Struck by the book *The Mother I Never Had* by Joyce Carol Oates, she thinks she is repeating the story of emotional sterility in her relationship with her mother and that she is unable to produce anything. Her desire to have a child with her partner remains frustrated. Numerous visits to specialists in an attempt to have a child leads her to resign herself to a diagnosis of mutual infertility: she does not have enough viable eggs, and her partner has a low sperm count with weak and "lazy" sperm. She brings a dream to her analysis quite early on, which is both diagnostic and prospective, I would say. *She sees, on her parents' double bed, a cow lying down and a fierce-looking rabbit with bloodshot red eyes. Suddenly, the rabbit pounces on the cow and tears it to pieces. The scene is gruesome, and the entire bed is covered in bright red blood. Esther, who is watching the scene from outside, panics and begins to cry inconsolably.*

Obviously, the nightmare causes the dreamer to wake up, and she once again dreams about the rabbit the following night. *This time, the red-eyed rabbit is not threatening. It is lying in its burrow – it is actually a female rabbit – and Esther notices that it is brooding over some eggs, which eventually hatch and produce some beautiful baby rabbits.*

Esther comments on the first dream, recognizing her mother in the cow and herself in the rabbit, or rather, the anger that grips her because of a motherhood she experiences as distant and sterile, which frustrates any cre-

ative desire, whether biological or for self-fulfillment. Her relationship with her partner is described as warm and welcoming, but it is still unable to heal her wounds and lack of creativity. The second dream reminds her of the Easter rabbit, which cheerfully paints eggs, but in the end is only an illusory game for her, to console her for the harsh reality of a desire that cannot be fulfilled.

An intense period of analysis continued over the next two years, during which Esther committed herself to exploring and understanding her complex relationship with her mother. In the meantime, she underwent further gynecological examinations to assess the possibility of artificial insemination. With the guidance of specialists, she made two attempts at insemination, undergoing heavy hormone treatment, but without success. In the end, the medical verdict leaves her with no options: her infertility is too severe and it is pointless to continue with further attempts. She is getting older and will never be able to have children.

In her third year of analysis, Esther seems resigned to the idea that she cannot have children; ultimately, she has reconciled herself with her mother and her fate, and she is focusing creatively on her relationship with her partner. Together, they organize exploratory trips to exotic locations she has always wanted to visit. It is July, and during the break in her analysis, Esther goes on one of these trips with her partner to Indonesia. She tells me that even before leaving, she felt different, full of life, eager to explore, happy with her relationship with her partner and excited about what they were about to do. When she returns from her trip, we resume our therapy sessions, and she tells me that she is pregnant! During the trip, she had made love to her partner several times, and on one occasion she felt an unusual warmth in her womb, and she had a vision: she remembered that dream in which the rabbit was brooding over the eggs and, reflecting to herself, she had said that Easter eggs did not really have much to do with it.

What can I say? In her first dream, her unconscious had revealed the problem that was tormenting her intensely and extremely, making it impossible to ignore. But then, looking ahead, it had also shown her the potential she had within her, if only she could calm her fierce anger and accept her fears, represented by the rabbit. Esther is now the mother of a beautiful baby boy.

In conclusion, what can we state? The unconscious has been recognized as a fundamental and implicit aspect of consciousness. In this dimension, consciousness is a continuous processing of memory and a reworking of our personal history and our past, in view of new future developments. However, there is still much more to consider.

The individual unconscious dimension is intrinsically related to others and to the whole. In this transpersonal dimension, consciousness draws a

prospective intentionality from the unconscious, like everything that has not yet been said or given, like an expressive potentiality for something new and for change, expressed through symbols. That is, if we understand symbols not as a metaphorical reference to already given content, but according to two possible meanings:

> "In the first meaning, that of everyday human language, a symbol is a way of expressing the inexpressible, alluded to by means of a representation that is in fact called a symbol. In the second meaning, more typical of philosophical language, a symbol is a way of expressing the inexpressible, alluding to itself by means of a representation of itself that is in fact the symbol." (Montefoschi, 2005)

Dreams, through symbolic images and sensorimotor stimuli, can give voice to these potentials. In this way, they are transformed into a new narrative of the self for the Subject, expanding their intersubjective understanding of reality. This process not only enriches individual identity, but also fosters a deeper connection with others, stimulating shared reflections and continuous dialogue between the internal and external worlds. The prospective unconscious manifests itself to consciousness as an *intentional pre-reflection* – an intention not yet reflected upon – capable of allowing unexpressed potentialities to emerge. These potentialities guide the Subject towards a new understanding of themselves and help them to seek their own meaning in life.

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