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The ecopsychology is a new methodological discipline, which intends to study in a scientific way the relation between man and the environment that surrounds him. Man is the ultimate aim of a development that ties together in an inseparable way the mineral, the vegetal and the animal kingdoms, in a process of systemic-complex organization. Starting from this evolutionary assumption, the ecopsychology intends to study the possibility of man to revisit by means of his conscience the archetypal aspects of life, sedimented in the body as instincts and traceable in the psyche as symbolic images.

The Weltanschauung which the ecopsychology tends to is not the one dominated by a thought of casual relation, which reduces to "sign" and "semantics" all what concerns nature and man. On the contrary it can be defined as a holistic approach, which endeavors to put together in harmonious and vital way the conclusion of physical and biological sciences with those of human sciences. Such a wide program, of course, requires the dialectic integration of many disciplines, and this is made possible by means of a correct use of the analogic and symbolic thought. Through the symbolic language and the comprehension of the analogic significance of shapes, colours, images of all what surrounds us, it is possible to go back to the archetypes present in man. This way makes possible to recognize the plot of the totality of the world (*Unus Mundus*), and therefore the sacral sense of the existence.

With these premises, ANEB operates as scientific association without a purpose of gain, and gathers researchers of various scientific fields, ranging from Psychology and Psychoanalysis to Literature and Philosophy, to Art and Aesthetics, to Mythology and Religion History, to Economics and Social Sciences, to Biology and Physics. The aim of ANEB is, therefore, to recover a common language of approaching the world and man, based on a "circular logic", as analogy, which allows to tie the psychosomatic aspects of the being, and the synchronic events of the becoming.

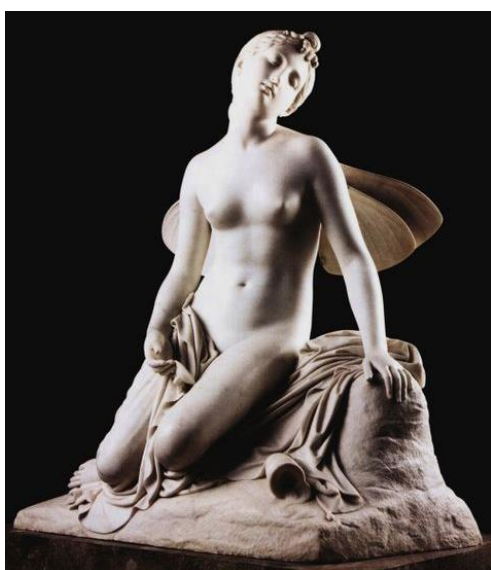
THE ARCHETYPAL TRACES OF THE BIRTH AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE MIND IN THE MYTH OF CUPID AND PSYCHE

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MATERIA PRIMA RIVISTA DI PSICOSOMATICA ECOBIOPSIKOLOGICA – INERZIA E TRASFORMAZIONE - NUMERO V - MARZO 2012 - ANNO II

From an ecobiopsychological perspective, analyzing a myth means not only looking for those images which symbolically reveal the experiences present in the individual and the collective psyche, but also identifying in them those traces that the evolution has impressed in the forms of the living world and man has always represented in them. Carrying out the analysis of the myth of Cupid and Psyche, it is therefore possible to underline some fundamental aspects to recognize a kind of *continuum* which has reference to the birth of the psyche from the living matter and to that echo of the analogous birth of the individual psyche from the embrace of the relationship in which since the beginning has been kept.

The myth of Love and Psyche is part of the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, a Latin text dating the second century b.C., later given the most famous title "The Golden Ass". The plot refers to the vicissitudes of the young Lucius who transformed by magic into a donkey, finally finds salvation through the intervention of the Goddess Isis. Underlining the symbolic contents, the story goes beyond its historical meaning, deepening its symbolic contents; it refers to the fall and the redemption of man and, ecobiopsychologically, to the development of the consciousness in relation to the matter in which it is embodied.



Tenerani P., The fainted Psyche, 1823-1828, Saint Petersburg, Hermitage

This myth is to be considered both as a symbolic reference to the metamorphoses of the consciousness of every single man in the direction of the archetypal totipotentiality expressed by the initiation, and as the expression of the most complex aspects related to the mind-body relationship the ordinary hermeneutics has left in the shadow.

It is known that Apuleius was initiated to the mystery cults of Isis. The initiation of Apuleius represents his need for individuation which, with reference to the magic domain, had the ambition to transform the consciousness of the individual from the instinctual dimension, symbolized by the donkey, towards a more developed evolved spiritual dimension.

An analytical psychological analysis would highlight the general aspect of the work of Apuleius, underlining how the story between Cupid and Psyche covers a great importance in the comprehension of specific problems related to the feminine psychology such as the detachment from the Mother and the

comparison with the development of her *Animus*.

However, being Cupid and Psyche part of a work which underlines the value of the transformation of the consciousness or of the initiation, it makes us, living in a modern age, need to explore all what goes beyond the feminine psychology to find those archetypal images which join the infrared and the ultraviolet¹, those images of the totality which orientate the consciousness of the Ego in the direction of the Self.

¹ Jung schematized the relationship between the Ego and the archetypes using the analogy of the bright spectrum. At the infrared pole he made the materiality, the instincts correspond while at the ultraviolet pole he placed the archetypes in their psychic dimension given by the images and the representations. The infrared-ultraviolet spectrum joins together the expressive totipotentiality of the archetype if indagated by the Ego in its double expressivity –matter and energy, body and psyche –allows an amplification of the consciousness in the direction of the archetypal dimension of the Self made explicit in the path individuation.

According to the ancient mysteries, every initiation had the aim to identify those general laws on the basis of the natural world which had to be recovered by man as a meaningful trace as to be able to orientate the metamorphoses of his own consciousness. Every initiation, in other words, had to integrate in itself the aspects of the body, of the nature, and of the psyche as to reawake the spirit. In this perspective, every detail or trace of the work, the name of the characters as well as the challenges related to the transformation, must be considered as that allusive expression of the metamorphoses inspiring the whole *telos* of the novel.

That is evident in the name of the character, Lucius, from the Latin *Lux*, an expression of the enlightened consciousness. At the beginning of the novel Lucius is a handsome, rich young man belonging to a well-to-do family, who likes the magics, the sorceries, in a word the power of the transformation. Lucius is therefore that still young consciousness which at the beginning of its existence, being unconscious, is dominated by the instincts.

But Lucius is also the image of the consciousness still embodied in the matter. Referring to Maturana and Varela, two neuroscientists belonging to the School of Santiago we would speak of *cognition*, and therefore of a still primitive state of consciousness unable to rise to all the potentialities of the reflexive consciousness typical of the human being. Specifically, with the development of the neurosciences, discovering the consciousness in every vital phenomenon, it has been identified a *primary consciousness* which expresses those states of cognition representative of the potentialities of the psyche still embodied in the matter (the young Lucius), and a *superior consciousness* or reflexive consciousness which underlines the development, the archetypal dimension got during the phylogeny up to man.

In the *Metamorphoses* Lucius wishing to rapidly obtain a transformative success, uses some magic ointment which together with some magic spells will turn him into a bird as to become, as told to his lover, "The winged Cupid of my Venus". But because of a fatal change of ointments his smooth skin will get as hard as the leather, his fingers and toes will become hoofs and from his backbone will appear a tail. Lucius will be transformed into a donkey to be turned again into a man only when eating the roses given him by Isis.

What is the meaning of all that? Of the archetypal images present in the novel? What about the choice of the donkey to underline the animal instincts? An answer to these questions to get a key, to give sense to both the human vicissitudes and, broadly speaking, to the different aspects of the archetypal forces expressed in the nature. can be given by exploring the archetypal images. The donkey is present in the Christian culture associated with the birth of the Redeemer which, in the Holy Scriptures, is described in the hut with in the background *the ox and the donkey*. But if the donkey is the symbol of obtuseness, how is it possible that the Redeemer is associated with such a confused origin? And why more than once in the Gospel it is underlined that the parents of Jesus, Joseph and Mary, reach Bethlehem riding a donkey? The donkey could be referred to as the most common means of transport of the time, but that would be reductive. Moreover, exploring the most hidden aspects of the archetypal images more subtle meanings may emerge even if not always that immediately accessible to the consciousness. In the figure of the donkey it is represented the instinctive element of man, the expression of a life developing on a terrestrial and sensual basis. It is known that to this animal is related a great phallus, the symbol of a Dionysiac power, but also big ears. In the Eastern iconography, the animals such as the elephant, Ganesha, as well as the images of Buddha show big ears to underline the capability of perceiving the original sound of the creation. The Saviour, the image of the cosmic Self, who was born in a hut with the ox and the donkey in the background, seems to communicate how the spiritual consciousness maintains in itself three prerogatives in his birth: the first one is related to the ox, as the symbol of quietness, of a quiet force, of the power of work and sacrifice: the second one related to the hut, to underline the spirit must have an intrinsic humility, a connection with the forces of the earth (*humus* = earth, ground), and finally the donkey which points out how the spiritual consciousness must be able to dominate the

matter, the instinct submitted to it. Consequently, in the novel the initiation of Apuleius implies his initial return to the elementary state of the instinct, but of an instinct with a potentiality, if sublimated to carry out its metamorphoses.

Archetypically, the image of the donkey refers to the transformative force present in the phylogeny, the *élan vitale* of Bergson, the archetypal stimulus which in the brute matter, dominated by the blind instinct and sexuality will get to sublimate in the human being in the love experience. In other words, since the late nineteenth century the biologists and the philosophers have referred to the germinal *plasma* or *élan vitale* to underline that primordial force of the nature which subdues every transformation of all the living forms, those of the vegetable world as well as those of the animal one, until man. But just because this archetypal force with an instinctual excess of power has in itself the possibility of being "listened to" in its most archetypal meaning (the big ears), it can be sublimated in the most evolved dimension of an attractive force (the lover) meant to orientate the destiny of the human beings.

In the novel Lucius using the magic ointment and the magic spells for his transformation into a bird, underlines how his wish was that of elevating his psyche towards the awareness of his own spirituality getting his soul free from the matter.

As described, every apprentice of initiatic rules cannot take short cuts or act under false pretences to get to the transformation consequently Lucius, even if wishing to elevate his destiny towards the spiritual direction, uses misleading instruments, not responding to the needs of a real change. Referring to the Ego reality, how often in fact, especially in young people, the strong desire to change their own existential condition drives them, as Lucius did, to act under false pretences? The drugs, the alcohol, all the psychological deceptions and the illusions the human consciousness disguises with, represent nowadays that experience similar to Lucius's attempt to change himself.

Concerning the archetypal aspects, in relation to the myth of Cupid and Psyche, it is important to underline them not only with reference to the subjectivity of the individual, that is the mind-body relationship, but also to the collective aspects, present in the nature and well expressed in the matter-energy relationship. This is evident in the archetypal image of God Eros. Archetypically, Eros is the product of two opposite forces, the attractive and the repulsive ones, which in the ancient mythology were related to the images of *Ares and Aphrodite*. These forces merged in a precise balance in the figure of Eros and were thought to be the basis of all the cultures as well as the foundation of life. In the Eastern iconography the *Yin* and the *Yang* in China, as well as the concepts of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* in India, represent the symbols of the aggregation of the matter and of the energy. These forces are present in the structure of the atomic world, in the shape of proton and electron, but also as the archetypal basis and synthesis of all the opposites at the basis of the evolution of life. A prayer in a Greek magic papyrus states referring to Eros: «You first-born, creator of the universe, you with golden wings, you obscure, you who veil all the reasonable proposals and inspire mysterious passions: you secret living hidden in every soul, you who have caused the invisible fire touching all the animate things and tormenting them with infinite voluptuousness and painful pleasure since the creation of the universe: you who can cause pain with your presence sometimes reasonably but some other times unwisely [...]. You master of the oblivion, you father of the silence for whom and towards which every light radiates...»².

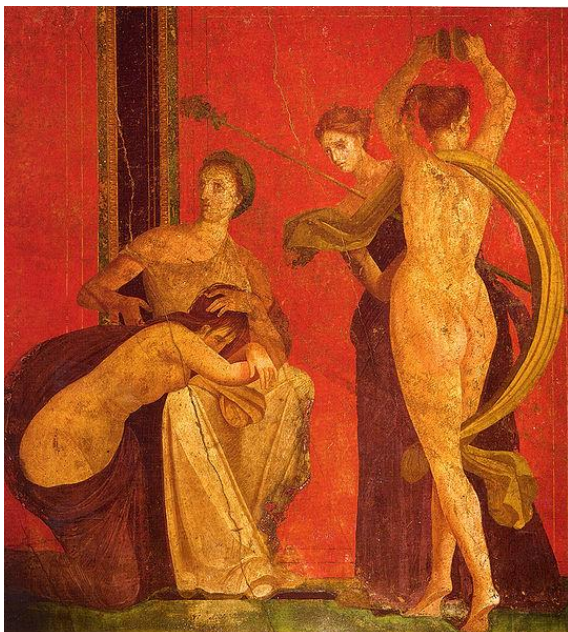
Today, thanks to the totality of their force and their meaning, these archetypal images can also be found in the theory of the attachment. In the attachment, meant as the tie a person or even an animal has got with his/her/its own *caregiver*, it is evident how the aim is to keep a respectful distance between two individualities which mutually self-regulate in their affections, as to allow the birth of the psyche from this relationship. In the

² *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, in Citati P., *La luce della notte*, Mondadori, Milano 1996, pag. 106-107

attachment, the subtle play between the pleasure of the mutual attraction and the pain of the detachment of the two individualities must always be maintained as happens in all the vital phenomena belonging to the dimension of the archetype of Eros. Ecobiopsychologically, not only the forces of Eros refer to the studies on the attachment, but are present in man. In fact, in the infrared of man, the forces of Eros constitute the attractive modalities which connect the single cells of the organs which in turn drive the mind to more complex entities of the system, and permit the same system to harmonize with them in a living unity called "Man". By studying these forces belonging to the infrared world that the ecobiopsychology considers as having their own "vital proportion", the consciousness, getting hold of them as a conscious experience, can concretely live its own amplification. It is important to reflect on the synthesis of the myth to highlight the most meaningful knots present in the process of transformation starting from the archetypal forces³.

The marriage of Psyche and Eros is at first quite a paradisiac experience making Psyche claim: «I'd rather die a hundred times over than lose you. I have no idea who you are but I love you. I love you desperately, I love you as I love my own soul; I wouldn't exchange your kisses for the kisses of the God Cupid himself». This is an ecstasy of darkness. It is a condition of not-knowing and not-seeing, a condition where Psyche can only touch and hear her beloved. Symbolically, this initial condition refers to the unconscious experience of a psyche still assimilated to the instinct projecting all its desire towards an object of love to be meant as an exclusive ideal of love.

As far as the psyche of the new-born is concerned, obviously taking the due precautions, this archetypal stage could be representative of that primary experience the new-born has in its "appetitive" dimension towards his/her own parent, driven by the "instinctual" need of integrating his/her own need of relationship, that the theory of the attachment observes and theorizes as the main organizer of the psyche. In fact, what in a synthetic and abstract way is called "mother-child union", expresses in the infrared as that initial care-giving made of caresses, of words which "caress", of smell recognition, of that maternal tenderness which culminates in the nursing where the looks of the child and of the mother mirror in a sort of "beatitude".



Detail of the terror and the ecstasy, 1st century b.C.,
Pompei, Villa dei Misteri

In this passage of the myth, the role played by the sisters who cast doubt making Psyche think her invisible husband is a monster, expresses that fertile, evolutionary doubt which informs the psyche about the danger of being eaten by the monster of the indifferenciation. Neumann claims «In the same body she hated the beast and loved the husband, ... we perceive a *drama* of great depth and power, a *psychic transformation* of unique meaning. It is *the awakening of Psyche* as psyche»⁴. That is the first physiological passage: up to then the psyche had lived the relational aspect in a natural and unconscious way, but in so doing, the individuality could not develop and most of all explore the potential of its own nature but only depend on the instinct.

However, Psyche more than listening to "the voices" of the palace and caress her invisible lover, wishes to see him but while admiring her divine bride she let one drop

³ Apuleio, *Le Metamorfosi*, BUR, Milano 1990, pag. 307

⁴ Neumann E., *Amore e Psiche. Un'interpretazione nella psicologia del profondo*, Astrolabio, Roma 1989, pag. 58

of the ointment fall on the leg of Eros. At the light of the lamp Psyche recognizes Eros, the God of Love. This passage shows a new awareness present in Psyche: the “implicit” need for knowledge. She is driven by the inner forces of the infrared. She has not recognized Eros yet, towards her own realization in the ultraviolet, first of all she must recognize the initial indistinction, she must enter the relationship world through the awareness. But in this passage Psyche loses Eros because every consciousness which wishes to transform is forced to abandon the amplexus with the dark blindness of the instinct as to transform the forces of the evolved dimension of the awareness; but such a detachment, this separation, this search for awareness is not easy as it always implies, as well expressed in the myth, the presence of pain.

Concerning the experience of the attachment, at the dawn of the human intelligence, also the child through his/her own wishes builds up an ideal world without any contradiction. Every passage from the ideal world to the real world is marked by a difficult awakening which can be lived as a loss or a pain. In such a context the role of the mother or of the caregiver who with her/his sensibility, experiences or knowledge is fundamental to allow the child this passage helping him/her with the birth of his/her own distinct separate psyche.

It is interesting to take into account this symbolic image able to join both the most specific aspect of the human experience and the most general one linked to the archetypal value. In the myth what separates Psyche from Eros is represented by the hot oil falling from the lamp lit by Psyche. In many cultures the lamp is the symbolic representation of Man: it has a body of clay, a vegetative soul or principle of life constituted by the oil, a spirit represented by the flame. Offering it in a sanctuary is the same as offering yourselves, placing yourselves under the protection of the “invisibles” and of the guardian genes. The same theme is present in the Christian habit to offer and light candles to the statues of the saints. If the lamp has got this symbolic meaning, the hot oil and the flame represent that initial awakening of the consciousness which “lighting”, lays the foundations of the wish for knowledge. In fact, when the human being wishes to develop the awareness of his own state of consciousness must symbolically “light” experimenting the birth of that condition of explorative curiosity which methodologically belongs to the “birth” of a hypothesis of work.

However, in its path of growth and knowledge, the psyche, once separated from the blind dependence from Eros, if willing to amplify its awareness, must revisit the instinctual consciously without being overwhelmed, and this revisitation will be in the tale expressed by the challenges induced by Venus.

The first challenge was that of separating and arranging a great heap of wheat, barley, millet, poppies and chickpeas peas, lentils and broad beans while Venus taking part in an encounter with the gods. In so doing Psyche is helped by the people of the ants, the forces of the earth, the symbols of the instinctive world, the unconscious forces belonging to a Psyche enabling her to choose, evaluate, order the conscious confusion of the material world in its germinative aspect present as a potentiality to be made conscious in the psyche. The myth seems to communicate through these images that the psyche, the very moment learn to discriminate the signs of the things, must learn to get the “germs” of the origin of things symbolized by the vegetables which specifically are all seeds. The same, the child, in his/her separation from the original union with the mother will begin to get the world known by means of food coming from the ground quite different from the milk, and by eating parts of the world, in his/her psyche, he/she will start and allow the relationship with the others.

The second challenge Psyche has to face is that of taking a wool-flake from those “marvelous sheep with golden wool”. Psyche will be helped by a water reed which suggests her how to rise to the challenge. She has not to get near the sheep at mid-day when the sun is high in the sky because the heat makes them aggressive but instead gather the wool left on the branches of the trees at sunset. The second challenge highlights how the choice of these images is not at all casual: the image of the sheep if read through “the vital analogy”, through the archetypal expressivity of nature, expresses in itself a bipolar instinctual force. On the one hand, the sheep in its juvenile form of the lamb is the expression of the meekness, of the dependence (the flock) and

of the “sensitivity” (sacrificial lamb), and on the other end is the ram, with its sexual aggressiveness and its instinctual force. Psyche, after having been able to grow up through the knowledge of the nature behaving similarly to the primitive animals which had to learn about which herb was poisonous and which one not from their germinative roots present in the vegetable life of the nature, must now confront with the animal forces. In the myth Venus, symbol of the Nature, advises Psyche to approach these forces “in the full consciousness of mid-day”. But it is the reed, that voice from the arboreal world, that world already elaborated in Psyche through the assimilation and the knowledge of the vital forces, which allows her taking possession of the forces of the soul approaching it not directly not to wake the reactive forces of the animals, but indirectly recuperating what the animals had spontaneously left on the branches.

This passage seems to highlight how the psyche for its own evolution, must also take possession of the forces belonging to the animal world which are much more powerful than the vegetable ones, but gradually what means for our Ego the recall and the acquisition of “the images more than the direct aspects of the instinct”. It is, in fact, a different direct approach to sexuality compared to an exploration through the assimilation of allusive images as it happens with the evolution of the human beings. From a psychological perspective, this passage is essential in relation to the evolution of the human beings, specifically concerning the attachment aspects as reported in the studies of the object relations theories when underlined that to face the urge of the instincts it is needed to transform the *beta* elements, that unbearable in themselves to be elaborated, into *alpha* elements. With reference to the third challenge Venus asks Psyche to fill in a crystal vessel with spring water which flows into the Styx marsh and the currents of the Cocytus, the rivers of the hell. That is on the highest peak of a mountain and the way to reach it is guarded by wild dragons. This time is the eagle of Zeus coming to help her. Symbolically, the eagle represents the need of the presence of a consciousness not anymore under the control of the matter. Therefore, Psyche to confront with the forces of the death and of the destruction has to make use of a completely new awareness, not anymore dominated by the forces of the matter but able to approach them by means of a new reflexive capability. Filling in the crystal vessel with the death water can then mean that the consciousness must become transparent to the death forces as that vessel without being dominated by them. Only when able to go beyond the anguishes caused by the death, the consciousness can rise to the awareness of its own spirituality. Referring to the attachment, the image of the psyche becoming transparent to the forces of the underworld can correspond to the psychological one where the child starts distinguishing the cyclicity of the phenomena without dreaming of their complete



van Dyck A., Cupid and Psyche, 1639,
London, Royal Collection

separation. In fact, the perception of the cyclicity of the light and of the darkness being the time unit called day, if taken for granted by the adult, it is not natural in the infant psyche, where initially the day and the light are completely separated as events not at all in relation among themselves.

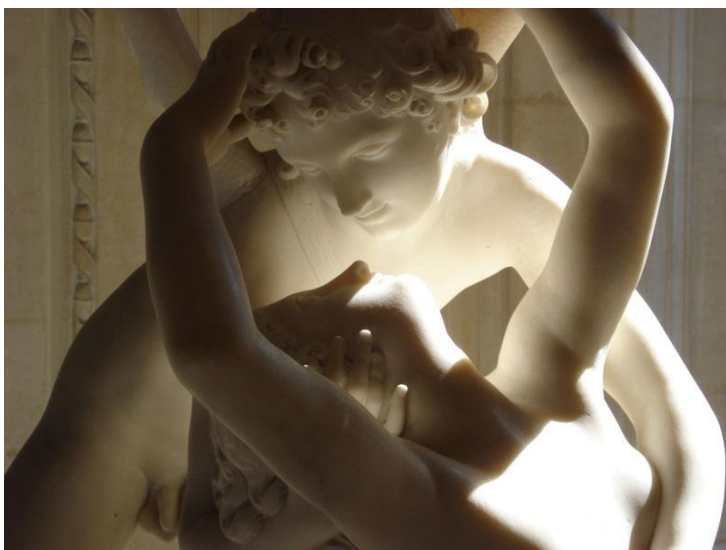
In the last challenge Psyche will confront without any help from the vegetable and animal world. The only help will come from a tower, the symbol of the human experience which will tell her about the useful hints to carry out her task. Venus will give her an empty vessel and send her to the hell to meet Persephone, the goddess queen of the underworld. The vessel was to be filled in with the qualities of the Goddess useful for Venus for an encounter with the Gods. Psyche frightened at the idea of entering the kingdom of the death thinks about committing suicide letting herself fall from

the tower. But the tower will tell her how to rise to the challenge. Following the indications of the tower, Psyche will be able to have access to the underworld and fill in the vessel for Venus. However once got the gifts of Persephone, she opens the vessel immediately going into a *sleep-like* state known as *torpor*.

Symbolically this is the most complex and the most mysterious challenge. The deepest aspects of the human soul representing the comparison with the death. Referring to the archetypal images, the comparison with the death implies, for the consciousness of the Ego, the conscious return to that indistinct condition psychologically represented by the psychoid unconscious. where the matter and the energy, the mind and the body, are so confused to be indistinct. Psyche is seduced by the divine qualities of Persephone, that *hybris* the consciousness experiments in its relationship with the different archetypal images able to give a preliminary power of the awareness without perceiving the inflative entity of the energy at play. The tower helping Psyche refers in a collective optic to the forces of the human cultures, and personally to those forces structured during its growth.

As far as the evolution of the human being is concerned, these forces are always present during the transformation in the very early infancy, in the adolescence, in the most meaningful steps of the human existence. The human being confronts with these archetypal forces often unconsciously guiding his existence but once willing to search for his own individuation, he is compelled to confront with the anguish of loss of his own identity. The partial moments of this anguish are lived as depressive aspects, if not suicidal, of the subjective experience of the Ego.

Concerning the theme of the attachment, it is known that the new-born immediately establishes with the mother a sort of dynamic relationship which can well be expressed in the concept of a virtual dance between two interacting units. This spontaneous automatism is a direct expression of the archetypal forces. As the virtuous circuit of relational correspondences will be activated in a coordinated way, the child, through a confirmation of the relationship with the mother will progressively conquer the capability to elaborate a discretionary power towards the world. Every moment, every further passage marked by the evolution of his/her consciousness of the Ego, the child will detach from Eros meant as that archetypal force necessary. Getting his own progressive individuality marked by all those moments of transformation the myth of Cupid and Psyche has described using the archetypal images. That means that every time the child needs to experiment his own individuality, will subtract from that form of power determined by the indiscriminate embrace of the archetypal forces of Eros. In its growing the psyche of the child, establishing object relations



Canova A., Cupid and Psyche, 1787-1793, Paris, Louvre

with the world in a more and more coordinated way, will realize its own physiological development. The psychopathology demonstrates the tragedy lived by the consciousness each time that Psyche detaches from Eros. There are in fact conditions in which the “new-born” psyche maintains in itself a manipulative *hybris* on the world similar to that new-born egoic capability (the narcissistic aspect), as well as a psyche which scared to separate from Eros may take refuge in the warm embrace of the lover (the depressive personality trait).

That is the outcome of the reflection on the

myth of Cupid and Psyche: the focus has been on the initiatic value of the myth in relation to the path of transformation that the instincts belonging to the telluric world, have to follow to raise to the “divine” world of the consciousness, and on its typically human value of the birth of a consciousness of the Ego which detaches from the dependency of the instinct thanks to the “cradle” of the relationship.

The care-giving relationship in fact both inwardly and objectively as Jung has taught us, is essential for the development of the life and of the consciousness. The same, James Hillman, deepening into the study of the Anima and of its epiphany in the myths, writes in *A blue Fire* «Whatever the disguise, what is taking place is the *creative Eros* connecting with an *awakening Psyche*»⁵.

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⁵ Hillman J., *Fuochi blu*, Adelphi, Milano 1989, pag.394