Western consciousness is by no means the only kind of consciousness there is; it is historically conditioned and geographically limited, and representative of only one part of mankind. It is a mistake to think that we are the center. We start with that prejudice. But we are really devilish, awful things; we simply do not see ourselves from the outside. We think we are really wonderful people, highly respectable and moral, and so on, but in reality we are bloody pirates. What the European thinks of himself is a lie. We read the newspapers, we learn about the world of politics and economics, and we believe that this is something concrete, as if everything depended upon what we would do about currency exchange rates, the general economic situation, and so on. On this we are completely mad, as if dealing with these matters were the right thing to do. We take it for granted that this is the world where real things happen, that it is the only world, and that perhaps there is nothing beyond it. But there are innumerable people who think differently: we are few compared to those who have a completely different idea about the meaning of the world. For these people, we are simply ridiculous, because we live in a sort of illusion with respect to the world.[1]

When evil is exclusively attributed to others, even more so if these "others" are different and far away from us, circumscribed within an identifiable category, it is partly projected outside and partly relegated to the unconscious (in fact, it is during childhood that this psychic mechanism is activated: *we* were absolutely good; evil was, instead, located in some remote region, comfortably and well-separated from our known world).

A nation, a society, a single individual, or all of humanity is not instinctively inclined to attribute the responsibility for evil to themselves, not even in retrospect, and the borderline between good and evil does not separate the good and evil within us, but rather serves to separate us, who are good, from others, who are evil incarnate. It is easy at this point to demonize the other, from whom we separate ourselves to confirm our purity by putting up barriers or walls which we also ask for them to help us pay for.

Evil comes from the outside. In Egypt, Seth, god of destruction, chaos, storms, and violence, is brought by the desert wind; he is the divinity of the borderlands and foreigners, but at the same time he is also considered to be the god of the equilibrium between the positive and the negative. In Norse mythology, Loki is also a constitutionally ambiguous god: he symbolizes the Shadow and personifies evil; his deeds testify to a great cunning, as well as the ability to become a point of contact and exchange between gods and other mythical

figures. Loki stands apart from the usual moral norms, and his transversality and eccentricity serve to maintain the cosmic balance, which is continually destabilized and then restored by his actions. He is the origin of evil, but paradoxically, his malignant side guarantees the existence of the good. Moreover, his ambiguity is underlined by his bisexuality and tendency to change form (his name appears to be derived from the word for flame, the symbol *par excellence* of state changes) as well as to perform clownish and clever actions, typical of the trickster. Still further, in Abraxas, the apotropaic and multiform divinity of probable Gnostic-Mithraic origin present in the Persian tradition, we find light and darkness, male and female, guilt and purity together. He is an invisible being, an archetype, who acts as a mediator between mankind and the Sun and, according to the Persian tradition, symbolizes the union and totality of Arimane, leader of the Daeva, demon-like creatures that incarnate Evil, Darkness, and Substance, and Ahura Mazda, in which Good, Light, and Spirit are lodged.

In opposition to the theories of good as *summum bonum* and evil as *privatio boni*, gradually advocated and disseminated in various forms by authors ranging from St. Augustine to Scotus Eriugena, and to the "lesser good" of Leibniz, Jung states that evil is a psychic reality consubstantial with the reality experienced by the psyche.

Here, then, is the ancient fear of foreign invasion, carried out by beings who are *surely* more advanced than our civilization, who usually attack us, or could attack us, with the intention of annihilating us, for two reasons: either because they have run out of something which is indispensable for their survival and which we are unlucky enough to possess, or because they are *absolutely evil*, and their goal is blind, in the sense that their evil nature "forces" them to crush the stupid inhabitants of the Earth who, deep down, are quite good, apart from a few hiccups along the way, but who, whenever they are proudly defending their own territory together, find solidarity, courage, heroism, and good feelings that would otherwise remain submerged.

Post-industrial society and hegemonic culture have, more or less unknowingly, ridiculed and banalized the idea of Evil. Evil has been sterilized, with the result that the Shadow has been expelled, but only apparently: the contemporary collective psyche has built a "ship of fools" in which to expel all our negative qualities, but when we later awaken from this illusion, we find it lurking outside the door to our homes or inside our very walls.

The process of globalization has been forcing mankind toward shared meanings and a universal validity of values which, though apparently leading to the "protection" of the dominant contemporary social system, is not always able to guarantee the expression of the individuality of the people, especially those who, due to historical or personal psychic and collective events, have no "central" or defined roles in the host society. The result is, often, a profound split between the social part of the individual (the Person) and its more intrinsic and internal components which, being more protected from external, worldly influences, are closer—psychologically and symbolically—to the oldest layers of humanity.

What we are facing globally is the realization and re-actualization of a form of archaic thought in which people who plan and carry out criminal acts have a very serious psychic immaturity and, perhaps even more serious, a very dangerous incapacity to think symbolically.

Thinking through symbols means understanding and welcoming within oneself the possibility of the indefinite, tolerating incompleteness, doubt, and paradox, all of which are elements making up the Self, in the knowledge that, beyond the most obvious meanings and explanations, beyond the absolute Light, there is a submerged world of contradictions, of the non-finite and of non-final explanations, that point to different and still other meanings.

We are witnessing the loss of those overflowings of meaning that were the mysterious heritage of every religion and which distinguished them from otherness. We are filling our psyche with concepts, techniques, certainties, and skills, but we are losing silence.

Contemporary society, having lost the sense of expectation and of the sacred, the transcendental, and the mysterious, has placed the sign and the symbol on the same level, producing a dangerous confusion of meaning. The sign corresponds to one and only meaning, and if by chance our unconscious, which is infused with semantic univocity, introduces a dissonant, strange or unknown element, alarm and panic are triggered in the rational psyche and defense systems are adopted, some of which are also unconscious.

What is happening in the world, with such naked and cruel acts of terrorism, shows a misunderstanding of the Shadow. "Civilization" has forced upon the individual a radical restriction of his/her freedom, in the sense that every personal idea of "justice" has to be

subverted by a socially sanctioned justice, albeit not always shared, whether it is divine or secular. Over time, moral codes change, depending on changes in society as well as those in the collective and individual psyche. In Italy, for example, laws on abortion and divorce have changed the boundaries between good and evil, modifying the priorities of some values that are more or less accepted: today, the law affords protection to individual freedom with respect to family protection in the case of divorce[2] and, in the case of abortion, it protects the agency of women in relation to maternity.[3]

In the particular case of Islamic-inspired terrorism, a struggle is underway between the individual and the society in which the individual lives and was often born and raised; there is a dramatic fracture between a collective unconscious, by its nature impossible to identify but whose roots date from a time long before the present, temporally and culturally, and a personal unconscious made up of painful repressed memories, pregnant with privation, marginalization, uprooting, ignorance, and desires for revenge, which have not found a resolution in the individual's psyche, remaining at the level of Shadow.

I truly believe that one of the causes triggering the devastating fury of recent, dramatic episodes of terrorism derives from the emergence of socially and individually pathological conditions such as depression and, above all, identity crisis and the anxiety of non-being. These have found their horrific "exit pathway" that we have learned to recognize because the majority of the individuals committing these acts of terror are from the first generation of immigrants who have their primary needs fully met: if their parents and grandparents had to reinvent their everyday social context, finding a job, accommodation, and a "logic" to having uprooted themselves from their places of origin with which, however, they maintained a deep psychic bond and which they were recognized as being from, today's terrorists find themselves to be no longer the children of their family's place of origin, but psychically not entirely, or only superficially, integrated into their new cultural environment either. These individuals possess a huge share of free psychic energy which they are unable to invest in pro-social activities, but rather anti-social, in a multilayered act of rebellion against the previous generations, desperate and despairing. It is as if the psychic energy of two or three generations before them has been compressed, with only a narrow passageway to escape, rendering their expression violent. When individuals lose, or perhaps have never found, the ability to relate, even symbolically, to impersonal social institutions, there is a serious risk that the public part of the individual's life may collapse, with a consequent

withdrawal into radicalization. Every experience, every aspect of life that affects an individual who has embarked on the path of radicalization, is perceived as a profanation of truth and faith. The individual becomes hard, closed to the world and the society in which he or she lives. James Hillman would say that it is as if there were excess salt, which pushes the person to a paroxysmal closure and a virginal self-perception. The risk that society runs is what Hillman called the fervor of salt, which can lead to fanaticism, puritanism, and terrorism: a lack of salt leads to the slackening of social and individual principles, whereas excess salt can facilitate entry into a climate of terror.[4]

Blind adherence to a collective "ideal" crushes any individual desire, transforming identity into an undifferentiated set of characteristics: it is the opposite path to individualization. This sort of "collectivization" protects individuals from the discomfort of being face-to-face with their own ghosts, with their own selves, enabling them to hide not only from the eyes of the "enemy", but also from their own eyes. The massacre of random unarmed and unsuspecting citizens accentuates the indifferentiation of the victims as well as the executioner: group ferocity causes the sinking into the Shadow of any sense of guilt which, for the individual, can evoke feelings of human pity, but for the group, the horde, it hides in the non-distinction, precluding any sensitivity. This explains the extreme coldness and cynicism with which terrorists perpetrate blind and ferocious acts of violence or cold executions of "infidels": this is the anesthesia of terror.

The violence of terrorist attacks is the dramatic concretization of a symbolism missing in Western society, in whose collective psyche a monster has been growing which is invisible to those who do not want or do not know how to see it. This monster is now attacking the host body from within. The Shadow has exploded and is corroding an increasingly sick body: the body's reaction is similar to that of a feverish sick person who, rather than understanding whether the fever originates from a cold or an infection, wards off the cold with a triple layer of sweaters: it will not die from the cold, but rather from sepsis.

The search for immortality does not regard the individual, but the whole group; that is why the communication strategies of IS try to involve the masses. The individual regresses psychologically for the benefit of the group's psyche, which is governed by "leaders" who exalt the submissive and indifferentiated members of the group itself. The existence and the sacrifice of the individual guarantees the survival of the group. That is why I argue that

there is a terrorist disease, rather than a terrorist, since "madness" is to be sought in the psyche of the group rather than the individual. If you read the results of the Rorschach tests that were given to Nazi officials during the Nuremberg trials, psychiatrists were long reticent to reveal their findings; only one, after many years, though not addressing individual responses, stated that it was considered inappropriate to publish the results precisely because the respondents' replies were considered "normal" on average. This made him reflect on the possibility that anyone, potentially, finding him/herself in a certain place at a certain historical, economic, social, etc. moment, could have "revealed" his or her Shadow and been overwhelmed by it.[5]

Renouncing social life in favor of remaining hidden means renouncing any relationship outside of the group; psychologically, it is to renounce the acceptance and decoding of the complexity of real life, made up of contradictions, limitations, and "unsaturated thought". The choice of radicalization frees up the individual, in the sense that it allows him or her to entrust every choice and every interpretation to the leader. Thought is "saturated" because, in a closed group, there is no exchange with the outside, no space for any psychic movement. In the long run, however, it will be the "impermeability" of the group that leads to its implosion and death.

The uniformity of clothing, combined with camouflaging facial features, helps to homogenize the mass whose very reason for existing is its indifferentiation. The fear of psychic anonymity which the individual feels constrained by is contained and sublimated by an anonymity of "return": if the host society ignores or, worse, despises me, then my voluntary withdrawal from the eyes of the world will guarantee my psychic survival. Adhering to an extremist organization unconsciously guarantees the security of the individual who, by being "at the edge" of society, finds his own eccentric individuality.

The psyche, in order to function in an adaptive and rewarding manner for itself and the society in which it lives, needs motion, since any inert state is synonymous with psychic and physical death. In alchemical terms, it is as though the terrorist, or the fundamentalist, remains attached to the state of *nigredo*, which is a condition of disorientation, depression, dissolution, and darkness, but which allows the individual to consciously, though with pain and difficulty, redirect their existence toward the Light. In some psychic states, it is as if there is a stasis of the propulsive thrust of the psyche, which can no longer project itself

towards an external psychic object: it is a closing off of the real, external world, moving towards an autistic and paranoid condition. Certain extreme and radical doctrines convince individuals that the only possibility of giving "meaning" to their existence is through a dramatic break with the real world in order to move towards an ideal world.

The terrible events we are witnessing reveal a short circuit between the Person, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious of so-called "terrorists", with the addition of a very serious relapse of the archetype of the Shadow, which risks becoming an alien psychic object, entrenched in our psyche and whose extreme danger consists in its non-recognition: all the negative, the unacceptable, the demonic—natural components of the ambivalent human condition—are placed in our Shadow, which is neither positive nor negative, but becomes harmful if ignored, misunderstood, or projected onto the psychic object.

The Person is a compromise between the individual and the collective. It consists of pieces of the collective with which the I identifies and which have the function of facilitating adaptation to the surrounding social world. Humans have a peculiarity that is very useful for adapting to the collective, but which is potentially dangerous and misleading for the purpose of identification: imitation. This is essential for the recruitment of young people to be turned into soldiers and terrorists: imitating one's hero can push one to emulate that hero's death in action.

When individuals lose the ability to relate to *impersonal* social structures that, in turn, have lost the ability to convey and "narrate" shared beauty and harmony, the result is a collapse of the public sphere of life.

The arrival of massive migratory flows has re-activated the ancient fear of contamination coming from the outside. "Western" society unconsciously fears contagion, with its burden of suffering, corruption, and death. Terrorist acts perpetrated "at home" are nothing less than the materialization of such fears. In the past, foreign invaders entered the city by breaking down the perimeter walls; today the "new barbarians" are often born in our own cities, are our own *brothers* with whom we share the same places, the same horizons. If previously the enemy of our civilization was *alien*, today the "alien" is our unconscious part that fails to find dialogue with the community to which the individual belongs: it is a psychic

oxymoron, an *alien-citizen*.

In this kind of situation, the concept of adherence to a peer group grows unchecked, to the detriment of individuality: I am not, I belong. We should not, however, necessarily imagine that these fundamentalist organizations operate according to the Western mentality; a sense of belonging does not require rigid hierarchies, physical proximity, or pyramid structures (René Guénon said that Westerners, in their mental habits, are too inclined to find "systems", even where they cannot be).[6] It is just as wrong, and perhaps even more dangerous, to give credence to the idea of the existence of so-called "lone wolves"; it is highly unlikely that a "lone wolf" will plan terrorist action "in the name of …". Those who choose to kill blindly, taking into account the end of their own lives as well, must have previously gone through a period of ideological brainwashing and emotional subtraction from the social world in which they had lived and with which they had interacted up to the point of their extreme decision. I speak of an extreme decision because in the word "decision" there is the idea of the cut (from the Latin *de-caedĕre*, to cut off), which an individual cannot reach alone. Terrorists receive fundamentalist education that makes them immune and impermeable to any emotional influence external to themselves and the organization or religious movement they have joined and feel they belong to.

Recent events, however, have revealed a pathogenic aspect of our nihilistic society: its inability to give meaning to people's existence, neither to their lives nor to their deaths. The most fundamentalist wing of the Islamic world has thus become entrenched in this painfully exposed nerve of Western culture that, often, can no longer adequately respond to questions about the meaning of life, allowing the emergence of a psychological context of the idolatry of power and money, full of declared and supposed "freedoms," which in truth is scarcely human. Radicalism has occupied the emotional spaces left empty by a profound crisis in and fragmentation of shared values, to which fundamentalism is opposed in its rigid Manichean thought.

What does the so-called "Western" system of thought propose (or oppose) to these extreme forms of fanaticism and "non-thought"? An external faith anchored solely to an external form in which the religious function is no longer a "matter of the soul". A religious phenomenon, being truly religious to its core, must be an experiential psychological fact, a "*mysterium*," and in the word *mysterium* there is the "mu" particle, that is, silence as a

mystical place of shared contemplation, or the absolute nothing of Zen. For the divine image as archetype to find its sacred silence, which is not an absolute or desperate silence, it must walk the path from the depths of the collective unconscious to consciousness.

Self-sacrifice in the suicidal terrorist act corresponds to the renunciation of one's relationship with anyone else; in the case of the fundamentalist, he or she has already withdrawn any form of projection, abdicating any form of relationship during the preparation and the psychic and physical waiting for the approaching time of action.

For Jacques Lacan, man risks falling into the abyss of perversion when he disregards and denigrates the Law of the Word, giving precedence to a Law that transcends humanity and every established limit. This happens when a person rises up as an avenger who, transcending his or her individual life, kills in the name of a Value, a Cause. Whoever rises up as an avenger assumes the role of "crusader" in the pursuit of the affirmation, at any cost, of God's perfect Law which, perversely, "mortifies" the imperfect law of humans, at the cost of the physical annihilation of the *infidel*.[7]

Symbolic thinking *exceeds* the standard capacity of the senses since it is in the symbol that we find the future. In the terrorist there is the loss of symbolic function and the ability to produce one's own "living" images. Images no longer represent something, they no longer have any connection with underlying unconscious factors; they have become empty simulacra without meaning and thus without soul.

Here the dyad chaos-cosmos turns out to be an inseparable binomial because it is in their polarity that life, with its moderate and extreme aspects of good and evil, finds its reason for being, and it is not possible, not "Natural" to conceive of existence as made up only of good or only of evil, with the evil segregated into a hermetically sealed hell. The myth of Pandora's box tells us how impossible, even unnatural, it is to try to confine all the evils of the world in a single space; sooner or later, the thirst for knowledge, sometimes dressed in the guise of curiosity, *must* liberate the evils of the world; besides jealousy, vice, and madness, they include old age and disease, which remind us of the passage of time. Only hope, remaining at the bottom of the box, can save us from the dejection of lost immortality; we have to thank Pandora and the female gender, to which, by extension, is attributed curiosity, if time has found its natural course: from the unnatural and immobile Chaos of

Uranus, tenaciously attached to the mother-wife Gaia, who does not literally breathe (for our cultural canons, bound as we are to the "breath of life", to the "mother's breath", it is a non-living life), and who refuses to give "light" to his offspring, presaging their end, we pass to the "death" of an eternal—and therefore not real—love and to the birth of Time, a time of births and deaths, of hopes and disappointments, of lights and shadows.

Western civilization has preferred to rely on a dichotomous morality in which the good-evil division reassures us of the "extraneousness" of evil, to be projected through its Shadow onto the alien, excluding it from its own God. The Book of Job is exemplary in this regard: the "permission" that God gives Satan to bring evil to poor Job reveals all his symbolic ambivalence: for, the omnipotence of God, so far away in his inscrutability and thus beyond good and evil, turns out to be fallacious like, and more than, his creation, though remarkably powerful (proving that, in the end, it will be the same God who "grants" a sort of "reparations" to Job). Job chooses the path of acceptance, revealing in his "humanity" all of his greatness.[8]

In conclusion, one of the evils and risks of contemporary Western humanity is what we might call "the shelter of reason." We seek protection in a supreme order, whether religious or secular, in the blind hope that an external entity can guarantee us a sterile existence, devoid of accidents and misfortunes, but also, I would add, devoid of fantasy, depth, mystery, imagination, surprises, ideas, and visions, in a kind of perennial *Truman Show*. I believe that Jung referred to this when he pointed out that it is precisely in the vortex of chaos that eternal miracles dwell, and that it is the disquieting chaos itself that reveals a deep meaning, since man not only dwells in an orderly world but also in the magical world of his soul.[9]

[1] Carl Gustav Jung, *Collected Works, Alchemical Studies, vol.13,* p.55, U.S.A.

[2] From Law n. 898 of 1970 to Law n. 55 of 2015.

[3] Law n. 194 of 22 May 1978.

[4] James Hillman, *Alchemical Psychology*, Spring Publications, 2015, U.S.A.

[5] G. Pietropolli Charmet, A. Piotti, *Uccidersi. Il tentativo di suicidio in adolescenza,* 2009, Italy.

[6]René Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta*, 1945, United Kingdom.

[7] See Philippe Julien, *Jacques Lacan's Return to Freud: The Real, The Symbolic, and the Imaginary (Psychoanalytic Crosscurrents)*, 1995, USA.

[8] See C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, 1984, United Kingdom.

[9] See C. G. Jung, *Collected Works: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche: vol.8*, 1970, United Kingdom.