

The Fight Against Time: Aging, Aesthetic Procedures, and Jungian Psychology

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze, from a theoretical and analytical perspective, how the culture of eternal youth and the expansion of aesthetic procedures influence the subjective construction of aging, drawing on recent scientific literature and concepts from analytical psychology. To this end, a narrative review was conducted in the PePsic, PubMed, Google Scholar, and SciELO databases, using descriptors related to aging, aesthetic practices, and psychogerontology, in Portuguese and English. The search identified 28 articles published between 1995 and 2024, of which 13 were selected for their greater theoretical relevance. In addition, statistical data from associations in the aesthetic sector were incorporated to contextualize the growth of these practices. Concurrently, works from analytical psychology discussing aging, individuation, *puer*, *senex*, and *metanoia* were analyzed, forming the framework to interpret contemporary findings. The analysis suggests that cultural pressure to maintain a youthful appearance exacerbates identity fragmentation, reinforces dependence on external validation, and hinders the acceptance of maturity, thereby compromising fundamental psychological processes in the second half of life. It is concluded that aging should be understood as a central stage of human development, whose emotional health depends on the symbolic integration between *puer* and *senex* and the acceptance of finitude. Furthermore, it is highlighted that the cultural denial of old age and the encouragement of idealized aesthetic standards can generate negative impacts on mental health, indicating the importance of clinical and social approaches

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that promote a more balanced, critical, and integrative view of aging in the light of analytical psychology.

Descriptors

Jungian psychology, Jung, Carl Gustav, 1875-1961, aesthetics, aging, psychogerontology.

A luta contra o tempo: envelhecimento, procedimentos estéticos e a psicologia junguiana

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar, em perspectiva teórico-analítica, como a cultura da juventude eterna e a expansão dos procedimentos estéticos influenciam a construção subjetiva do envelhecimento, articulando literatura científica recente e conceitos da psicologia analítica. Para isso, realizou-se uma revisão narrativa nas bases PePsic, PubMed, Google Scholar e SciELO, utilizando descritores relacionados ao envelhecimento, práticas estéticas e psicogerontologia, em português e inglês. A busca identificou 28 artigos publicados entre 1995 e 2024, dos quais, 13 foram selecionados por maior pertinência teórica. Além disso foram incorporados dados estatísticos de associações do setor estético que contextualizam o crescimento dessas práticas. Paralelamente, foram analisadas obras da psicologia analítica que discutem envelhecimento, individuação, *puer*, *senex* e metanoia, compondo o referencial para interpretar os achados contemporâneos. A análise indicou que a pressão cultural para manter uma aparência jovem intensifica a fragmentação da identidade, reforça a dependência por validação externa e dificulta a aceitação da maturidade, comprometendo processos psicológicos fundamentais da segunda metade da vida. Conclui-se que o envelhecimento deve ser compreendido como etapa central do desenvolvimento humano, cuja saúde emocional depende da integração simbólica entre *puer* e *senex* e da aceitação da finitude. Ademais, destaca-se que a negação cultural da velhice e o incentivo a padrões estéticos idealizados podem gerar impactos negativos na saúde mental, indicando a importância de abordagens clínicas e sociais que promovam uma visão mais equilibrada, crítica e integrativa do envelhecimento à luz da psicologia analítica.

Descritores

psicologia junguiana, Jung, Carl Gustav, 1875-1961, estética, envelhecimento, psicogerontologia.

La lucha contra el tiempo: envejecimiento, procedimientos estéticos y la psicología junguiana

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar, desde las perspectivas teórica y analítica, de qué manera la cultura de la juventud eterna y la expansión de los procedimientos estéticos influyen sobre la construcción subjetiva del envejecimiento, articulando literatura científica reciente y conceptos de la psicología analítica. Para eso, se realizó una revisión narrativa en las bases PePsic, PubMed, Google Scholar y SciELO, utilizando descriptores relacionados al envejecimiento, prácticas estéticas y psicogerontología, en portugués e inglés. La búsqueda identificó 28 artículos publicados entre 1995 y 2024, de los cuales, se seleccionaron 13 por ser teóricamente más pertinentes. Además se incorporaron datos estadísticos de asociaciones del sector estético, que contextualizan el crecimiento de esas prácticas. Paralelamente, se analizaron obras de la psicología analítica que debaten el envejecimiento, individuación, *puer*, *senex* y metanoia, componiendo el referencial para interpretar los hallazgos contemporáneos. El análisis indica que la presión cultural para mantener una apariencia juvenil intensifica la fragmentación de la identidad, refuerza la dependencia de la validación externa y dificulta la aceptación de la madurez, comprometiendo procesos psicológicos fundamentales de la segunda mitad de la vida. Se concluye que el envejecimiento debe ser comprendido como etapa central del desarrollo humano, en el cual la salud emocional depende de la integración simbólica entre *puer* y *senex* y de la aceptación de la finitud. Además, se destaca que la negación cultural de la vejez y el incentivo para estándares estéticos idealizados pueden provocar impactos negativos en la salud mental, indicando la importancia de enfoques clínicos y sociales que susciten una visión más equilibrada, crítica e integrativa del envejecimiento, a la luz de la psicología analítica.

Descriptores:

psicología junguiana, estética, envejecimiento, psicogerontología.

Introduction

Population aging is a global phenomenon that is becoming increasingly evident in many countries, and Brazil is no exception. In 2023, the Special Secretariat for Social Communication ([Secom], 2022) published a summary of the 2022 census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), revealing a significant

fact: the population aged 65 and over in Brazil reached 22,169,101 people, representing 10.9% of the total population. This number marks an impressive 57.4% increase compared to 2010, when this group accounted for 7.4% of the population, evidencing a remarkable demographic transformation.

The 2022 Demographic Census—which had a second count, revealing a total population of 203,080,756 inhabitants—illustrates not only the absolute growth of the elderly population but also the change in the country's age structure. Izabel Marri, manager of Studies and Analyses of Demographic Dynamics at IBGE, notes that "over time, the base of the age pyramid has narrowed due to the reduction in fertility and births in Brazil" (Secom, 2022, tela 1). Since the 1990s, Brazil has experienced a change in the shape of its age pyramid, with the gradual loss of its pyramidal shape starting in 2000 (Secom, 2022).

In recent decades, the increased availability of modern contraceptive methods has enabled women and couples to have greater control over family planning. According to IBGE (Secom, 2022), the total fertility rate in Brazil dropped from 6.3 children per woman in 1960 to 1.7 in 2020, a clear indicator of contraceptive methods. At the same time, the greater inclusion of women in the labor market has also contributed to this change. The increase in female participation in the workforce has provided women with more autonomy and opportunities, leading to a postponement of the age for their first child and a reduction in the total number of children.

Other important factors that enabled the increase in longevity were the processes of migration and urbanization. Improvements in the healthcare system, new medical treatments, and a healthier lifestyle have increased the life expectancy of the Brazilian population. Furthermore, the migration of young people to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities and the consequent reduction of the youth population in rural areas also played an important role in the inversion of the age pyramid (China et al., 2021).

This growing population aging raises the urgent need for further studies on issues related to old age. Although statistical and mortality factors have received considerable attention, the analysis of the subjectivity and well-being of the elderly is still developing. Understanding the complexities of health and quality of life for this age group is becoming increasingly relevant and urgent.

In parallel with population aging, current society exhibits a quest for eternal youth, a phenomenon that crosses cultures and eras, reflecting humanity's deep desire to escape the limitations imposed by aging and mortality. This fascination is not just a matter of vanity

but is rooted in psychological, sociocultural, and biological aspects that shape our perception of time and life.

Historically, youth has been associated with vitality, beauty, and potential, which partly explains why societies over the centuries have idealized this phase of life. In the contemporary world, this obsession has been amplified by advances in science and medicine, which promise not only to prolong life but also to preserve the physical and mental characteristics associated with youth. According to sociologist Bryan Turner (2020, p. 132), longevity has become a new type of capital, in which youth is a social value that translates into power and prestige in modern society.

Although the cult of youth is a current phenomenon, cycles can be observed throughout history in which periods of valuing the elderly are followed by conflicts between young and old, subsequently resulting in the devaluation of older people. Today, even though a part of the economically active elderly population drives markets, such as tourism and services for seniors, there is a predominance of narratives that favor the young. The media, such as television and cinema, play a significant role in this context, influencing perceptions of old age by displaying negative stereotypes and underrepresenting the elderly. The image projected by these media directly affects the self-esteem of older people and reinforces the idea that old age is less relevant in today's society. This cultural view contributes to the devaluation of the elderly, creating an environment where being young is synonymous with importance and visibility. Although public policies, such as the National Policy for the Elderly, seek to protect this population, the influence of the media and consumption still reinforces the valorization of youth and the denial of aging (Malheiros Junior & Freitas, 2012). The aging process, in its natural essence, is often fraught with challenges that go beyond physical issues. Contemporary society, marked by a culture that values youth and appearance, imposes significant pressures on individuals as they age. This phenomenon is reflected in the growing increase of aesthetic and surgical procedures aimed at combating the signs of aging.

Resistance to aging, associated with the fear of losing physical attractiveness, has been linked to body image dissatisfaction and an increased demand for aesthetic interventions aimed at attenuating the signs of aging. Studies indicate that a negative perception of one's own body, especially in the context of aging, can significantly impact individuals' self-esteem and quality of life (Silva et al., 2024). In this scenario, the pursuit of aesthetic procedures is not limited to aesthetic motivations but also involves psychological factors, such as unrealistic expectations and difficulties in processing bodily changes over time (Moreira Filho et al., 2024). In more difficult situations, high levels of body

dissatisfaction can be associated with clinical conditions such as body dysmorphic disorder, characterized by an excessive preoccupation with perceived defects in appearance, and with significant impacts on psychological functioning and overall well-being (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

In the context of this research, the concept of "gerontophobia" has been gaining relevance in studies on aging, especially with the increase in longevity. According to Sampaio (2017, p. 812), the term "gerontophobia" refers to a specific phobia characterized by an aversion to old age and everything related to aging. Although described as a "new pathology of psychiatric science," it has not yet been officially included in diagnostic manuals such as the ICD-10 and the DSM.

According to Feijó and Medeiros (2011, p. 114), the phobic condition related to aging is defined as the imminent fear of "any real manifestation attributed to the aging process." Furthermore, studies point out that this "fear of aging" is influenced more by social factors than pathological ones, indicating that social constructs are directly linked to this collective discomfort. Marques and Matos (2011) observe that the constant media appeals for maintaining a young and beautiful body, alongside the relentless pursuit of eternal youth, end up generating a certain repudiation within the population towards everything related to old age and mortality.

According to the Brazilian Society of Plastic Surgery (SBCP), since 2016, there has been a steady increase in the number of aesthetic procedures performed, with a significant growth in interest in plastic surgeries aimed at facial and body aesthetics among the elderly. Recent data indicate that the demand for procedures such as facelifts, fillers, and Botox is not restricted only to a younger audience, but extends significantly to older individuals who frequently feel pressured to maintain a youthful appearance to conform to prevailing social norms (*Sociedade Brasileira de Cirurgia Plástica [SBCP], 2016; International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery [ISAPS], 2023*).

Beyond aesthetic motivations, the choice of appearance-related interventions can be associated with body image dissatisfaction and the impact of bodily changes during aging. Studies indicate that a negative perception of one's own image can compromise an individual's self-esteem and quality of life, highlighting the relevance of psychological aspects in this process (Silva et al., 2024). Thus, the social pressure to maintain a youthful appearance can lead to a spiral of aesthetic procedures that are not always beneficial to the physical and mental health of the elderly.

It is essential, therefore, that the discussion about aging and aesthetic procedures be conducted from a critical and humanized

perspective. Understanding the motivations behind the pursuit of aesthetic treatments and recognizing the psychological and social implications of these choices are fundamental to promoting a balanced and healthy approach to aging. Ultimately, society must reflect on how to create an environment that values all stages of life and allows individuals to age with dignity and respect, without resorting to extreme interventions as a form of validation.

To deepen the understanding of the reasons that lead people to resort to aesthetic procedures today, it is crucial to consider the perspective of analytical psychology, particularly Carl Jung's thoughts on aging. Jung offers valuable insights into the experience of aging, and his view on the development of the psyche becomes necessary for a better understanding of this contemporary social phenomenon.

Methodology

This study presents a conceptual and theoretical approach to the theme of aging, based on recent scientific literature and works of analytical psychology. To update the overview regarding aging and the pursuit of youth, a narrative review was conducted in the PePsic, PubMed, Google Scholar, and SciELO databases, using the descriptors "aging," "dysmorphia," "aesthetic procedures," "elderly," "eternal youth," "old age," and "psychogerontology," in Portuguese and English.

The initial search identified 28 articles published between 1995 and 2024. After exploratory reading, 13 were selected for presenting greater relevance to the discussion on aging, aesthetic practices, and their psychosocial implications. Statistical data from associations in the aesthetic sector were also incorporated to contextualize the expansion of these procedures in contemporary times.

Complementarily, works of analytical psychology dealing with aging and the second half of life were analyzed, serving as an interpretive basis to articulate contemporary findings with the classical theoretical framework. Thus, the article adopts a theoretical-analytical design that integrates current data and Jungian reflections to understand the subjective construction of old age today.

A Constantly Growing Market

According to the most recent survey by the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS, 2023), published in 2023, Brazil ranks

as the second country with the highest number of aesthetic and reconstructive procedures performed globally, representing 8.9% of the world total. This volume places Brazil behind only the United States, which leads with 24.1% of total procedures.

This scenario is corroborated by previous data from the SBCP (2018), which, in a 2018 survey, already indicated a significant change in Brazilians' preferences regarding aesthetic procedures. Between 2016 and 2020, there was a 24.1% increase in the performance of non-surgical injectable procedures in Brazil, with over 600,000 of these procedures registered in 2020 alone (ISAPS, 2023). The preference of Brazilians for non-surgical procedures, led by the application of botulinum toxin (Botox), followed by hyaluronic acid fillers and collagen biostimulators, reflects a growing trend of seeking less invasive alternatives to maintain appearance (ISAPS, 2023).

Data analysis also reveals that the popularity of non-surgical procedures in Brazil jumped from 17.4% of the total in 2014 to 49.9% in 2018, as reported by the SBCP. This growth is evidenced by the significant increase in the number of facial harmonization procedures, which went from 72,000 to 256,000 per year during this period (SBCP, 2018). On the other hand, traditional plastic surgeries showed a proportional reduction, falling from 82.6% to 50.1% of total aesthetic procedures in the same interval.

Among the plastic surgeries that are still popular in Brazil, liposuction and breast augmentation stand out, continuing to be the most sought-after by patients. Other notable surgical interventions include blepharoplasty (eyelid correction procedure), rhinoplasty (nose reshaping), and abdominoplasty (removal of excess abdominal skin) (SBCP, 2018; ISAPS, 2023).

The main aesthetic procedures performed in Brazil reflect a predominant desire to resist the signs of aging and improve specific areas of the body that evidence the passage of time. Facial harmonization, rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty, abdominoplasty, and breast augmentation are interventions that directly address the regions that change the most with age, offering individuals the possibility of maintaining a youthful and revitalized appearance.

The Pursuit of Eternal Youth

Contemporary society's fixation with youth is not merely a recent phenomenon, but an intensification of values that, although they have always existed, are now presented in a more exaggerated form. Youth, once seen as a transitory phase of life, has become an ideal of beauty, health, and success. This phenomenon can be

observed in various aspects of popular culture, especially in the media, which play a central role in perpetuating this behavior.

In contemporary society, the pursuit of the ideal appearance and the cult of youth have become central aspects, reflecting Zygmunt Bauman's (2001) concept of "liquid modernity," which refers to a new era in which social, economic, and production relations are fragile, fleeting, and malleable, like liquids, where values and identities become fluid and mutable. In a later publication, Bauman (2008) discusses how current society is structured around a logic of rapid consumption, where even body aesthetics becomes a temporary product that needs to be constantly updated. This context drives the proliferation of aesthetic procedures that promise rejuvenation and beauty, but in a fast and accessible way, reflecting the "fast" model of contemporaneity, characterized by speed and superficiality in relationships and ways of being.

Aesthetic procedures, in this scenario, become tools of adaptation to the demands of a society focused on the consumption of image and appearance. Just like consumer products, bodies undergo "updates," but without sustaining themselves on an ideal of permanence; on the contrary, they are designed to be disposable and renewed as new trends emerge. Bauman (2001, p. 167) emphasizes that liquid modernity empties relationships of depth and durability, leading the individual to a constant search for new identities and appearances, which reinforces the notion that the body, like other products, must be adapted and consumed according to temporary and mutable standards.

In recent decades, the media have significantly influenced the way youth are perceived and valued. Television, cinema, and, more recently, social networks constantly promote images of young and vigorous bodies as the ideal standard of beauty. This media representation creates constant pressure on individuals, encouraging them to relentlessly pursue a youthful appearance, often through aesthetic interventions, strict diets, and intense exercise routines. According to Featherstone (2010, p. 216), contemporary culture is deeply rooted in the "glorification of youth," in which youth is synonymous with vitality, innovation, and relevance.

The media's influence is not limited only to physical appearance but also to how youth is associated with success and happiness. Social networks, in particular, amplify this fixation by promoting narratives of perfect and successful lives, generally centered on young people who achieve financial success, public recognition, and a life full of positive experiences. These narratives create additional pressure on other age groups, leading to a relentless pursuit of maintaining

youth, as if aging were a failure or something to be avoided at all costs (Lira et al., 2017).

This pressure to stay young is not without consequences. The obsession with youth contributes to the dissemination of harmful behaviors, such as body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and even depression. According to recent studies, the increase in plastic surgeries and aesthetic treatments among young and middle-aged people reflects an attempt to adhere to this unrealistic ideal of youth perpetuated by the media (Mironica et al., 2024).

Han (2014) argues that contemporary psychopolitics¹ imposes a subtle control over the individual, who submits to market demands, believing they are acting authentically. By seeking the aesthetic perfection promoted by fast and disposable procedures, the subject does not express a genuine individuality, but rather a conformity to externally imposed standards. The author observes that the individual becomes controlled by a logic of conformity, where personal choices reflect the influence of the market and collective pressures, rather than an authentic expression of the self.

Still in this line of thought, the logic of commercialization tends to depersonalize the body and dilute identity. Aesthetic culture begins to transform the body into an object of visual consumption, adjustable and ephemeral, configuring itself as a surface moldable to the standards of an artificial ideal of beauty (Han, 2022).

Brazilian society proves to be relatively vulnerable to this type of media and psychopolitical influence. Penna (1974/1994), in his analysis in the book "Em berço esplêndido", observes that Brazilian society is characterized by a predominant *puer*, an emphasis on youth and dependence on the State, while the *senex*, which represents wisdom and maturity, is often neglected. This phenomenon is evident in social behaviors that prioritize comfort, immediacy, and an aversion to change, perpetuating individual irresponsibility and a resistance to autonomous and conscious development. Excessive dependence on the State is a reflection of this social infantilism, in which citizens often do not take responsibility for their own actions and decisions. As a result, Brazilian society faces challenges in achieving more sustainable and independent development, requiring a greater balance between the virtues of youth and the wisdom of maturity. This vulnerability stems from the lack of a critical and autonomous stance towards information, a consequence of social infantilism that prevents the development of a mature consciousness. The media, by exploiting this scenario, shapes behaviors and opinions, promoting consumption patterns and a worldview that reinforces this dependence and superficiality.

Aging from a Jungian Perspective

For Jung, aging is not just an inevitable physical decline, but a significant process of psychological development, where the search for self-knowledge and the integration of opposites within oneself become essential.

The aging man should know that his life is not mounting and expanding, but that an inexorable inner process enforces the contraction of life. For a young person, it is almost a sin, or at least a danger, to be too preoccupied with himself; but for the aging person it is a duty and a necessity to devote serious attention to himself (Jung, 1928/2000, p. 167).

According to analytical psychology, the first half of life is generally focused on strengthening the ego, building a social identity, and fulfilling external ambitions. However, in the subsequent stage, marked by the aging process, the focus tends to shift. This period is understood as an essential opportunity for the individual to turn inward and seek a deeper integration between the unconscious and the conscious (Jung, 1928/2000).

Jung (1961/2016) proposes that in the second half of life, a significant transformation occurs, which he called *metanoia*. At this stage, there is a shift in focus, and the ego begins to turn toward the Self, which the author describes as the regulating archetype of psychic totality. According to Arcuri (2012), the concept represents a moment of renewal of consciousness, when the individual begins to perceive the being as something greater, going beyond the ego and parental relations. It is in this phase that it becomes possible to contribute more broadly to life and to others. The term *metanoia*, of Greek origin, refers to a profound transformation in personal life, where new values can be adopted.

This period is of great relevance within Jungian psychology, as it marks a phase of reflection and review of the paths taken during the first half of life. In this process, the focus shifts to the internal world, and the demands of the ego, which were previously predominant, lose part of their importance.

Jung (1928/2000) believed that to achieve this liberating balance in *metanoia*, a confrontation between opposing pairs was necessary, in which the polarities must have equivalent energies at each end, avoiding any inclination. According to Pandini (2014), the archetypes of the *puer* and the *senex* represent one of the main oppositions the individual may face in the process of psychic maturation. Considered an archetypal pair, they symbolize the youth and the old man, carrying a series of potentials and qualities that, when integrated, can promote the balance of the personality.

According to Hillman (1999), the *puer* is marked by speed, urgency, and transience. Although fascinated by the new, it resists the time necessary for its maturation and may wander aimlessly. It presents itself as cold and distant, yet at the same time, attractive and charming.

Regarding the *senex*, Hillman (1999) describes it as a symbol of old age, wisdom, solitude, prudence, honesty, order, and certainty. However, it also brings aspects of repression, greed, coldness, distancing, and rigidity in its repetitions, being associated with death.

For Pandini (2014, p. 34), *metanoia* allows the encounter with archetypal polarities, activating the ability to observe new aspects of the personality that arise spontaneously in consciousness, as well as recognizing the parts denied or repressed throughout life. We can state that an essential condition for change to occur genuinely in the psyche, promoting the growth of the personality, is the integration between *puer* and *senex* and not the split between them.

One of the risks associated with *metanoia* is the tendency to fixate, or even worse, to identify exclusively with one of the archetypal poles. Faced with aging and the realization of finitude, the *senex* archetype manifests itself; depending on emotional responses, it can end up crystallizing development instead of integrating it with the *puer*, whose energy drives transformations in self-perception and worldview. The experience accumulated throughout life is a valuable ally for individuals in midlife. If they can deal with the discomfort inherent in this transitional period, marked by internal and external changes, and establish a continuous dialogue between the potentials of the *senex* and *puer* archetypes, they can avoid distancing themselves from who they are and from their personal growth processes (Pandini, 2014, p. 60).

In *metanoia*, the main emphasis shifts to "being," in contrast to the previous phase of life, which was more centered on "doing." The unconscious, which until then occupied a secondary role, takes center stage, overshadowing the conscious personality that dominated the earlier years.

After having lavished its light upon the world, the sun withdraws its rays in order to illuminate itself. Instead of doing likewise, many old people prefer to be hypochondriacs, misers, pedants, applauders of the past [*laudatores temporis acti*] or else eternal youths—pitiful substitutes for the illumination of the Self, but the inevitable consequence of the delusion that the second half of life must be governed by the principles of the first (Jung, 1928/2000, p. 169).

This transition, however, is not an easy or simple process. It is a challenging crossing that few dare to face, as it involves the reevaluation of values, the confrontation of crises, and the emergence of new or dark contents. If these emerging aspects are not recognized and integrated, they can become internal threats that hinder personal development during this phase of transformation.

For this reason, Hollis (1995) considered the dynamic of shadow integration as an essential process for healthy aging, especially in the second half of life. This phase is heavily characterized by an identity crisis in which the shadow emerges strongly, demanding recognition. This phenomenon, termed by the author as the "revolt of the shadow," represents an effort of the Self to rebalance the psyche and correct years of repression and excessive adaptation to external expectations. Integrating the shadow involves accepting parts of oneself that have been neglected or repressed, allowing them to manifest authentically.

The integration of the shadow, from Hollis's (1995) perspective, involves a progressive detachment from identification with the persona, understood as a form of adaptation to social expectations, while also presupposing the willingness to recognize and integrate psychic contents previously denied or considered incompatible with the assumed social role. In this sense, integrating the shadow does not imply abandoning responsibilities, but rather living more truthfully with oneself and society. It is necessary to accept "inner truths," whether comfortable or disturbing, in order to make room for a new phase of life more aligned with one's personal essence.

This reconciliation with the shadow fosters the development of emotional and psychological maturity that sustains healthy aging, freeing the individual from the limitations of a "provisional life" and the impositions of the persona. Thus, the path of self-discovery and full acceptance allows the individual to recover personal meaning and integrity, promoting a solid foundation for emotional health in the second half of life.

Aging, for Jung (1928/2000), is inevitably accompanied by a confrontation with finitude. However, he did not view this as something to be feared, but as a natural transitional phase, in which the individual is called to reflect on the purpose of life and their own spirituality.

But here my physician's conscience awakens and reminds me that it has an important word to say on this matter. I have observed that a life directed to an aim is in general better, richer, and healthier than an aimless one, and that

it is better to go forwards with the stream of time than backwards against it (Jung, 1928/2000, p. 172).

Hillman (2001), agreeing with Jung, describes the process of accepting finitude as an essential process in aging, where the awareness of mortality becomes a valuable resource for personal development. For him, aging, by revealing the inevitability of death, promotes a profound reflection on the meaning of life and enables a maturation that is not limited only to preserving the body, but to strengthening character.

The acceptance of death, rather than being seen as a negative event, represents an opportunity to reflect on legacy, authenticity, and the value of a life lived. In this context, the author states that the awareness of death can be transformative, allowing the individual to value the present and make choices more aligned with their deepest values. Ultimately, he saw the acceptance of finitude as a necessary part of life, which brings wisdom and serenity, contributing to the development of a stronger and more integral character (Hillman, 2001).

Furthermore, Jung (1961/2016) highlighted the importance of accepting aging as part of the natural cycle of life. Resistance to aging and the attempt to indefinitely prolong youth, according to the author, can lead to psychological stagnation and a superficial life. The elderly person who cannot detach from life is as vulnerable and fragile as the young person who has not yet managed to build their own. In many cases, both demonstrate a similar immaturity, marked by the same greed, fear, stubbornness, and obstinacy. He suggested that aging should be embraced as an opportunity to explore inner wisdom and find new purpose. This vision is an invitation so that, in old age, people can reconnect with aspects of themselves that they may have neglected throughout life.

Natural life is the nourishing soil of the soul. Anyone who fails to go along with life remains suspended, stiff and rigid in midair. That is why so many people get wooden in old age; they look back and cling to the past with a secret fear of death in their hearts (Jung, 1928/2000, p. 179).

In Hillman's (2001) understanding, personal responsibility and autonomy gain crucial relevance in this advanced stage of life, as they are essential elements for an authentic and fulfilled existence. As they age, individuals are invited to reevaluate their role in society and rethink the projections they previously cast upon others, understanding that control over one's own life depends, to a large extent, on a posture of self-awareness and self-responsibility. This phase, marked by distancing from external standards and expectations, allows the subject to assume greater freedom to align their actions with their deepest personal values, promoting an

integration between their aspirations and the reality of their existence.

Hillman (2001) also emphasizes that the exercise of autonomy implies the recognition that the individual is responsible for their choices and their emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being, a process that demands both self-knowledge and discipline. For him, personal responsibility is not just a matter of social duty, but a movement toward strengthening character and building an identity that reflects individual truths and values. From this point of view, aging becomes a period of self-discovery and renewal, when the person can achieve an inner freedom sustained by authentic choices, bringing a sense of fulfillment and dignity to the final maturation of life.

Analytical psychology offers a rich and humanizing perspective on aging. It reminds us that, although old age can bring challenges, it also brings the possibility of a deeper realization of the being. As Hollis (1995, p. 160), one of Jung's main followers, observes, "If we can sustain our courage, the middle passage will bring us back to life after we have been separated from it."

Jung teaches us that, instead of viewing aging as an end, we should see it as an important stage in the journey of self-discovery and personal fulfillment. It is a period when one can achieve a fuller integration of all aspects of the personality, a true encounter with the Self.

The Crossing of *Metanoia* and the Emergence of the Self

The valorization of youth and ideal aesthetics in contemporary times favors the intensification of dependence on external validations and adherence to socially instituted standards, frequently aligned with market interests. This scenario contributes to a more superficial relationship with the body and time, increasing psychological vulnerability to aging, which becomes associated with the loss of social value and the threat of irrelevance.

From the perspective of analytical psychology, such a configuration can be understood as an expression of an imbalance between the archetypes of the *puer* and the *senex*. The predominance of the former, to the detriment of the latter, evidences a one-sidedness that compromises the individuation process, as it hinders the integration of aspects related to maturity, limitation, and finitude (Pandini, 2014). In this sense, *metanoia* can be understood as a movement of psychic reorganization aimed at articulating these polarities, favoring a more integrated development of the personality.

Within the scope of this transformation, the *Self* occupies a central position as the organizing principle of psychic totality (Jung, 1928/2000). *Metanoia* implies a progressive redirection of experience from the external to the internal plane, promoting the integration between conscious and unconscious contents and enabling the confrontation with aspects previously dissociated from the psyche. This process tends to expand the subject's symbolic capacity and favor the construction of new meanings for the experience of aging.

Post-Jungian literature emphasizes that this movement is not restricted to the relationship between ego and *Self*, but also involves other fundamental axes of psychic dynamics. In this context, the relativization of identification with the *persona* and the integration of shadow contents prove to be essential for psychic development, since they allow the individual to recognize aspects of themselves previously denied or incompatible with internalized social expectations (Hollis, 1995).

Thus, the second half of life requires the ego to be capable of sustaining tensions between different internal and external demands, without becoming rigidly fixated on identities or roles. Contact with the *Self* tends to promote an experience of greater psychic unity, although not free from conflicts, while simultaneously demanding mediation with social reality through the *persona*. This articulation allows emerging contents to find forms of expression in the world, preserving the flexibility necessary for the continuous development of the personality.

Final considerations

Contemporary social pressure to maintain a youthful appearance can be seen as a form of resistance to this natural individuation process. The relentless pursuit of youth and beauty may reflect a deep fear of one's own mortality and a difficulty in facing the existential questions that arise with aging. By attempting to maintain a youthful appearance with aesthetic procedures, individuals may, unconsciously, be avoiding confrontation with their own impermanence and the need for deeper psychological growth.

Jung argued that rejecting the natural signs of aging can symbolize a rejection of the very wisdom that comes with age. Instead of embracing the maturity and inner development that aging offers, many resort to aesthetic interventions as a way to maintain a facade of youth and vitality, ignoring the potential for growth that this phase of life can provide. This pursuit of a youthful appearance can therefore be a reflection of a lack of acceptance of the deeper and more significant aspects of one's own being.

The second half of adult life is emphasized as a period of profound learning and development in analytical psychology, comparable in significance to adolescence and youth. Jung sees this phase as a privileged moment of self-knowledge and inner transformation, in which the individual, through the process of *metanoia*, is invited to redirect their focus to their own psychic development. This phase of life, although frequently neglected as a period of learning, offers fundamental opportunities for expanding wisdom and self-understanding.

In this sense, Jungian psychology offers a valuable alternative to the modern understanding of old age and aesthetic procedures: instead of fueling a fight against time and conformity to external standards, it promotes the acceptance of age as part of the individuation process, enabling the individual to live a more authentic life, far from the alienating pressures of consumption and the impositions of the "fast" aesthetic culture.

Jung's critical thinking suggests that the desire for aesthetic procedures can be interpreted as an attempt to compensate for a feeling of internal inadequacy and an existential fear that is not being properly addressed. Instead of accepting and integrating their own life experience, many may be attempting to deny or escape the inevitable reality of aging. Jung's analytical psychology invites us to consider aging not merely as an aesthetic issue, but as an opportunity for deepening and for significant psychological transformation.

Therefore, when reflecting on the increase in aesthetic procedures in old age, it is essential to recognize that these choices may be indicative of a deeper resistance to the inevitable changes of life. Understanding these motivations in light of analytical psychology offers a richer and more comprehensive perspective on how society can support individuals in finding a healthy balance between self-acceptance and the desire to remain relevant and valued.

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ⁱFor Byung-Chul Han (2014), psychopolitics constitutes a technique of domination that, instead of older oppressive methods, resorts to a seductive and intelligent power, leading women and men to willingly submit themselves to the forces of domination.