

# Curing the cheese, curing the psyche: a metaphor

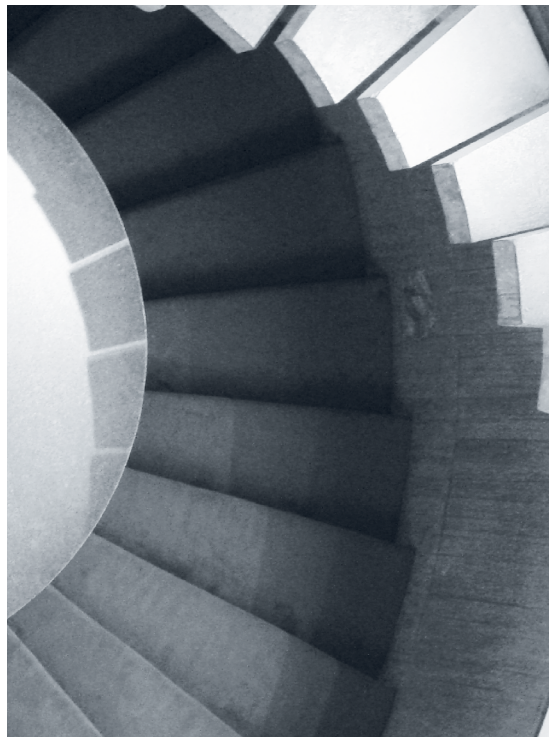
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## Abstract

Observing the artisanal cheese manufacturing process, we can see a possible correspondence between the phases of this culinary operation and the process of analyzing the psyche. Both begin with a destabilization that can be conducive to building something closer to its essence or turn sour and become unbearable. Both in cooking and in depth psychology, this process can be given the same name: healing. Sometimes, it is also called maturation. Thus, we can imagine that more than ending the symptom the cure could mean a maturation of the psyche. For this work, we will draw comparisons between three pieces of knowledge: the cheese production process (through testimonies from master cheesemakers from the Minas Gerais region recorded in the film *O mineiro e o queijo*, directed by Helvécio Ratton, in 2011), the psychotherapy process in analytical approach and, on the third

seat at the table for this conversation, the tradition of alchemy. ■

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cheese, cure,  
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## Curing the cheese, curing the psyche: a metaphor

### Switzerland: cheeses and therapists

Two subjects could easily come to mind when referring to Switzerland: cheese and mental health. Perhaps the two of them have some connection, at least if we make use of poetic and culinary metaphors, just as they can support the metaphors of alchemy: both cheese and a psychotherapeutic process revolve around something that can be considered a nuisance, a “souring,” a type of crisis, which if administered can bring flavor to the palate and the soul.

Switzerland has not only produced internationally renowned cheeses like emmental, gruyère, raclette, and tête de moine but also led the way in mental health research at the Burghölzli psychiatric hospital, especially in the 19th century. In 1879, a team led by Wilhelm Wünderlin began researching into word associations. In this study, a researcher would present a stimulus word, and the participant would say the first word that came to mind. Previously, in a similar study, answers that deviated from the standard or had long reaction time were disregarded as errors, as if they had gone sour; the goal was to measure the speed of reasoning.

At the Burghölzli, it was precisely these disregarded, curdled answers, perceived as wrong, that were the subject of research interest for young Franz Riklin and Carl Jung, supported by their director, Eugen Bleuler. The question that instigated their research into the word association test was something like: What happens in the psyche that makes a person say expressions that consciously make no sense to them?

The invention of cheese may have been something similar. It is estimated that this

happened around the time when man made the transition from hunter to animal breeder. With the domestication of cattle, sheep, and goats came the consumption of milk, and the need to preserve it as a food reserve (Nogueira, 2018).

We can imagine that it began by experimenting with culinary phenomena, perhaps even accidentally, as the character Alecrim, played by actor João Miguel, tells us in the Brazilian movie *Estômago*: “Then the cowboy forgot the milk there. The next day his wife saw that everything was spoiled. Women are curious, so she went there and took it and turned it into cheese” (Ratton, 2011).

In a rare quote on the subject, in a footnote, the Swiss Jung even made a comparison between humans and cheese: “Fatty milk makes good cheese, like some humans; others would be humans made with skimmed milk, bland cheese, and even bitter milk cheeses” (Jung, 2013, p.118, §770).

Here we refer to artisanal cheese as the kind that can go through the curing process. A cheese contains large reserves of protein energy, as Jungians also say about the psychic instance called the Self, which generates vital energy. Like a cheese in the process of curing, the Self is also a living instance (Jung, 2000, p.173, §291), which also brings us another curiosity: most graphic representations of the Self, in art, dreams, and mythology, are circular, like a cheese.

Another correspondence between cheese and the unconscious is that in both we enter the terrain of the maternal archetype, of nutrition and breastfeeding. We recall that at the beginning of his writings, Jung associated the unconscious as a kind of mother (Jung, 1999, p. 286, § 450s).

## The cheese-making process

Jung discovered the metaphors of alchemy as similar to the journey of the soul in search of individuation. He also knew that cooking was not something outside of the alchemists' everyday life. Perhaps the act of curing cheese wasn't so foreign to the master alchemists, according to the ancient alchemical saying, quoted here by Jung himself: "So study, meditate, sweat, work, cook, and then a salutary stream will open up for you" (Jung, 1994, p. 286, § 390).

With some variations, we can systematize the cheese-making process into seven stages: milking, carving, dripping, straining, pressing, salting, and curing.

Since cured cheese is an artisanal product, often found in the trade in its early stages, the semi-cured chesse, we will use the knowledge of traditional master cheesemakers, not paying attention to industrialized processes, not even in the most widely sold cheese today, fresh cheese, also called white cheese.

If the Jungian perspective sees individuation, alchemy, gold, or the philosopher's stone as the goal, the artisan cheesemaker's goal is a soft cheese with a remarkable flavor and rich in protein.

On hearing about the Jungian concept of individuation, a master cheesemaker might think: the milk wants to be cheese! Its nature is to go sour, and if it is directed, accelerating its natural process, the curing takes place.

For this text, we will use the author's field research in the region of São Sebastião da Grama (SP State, Brazil) and Alagoa (MG State, Brazil) and mainly the quotes from Brazilian master cheesemakers captured in the feature film *O mineiro e o queijo*, directed by Helvécio Ratton in 2011.

## Grazing and milking

Even before milking, we can think of the initial origin of cheese as being in the grazing. Like a psyche that is structured from nature, it is the pasture that provides the cattle with protein

fat<sup>1</sup>, significantly influencing the quality of the milk and cheese. After the pasture, especially the fat content, cheese production continues, now with the milking. But in the meantime, we can't overlook another significant transmutation, possibly with the goal of nourishing and continuing the species, literally visceral alchemy that takes place inside animals: grass becomes milk.

Let's imagine that while a Swiss retreatant was milking his cows on the shores of Lake Zurich, Carl Jung was writing similarities on the other side of the lake. His texts show us the importance that lies in the search for healing, in which there is an objective level, with information about the patient's history, told by the patient's conscience, but also the collection of material coming from the unconscious, transformed into spoken or drawn ghosts, symptoms, dreams and sensations and feelings that the analyst can perceive in himself when he is in the presence of this specific patient: the transference. It is in this sense that we understand the word "curing"<sup>2</sup> here. If cheese needs the warmth of light, in the right measure, to lose its excess water, the word "curing" could also be associated with this phase of the psychotherapeutic process, because it is in the interaction between patient and analyst that issues could arise that have never previously occurred to the patient, because it is a blind spot in their consciousness.

<sup>1</sup> Currently, there is a deadlock in Brazilian dairy cattle farming, which consists of the choice between the modern *Brachiaria* grass (*Brachiaria decumbens*) and the older, fat grass (*Melinis minutiflora*), uprooted in the 1960s to be replaced by this new one. This new pasture, as promised, is more durable and productive, but lower in the amount of fat necessary for cheese production. However, this new grass infiltrates its roots into the soil, making it considerably difficult to uproot it for a possible replanting of the fat grass pasture (Vitor et al., 2024). As in mental health, we once again have the intervention of human consciousness seeking greater productivity but ultimately damaging natural homeostasis.

<sup>2</sup> A curiosity is that in Brazil's ancestral language, Tupi-Guarani, there is the term "curare", which is which, in a complementary opposite, means "ointment to poison arrows", according to a Tupi-Guarani/Portuguese dictionary (Yatra, 2024).

Interestingly, the verb “curar” (to cure) has the same Latin etymology as the word “curiosidade” (curiosity): *c r æ*. In this sense, therapeutic prose would allow us to go deeper and see unprecedented angles when the analyst uses his or her curiosity—not in the sense of something for their own speculation, but to understand the individuality of the being in front of them.

When, in the belief that they understand, or in moral judgment, the therapist does not further investigate a patient’s speech with themselves, they may thus miss the opportunity to help them broaden their awareness and better understand their experience. In a certain text, Jung humorously says that therapists are “not very curious”<sup>3</sup> (Jung, 2008, p.2, §3). If the patient says they have depression and the analyst assumes they know what the word depression means and do not use their investigative curiosity, he or she will not better understand what that specific person understands and feels as depression, for instance. On the other hand, this does not mean that the analyst should make a new hypothesis, different from the patient’s account, and cling to it as a truth, which would also distance he or she from a better understanding of that specific person.

This is how the milking of the unconscious begins, harnessing the energy contained in the fat of the milk; to do this, it is necessary to separate it from the water, which is predominant in the milk, hence the need for the next step in the process.

### Carving

It wouldn’t be too difficult to imagine Jung, coming from a rural region of a country known for its cheese-making tradition, as well as a man interested in the metaphors of alchemical transformations, listening, for example, to a Brazilian like cheesemaker master Mr. Zé

Mário Oliveira<sup>4</sup>, from the Serra Canastra region in Minas Gerais, explaining the principle of making cheese that would later be cured: “cured as we consider it to be... it is a process... it goes as this. When the cheese starts the curing process... sometimes it gets sick (laughs), it has an infection, bacteria; when it goes to the curing, either it cures or it spoils” (Ratton, 2011). Perhaps at this point Jung could think of something like the risks of the maturing process: “the formation of the personality is always a risk” (Jung, 1986, p.192, § 321).

From this perspective, Jung and cheesemakers could agree that something that may initially seem bad, or symptomatic, is not something to be avoided, or extirpated, but understood, or cared for, because, if properly managed, it would not only get rid of the discomfort, a characteristic common to the nature of symptoms, but would bring a gain to the psyche and the cheese.

Thus, between a Brazilian straw cigarette and a European pipe, Jung could further expand the conversation when he says: “The symptomatology of a disease is, at the same time, a natural attempt at a cure” (Jung, 1998, p. 86, § 312), which provokes the common current conception of pathology, which also seeks a preference for psychic pasteurization.

Letting milk turn sour is not the same as making cheese. We would also point out that, in analytical psychology, this process should not be confused with a passive acceptance of the symptom. It doesn’t mean that, instead of trying to eliminate the symptom, you just have to give up and accept it.

Cheese cooking foreshadows what, later in history, both the practice of psychotherapy and alchemical treatises announce: that the moment of pain is not a passive acceptance of suffering, but an attempt to resolve it. “There is no illness that has not also been an unsuccessful attempt at a cure” (Jung, 1991, p. 41, § 68).

<sup>3</sup> “*Les savants ne sont pas curieux*”

<sup>4</sup> The informality of the names and speeches of the master cheesemakers has been kept as it is in the film by Ratton, 2011.

In the same spirit, Jung continues:

The result of the treatment must go beyond the simple solution of the old pathological attitude [...] The sick part cannot simply be eliminated, as if it were a foreign body, without the risk of destroying at the same time something essential that should remain alive. Our task is not to destroy, but to surround with care and nourish the sprout that wants to grow until it finally becomes capable of playing its role within the totality of the soul (Jung, 1987, p. 10, § 293).

The difference between souring and curing lies in the management of the process. Sour milk will not naturally turn into cheese, unless care is taken to ensure the transformation, as explained by cheese maker Mr. Jorge Simões, from the Serra do Serro region in Minas Gerais: “The rennet was produced on the farm, with a part of the cow’s stomach” (Ratton, 2011). Regarding the origin of chymosin, the enzyme that will metabolize the cheese production processes, producer Joãozinho, from the Canastra region of Minas Gerais, explains: “Ever since they discovered four thousand years ago that, in the Arabias, if you took an animal stomach and put it in milk, the milk renneted, they discovered cheese; cheese is made in the same way” (Ratton, 2011).

It was not uncommon for the god to appear in animal form in the curing processes of ancient Greece, in the incubations of dreams in the temples (Groesbeck, 1983, p.75). Usually, they were snakes, but anecdotally we can imagine *Lactobacillus* in the cheese-making process.

The souring of the milk has a strong smell, invites flies and rats, and causes a certain repulsion to human innards. It is a yeast that comes from the animal’s innards and thus does its job. This rennet acts as a fermentation accelerator; Rulandus tells us about the symbolism of this in his entry on “fermentation”:

The enhancement of a Matter to its essential part happens through a yeast that penetrates the entire dough and works on it in a peculiar way, acting immediately on the spiritual nature. Thus, it turns out to be an agent of medicinal fermentations which, having little symbolic value, produces the noblest substance that nature allows us to attain (Rulandus, 2012, p. 122).

Hillman had already drawn parallels between the soul and a cow in this phase of fermentation. In explaining the circulation and re-circulation of ideas, he reminds us of the primordial origin of cheese and healing: “Information and influences nourish only after they have been somewhat fermented and cooked. Think of the soul as a cow with several stomachs” (Hillman, 2011, p. 69). At another point in the same book, he confirms the importance of curdling: “Fermentation encourages the thing to enrich itself from its own internal obscurity” (Hillman, 2011, p. 75).

We may not like the moments when psychological analysis exposes confusion to the ego, and darkness of consciousness, where fixed truths become relative and sometimes lies—what alchemists would call the *nigredo* phase. It is at this moment of deconstruction of matter that the birth of another version of this matter, now “more essential”, takes place, in the words of Rulandus: “After fermentation, we must be silent, for a period of quarantine” (Rulandus, 2012, p. 121).

### Dripping

The “drip” is an amount of a few milliliters of whey<sup>5</sup> collected from the previous cheese production, stored, and passed on to the current production. This small amount of liquid contains the characteristic fermentations of that type of cheese, which are transmitted in

<sup>5</sup> Half a liter for every 100 liters of milk, according to some recipe books.

terms of taste characteristics by the continuity of the linear process. Thus, the cheese you eat today must have had a hint of the cheese made last week, which, in turn, had a hint of the cheese from a month ago, a year ago, or even from a time when a family emigrated from another country.

It is this characteristic flavor that differentiates the cheeses from each region of a country, and even from one producing family to another, as if it were a psychological cultural complex. In culinary language, it's called *terroir*<sup>6</sup>, a French term that specifies a set of geographical factors in terms of topography, rainfall, geology, and climate characteristics, among others.

In the words of researcher Célia Lúcia Ferreira, from the Federal University of Viçosa: "These bacteria that are in the drop will direct the next fermentation, so they're the ones that maintain the uniformity of the product" (Ratton, 2011).

Thus, we know that cheese and humans, or any other matter, are not something apart from their environment, but are constituted from their entire surroundings. In a significant coincidence, it was at the very beginning of his research that the young Jung noticed and even managed to measure the sharing of psychological complexes between members of the same family. In his series of lectures at the Tavistock Institut, he made graphs of words that burst out in high reaction times among people from the same family. The same words made siblings and parents take a long time to respond. There, an unconscious complex delayed the ego's processing (Jung, 2008b, p. 88, § 155).

As with cheese, Jungians will say that in the process of healing the psyche, ancestral motifs, both from the family of origin and from the archaic ones of the human species, are observable in a person, even if the analysis is individual:

Just as the human body represents a true museum of organs, each with its long historical evolution, in the same way, we should expect to find an analogous organization in the mind. Our mind could never be a product without history, in the opposite situation to the body, in which history exists. (Jung, 2008c, p. 67).

A cheese maker by profession, Mrs. Waldete Aparecida Alves da Silva, from the Canastra region of Minas Gerais, explains what can happen if you don't use this ancient technique: "The drip means the yeast in the cheese, it makes the cheese tastier. If you don't put the dripping on, it makes the cheese a bit rubbery" (Ratton, 2011).

### Straining and pressing

Perhaps Heraclitus was pressing feta cheese, the kind traditionally made from sheep in Greece, while saying that "It is death for the soul to become moist" (Heraclitus, 2012, 143). When researching alchemy, James Hillman noted the function of fire, especially the nature of coal, which "gives a purer fire, where everything superficial has already been burnt" (Hillman, 2011, p. 49). This is the way to eliminate enough water to make a cheese that isn't dried out, as the protein fat continues to provide softness. Unlike milk, which is available in nature without human intervention, cheese is an *opus*, a work built and cared for, as the old jargon of alchemy tells us: "The alchemist works with essences; that nature treated, cooked, conquered, not with raw nature" (Hillman, 2011, p. 41).

Handling cheese is much easier than transporting milk, with its risk of souring. Consequently, it's not too difficult for us to compare it to the process described by archetypal psychology, taking alchemy as an example:

Only when the substance has been entirely cooked and has been truly separated from its historical and habitual way of being,

<sup>6</sup> Roughly translated to Brazilian Portuguese as "*terruá*" or "*trem-ruá*" by some producers, as described by producer Túlio Madureira (Portal do Queijo, 2024).



can it be said that an alteration has been achieved. Then the substance, which psychology might call a complex, becomes less autonomous and more malleable and fusible, having lost its independence as an untreatable object that objectifies and resists (Hillman, 2011, p. 58).

In this search for the essence of milk, the moment when a dairy is carved begins coagulation, which is no coincidence if we think of the *coagulation* operation of ancient alchemy. Particles start to agglutinate and solidify, beginning to form a white mass that will become the cheese, or a new consciousness, in the human metaphor. Let's imagine here the possible parallels of a transformation of mind, the alchemical *metanoia*, a person who, as they mature, becomes more secure, not rigid, more aware of who they are—not by a determination of the ego, but by the inner conversation between ego and Self.

A master cheesemaker undergoing analysis could draw parallels between his ancestral art and this new art: little by little, during the conversation with someone who brings new, unperceived ideas, suggestions of observations through other points of view, which are added to other perceptions, promotes an image that opens up new mental connections and the psyche begins to have a greater perception of who it is, closer to its whole, in its circularity, much larger than ego, but without its inflation.

It is during the pressing phase that the cheese is strained, *separating* the liquid, which is almost protein-free, from the solid, white mass that will go into the press, a cylindrical shape with a false bottom and holes<sup>7</sup>, so that more water can drain out, bringing the cheese ever closer to its protein essence. Analysts also know that without the pressure, the pressing of

the two poles of opposites, the so-called transcendent function, the opening for the birth of the symbol, doesn't happen (Jung, 1987, p.157, § 503). This is when the ego gives up on solving the problem itself, its defenses diminish and the symbol appears, coming from the unconscious, to symbolically represent the integration of the opposites.

Jung was familiar with the psychological process of forming symbols from the unconscious and identifies it with alchemical procedures when he mentions the elaboration of the idea down to its lowest denominator, seeking “the elimination of all that is superfluous and adherence to all merely natural products” (Jung, 1987, p.142, § 486).

Psychologically speaking, it's about ideas that are becoming more and more perceptible and concrete to consciousness. It's about discrimination for better appreciation. By differentiating between all the milk and a piece of cheese, we can also think about the suffering of the soul: “We can't handle all the suffering [...], only that part which has been separated and taken on a recognizable form” (Hillman, 2011, p. 60).

Ideas that were previously vague and repressed in the personal unconscious, or even collective potentials not imagined by a particular individual, gradually take on a mental form and become firmer, more manageable for the ego, and less ephemeral, more lasting. One patient said: “I say a crazy idea here and you listen to me, then I can't pretend I never thought it, because you've already heard me and stored it in your memory”.

Even though the pressing is not at all gentle, nor is the psychic ripening. Normally the pressure applied to the cheese is up to 40 times its weight (Cavalcante, 2004, p. 29).

It is with coagulation and pressing that the cheese reaches the form we know, although its mass is not yet ripe, needing the curing process for that instance.

<sup>7</sup> Today's cheese molds are made of PVC or silicone, but initially they were made from tree trunks cut into slices and hollowed out inside.

Alchemy calls the solidification, consubstantiation, and incarnation of *Coagulatio*. It's no coincidence that one of the most repeated sayings in ancient alchemical treatises is "dissolve and coagulate"<sup>8</sup>.

Edinger lets us understand that, when we talk to someone about a complex, this causes a shift from a loose idea, a fantasy that the consciousness soon abandons, to a subject that gains density, since there is now a witness and it becomes more audible, a little more concrete:

*Coagulatio* is a drying process. An important component of psychotherapy involves drying out unconscious complexes that live in water. The fire or emotional intensity necessary for this operation seems to reside in the complex itself and becomes active as soon as the patient tries to make the complex conscious by sharing it with another person (Edinger, 1990, p. 61).

In Hillman's words, the process is constant and multifaceted, because "we are the cook and also what is cooked" (Hillman, 2011, p. 66).

In Hindu mythology, the world as it is known today begins with a kind of cheese or butter. The origin of the world happens when the deity Matsya turns into a fish and struggles in an ocean of milk until it becomes solid.

The first chapter of the biblical book of Genesis could also recall the process of pressing and forming coagulated cheese when Yahweh separates the earth from the water.

Similarly, we can bring Jung's ideas to this discussion (Jung, 1987, p. 47, § 366) when he gives us an example of how the construction of the Ego resembles the construction of an island, which gradually receives sediment, solidifying into coagulations of grains of sand, shells, earth, wood, on a high level of land that already began at the bottom of the ocean.

<sup>8</sup> *Solve et coagula*, nos textos em latim.

From this perspective, it is little by little that awareness expands during the process of analysis: an idea that appears as an apparent discomfort to the already established Ego and, by making sense, gradually becomes familiar and discriminates between a previously confused and indiscriminate instance.

If we think of cheese as being a kind of essence of milk, from which what was previously water has been taken, we can have an allegory of the Jungian concept of individuation:

Individuation, in general, is the process of formation and particularization of the individual being and, in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the whole, from collective psychology. It is therefore a process of differentiation aimed at the development of the individual personality (Jung, 2021, p. 467, § 853).

### Salting

A cheese without salt is considered insipid in cooking; the same word is used to refer to a person or event that is uninteresting, monotonous, or dull. Salt is a product widely cited in recipes, both culinary and alchemical<sup>9</sup>. Its prescription usually appears as a subjective deliberation: "Add salt to taste". When it comes to cheese, "salt enhances the flavor and helps to ensure the good condition of the cheese" (Ratton, 2011).

In alchemical terms, salt is the non-volatile body, which brings fixity. It no longer catches fire but is capable of absorbing moisture<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Chefs know that the function of sodium chloride (NaCl), or table salt, is both to season and to prolong the life of a cheese, as it acts as a preservative in enzymatic activity and desorption, the elimination of water. Cheesemaking consultants warn against using salt too much: "It must be used properly for a correct ripening process, as it can impair microbiological and enzymatic activity and, consequently, have a negative effect on the cheese.

<sup>10</sup> Looking at plant ashes in alchemical experiments, we observed two different types of salts. The first, Sal Salis, is soluble and



If in the alchemical expression, there is a concentration of light within a grain of salt, in the kitchen we could popularly say that there is a concentration of flavor in common salt. Here we need to differentiate that salt itself is not tasty. We don't see anyone in their right mind saying: "I feel like eating salt". On the other hand, it's not usual to see someone wanting to eat a meal "without salt" unless it's a doctor's order.

The function of salt is to enhance the flavor that already exists in the food: "Salt makes the salty part of a food even more potent than the others, easier for the palate to perceive," explains biochemist Maria Inés (Genovese, 2024). Unsalted cheese could be just as nutritious as salted cheese. This would make no difference to the nutritional aspect. The big difference seems to have to do with the taste, the flavor, the enjoyment of eating that particular thing. Something like a search for life, not just mechanical, bland survival; similar to the search mentioned by the Minas Gerais poet Adélia Prado, who knows that there is something greater than cheese: "I don't want the knife / I don't want the cheese / I want hunger" (Prado, 1978, p. 73).

In the New Testament, salt also appears as a very important metaphor for doing God's will: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its taste, how can its taste be restored?" (Bible, 2002, Matthew 5:13 and 14).

In the alchemical tradition, salt is any product that remains after calcination. It's what no longer catches fire, the so-called "incombustible remains of calcination". As an eight-year-old patient joked during his psychotherapy session, after burning his drawings of monsters: "Look, there's this gray stuff left over and this other stuff, which is charcoal. We'll save the charcoal to burn again next week. This gray powder we'll keep because it's anti-fire".

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can be used to make tinctures and ointments, and the second, Sal Caput Mortuum, is insoluble in water, more stable and more fixed.

In alchemical language, Hillman explains that salt "makes possible what psychology calls 'felt experience'" (Hillman, 2011, p. 93). Alchemical salt is related to the possibility of becoming familiar with suffering that is impossible to solve objectively, "the soul licks its own wounds in order to draw sustenance from them. We make salt in our sufferings and, by keeping faith in them, we gain salt, curing the soul of its lack of salt" (Hillman, 2011, p.93). In alchemical treatises, sulfur makes a rapid penetration into matter, but not necessarily a lasting one; very different from salt. "What results from the healing of salt is a new sense of what has happened, a new appreciation of its value to the soul" (Hillman, 2011, p. 94). The function of salt is to "fix, correct, crystallize and purify". (Hillman, 2011, p.112).

One patient lamented his bad luck in business during the COVID pandemic, speaking with sorrow and veiled anger, and was haunted by depression. In one session, with a more relaxed ego, he said: "I'll only go back to work if I want to have the good life I had before". His sessions were lamentations, mourning, until he gradually realized that this worked as a kind of protest, but that it didn't serve to change the situation. He was now realizing his administrative mistakes, as well as the bad luck that affected not only him but all of humanity. It didn't solve his professional problem, but it made sense, given that many other people around the world were going through similar pain. He also felt guilt for having left the business in such a vulnerable way.

In Hillman's words:

[...] the issue here is the ability to internalize, to admit and receive a problem in our innermost nature as our innermost nature. That would be salting it. A problem finds its solution only when it is properly salted, because then it touches us personally, penetrating to that point where we

can say: “All right, I admit it, I surrender; it really is my problem; it has to be”. The taste of this experience is bitter, humbling and hard—a lasting solution (Hillman, 2011, p.104).

Jung reminds us that “the dosage of salt is an art: it must be taken with *grano salis*, not with bitter and corrosive irony, biting sarcasm or immortal fixed dogmas, but the skillful touch that gives the taste” (Jung, 1985, § 320). Salt as medicine “in the right dilution accelerates healing” (Hillman, 2011, p.124).

### Cure

As mentioned earlier, the invention of cheese seems to have originated from the need to store milk, which would spoil more easily in liquid form than in solid form. It was from this need that the curing process was born. The more it is matured, the more resistant and tastier it becomes.

Once a cheese has been finished, pressed, and shaped, it still contains a lot of water. Its color is white; it is called “fresh cheese”. It will only turn yellow as it goes through the curing process, which may remind us of the phase called “*citrinus*” by the alchemists. A yellowing that starts from white, called “*albedo*”. When you think that everything is clear and objectively resolved, the white color takes on an icy hue, then a creamy one, and yellow appears (Jung, 1994, p. 497, § 558).

During ripening, the cheese loses its excess water while retaining its fat, which doesn't dry it out. We can say that it becomes closer to what it is, a kind of essence, but without losing its materiality.

But the preference for white cheese over ripened cheese is a recent trend, as Luciano, a cheese producer from the Canastra region in Minas Gerais, explains: “It's been about thirty years since we started working with fresh cheese because before there was no fresh cheese from here, only ripened cheese” (Ratton, 2011).

These behavioral changes in cheese consumption are also due to electrical technologies. It was with the advent of the electric fridge that it became increasingly common to consume white cheese, which is more recommended by nutritionists because it contains less fat, fewer calories and is economically cheaper: “With the ease of transportation, it was no longer on the back of a mule or ox cart, the cheese arrived fresh at the place of sale, this changed eating habits; that's when we started to reject matured cheese” (Ratton, 2011).

When it comes to cheese (as well as some meats)<sup>11</sup>, the curing process can also be called maturing. It is the enzymatic action that, administered by a human being, allows food to become softer and more flavorful instead of spoiling naturally. The term “curing” is also used in construction, where it means “to set properly”, in the sense of preventing the premature evaporation of water in the concrete structure, which could cause cracks and fissures.

On curing as a synonym for maturing, here's the producer's explanation Zé Mário Oliveira, from Serra da Canastra; “Some say cured, others say matured. We say cured”. (Ratton, 2011). From this perspective to cure is to mature.

Perhaps it was while eating Swiss cheese in 1932 that Jung placed maturity as one of the triads for what he calls “personality”: “The personality already exists in germ in the child, but it will only develop gradually through life and in the course of life. Without determination, wholeness, and maturity there is no personality” (Jung, 1986, p. 177, § 288).

<sup>11</sup> The meat's own enzymes act during the resting, curing, and maturing period, around 15 to 20 days, making the meat softer and juicier, enhancing its aroma and flavor. This is also known as dry aging (Vilasbôas, 2024).

We suggest here that we think of the psychotherapeutic process in which seeking healing means seeking maturity, and not necessarily the reduction of symptoms.

The alchemist doctor Paracelsus must also have been inspired by cheese when he imagined that the maturing of the soul brings stability, and authenticity and is dynamic, but not something that the ego can choose and regret. In this regard, Jung quotes Paracelsus: “Cheese never becomes milk again, nor will the thing generated ever reappear in its first matter” (Jung, 1994, p. 333, § 430).

If healing were just about eliminating the symptom so that the subject could get better and return to their pre-crisis state (as suffering patients often say: “Oh, how I wish everything could go back to the way it was before”), we would return to the emotional state that caused the crisis and the symptom in the first place. In this way, we would have a loop of improvement and a return to the previous situation, which in turn led to a new and similar crisis.

The daily routine of the cheese curing process could remind us of the daily routine of an analysis process, where the shadow comes to receive light. In these processes, both in cheese and in the psyche, the entry of light is fundamental, but it must happen gradually, session by session, taking in light from both sides, as master cheesemaker Ismar Pimenta explains here:

Sometimes you plant a tree next to the cheese factory so that it doesn't get the afternoon sun, and you manage to change the quality of the cheese. The cheese factory can't get the afternoon sun because artisanal cheese is all-natural, you don't have a chamber, you don't have a fridge, you have to have an environment suitable for cheese production (Ratton, 2011).

He also demonstrates care with the gradual entry of light into the various areas of the cheese,

and a thoroughness in the ripening process, as Waldete Aparecida, from the Canastra region of Minas Gerais, teaches us: “You have to turn the cheese every day like this. Early in the morning and late in the afternoon, so that they turn yellow evenly” (Ratton, 2011).

In this quest to refine the taste, to become more whole, to be closer to what one is, we raise the possibility of a concept of healing that is different from the concept of “absence of symptoms”.

Jung presents his method as a tool to help the subjects discover themselves, to understand themselves in a more authentic, genuine way, observing with their conscience the demands of the unconscious and negotiating these positions with the demands of those around them. It's not about increasing social adequacy. He says of healing: “For some patients, orientation is all that is needed [...] for others, healing means transformation [...] it will be a process called individuation. and it becomes what it is” (Jung, 1998, p. 7, § 11). Here, healing is synonymous with individuation. It seems to us that for Jung the verb “to mature” can be used as a synonym for individuation. When commenting on how a model teacher could educate students, this is how he puts it: “No one can educate for personality if they don't have personality. And it is not the child but an adult who can attain personality as the fruit ripened by the effort of a life oriented towards this end” (Jung, 1986, p. 177, § 289).

In the imagination of a cheese taster, we could imagine Hillman talking here about curing, both cheese and soul:

[...] only when the substance has been entirely cooked, and truly separated from its historical and habitual way of being, can it be said that a change has been achieved. Then the substance, which psychology might call a complex, becomes less au-

tonomous and more malleable and fusible, having lost its independence as an intractable object that objectifies and resists (Hillman, 2011, p. 58).

The discovery of cheese predates the discovery of depth psychology, but long before these two, there was already the psyche. It therefore

seems no coincidence that these two types of cure are similar. In both processes there is no end, no exact finish line. Like the psyche, artisan cheese is a living organism, where fermentation takes place all the time with living yeasts acting on its metabolism, altering its flavor. ■

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## Resumo

### *Curar o queijo, curar a psique: uma metáfora*

*Observando o processo de fabricação artesanal de queijos, podemos perceber uma possível correspondência entre as fases dessa operação culinária e o processo de análise da psique. Ambos começam com uma desestabilização que pode ser propícia para a construção de algo mais próximo à sua essência ou azedar e se tornar insuportável. Tanto na culinária quanto na psicologia profunda esse processo pode receber o mesmo nome: cura, por vezes também chamado de maturação. Assim, podemos*

*imaginar que, mais do que encerrar o sintoma, a cura poderia significar um amadurecimento da psique. Para este trabalho, traçaremos comparações entre três saberes: o processo de produção queijeira (através de depoimentos de mestres queijeiros da região de Minas Gerais registrados no filme *O mineiro e o queijo*, dirigido por Helvécio Ratton, em 2011), o processo de psicoterapia na abordagem analítica e, na terceira cadeira desta mesa de prosa, a tradição da alquimia. ■*

Palavras-chave: queijo, cura, maturação, alquimia, psicoterapia.

## Resumen

### *Curar el queso, curar la psique: una metáfora*

*Observando el proceso de elaboración artesanal del queso, podemos ver una posible correspondencia entre las fases de esta operación culinaria y el proceso de análisis de la psique. Ambos comienzan con una desestabilización que puede favorecer la construcción de algo más cercano a su esencia o volverse amargo e insoportable. Tanto en la cocina como en la psicología profunda a este proceso se le puede dar el mismo nombre: curación. A veces también se llama maduración. Así, podemos imaginar que,*

*más que acabar con el síntoma, la cura podría significar una maduración de la psique. Para este trabajo, realizaremos comparaciones entre tres saberes: el proceso de producción del queso (a través de testimonios de maestros queijosos de la región de Minas Gerais registrados en la película *O mineiro e o queijo*, dirigida por Helvécio Ratton, en 2011), el proceso de psicoterapia en enfoque analítico y, en la tercera silla de esta mesa de conversación, la tradición de la alquimia. ■*

Palabras clave: queso, curación, maduración, alquimia, psicoterapia.

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