



This work has been submitted to **NECTAR**, the **Northampton Electronic Collection of Theses and Research**.

Thesis

Title: Painting as process: a Jungian approach to image and imagination as experiential practice in contemporary culture

Creators: Parker, D.

Example citation: Parker, D. (2012) *Painting as process: a Jungian approach to image and imagination as experiential practice in contemporary culture*. Doctoral thesis. The University of Northampton.

Version: Accepted version

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/5049/>





*Painting as Process: A Jungian Approach to Image and Imagination as
Experiential Practice in Contemporary Culture.*

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
At the University of Northampton

2012

David Raymond Parker

© David R Parker January 2012

This thesis is copyright material and no quotation from it may be published
without proper acknowledgement

*"That God Is Colouring, Newton Does Shew
That The Devil Is A Black Outline All Of Us Know"*
William Blake

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	04
INTRODUCTION	04
Research Questions	06
SECTION ONE	
Jung and the Arts	09
SECTION TWO	
Painting as Process	23
SECTION THREE	
Alchemy, Painting and Altered States	35
Art, Alchemy and the Outsider	36
Modern Culture and Its Marginalia	37
Art and the Other as Outsider	41
Conclusion	42
References	43
SECTION FOUR (Exhibited Paintings)	
Paintings 2003 - 2012	47
SECTION FIVE (Published Writings)	
On Painting, Substance and Psyche	62
Art and Otherness	73
The Abstract Unconscious in Painting	86
SECTION SIX (Published Writings)	
Outsider Art: a brief account	97
Illness and Epiphany: an awakening spirit	103
The Stuff of Life: The Life of Stuff	107

ABSTRACT

Drawing on Jungian and Post Jungian Psychology as theoretical frameworks, the psychologically transformative properties of painting are explored as aesthetic process and aesthetic product in abstract painting. Consideration is given to precedents within modern culture and the arts in relation to mainstream and marginal practice, along with the concept of the Other as Outsider. Speculations on the idea of altered states of consciousness are explored in relation to different values (both cultural and a-cultural) and the primacy of imagination in the formation of affective relationships between self and world.

INTRODUCTION

The critical appraisal aims to articulate a body of knowledge exploring the arts and psyche in relation to cultural values and speculations on mind and matter in the practice and reception of painting.

The theoretical and practical concerns underpinning these research interests developed from initial studies undertaken at Sheffield University into the relationship between art, psychology and psychotherapy. Interest in this area of study came out of a strong desire to try to elucidate a psychological understanding of painting as a practice and to set this in relation to emerging ideas on aspects of painting as both cultural expression and as therapeutic transformation.

These ideas developed from critical reflection on my own painting practice, where a close and highly sensitised relationship to the particular properties of painting are seen as central to the cognitive processes at work within aesthetic engagement. My overall intention was to try to spread some light on the broader issues underlying the self/world or self/other philosophical and essentially psychological aspects of painting, and the crucial part that the imagination plays in these issues.

There are six sections to this document:

Section one presents an overview of the historical context to both Jungian psychology and the arts, exploring some of the key themes concerning art, image and imagination within both Jungian psychology and painting. Reflective consideration is given to the problems underlying connections between art and science in relation to psychology, along with different perspectives on cultural and a-cultural approaches towards image and imagination in art and aesthetics.

Section two is an explication of painting practice in relation to speculations on altered states of consciousness in the process of imaginative experience. Experiential practice and the idea of an abstract unconscious are explored and this is placed in relation to Jung's theories on archetypes. Reference is also made to Kant's philosophical thinking on categories of imagination and how such thinking can be useful in attempts to discuss the psychological processes involved in imaginative elaboration within painting. This description of the painting process relates to all the paintings presented as exhibited, published works within section four pp. 47-61.

Section three discusses the art of alchemy in relation to both painting and Jungian Psychology, with speculations on the importance of matter and substances as transformative agents. Also, Outsider Art and ideas on the 'Other' in relation to modern and post-modern culture is explored, with connections being drawn between painting and alchemy when viewed as marginal practices. Connections are also drawn between the paintings presented in section four and aspects of Outsider Art; where non-rational phenomena are employed in order to mitigate tensions between conscious and unconscious processes of mind. Different aesthetic values and different mental states are viewed in relation to painting and aesthetics - seen as both cultural and a-cultural practices exploring imaginative processes.

Section four contains images representing ten years of painting spanning 2003 - 2012 dedicated to an exploration of the above issues. They aim to express what both Watkins and Tucker respectively have called 'Waking Dreams' (Watkins, 1984) and 'Dreaming With Open Eyes' (Tucker, 1992). These paintings, as both process and product, are the main stimulus to the ideas expressed within the published writing, underpinning the research questions identified and addressed below. The paintings have been exhibited at academic institutions via peer selection.

Sections five and six contain transcripts of the peer reviewed, published papers, referred to within the critical appraisal. These papers represent and demonstrate the extent to which the ideas explored within both the painting and the writing, have been acknowledged as a significant contribution to new knowledge within both Jungian psychology and the marginal arts. All the written published material has been commissioned by leading experts in the

field — having developed from major international conference presentations, or as a response to publications on psychology and the arts.

Both the paintings in section four and the published papers within sections five and six are presented as new research into painting and Jungian Psychology - thus forming a unique contribution to the fields of arts practice and Jungian psychology. A complete digital archive of all the paintings carried out throughout this research is also included.

Research Questions

Central to the claims presented in this appraisal and the published works, is the special value placed on abstract or non-figurative forms and structures in painting – couched in relation to Jung's concept of the archetypes and their unconscious foundations. Throughout the appraisal, and within the published papers, an argument is made for the psychological value of abstract or non-representational imagery. In painting, abstract mark making, and related material considerations, suggests an archetypal foundation – one that is not necessarily tied to, or expressed, via figurative / representational concerns. This aspect of the research is explored within the paper *On Painting Substance and Psyche* – a commissioned essay that developed from the conference presentation *Image in Music, Art and Literature*, for *The International Association for Jungian Studies* (IAJS) (see section five pp. 62-72).

Allied to this is the idea of an 'abstract unconscious' – operating as a process focussed on 'thinking through doing' – regardless of representational concerns. The part played by chance and associated spontaneous aesthetic responses, is seen as fundamental. This process, in practice, is described in section two of the appraisal, where the unfolding of abstract imagery through painting suggests the accessing of altered states of consciousness on the threshold of the conscious / unconscious spectrum. An implicit valuing of this state of consciousness underscores the practice, being considered oppositional to overtly rational processes. A case therefore is made for abstract aesthetic experience in painting and imagination in relation to Jung's ideas on *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Jung, CW9). This aspect of the research is explored theoretically within the paper *The Abstract Unconscious in Painting* (see section five pp. 86-96), which developed from

the conference presentation *Psyche & Image*, for the *San Francisco Jung Institute extended Education Programme*.

A key concept within Jung's psychology concerns the idea of a *Transcendent Function* (Jung, 1959a CW 9: 524). In this respect, the psychologically transformative potential of painting, for both artist and viewer, is also considered. Implicit within this concept, and therefore by implication within the arguments put forward here, is the implied therapeutic value of such altered states of consciousness when viewed as transformative processes. Such therapeutic processes are also addressed in relation to ideas on the 'Other' as Outsider within the co-authored paper *Art & Otherness: An Enquiry into the Experience of the Other in Painting* (section five pp. 73-85). This paper developed from the conference presentation for the joint IAJS/JSSS conference: *On the Edge: Psyche in Ethics, Arts and Literature* and was commissioned for the JSSS online publication: *Conversations in the Field*.

The three published papers in (section six pp. 97-113) on Outsider Art and Artists forms the final contribution to this research. These papers are all commissioned works exploring the idea of altered states of consciousness and 'Other' modes of thinking through doing in relation to image and imagination in arts practice.

Outsider Art: A Brief Account, (section six pp. 97-102) was written for *Asylum* the journal on psychiatry and mental health. *Illness and Epiphany: An Awakening Spirit* (section six pp. 103-106) discusses the Outsider Artist Leon Martindale and was written for the leading international journal on Outsider Art *Raw Vision*. Finally, the essay *The Stuff of Life: The Life of Stuff: The Material Imagination*, (section six pp. 107-113), on the Outsider Artist Roy Wenzel, takes a psychological view on his art and imagination, written for the co-authored publication on his work *Roy Wenzel: Works on Paper*.

As a complete body of research addressing painting as both process and product, couched in relation to Jungian psychology, the theoretical and practical outcomes therefore address the following key questions:

How does Jungian psychology help to further knowledge about painting as a practice in relation to the arts and culture?

Is painting as a cultural and as a specifically therapeutic activity, expressive of an innate desire to access different mental states predicated on different values in relation to both the personal and the cultural?

SECTION ONE

Jung and the Arts

Historically, Jungian psychology has clearly been influential on the ideas and images explored by artists of, in particular, the mid twentieth century. This is perhaps best exemplified by post war American Abstract Expressionism where it is well documented that, for example, the painter Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) had been familiar with, and influenced by Jungian ideas. Daniel Belgrad in his book *The Culture of Spontaneity* (Belgrad, 1998: 66) discusses Jungian psychology as one of the influences on Pollock's developing imagery, along with his interest in the arts of Native American cultures. Claude Cernuschi in *Jackson Pollock: Psychoanalytic Drawings* also considers Pollock's imagery in relation to his (Pollock's) Jungian analysis by Dr. Joseph Henderson (Cernuschi, 1992). In his essay on artists Mark Rothko (1903-1970) and Robert Smithson (1938-1973), Timothy Martin also cites both Rothko and Smithson, along with Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974), as being informed and influenced by Jungian ideas (Martin, 2010). Belgrad is even more explicit:

But even before Bollingen began its immense cultural project, an affinity for Jungian psychology existed among artists. According to one contemporary, "Jung was in the air, the absolute texts were not necessary, there was general talk among painters".
(Belgrad, 1998: 61)

It is clear then that interest in Jungian ideas permeated the artistic and intellectual discourses of the post war years in America.

Although Jungian psychology appears to have been of some influence regarding post-war arts and culture, in contemporary terms, it is noticeable that painting as a cultural practice is rarely discussed critically within a Jungian context. It is perhaps safe to say that Jungian Psychology in relation to the arts remains a contested field as a valid mode of critical enquiry. In this respect Jungian Psychology could be seen as an outsider psychology in terms of the degree to which it is marginalized in relation to those psychologies that have their roots more deeply embedded within materialist, reductionist paradigms and related medical models concerning the etiology of mental disorder. In these models, emphasis is placed on the significance of

nurturing conditions and psychosexual development, such as those of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) or Melanie Klein (1882-1960).

This situation may well be a symptom of the academic culture in which Jung's ideas were originally formulated — the reductionist basis of Freud's Psychoanalysis tending to be the main source consulted for any psychological investigations into artistic expression. There are however significant signs that this situation is beginning to change as contemporary thinking in relation to the arts reflects a renewed interest in how Jungian psychology can help to reframe the way artistic processes and products are valued — both as cultural expression and as therapeutic reparation. In light of these issues there are now a number of Jungian organizations across the globe made up of academics, artists, therapists and scholars from a broad range of disciplines, all of whom are beginning to take seriously Jung's ideas and to expand and develop these in relation to their different fields of expertise e.g. *The International Association for Jungian Studies (IAJS)*, *The Jungian Society for Scholarly Studies (JSSS)* and *The C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco*. These organizations have been instrumental in providing a platform for the research interests presented here.

It is significant that, historically, Jung's ideas have been influential on, in particular, the concerns, aims and intentions of the Abstract Expressionists. Belgrad cites the influential artist John Graham (1886-1961) and his *System and Dialectics of Art* published in 1937 as a key text on Jungian ideas in relation to the development of abstract art in America. Belgrad also discusses the influence on Pollock of Native American imagery and the ritual processes involved in, for example, Navajo sand painting (Belgrad, 1998: 62-67). Intrinsic to these influences are ideas concerning the possible 'healing properties' underscoring the accessing of unconscious contents through such processes and the part such properties may well have played in Pollock's developing aesthetic. As a key figure within the new expressionism, Pollock used spontaneous mark making and gestural approaches to painting as a method of accessing these unconscious contents — a form of aesthetic engagement focused on the *process* of painting as a ritual act of spontaneous form production.

It could be argued that, as a painter, Pollock intuited the value of this process as a method for stimulating states of mind that were capable of providing

such healing value both personally and collectively. By using the term 'healing' there is an implied reference here to the psychological benefits to be gained from the accessing of unconscious contents through this approach to painting. This suggests that there are common factors involved in the therapeutic value of painting as an art and the therapeutic value of psychology as a science. The research presented here specifically addresses these common factors in relation to cultural and a-cultural contexts.

AUTOMATISM

Automatic or spontaneous processes, used as a method for accessing unconscious contents, share a common history and were used within both art and psychology. The early years of the twentieth century saw such processes used by Freud in the use of word or free association within his clinical practice and Jung extended and developed this process into specifically visual forms of expression such as drawing and painting — though ostensibly for strictly therapeutic ends (Jung, 1961/1933: 79-80). Parallel to such processes being used within psychotherapy, artists were also experimenting with the creative possibilities of this method and this is evidenced in the experiments of the Dada and Surrealist movements. Artists from both these movements were fascinated by the mediumistic practices of spiritualists and their engagement with occult phenomena; where automatic processes were employed as a means of communicating with the spirit world (Piery, 2001: 16-20). Freud had also developed his theories from work undertaken earlier by doctors Pierre Janet (1859-1947) and Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893). Adopting such processes for aesthetic ends, the surrealists explored the creative potential of automatism as a means of accessing the unconscious depths. It is also well documented that artists related to these movements such as Andre Breton (1896-1966) and Max Ernst (1891-1976) were interested in, and influenced by, the discoveries of Freud (Warlick, 2001: 35).

ART OR MEDICINE?

At this point it is perhaps worth stressing that, as a doctor of medicine, Jung's declared interest in attempting to understand the mind remained primarily that of healing and the alleviation of suffering. Jung developed his Analytical Psychology as a therapeutic process not as a cultural theory of art — or for that matter as an aesthetic philosophy of art. In this respect Jung's

primary goal was the same as Freud's Psychoanalysis, though Jung differed radically with respect to the potential transpersonal value he was prepared to attribute to the imagery and meaning underscoring his patients' imaginative outpourings. This being the case, it was however perhaps inevitable that, given the focus of his research, the breadth and depth of his insight and intellect would ultimately lead him into investigations that took him well beyond individual clinical therapy as such.

Jung clearly valued the importance of image making through processes such as drawing, painting and modelling etc.— using such processes as therapeutic tools towards the accessing and revealing of powerful unconscious contents. Such activities were also vitally important to him personally, helping him to form and articulate deeply significant imagery welling up from his unconscious, creatively helping him to direct his thinking in the development of his psychology. Jung even went so far as to state that the experiences documented within his Red Book were the most important in the development of his psychology:

THE YEARS OF WHICH I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU, when I pursued the inner images, were the most important time of my life. Everything else is to be derived from this. It began at that time, and the later details hardly matter anymore. My entire life consisted in elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious and flooded me like an enigmatic stream and threatened to break me. That was the stuff and material for more than only one life. Everything later was merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration, and the integration into life. But the numinous beginning, which contained everything, was then.
(Jung, 1957: 7)

There is however a paradox detectable in Jung's approach towards image and imagination when seen within the context of art presented as a cultural product. Although Jung clearly acknowledged a connection between images made as cultural expressions and their psychological origins, he appears (at least outwardly) to show little interest in their aesthetic value at the level of any implicit non-figurative content. For Jung, or so it would seem, the making of images as a psychological process necessarily involved expression using a figurative form – one which took precedence over other aesthetic qualities. This suggests that Jung had a tendency to privilege the figurative symbolic over the non-figurative symbolic aspects of art. This does perhaps account

for Jung's apparent ambivalence towards modern¹ art, which had, from Kandinsky onwards, begun to explicitly foreground non-figurative forms of abstract art (Golding, 2000).

It is significant that the aesthetic products being produced as cultural art by Jung's contemporaries clearly reflected an interest in the unconscious as a source of imaginative exploration and, perhaps therefore psychological transformation, and that this might best be expressed via forms other than the figurative. We only need to turn to the radical experiments of those key figures within early modernism such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), or Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), or the Surrealist Andre Masson (1896-1987), to get a flavour of this radical move towards the abstract as a source of symbolic meaning drawn from unconscious processes. Also, that how artists chose to express these images began to demonstrate a radical movement away from the figurative as a symbolic structure. Noticeably, Jung appears to have had little to say on the psychology of this avant-garde art of his time, seeing it as an aesthetic activity outside his field and therefore the domain of the cultural artist and art critic. I refer specifically to this observation in my paper *On Painting Substance and Psyche* (2008) see section five pp. 62-72). This is a key issue in my approach towards research into this subject, thus forming a specific contribution towards new knowledge within the field.

These observations, drawn from a particular reading of the trajectory of modern art, are intrinsic to these research interests. The perceived point of tension between Jung's ideas in relation to therapy, where image making might be used for the benefit of individual healing, and his ideas when placed in relation to art as a collective cultural expression, remain central to the research. Such a point of tension becomes dynamically articulated via a notional third position – that of the art of the 'Other' the a-cultural outsider – in this case exemplified by what is now known collectively as Outsider Art or Art Brut (Cardinal 1972; Rhodes 2000; Piery 2001). In many respects this term can also be employed to embrace the influence of different *cultural* positions regarding artistic form and content — as exemplified, for example, by the influence of tribal cultures on the development of Western art throughout the modern period.

¹ Throughout this document I am using the terms 'modern' and 'modernist' non-specifically to refer in general to the cultural condition of the West as represented by the arts throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

ART OR SCIENCE?

The claim of Jungian Psychology to be both scientific - and therefore objective in its method - whilst also creative and imaginative regarding a valuation of the material being explored, is significant. Artists and arts therapists have in general, more easily embraced Jung's ideas than those disciplines that mainly formulate their knowledge on scientific models where a detached, objective method of analysis is considered fundamental to a verifiable interpretation of phenomena. It is also significant that, even given that artists and therapists have appreciated and valued Jungian ideas, much of the academic discourse on art as a specifically cultural activity has, throughout the modern and into the post-modern, been largely, though not entirely, conducted through theoretical frameworks that have their epistemological roots more firmly embedded within either Freud's Psychoanalysis (1856-1939), the socio/political theories of Karl Marx (1818-1883) or the Structuralist theories of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913).

Marxist/Structuralist positions have perhaps tended to figure as the main critical frameworks employed in approaches towards a critique of the arts and culture². Examples of this can be found in key writers on the visual arts of the post war years such as Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) and Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978). More recently philosopher, art historian and art critic Donald Kuspit has taken a mainly Freudian and Kleinian based approach towards psychological readings of modern and post-modern art (Kuspit, 1993). Professor of Art History Rosalind Krauss has also written extensively and influentially on the visual arts — though again, couching her psychological observations by drawing mainly on Freudian psychoanalysis (Krauss, 1993).

These theoretical positions have their philosophical roots within Enlightenment thinking of the eighteenth century, where knowledge and understanding of the world (and therefore a lived experience of it) became increasingly predicated on scientific principles. These principles developed from a concentration on investigations into the properties of matter, physics and chemistry, where a detached, objective approach towards observation

² An exception to these positions can be found in the later ideas of Philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida's Post-Structuralist approach attempts to expose a perceived instability in the nature and structure of language per se and the assumptions implicit in the dominant discourses seen as the foundation of the Western philosophical tradition. Arguably, parallels can be drawn between Derrida's thought and Jung's as regards notions of the spiritual in art and culture, see: (Tacey, D. in Huskinson. L. (ed.) 2008: 58-68).

presented values that specifically aimed to remove subjective responses regarding the observation and interpretation of phenomena. Prior to the Enlightenment, knowledge had been fundamentally rooted in what was not known and not capable of being known in the same way, or on the same terms, as the new sciences. Such knowledge had been based on values of profound importance for the development of a spiritual wellbeing, providing a point of mediation between physical immanence and spiritual transcendence. Within Western civilizations, owing their artistic and intellectual heritage to classical thought, expressions of these pre-enlightenment values were, of course, to be found within the religious structures underpinning society and community, where the arts, working in service to religion, reflected and reinforced such belief systems and provided imagery that gave sustenance and a potential sacred space for reflective contemplation.

It can be argued that the displacement of religion as the fundamental reference point for meaning and value, and the questioning of religion's symbolic structures, by scientific rationalism, created a profoundly disruptive effect on how the human subject interpreted his/her sense of place in the cosmos. For all the undoubted benefits that science brought to an understanding of material reality, a spiritual vacuum had perhaps been created regarding meaning and value for both the individual and the collective within a modern, secularized culture. The arts alone thus became the main vehicles for the expression of depth experiences and attendant spiritual values — over and above their service to religious institutions.

In response to this perceived spiritual vacuum, Jung formulated his Analytical Psychology in order to address, within an essentially secular framework, the spiritual and emotional problems precipitated by this lack of a deeper meaning to life. By explicitly valuing the significance of the non-rational, imaginative material erupting within psyche and seeing this as essentially spiritual in significance, Jung's psychology effectively challenged the solely rational basis of science as the dominant index for what constitutes meaning and value within culture. Jung recognized that an unconscious foundation drives this imaginative material and that this unconscious foundation is, in all its bizarre appearances, the carrier of the deepest meanings for spiritual life and growth. Because Jungian psychology explicitly values the psychological significance of the images produced by the psyche, it can be seen that this could have a significant bearing on approaches to the arts and culture,

thereby presenting a collective as well as individual implication. This then brings us to the interface being explored in this research between Art, Psychology and Psychotherapy and how these three disciplines interconnect in relation to individual and collective expressions of spiritual and emotional well being.

Given that Jung clearly considered his psychology to be as much a science as an art, it is necessary to consider how scientific method, and associated truth claims, impacted on Jungian approaches towards the arts and culture. On reflection the problem with Jungian Psychology, when viewed from the perspective of science, is perhaps not so much to do with science per se as a way of engaging with and interpreting experience, but rather a problem with how science is perceived and used within a culture in order to validate that experience. It is highly probable that the renewed interest in Jung, within some academic fields, is indicative of a growing reassessment of scientific method in relation to attempts to understand aspects of life experience that cross the strict divide between object/subject perspectives. Jung perhaps intuited the need for this at a time when such a move was untenable - the developments within Post-Newtonian mathematics and physics, known as complexity or field theory, is also indicative of this shift in thinking.

Key thinkers within the mid twentieth century, such as the philosopher mathematician Alfred North-Whitehead (1861-1947) and the physicist and mathematician Albert Einstein (1879-1955) were instrumental in these new perspectives on the dynamic relationship between, space, time and matter and these ideas were indirectly influential on the post-war arts of America in particular (Belgrad, 1998: 120-141). Viewed from this perspective, Jung's psychology, mirroring the new mathematics and physics, clearly challenges the object/subject divisions and, by implication, the body/mind or spirit/matter separations so fundamental to Western thought up until this point.

IMAGE AND IMAGINATION AS PRIMARY DATUM

Jungian psychology then is neither strictly an art nor a science when viewed using the traditionally clear demarcations that separate these as approaches to knowledge and experience. Rather, Jung's Analytical Psychology addresses directly the reality of human experience as expressed through the dreams

and visions presented by the images welling up into consciousness. As James Hillman (1926-2011), the founder of the Post-Jungian movement known as Archetypal Psychology shows us, truth to experience requires us to proceed on the premise that 'what the soul wants' (Moore, 1990: 72) and therefore what nature determines, is best explored via the images (as agents of psyche) that manifest in the dreams, visions and creative works of both culture and the individual within psyche. This process is dialogical and continuously adaptive, demanding both a non-rational appreciation of valuable insights drawn from the unconscious and a rational assimilation of these experiences into conscious awareness. Archetypal Psychology is not seen as a reductive process aimed at objectifying experience literally, but rather an image based *expansive* process, one which values the metaphorical significance of the images in psyche. Both Analytical Psychology and Archetypal Psychology are psychologies of flux and change, where self and other or object and subject, exist in a dialogical relationship mediated by the unfolding images carrying that relationship. As Hillman shows us, Jungian psychology is perhaps best considered alongside or within the arts.

(Hillman, 1995, pgs. 176-201)

For both Jung's Analytical Psychology and Hillman's later developments within Post-Jungian Archetypal Psychology: 'image [is] identified with the psyche' (Hillman, 1997/83: 14) Hillman elaborates further: '...the soul is constituted of images ... the soul is primarily an imagining activity' (ibid.). For Hillman as for Jung, the word *soul* has a strictly metaphorical meaning:

Psychology (logos of psyche) etymologically means reason or speech or intelligible account of soul' [ibid.: 24] '...by 'soul' I mean the imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream image, and *fantasy*— that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic or metaphorical. (ibid.: 25)

So, for Archetypal Psychology, the word *image* refers to all images generated within soul — it is not restricted to a meaning grounded literally in images created from sense perceptions or mental constructs alone — i.e. creative works of fiction — though it does necessarily embrace these. In this sense then, soul and image become metaphors for *how* we see rather than *what* we see, thus turning as Hillman states, '...events into experiences'

(Hillman, 1990: 21).

For Jungian Psychology, all symbolic images and therefore, by implication, all genuinely imaginative constructs, owe their generative impulses to an archetypal foundation. In classical Jungian theory, archetypes are rooted in a collective unconscious that is non-personal, owing their sources to hereditary factors (Jung, 1959a: 88). Archetypes then are collective, universal, inherited contents of the psyche – non-personal and non-individual. Archetypes are not ideas in themselves but, as Jung states:

[T]ypical forms of behavior which, once they become conscious, naturally present themselves *as ideas and images*, like everything else that becomes a content of consciousness.
(Jung, 1960: 435).

IMAGE AND IMAGINATION IN PAINTING

From this overview of Jungian theory in relation to science, art and culture, it can be seen how the perspectives of science and the perspectives of art become entangled in attempts to articulate the movements of psyche. When such ideas are applied to the experience of painting as a process of imaginative elaboration, we find clear signs of a melting of boundaries between objective and subjective forms of knowledge. This process reflects Jung's image based psychology in action, drawing on archetypal foundations that transcend a solely personal grounding. From this viewpoint such an approach towards a deepening of experience through an engagement with painting can be productively articulated within a Jungian/Post-Jungian framework. By approaching painting and imagination as an expression of *soul* and the images unfolding in the imagination as grounded in archetypes, the way is then open for a creative engagement with that which manifests in the process of painting. It can also be seen that a Jungian approach towards the dynamics of art making has the capacity to address perceived boundaries between art valued as both a cultural product (and therefore *inside* culture) and art valued as a-cultural or *outside* culture. This position can also be interpreted as the dialectic between art as culture and art as therapy.

PAINTING AND PSYCHOLOGY

As a painter, the ideas explored theoretically within this research are both reflectively formed and informed by the direct experience of painting. In this sense, a parallel could be drawn between the scientist working in the laboratory and the artist in the studio. Though different in aims and intentions, both formulate their knowledge from the close observation of

phenomena in the object /subject relationship – the difference being that the painter, as artist, specifically values the subjective *affect*³ – i.e. the psychologically transformative value of intense aesthetic engagement. Fundamental to Jung’s psychology is the concept of a *Transcendent Function* – the constructive integration of unconscious material into consciousness by an insightful grasping of meaning for the individual. This unconscious material expresses itself symbolically as images rooted in their archetypal foundations and are thus identified by Jung as symbols of transformation (Jung, 1959a: 524).

Although not couched in the language of psychology, there are clear examples of where artists have alluded to such a transformative *affect* in their perceptions of the world through artistic process. Artist Paul Klee (1879-1940), in a diary entry of 1905, reflects on this inner relationship between artists and their work:

[My] instincts as a creative artist are the most important for me. Or perhaps the whole matter should not be interpreted so rationally: perhaps an ageless philosophic spirit holds sway, who overcomes the world, even if it means leading us into the wilderness. *One thing is quite certain: in creative moments I have the great privilege of feeling thoroughly calm, completely naked before myself, not the self of a day but the whole sum of self, totally a working instrument.* (Klee, P. 1905: 170, my italics)

In this reflection by Klee we see a clear sign of a move towards the expansion of Self,⁴ mirroring that of Jung’s transcendent function – a concept that articulates a movement away from an ego centered attitude. Crucially, this would seem to be rooted in Klee’s intense engagement with the art imagery under transformation, such that a symbolic transformation begins to take place in the artists’ psyche in tandem with the literal transformation presented in the work. Likewise, contemporary painter Ian McKeever also alludes to such intensely transformative moments:

³ In psychoanalytic terms *affect* is used as a general term for feelings and emotions. It is used in relation to ideas and is seen as being attached to ideas in general (Rycroft 1995: 4). Here I am using the term to denote an emotional response to phenomena that is not necessarily concerned with ideas as such, where ‘idea’ is viewed as being conceptually based. Rather, the reference is to a ‘felt’ response that does not necessarily have a rational basis or a clearly defined goal. The implication is that an *affect* is aesthetically driven, creating a tension in the respondent that involves a symbolic integration of the experience into the psychic structure.

⁴ The term *Self* has a very specific meaning when used by Jung, generally indicated by the use of a capital letter. By *Self*, Jung is alluding to a hypothetical point between conscious and unconscious. This point becomes the location of the total personality – where the locus of *Self* moves away from ego consciousness- thus more successfully incorporating material that has its origins in the unconscious dimensions of psychic life (Jung, 1967, CW13: 67).

Is this what the artist has to do: to begin all over again; stake claim to a time which was then and yet still is now? Find the moment which threads us back to all which was and to all which still can be, and know it again for the first time ...[we] cannot come to paintings other than as we are. This is our limitation. Paintings are not tools for learning, but redemptive moments of our lives.
(McKeever, 2005: 94-95)

Such experiences, accessed through the *process* of painting, and the special relationship formed between the materials and attendant body sensations, become intimately bound to the significance sought within imaginative elaboration. Theoretical speculation considers these particular material and structural properties as uniquely co-creative in the psychologically transformative potential, for both the artist and the viewer. Consideration is given to the psychological *affect* of painting and the relative strength of its potential to create a perceptual transformation in the artist/viewer through aesthetic engagement. In this sense then, what takes place in the studio, and, ideally, within aesthetic appreciation generally, is driven by a perceived need to access depth experiences transcending the familiar and the rationally known. In effect, such a position places the meaning of the word 'known' and therefore 'knowledge' back to its source in the word 'Gnosis' where what is experienced aesthetically cannot be grasped by rational understanding alone — being critically embedded in the non-rational, the mysterious or numinous.⁵

In his book *The New Gnosis: Heidegger, Hillman and Angels*, poet and philosopher Roberts Avens presents Gnostic knowledge as '...knowledge of the soul, [where] its aim is not to prove or to explain the soul but to transform it' (Avens, 2003: 5). It is in this sense that *Gnosis*, as knowledge, shifts the meaning of knowledge away from a purely rationalised knowledge towards a potentially deeper knowledge experienced initially as non-rational, articulated in this case through painting as an aesthetic transformation.

IMAGINATION AS PROCESS IN PAINTING AND PSYCHOLOGY

The central part played by imagination in both psychology and painting demands careful scrutiny, for how we individually and collectively utilise this faculty has a direct impact on how we, as thinking, sentient beings, connect

⁵ The term 'numinous' is invoked and used by Jung to describe a special form of non-rational, meaningful experience that, by definition, cannot be defined rationally. The term is adapted from Rudolf Otto's formulation from the Latin word 'numen' used as a special aspect of the holy (Otto, 1923: 5-7).

to the world and live within it. This is seen as of crucial importance to the processes at work within this research. Painting and psychology can provide an aesthetic experience that helps to shift the locus of *Self* (in Jung's meaning) - via the image, (in this case the shared collective image of the painting) to a position that is *other* than a self when seen as ego centered. In this respect, Jung's ideas on the existence of archetypes and their archetypal images, and the idea of a collective unconscious from which these can be found to manifest, provides a good theoretical framework for exploring the dynamics of an imaginative psyche at work in painting (Jung, 1959a CW 9). This particular shifting of perspective regarding the locus and meaning of the word *Self* is also discussed within my paper *The Abstract Unconscious in Painting* (2009) (section five pp. 86-96) where reference to the work of Islamic Scholar Henry Corbin is used to articulate this de-centering of self.

In the following section the method of image generation employed within the production of the paintings presented relies on valuing the primacy of imagination— without recourse to the direct observation of external stimuli. It is however also acknowledged that the forms and structures produced in the paintings may also draw on subliminal memory traces of lived experiences of significance, and in that sense, these can be likened to dream images which are (presumably) experienced in sleep and then recalled after waking from sleep. The difference however, between a dream image and a painted image, concerns the part played in the latter by optical and physical responses to material phenomena, which, unlike a dream image per se, involves imaginative elaboration around the particular material and structural qualities presented. This approach to painting, as a process based, image-making activity, is concerned with the articulation and expression of highly charged states of imaginative engagement. What is being experienced in both the 'doing and looking' has its focus on attentive observation of the (initially) strange, unassimilated phenomena as it emerges from the depths of psyche. Paradoxically, the rationale for valuing this experience has roots in a perceived need to re-establish non-rational experience as an emotionally valuable counter force to that which is all too easily rationalised and explained away in the inertia of a disenchanted⁶ view of the world.

⁶ Enchantment and disenchantment denote different modes of being in the world whilst forming a living relationship with it. Sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) is credited with being the first to systematically explore the implications of this within a modern secularized culture.

The paintings presented are indicative of these ongoing concerns. They are imaginative constructions developed from attentive, intuitive responses to unfolding imagery as it crystallizes into forms and structures that seem to carry an emotional resonance which cannot be explained as meaningful in any literal way. They are, however, offered as vehicles for the experience of meaning-fullness when viewed as containers for what Hillman has described as 'imaginal' experience (Hillman, 1990: 50-70). In this sense they can be seen as symbolic in the Jungian sense, i.e. possessing an affective quality by pointing towards: '...something not yet known' (Jung, 1978: 41). Crucially, they are considered as independent agents of psyche rooted in the archetypal nature of psyche – without literal meaning as such, yet, hopefully, possessing an imaginative and transformative value for the attentive viewer.

SECTION TWO

Painting as Process

Through the practice of painting the theoretical speculations identified within the written published material is in effect 'materialised' as aesthetic product and aesthetic process – being the initial stimulus for the topics explored within the writing. Taking the primacy of imagination as the key element to any transformative potential, the *process* of painting is seen as the generative impulse – i.e. the elaboration, through complexity, of initially unknown and unresolved visual phenomena.

The paintings are produced over long periods of time and involve a close engagement with how the material behaves as it settles on the surface of the canvas. Developed initially from random mark making using fine traces of line and smudges of tone, they are slowly built up into highly complex interlocking structures that have no intentionally planned, preformed imagery. What appears before hand and eye unfolds without any conscious planning — being predicated on a spontaneous response to the marks and colours as they emerge. These structures develop and grow according to their own visual logic from the matrix of marks as they appear, rather in the manner of an organism growing according to its genetic pattern — with no overtly conscious attempt to direct the outcome beyond what feels right at each moment of engagement. In effect, this analogy mirrors Jung's use of the development of a crystal to explain the archetype as a concept, where the form can be said to be determined but not the content:

Again and again I encounter the mistaken notion that an archetype is determined in regard to its content, in other words that it is a kind of unconscious idea (if such an expression be admissible). It is necessary to point out once more that archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree. A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience. Its form, however, as I have explained elsewhere, might perhaps be compared to the axial system of a crystal, which, as it were, preforms the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, although it has no material existence of its own'.
(Jung, 1959a: 155)

In this sense, the form of the developing painting is determined by the process engaged in its making, whilst the content can be expressed as being

determined by conscious elaborations of the imagery under transformation. Crucial to this activity is the ability to maintain a relaxed and open, yet highly attuned, sensitivity to the developing forms within the fictional space of the painting, and the successful incorporation of the incidental lines and marks as they appear in response to the movements of eye and hand.

This method of painting provides a framework within which the imagination can wander and range in response to the accumulated marks, responding to each twist and turn, each nuanced mark, as it develops within the process of structural organisation. This is experienced as a highly *felt* as well as *thought* process — the movements of hand and eye are, in a sense, erotically charged (in the psychoanalytical sense of this word as meaning life-force or life-drive) being emotionally stimulated by the emerging imagery as it shifts and changes before the attentive gaze. The practice can perhaps be best described as a form of active day dreaming, where apparently random associations are responded to, with each structural element connecting to the next to form an intricate matrix of new imaginative possibilities. The following illustrations demonstrate this process at different stages of the process, showing how each stage acts as the stimulus for the next stage.

Fig. 3 shows a detail of the first marks created in the process — an apparently random network of lines that cross through each other and set up a dynamic movement across the surface of the canvas.

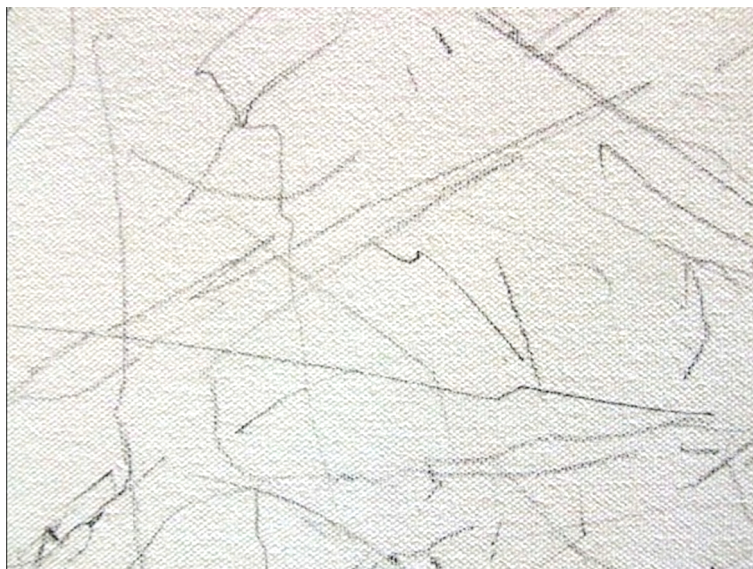


figure 3 (detail)

These initial marks are then developed further into more complex structures (fig.4) with spatial illusions created by varying the pressure on the pencil to create darker areas — thus bringing these forward optically to the eye. As the imagery becomes yet more complex (figs. 5-11) the relationship between figure and ground, i.e. what is and what is not rendered as a potential form, sets up a visual ambivalence, creating a 'field' or network of compacted spaces and lines that appears to move in two and three dimensions.

Yet more complexity is added by introducing tonal areas in order to render the linear structure into an orchestration of implied form and mass. This sets up a paradoxical illusion of solid form and fluid movement locked into a spatial configuration or tension which appears to disturb boundaries between the tangible and the intangible. As the paintings develop, the linear, tonal structures become worked over with additions of colour - heightening the sense of matter being under the flux of constant transformation — pointing the imagination towards experiences of the natural processes of growth and decay.

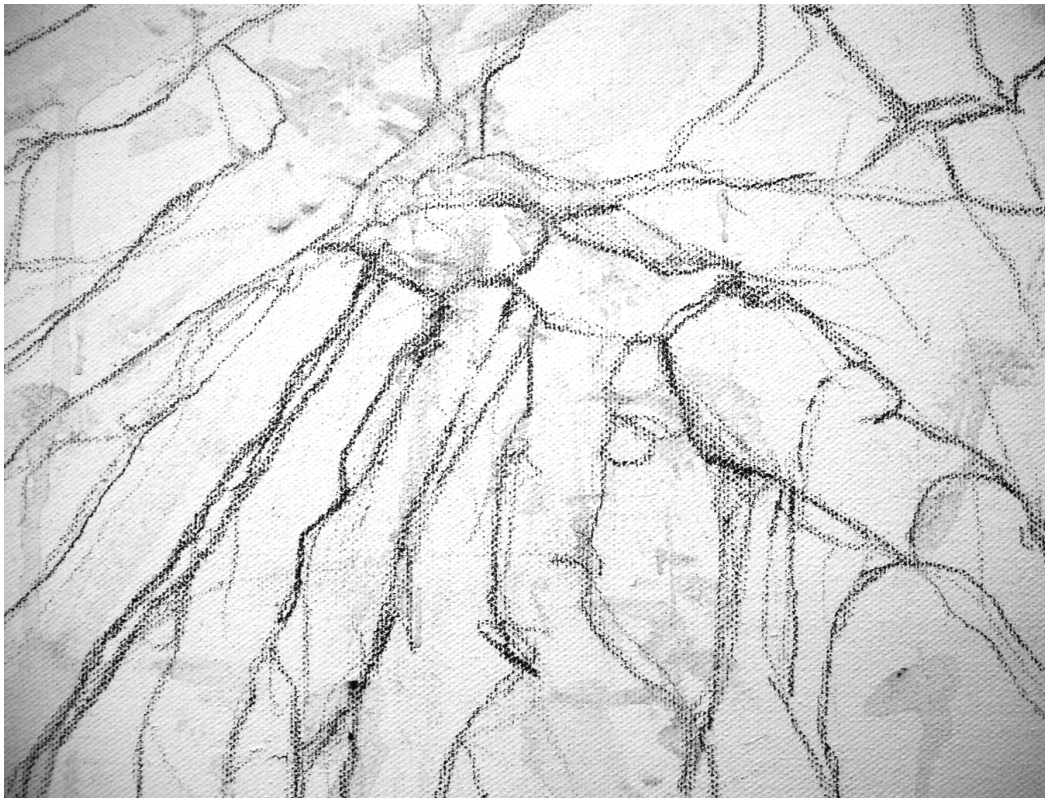


figure 4 (Detail)

There is an inbuilt symmetry underlying the realisation of each painting as it progresses — though paradoxically this is arrived at indirectly through an

asymmetric structural organization. The overall symmetry is created by the intuitive balancing of each shape or space in relation to each other and to the 'field' of the painting as a whole, while at the same time creating individuality and difference within each element. In this respect each painting is developed as a unique and individual 'unit of imaginative experience' determined by the chance effects of the medium as it is applied and the response to this through the process. Psychologically this process can be seen as Jung's *Active Imagination*⁷ at work through visual stimulation and the structuring of matter. Imaginative associations are made in response to the play of light, shade, form, space and colour — guiding the imagination towards the transformative potential of the symbolic forms emerging from the unconscious.



figure 5

As the painting develops, no overtly conscious attempt is made to rationalise any meaning value or to tie the imagery to specific, readily assimilated imagery. Throughout the process the intention is to create a complex visual field of form, tone and colour, one that does not give the eye a point of rest.

⁷ Storr describes this concept specifically in relation to drawing and painting: 'Jung encouraged his patients to enter a state of reverie in which judgment is suspended but consciousness preserved. They were then enjoined to note what fantasies occurred to them, and to let these fantasies go their own way without interference. Jung encouraged his patients to draw and paint their fantasies, finding this technique both helped the patient to rediscover hidden parts of himself and also portrayed the psychological journey upon which he was embarked.' (Storr, 1986: pp. 21).

Illusory space and the dynamic movement created by the confusion of figure and ground, aims to quite literally 'trance-fix' the eye and hence stimulate imaginative elaboration within the psyche.

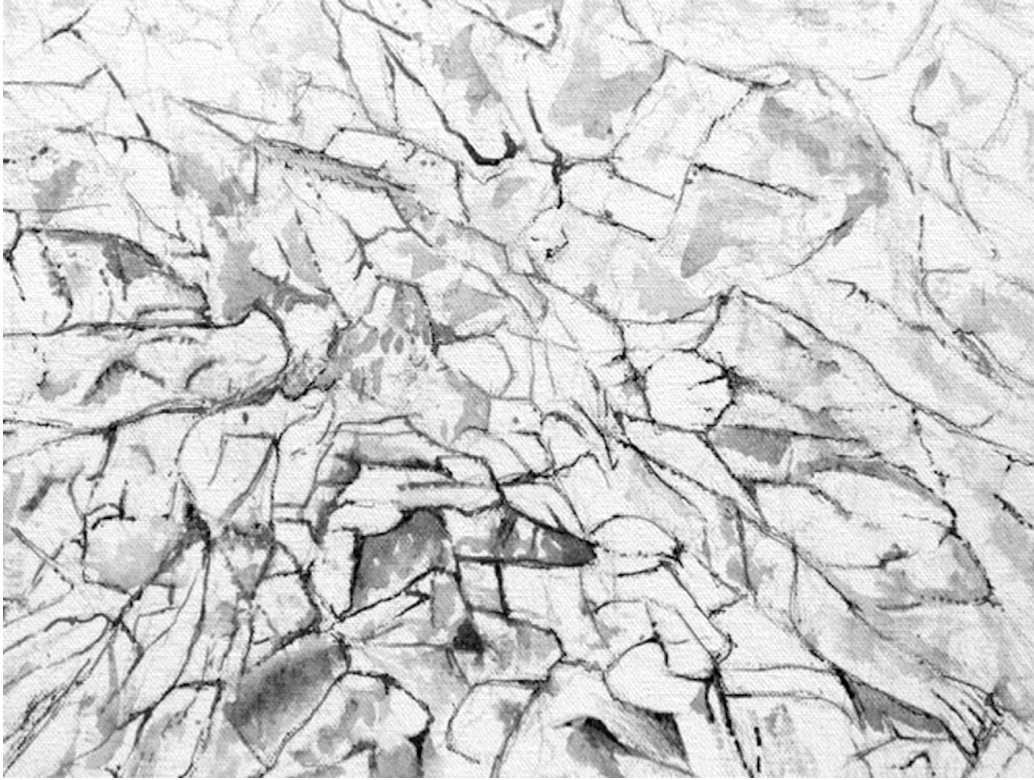


figure 6

By keeping the forms that develop independent of any direct connection to the representational, what is 'seen' by the viewer is determined more by what Avens, paraphrasing philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) describes as '...productive or transcendental' imagination, as opposed to '...reproductive imagination' (Avens, 1980: 14).

Following Kant, Avens considers the reproductive imagination to be associative:

The workings of the reproductive imagination are subject to the laws of association; as in Hume, its function is merely to solidify the chaos of sensations into an image, to stop it by creating an orderly series which the mind can contemplate. (ibid.: 14)

Conversely, Avens suggests that Kant's productive or transcendental imagination:

is an active, spontaneous power, a process that begins of itself and by itself, through its own internal agency and not through external causation. It is *a priori* to experience, not subsequent to it. (ibid.: 14).

It can therefore be seen that, considered from the view point of Kant's formulation on the two categories of imagination, what is intended by the paintings can be likened to the stimulation of a productive imagination through the agency of reproductive imagination — mediated by the form and content of the paintings. Stimulating productive imagination by avoiding any direct reference to imagery drawn from external sources of experience, psyche is, in effect, given space to re-imagine from its sources in the unconscious.



fig. 7

How the viewer might experience the paintings, or whatever the viewer may lock onto in terms of any perceived representational content, the fundamental desire is to create an active imaginative space that transcends a solely representational or figurative content. Ideally, this space will be one that is

not tied down by reason but is nevertheless capable of stimulating a 'transcendent'⁸ experience for the viewer in both the Kantian and the Jungian sense.⁹

Kant's transcendental imagination, as *a priori* imaginative faculty, is thus projected onto phenomena appearing to contain no immediate connection to that which is known and this suggests a particular psychological valuing of such non-rational experience. As an experience of psychological value, such an experience perhaps mirrors Jung's ideas on the transcendent function, where the individual steps into realms other than those contained solely within personal ego boundaries. For Jung, such an experience would be mediated by the symbol rooted in the archetypal. Thus, for both Kant and Jung, imagination forms the principle faculty behind transcendent experience, being drawn from the unknown.



figure 8 (detail)

⁸ Jung describes his use of the word transcendent as referring to the process by which conscious and unconscious contents are united through symbolic images. By creating this unification of opposites a new conscious perspective is established and a '...rounding out of the personality into a whole' becomes possible. (Jung, 1959a: *CW* 9: 524)

⁹ Jung was well read on Kant's philosophy (Storr, 1986: 24)



figure 9

PROCESS AND THE ABSTRACT UNCONSCIOUS

In *The Abstract Unconscious in Painting* (2009) (section five, pp. 85-95) there is a focus on connecting the direct experience of painting to theoretical speculations drawn from both psychology and art criticism in relation to non-representational expression in painting. This paper discusses those aspects of painting carrying a symbolic value rooted in the non-representational, where



figure 10

depth experiences are prompted by aesthetic qualities that are primary to those which manifest as representational or figurative. As the title discloses, the argument put forward concerns a view of the unconscious as a source of symbolic imagery deriving power and meaning from qualities that are other than the ready-made, culturally inscribed and culturally assimilated representations. These qualities are viewed as fundamental to imaginative experience in painting whilst being archetypal as regards their sources within

psyche. In this respect, how these archetypal and trans-personal qualities are revealed within an individual, personal experience of transcendent significance provides further material for speculation.

PROCESS AND THE PERSONAL UNCONSCIOUS

Speculation on the genesis of the images as they have unfolded within the paintings presented also considers past subliminal experiences within the personal unconscious. There is a strong feeling that the images might have their origins in the psychological *affect* created by intense states of physical and mental activity brought about by special transformative events from my past. This is not to say that any conscious awareness of this is at work during the actual process of painting — the paintings are not illustrations of readily assimilated imagery — rather, they are perhaps closer to a replaying in imagination of similar, intensely altered states to those experienced in the past.



figure 11

There are close analogies felt within the process of painting to the haptic sensations and visual complexities associated with climbing over rock surfaces, with their infinitely variable nuances of pattern, shape and colour¹⁰. In the imaginative space of a developing painting, what is unfolding visually seems to carry imaginative echoes of these physical / mental experiences, where rhythmic movements, physical tensions and textural sensations are

¹⁰ Extreme rock climbing had been a strong passion for me throughout my twenties and thirties and has undoubtedly had a profound influence on my psychological condition.

perhaps being replayed and symbolized, on a psychological level, as the painting progresses. This close and intimate imaginative engagement between the personal and the trans-personal in painting continues to offer fruitful speculation. How and where such issues have manifested both within culture and on the borders of culture and the arts forms the final conclusion to this appraisal of the research presented to date.

SECTION THREE

Alchemy, Painting and Altered States

Following Jung's researches into alchemy (Jung, 1953), I began to consider parallels between painting and alchemy since both involve practical skills concerned with material manipulation and visual phenomena and their psychologically transformative potential for the practitioner. Jung's mapping of the alchemical imagination to psychological processes and imagery seemed to provide a potentially fruitful theoretical framework for an understanding of what appears to be similar processes at work within painting. I have addressed these issues with particular reference to the part played by imaginative responses to substances and material handling and how an intimacy with materials and their attendant qualities are intrinsic to imaginative elaboration: *On Painting Substance and Psyche* (2008) (section five pp. 62-72). Using Jung's ideas on alchemy and the process of individuation and Elkin's ideas on the fundamental importance of material substance to painting, I discuss how psyche and imagination are intimately bound to the specific material properties within both alchemy and painting.

Taking James Elkin's ideas on painting and alchemy as a starting point (Elkins, 2000), I explore alchemy in relation to Jung's theories on psychology and alchemy and the psychologically transformative value of matter in both painting and alchemy. Consideration is given to the possibility that psychological experiences that seem to have no rational foundation are both sought after and valued by the practitioner, in order to better negotiate a notional gap in meaning between art and life. The highly charged states of mind precipitated by these activities which, on the surface, appear to have no rational basis, are viewed as profoundly significant and rich for the experiencing subject. The paper considers these experiences as both religious/spiritual and secular/psychological in relation to their generative impulse. From either epistemological position, an argument is made for the importance of such experiences in relation to art and aesthetics and what is, or is not, considered of value to a broader cultural psyche.

Throughout these theoretical speculations there is an emphasis on the idea of a visionary or 'Altered State' of perception in relation to depth experiences and therefore the value of depth psychology as a theoretical tool in the

exploration of conscious/unconscious processes. The connection between an altered state of perception in painting and speculations on the practice of alchemy is explored because both activities seem to suggest that a different mode of imaginative experiencing is at work. This different mode of experiencing seems to suggest a non logo centric¹¹ form of thinking, where what is being experienced in imagination is not immediately understood or even explicable in strictly rational terms. This view of perceptual experience considers logo centric thinking as a privileging of the intellect and the rational sequencing of thoughts based on the known and already assimilated. In contrast to this, a different or altered state of perception prioritises non-rational connections between imagery, where what arises in psyche appears, at least initially, to have no rational basis but is logically of value because such imaginative experiences are considered an aspect of the natural processes of psyche.

ART, ALCHEMY AND THE OUTSIDER

In the unpublished paper *Spirituality & Trans-Cultural Phenomena: Art, Alchemy and the Outsider* (2011) presented at the conference: *Contemplations of the Spiritual in Contemporary Art*, Liverpool Cathedral, U.K., I present ideas on possible connections between the imagery found within the art of alchemy and that found in marginal forms of modern/contemporary art. The paper speculates on motivational connections between art making and its reception, the alchemical process, and notions of the spiritual in the art of the marginal/outsider artist. Using Jungian psychology as a theoretical framework, the paper addresses the perceived oppositional conditions pertaining to art made from both within and outside the cultural mainstream. Parallels are drawn between the artist and the alchemist as outsiders and how visionary states of mind might be seen as fundamental to aspects of spiritual experience. This paper is currently being prepared for publication in: *Cultural Interactions: Studies in the Relationship between the Arts*, due for publication in 2012. The ideas contained in this paper were originally presented for the conference session: *Local & Global Aspects of Religion & Art: The case of Self-Taught/Outsider Art* for the 19th World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Tokyo, Japan 2005.

¹¹ In Jung's psychology the Greek word 'logos' is used to denote rational, critical thinking as the opposite of non-rational emotional 'mythical' thinking. Logos and Eros are used as opposites to express different ways of thinking. It is in this sense that I am intending the meaning of the word here (Jung, 1959b: *CW* 9 29)

MODERN CULTURE AND ITS MARGINALIA

A particular aspect of my research concerns the positioning of Outsider Art and Art Brut in relation to Jungian psychology and culture. Historically, these two categories of arts practice became significant because of their connections to notions of mental illness and associated therapeutic concerns. This presents issues regarding cultural and a-cultural forms of expression and how these categories were perceived and discussed within the historical record of modern art. Research suggests that the aesthetics of mainstream culture within the fine arts throughout the modern period had been inextricably interwoven with those of the Outsider, and this prompted a desire to explore this fact further with regard to theories on art and psyche in general.

Outsider Art, a term denoting a particular condition for art making, was first used as a title by Professor Roger Cardinal for his publication on the subject (Cardinal, 1972). In general usage, this term is often conflated with the term *Art Brut*, owing its origins to the French painter Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) and his: *Collections de l' Art Brut* a personal collection of non-mainstream art now housed permanently in Lausanne, Switzerland. Outsider Art serves as a cover-all descriptor for those works of creative imagination generated by individuals entirely from an inner need or volition - without any compromise to cultural precedents or formal learning. In this respect the identification of an *Outsider Art* implies an *Insider Art* as its polar counterpoint – represented by the culturally validated art of the mainstream. In reality the interrelationship between these two terms within modernist and contemporary arts practice is more complicated than such either/or positions.

In the published essay, *Outsider Art: A Brief Account* (2004) (section six pp. 97-102) I outline the sources and relationships between what has become known as *Outsider Art* or *Art Brut* and its origins in the mental asylums of Europe during the early years of the twentieth century. In this essay I also outline the relationship between attitudes towards, and perceptions of, mental illness, and the emerging new aesthetic interests of the cultural avant-garde of the time. This historically documented relationship between the art of the mentally disturbed, and a then newly developing, cultural aesthetics, is critically assessed in relation to attitudes towards mental illness and visual expression. Speculations are formulated as to why a cultural

interest had been taken in art from the mental asylum and why the aesthetics of this art subsequently proved to be so influential on particular modernist developments – Expressionism and Surrealism being two clear examples. In particular, the paper focussed on the idea that ‘different mental states’ and ‘non-rational’ (Otto, 1958/23) modes of perception might contain valuable insights for the experiencing subject and, ultimately, for culture at large.

There are clearly identifiable historical precedents supporting the close association between the art of the Outsider and the development and trajectory of mainstream art throughout modernism. Interest in the art of the *Other* — art which owes its provenance to sources and influences deemed to be external to the dominant culture of the West has been well documented (Cherbo & Zolberg, 1997; Hall & Metcalf, 1994; Rhodes, 2000; Peiry, 2001). Also, evidence for the considerable influence such art has had on modernist aesthetics is made clear by the sheer diversity of schools and movements seen throughout modernism — exemplified by such movements as Expressionism, Surrealism, Cubism and Abstract-Expressionism. Such evidence suggests that one of the key factors influencing the extraordinary diversity of expression seen within modernism lay in what appeared to be the underlying psychological disturbances brought about by post-enlightenment changes to cultural and social values. Common to a number of modernist movements developing in response to this thirst for new forms of expression was a powerful urge to find new ways in which to creatively release the mental images pressing forward into consciousness from their unconscious sources. In Jungian terms, such experiences signal the emergence of suppressed forms of imagery that, arguably, appear to be rooted in an innate human need to acknowledge what has been referred to within modernism as spiritual experience (Kandinsky, 1914; Golding, 2000; Gamwell, 2002). From this perspective, the imagery surfacing from the depths of the unconscious can be considered to contain significant spiritual meaning for a receptive psyche, accessed as an aesthetic experience rooted in symbolic imagery transfiguring solely rational understanding. From the Jungian perspective, such experiences contain the potential for stimulating creative growth within the personality and are thus treated as a vital component of psychic wholeness. A significant connection is therefore made between the non-rational and spiritual and the marginal and cultural in the developments of modern art.

The aesthetics of Outsider Art and its positioning in relation to mainstream practice remain significant to these research interests. There are important connections to be made between aspects of Outsider Art and the paintings presented in this thesis: (section four pp. 47-61). Fundamental to these similarities are the aesthetic qualities pertaining to such issues as — obsessive mark making, linear structuring, compacted 'allover' figure/ground rendering and an apparently free, playful involvement in imaginative responses to free-form marks as they emerge intuitively from the processes involved in their making. Such 'Outsider' works have been discussed as expressive examples of mental disturbance and yet perhaps paradoxically, they have also been valued for their aesthetic qualities, becoming significantly influential on mainstream practice within modern culture (Rhodes, 2000; Peiry, 2001).

As intuitive expressions of aesthetic process and aesthetic product such work is clearly driven by a compulsive form of creative ordering, where the gates between conscious and unconscious are opened. The imagery manifesting from this process follows no clear, rational logic and yet has a compulsive fascination which refuses any attempt to explain its meaning in solely personal terms. This compulsive, freely imaginative rendering, by those on the margins of culture, can possess qualities deemed to be trans-personal and archetypal. In this respect, this perhaps signals a move towards spiritual experiences rooted in the Other as Outsider. Rudolf Otto, in his attempt to articulate certain religious states of ecstatic reverie, describes this feeling state as 'wholly other'. In *The Idea of the Holy* first published in 1923, Otto states:

[T]he 'wholly other', that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny', and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment'
(Otto, 1958/23: 26)

Although Otto was referring specifically to religious experience, when such experiences are intuited through an engagement with artistic expression, it seems there is a clear sense that the religious/spiritual and the artistic/aesthetic become closely aligned. In the context of Outsider Art and its ultimate relationship to developing cultural values, such 'altered states of perception' and notions of madness and sanity become highly charged terms with significant influence on how the *Other* is perceived and valued within a

given culture. The industrialised cultures of the West (broadly Europe and America in the early to late twentieth century) reflected this 'highly charged' relationship, embracing and assimilating the aesthetic qualities whilst keeping the a-cultural sources of this aesthetic 'outside' the dominant discourses on art and culture.

Interest in Outsider Art and its influence on the development of modernist aesthetics implies a need within such a culture for an experience of 'otherness' and non-rational experiences — perhaps as a psychologically necessary counter force to the overtly rational, culturally assimilated perspectives.¹² Given that Outsider Art is, by definition, driven solely by forces external to cultural needs — needs that are not necessarily connected to cultural factors regarding their symbolic meaning — any cultural interest in such art would suggest that such interest is predicated on an unconscious empathy for the unfamiliar and disturbing aspects of this form of expression. It is here, where an implied unconscious dimension to life experience and mental activity impacts on conscious life, we find that all important mediation point between the personal and the collective. Both individual (personal) and collective (cultural) responses to non-rational modes of aesthetic engagement hint at the idea of the existence of trans-cultural phenomena underscoring meaning and value in all potent artistic expression. This hypothesis then opens the way towards Jung's theories regarding the idea of a Collective Unconscious and Archetypes as key psychological structures underpinning psyche (Jung, 1959a CW 9). These structures influence how both the individual and the collective respond to that which presents to us as, in the words of Rudolf Otto 'wholly other' — manifesting themselves in dreams and imaginative works of fiction and mediated by both culturally specific and trans-cultural imagery.

Is it possibly the case, therefore, that such an experience of strangeness — of otherness on the threshold between consciousness and the unconscious — holds a fascination for the receptive psyche precisely because it has the power to transform consciousness? As *Symbols of Transformation* (Jung, 1991/1916) are these powerful eruptions of imagery — wholly other in themselves and strangely impersonal in nature — significant messengers for the psyche in transformation? If this is the case, it is logically reasonable to

¹² The idea of a compensatory function for both the individual and the collective within culture is a key concept within Jung's psychology (Jung, 1971: 693-695).

conjecture that the archetypal nature of these images will carry a resonance for the collective and cultural by their assimilation into the cultural psyche through aesthetic experience. Thus, we have a bridge between that which is experienced initially by individual imaginative experience (as personified by the a-cultural and unassimilated) and the assimilation of these imaginative experiences (through aesthetic products) by the cultural, and therefore collective, mainstream.

This contribution to research into Outsider Art developed out of recognition that such work appears to be driven by powerful psychological upheavals within the individual concerned. Such upheavals would seem to reflect an attempt by the artist/maker to express inner states of heightened disturbance. In such states of disturbance, meaning and value for the subjective self suggests a highly disrupted and dissociated mental framework where 'inner' and 'outer' become confused. These states of mind – often seen as irrational outbursts on the edge of madness – can also be seen to reflect a visionary or altered state of consciousness where the intensity of the imaginative process appears to overtake the culturally conditioned mind, thus creating a reverie which has the potential to form a bridge between consciousness and powerful unconscious forces.

This research speculatively touches on these themes, drawing on the work of a range of writers from psychology and the arts. Throughout these investigations I maintain that non-rational, altered states are highly valuable as aesthetic phenomena because, looked at in a positive light, they demonstrate the value to culture of individual experiences that transcend the discretely personal via the recognition of a perceived collective unconscious dimension.

ART AND THE OTHER AS OUTSIDER

Two published essays on contemporary Outsider Artists are presented which further discuss the idea of the Other as Outsider (section six pp. 103-113). Both artists featured, although significantly different in backgrounds, exemplify two examples of creative expression born of a vital inner necessity and from a position of no formal education in the arts. In this respect both artists exemplify an innate urge to realise, in material reality, powerful imaginative experiences of significance. As 'Outsiders' these artists create

solely from a powerful internal necessity — using art making as a process to effectively negotiate conflicts between inner and outer experiences. Embedded in the material aesthetic of their chosen medium is an underlying sensitivity and intelligence — one that has the ability to move a sensitized viewer towards an experience of Otherness, transcending the personal and particular. Arguably, in this sense imagination becomes *the* faculty, turning such aesthetic experience into the mediator between Self and Other.

In the co-authored published paper *Art & Otherness: An Enquiry into the Experience of the 'Other' in Painting (2011)* (section five pp. 73-85) how Art Brut/Outsider Art has, historically, been influential on mainstream art and aesthetics is discussed in relation to the concerns of the cultural mainstream. The paper addresses a perspective on the current condition of painting regarding the problem for contemporary mainstream painters motivated by a desire to create a genuinely *affective* experience of otherness into their aesthetic vocabulary. The suggestion is that contemporary artists/painters, having knowingly embraced and assimilated the raw, naïve qualities found within Outsider Art, are now faced with the problem of how to approach painting whilst still holding faith in the very possibility of a genuine experience of Otherness. In this context, a sense of Otherness is considered valuable and vital to artistic expression because it has the power to transform consciousness, presenting culture with non-rational experiences deemed instrumental to a successful integration of conscious and unconscious within psyche. The paintings presented within this document demonstrate one strategy employed in the desire to access such experiences. Also, an argument is made within the text for the perceived close relationship between the aesthetics of Outsider Art and the cultural mainstream, and how and where this manifests in the dialogical tension between different values and different psychological experiences.

CONCLUSION

To summarise this overview of the published works contained here, the critical relationship between the strands of activity discussed above is, I believe, clearly embedded and articulated within both the paintings and the published writing. As a body of knowledge concerning cultural and a-cultural expressions of psychological and spiritual meaning and value, the paintings and the peer reviewed published outcomes signal an ongoing interest in, and

expansion of, developing new research into psychology and the arts within the artistic and academic communities.

REFERENCES

Avens, R. (1980) *Imagination is Reality*, Putnam: Spring Publications.

Avens, R. (2003) *The New Gnosis: Heidegger, Hillman and Angels*, Putnam: Spring Publications.

Belgrad, D. (1998) *The Culture of Spontaneity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cardinal, R. (1972) *Outsider Art*, Littlehampton Book Services Ltd.

Cernuschi, C. (1992) *Jackson Pollock: Psychoanalytic Drawings*, Duke University Press.

Cherbo, J. & Zolberg, V. (eds) (1997) *Outsider Art: Contesting Boundaries in Contemporary Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Elkins, J. (2000) *What Painting Is*, London: Routledge.

Gamwell, L. (2002) *Exploring the Invisible: Art, Science and the Spiritual*, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Golding, J. (2000) *Paths to the Absolute*, London: Thames & Hudson.

Hall, M. & Metcalf, E. (eds.) (1994) *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Hillman, J. (1990) cited in Hillman, J. & Moore, T. (eds.) (1990) *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire*, London: Routledge.

Hillman, J. (1992/1975) *Re-Visioning Psychology*, New York: Harper Perennial.

Hillman, J. cited in Gablik, S. (ed.) (1995) *Conversations Before the End of Time*, New York: Thames and Hudson.

Hillman, J. (1996/1983) *Healing Fiction*, Woodstock: Spring Publications.

Hillman, J. (1997/83) *Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account*, Woodstock: Spring Publications.

Huskinson, L. (ed.) (2008) *Dreaming the Myth Onwards: New Directions in Jungian Therapy and Thought*, Hove & New York: Routledge.

Jung, C.G. (1960) *On the Nature of the Psyche*, cited in, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, CW 8, Read, H., Fordham, M., Adler, G., McGuire, W. (eds.), 1969, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. & Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1967) *Alchemical Studies*, CW 13, Read, H., Fordham, M., Adler, G., McGuire, W. (eds.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul & Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1953) *Psychology and Alchemy*, CW 12, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd & Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1959a) *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, CW 9, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul & Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1959b) *Aion*, CW 9, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1991/1916) *Psychology of the Unconscious*, London: Routledge & Princeton.

Jung, C. G. (1978) *Man and His Symbols*, London: Pan Books Ltd.

Jung, C.G. (1961/1933) *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, London: Routledge.

Jung, C.G. (1971) *Psychological Types*, CW 6, Read, H., Fordham, M., Adler, G. (eds.) (trans. Baynes, H.) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd & Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1957) cited in Jung, C.G. & Shamdasani, S. (ed.) (2009) *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, (Kyburz, M., Peck, J., & Shamdasani, S. Trans.) London & New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Kandinsky, W. (1977/1914) *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, New York: Dover Publications.

Klee, P. (1905) cited in Klee F. (ed.) (1965) *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898-1918*, London: Peter Owen Ltd.

Krauss, R. (1993) *The Optical Unconscious*, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Kuspit, D. (1993) *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Post-Modern Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moore, T. (1990) in Hillman, J. & Moore. T. (eds.) (1990) *The Essential James Hillman*, London: Routledge.

McKeever, I. (2005) *In Praise of Painting*, Brighton: University of Brighton.

Otto, R. (1958/23) *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parker, D. (2000) *The Stuff of Life: The Life of Stuff - the Material Imagination*, cited in, Van Berkum, A., Rhodes, C., Parker, D., (eds.) *Roy Wenzel: Works on Paper*, Zwolle, Netherlands: Museum De Stadshof, pp 23-42. ISBN 90-75284-31-4

Parker, D. (2008) *On Painting Substance and Psyche* pp. 45 – 55; in; *Psyche and the Arts: Jungian Approaches to Music, Architecture, Literature, Painting and Film*, (2008) Rowland. S. (ed.) London: Routledge.

Piery, L. (2001) *Art Brut: The origins of Outsider Art*, Paris: Flammarion.

Rhodes, C. (2000) *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives*, London: Thames & Hudson.

Van Berkum, A., Rhodes, C., Parker, D., (2001) *Roy Wenzel: Works on Paper*, Zwolle: Museum de Stadshof.

Rycroft, C. (1995) *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Storr, A. (ed.) (1986) *Jung: Selected Writings*, London: Fontana Press.

Tucker, M. (1992) *Dreaming With Open Eyes*, London: Aquarian press.

Warlick, M. (2001) *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Watkins, M. (1984) *Waking Dreams*, Dallas: Spring Publications.

JOURNALS

Parker, D. (2004) *Outsider Art: A Brief Account*, cited in; *Asylum*, volume 14, number 1, pp. 5-7, United Kingdom, ISSN 0955-2030, Spring 2004.

Parker, D. (2009) *Illness and Epiphany: an awakening spirit*, cited in; *Raw Vision*, issue no. 68, pp. 46-48; ISSN 0955-1182.

ONLINE SOURCES

Martin, T. (2010) *Psychosis and the Sublime in American Art: Rothko and Smithson*, *Tate Papers Issue 13*, accessed 14/05/2012 and available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/psychosis-and-sublime-american-art-rothko-and-smithson>

Parker, D. (2009) *The Abstract Unconscious in Painting*, in: *The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism (A.R.A.S.)* peer reviewed and published online for *The San Francisco Jung Institute* extended education programme and available at: <http://aras.org/artandpsyche.aspx>

Parker, D. & Evans, M. (2011) *Art & Otherness: An Enquiry into the Experience of the 'Other' in Painting*, Joint article in, *Conversations in the Field* for the peer reviewed publication of *The Jungian Society for Scholarly Studies* (JSSS) and linked to the JSSS website, available at: <http://www.thejungiansociety.org/Jung%20Society/Conversations/2011/Parker-2010.doc.pdf>

Section Four

Paintings 2003 - 2012

The paintings listed have been curated and exhibited at the following venues:

- 2011 *'Paintings 2004 – 2011'*, (curated solo show) Avenue Gallery, School of the Arts, The University of Northampton, U.K. 26th September – 21st October.
- 2009 *Exchange: 2 Universities, 2 groups of researchers, 2 exhibitions, 2 dialogues*, (peer selected joint exhibition) University of Plymouth & University of Northampton collaborative project, Plymouth & Northampton, U.K. 18 November – 18 December 2009.
- 2008 *The Abstract Unconscious*, (peer selected joint exhibition with Michael Evans) School of the Arts, The University of Northampton, U.K. 14th January -22 February.
- 2008 *The Abstract Unconscious*, (virtual gallery), *The San Francisco Jung Institute* International conference on, *Psyche & Image*, 1st-4th May, San Francisco, U.S.A.
- 2007 *The Abstract Unconscious*, (peer selected joint exhibition with Michael Evans) North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, (now The University of Glendwr), Wrexham, U.K. 29th October – 16th November.



'Incantation' D. Parker, 39.5 x 30.5 cm oil on canvas (2003)



Eye of Faith - oil on canvas D. Parker 65.5 x 50.5 cm (2004-6)



'Passage' D. Parker, 65.5 x 50 cm oil on canvas (2006)



'Things Not Seen' D. Parker, 65.5 x 50 cm oil on canvas (2005-6)



'Juniper Gulf' D. Parker, 30.5 x 30.5 cm oil on canvas (2007)



'Catabasis' D. Parker, 30.5 x 30.5 cm oil on canvas (2007)



'Untitled' D. Parker, 36 x 30.5 cm acrylic, ink & oil on canvas (2007)



'Emanation' D. Parker, oil on canvas 30.5 x 30.5 cm. (2007)



'En-Trance' D. Parker, 30.5 x 30.5 cm oil on canvas (2007)



'Hallucination Aven' D. Parker, 65.5 x 50 cm. oil on canvas (2008-10)



'Suppliant' D. Parker, 65.5 x 50 cm oil on canvas (2008-10)



'Untitled' D. Parker, 60 x 60cm acrylic & oil on canvas (2009-11)



'A Grain of Sand' D. Parker, 60 x 60 cm acrylic & oil on canvas (2009-11)



'All That Glitters' (work in progress)
D. Parker 60 x 60 cm acrylic & oil on canvas (2009-)



'Untitled' D. Parker, 46 x 46 cm acrylic, ink, & oil on linen (2011-12)

Section Five

Peer Reviewed Published Essay

Parker. D. (2008) *On Painting Substance and Psyche* pp. 45 – 55; in; *Psyche and the Arts: Jungian Approaches to Music, Architecture, Literature, Painting and Film*, (2008) Rowland. S. (Ed.) ISBN10 - 0415438365, ISBN13 – 978 0415438360 London, Routledge.

ON PAINTING SUBSTANCE AND PSYCHE

INTRODUCTION

Given that the practice of painting concerns, at its most basic level, familiarization with the material and structural properties of the medium and its methods of application, any attempt to fully understand how psyche and imagination are engaged in the activity of painting demands a close reading of the phenomena involved. In this essay I would like to attend to some of these factors, using Jung's ideas on alchemy and the process of individuation, and Elkins' ideas on the importance of material substance to the creative process within both alchemy and painting. I chose to tackle this theme after reading James Elkins' refreshingly original examination of the practice of painting in which he explores painting in relation to alchemy. As a painter, with a deep interest in the underlying psychotherapeutic aspects of the activity, I was particularly struck by Elkins' scepticism of both Jung's psychology in general and Jung's reading of alchemy in particular (Elkins 2000: 4). That said, the book held my attention in its deep understanding of the material and physical nature of painting and the desire to both literally and metaphorically 'get under the skin' of painting. In this sense, Elkins' ideas seemed to connect quite strongly with my experiences as a painter - though I felt that his disregard for Jung's particular psychological approach to alchemy failed to address important questions regarding the psychological lining to painting. Artist, writer and art therapist David Maclagan discusses such issues in considerable depth (Maclagan 2001). My intention here is to try to connect some of these ideas (from a practitioner point of view) to speculations on the practical aspects of alchemy.

Although Jung's interest in alchemy is primarily concerned with understanding the symbolic nature of the unconscious in psyche, and not the pragmatic day-to-day concerns of the alchemist and his substances, his psychological work has long been recognized as pertinent to how modern artists have negotiated

meaningful forms of expression in an age of doubt and uncertainty.¹³ This is not to claim that artists have always knowingly drawn on Jungian ideas as sources of expression, though clearly there are many that have (e.g. Jackson Pollock), but rather to note that Jung's interpretation of the symbolic language of the unconscious appears to have been mirrored by many of the experiments in modern art.¹⁴ Questions therefore arose. Can we discuss the highly particular activities of both painting and alchemy, with their underlying psychological foundations, from the viewpoints of both Jung and Elkins and gain insight into the intimate relationship between mind and matter in both activities? Also, in the process, can we find a fruitful connection between Jung's aim to understand unconscious symbols and Elkins' aim to attend to the important part played by physical and material substances in painting? I believe so, for my intuition and experience tells me that both aspects are deeply interconnected in painting, and, for this enquiry, perhaps also alchemy. To ignore one at the expense of the other would be to do a disservice towards any attempt to understand how both painting and alchemy appear to create a unique and special bond between material substances and psychological processes. Without such a bond, it is probable that neither painting nor alchemy would hold such intense meaning and fascination for their practitioners. Where perception and imagination are seen as necessary components to a successful negotiation between art and life, then both will require a *symbolic structure*, and for the painter, a *material basis* on which to hang an essentially creative approach to lived experience.

From my reading of Elkins, it is clear that for him Jung appears to privilege the philosophical aspects of alchemy over the alchemist's practical and hence physical relationship towards the substances under transformation. What therefore is missing, and what perhaps all painters know intuitively, concerns

¹³ I am referring here to how artistic sensibilities after the Enlightenment appear to have been focussed on a subjective need to re-engage with the deeper 'spiritual' dimensions of life in order to counterbalance an overemphasis on rationalist and materialist paradigms. In painting within the developing industrialized societies, this can be traced through Romanticism to Modernism. In terms of the particular forms that painting began to employ in order to effect a re-engagement; non-figurative abstractions were perhaps an inevitable outcome. Such an outcome indicated the psychological insecurity felt by a loss of meaning regarding man's place in a universe without the divine purpose taken as beyond question before the Enlightenment. Wilhelm Worringer's pioneering book *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908) discusses these issues as perhaps the first study on the psychology of representation and abstraction as stylistic predispositions in art. Worringer argues from the premise that man's unease with the material world promotes a tendency towards abstraction and spiritual concerns.

¹⁴ My use of the word 'symbol' is determined by Jung's use of it, i.e. symbols are 'natural and spontaneous products' 'a symbol (that) hints at something not yet known' (quoted from Jung and Von Franz: 41). In this sense, I understand the symbolic to function as a means by which the opposites or conflicting aspects within psyche are brought into balance in order to synthesize from the conflict. This can be 'acted out' in creative work and thus point towards a deeper sense of self, one which encompasses non-ego states – a more complete state of being. This way of thinking about the symbolic is not concerned with the restricted use of the word as applied to cultural symbols per se, where any symbolic meaning that may be attributed to an image is predetermined by its expression as a consciously assimilated, culturally defined image. In this sense, such a 'symbol' effectively reverts back to a sign, having as its referent a culturally defined meaning that is frozen or reified, thereby moving meaning away from creative imagination

the way in which transformative experiences – and thereby a measure of psychological stability – involves *aesthetic* considerations, in the sense that Maclagan uses this term and that these are embedded and informed by responses to physical engagement with the materials of their craft (Maclagan 2001: 23). In other words, the body of the practitioner knows instinctively, through physical sensation and empathy for material and substance, when what is happening is revealing a psychologically significant meaning – even though this meaning may not be wholly consciously assimilated. Surely this is what James Hillman is getting at when he states ‘the fingers have an eye in them’ (Hillman and Eshleman 1985). As Maclagan suggests, this is such an important point when trying to discuss how psyche and imagination traffic meaning in an activity like painting (and presumably alchemy) that to ignore this aspect in favour of a mainly secondary symbolic reading based solely on a figurative or representational interpretation of imagination, seems misguided (Maclagan 2001: 48–51).

JUNG AND THE FIGURATIVE SYMBOLIC

Jung’s work on alchemy seems largely (though not entirely) to demonstrate a psychological interpretation that uses imagery that is essentially figurative and/or representational. It seems as if, for Jung, the imagination, prompted by the internal conflicts between conscious and unconscious processes, only presents meaning when attached to figurative or representational forms of symbolic expression.¹⁵ This perhaps is misguided when talking about painting – and for the sake of this comparison perhaps also alchemy. Such a view of the symbolic psyche does not fully address how the actual *process* of each activity might in fact be negotiating a psychologically transformative meaning. This being the case, perhaps the symbolic is carried and expressed by qualities which are other than the purely figurative or representational and yet are essentially aesthetically, and therefore psychologically, transformative in potential (Maclagan 2001). It is perhaps within the material and temporal process – as an intuitive negotiation between mind and matter and heightened states of awareness and insight – that psychological meaning and transformation takes place. In other words, the materials and substances

¹⁵ Clearly Jung does discuss substances such as salt, sulphur, mercury etc. as having symbolic meaning in alchemy. However, my point is that his desire to elucidate psychological meaning when discussing such substances results in a tendency to neglect or overlook how these substances actually promotes aesthetic/transformative responses in the alchemist *directly* within their physical and visual transformation – without recourse to re-presentation.

under transformation are affecting a psychological change in the painter/chemist. This being so, the symbolic structure as such is not just figurative or representational but rather *presentational* – a revealed insight disclosed by a *felt* rather than *thought* relationship to the material as a substance.¹⁶ Such an approach to psychological meaning is of course notoriously difficult to articulate with any clarity precisely because, intellectually, we are forced to use words in order to communicate and clarify what we mean beyond the phenomenal visual and tactile experience itself. As MacLagan shows us, words, in such a context, are perhaps really secondary abstractions to an essentially felt meaning (MacLagan 2001: 111–128). The closest we can get with words to actual felt experiences, is to use adjectives that resonate with the feeling of a given sensate experience, and this places meaning in the realm of the poetic. This then is a line of thinking that echoes Hillman's *Thought of the Heart and Soul of the World*, by bringing back into play a perspective on psychological experience that encourages us to reconsider the root meaning of the word 'material' as the matrix or mother of experience (Hillman 1997). With regard to the roots of alchemy, we can also turn to the work of Mircea Eliade, professor of the history of religions, for some interesting comparisons on this observation (Eliade 1978: 42).

THE STUDIO AND THE LABORATORY

So, what particular factors are common to the activities of both painting and alchemy? In each case we can begin with the void – the blank canvas or the crucible – and the desire to introduce the chaotic, unstructured material – the *prima materia*. What follows is, in effect, a process of becoming for the active psyche. This process carries with it the potential for success and/or failure determined by the degree to which, psychologically, the artist/chemist achieves a balancing of opposing elements in the work itself and a level of stability between these. In each case (painting or alchemy) such material must be manipulated, processed and shaped towards a desired goal, which may or may not be understood in terms of a prescribed, ideal outcome. Either way, what is desired by the artist/chemist is always changed by the materials and the process; a point addressed at some length from a phenomenological point of view by Nigel Wentworth in his study on *The Phenomenology of Painting* (Wentworth 2004: 25–52). In the end, as every

¹⁶ I wish to emphasize at this point that this is definitely not a plea for a solely materialist basis for meaning and value as such. It is simply to re-establish and re-balance a tendency in intellectual speculative thought to overlook the important part played by our physical relationship with matter to any spiritual and psychological transformations.

painter knows, a rigid and inflexible approach that does not remain open to changes in the work leads to a dull uninspiring result – also, crucially and fundamentally, this is not a one-way process. In the lived experience of each activity, both the material itself and the manipulator affect each other in a two-way process. Psychologically, the material under structural transformation appears almost to become an extension of the creator. Such a point, as Elkins highlights, is also characterized by popular perceptions of the artist, where the skills and knowledge of the artist/practitioner appear to become embedded in the very identity and personality of the individual (Elkins 2000: 147–8). With the flow of energy between psyche and matter, notional boundaries between artist/chemist and their materials become undifferentiated or rather 'de-differentiated', to import a term from Anton Ehrenzweig (1971: 19). Through the process of painting, marks, shapes, colours etc. and their structural organization record bodily actions as well as mental processes. However, these effects are also determined by the material qualities of the medium in its various states – dry, wet, sticky, thin, thick, lumpy etc. and their attached tonal and chromatic qualities. What happens and what appears in the process is therefore conditioned by the medium as much as it is conditioned by the artist/chemist. Both activities steer a course of development with no absolute prescribed or even repeatable outcomes – each is a unique process and a unique product. Implicit to both are aesthetic considerations, embracing all the nuances and particulars of changes of state within both the psyche of the practitioner and the substance under transformation – a negotiation between psyche and matter or spirit and matter. Such psychological states can appear as strangely 'altered states' of consciousness, states intimately connected to perceptual experiences of matter and its condition in the structural matrix of the developing work. Within such states, perception and imagination, stimulated by the material and structural properties under transformation, mediate and blur boundaries between conscious and unconscious activity, crucially exposing the extraordinary daemonic forces of unconscious drives. Perhaps this then is the symbolic alchemical fire, the living phoenix created by the friction between matter and psyche? Any figurative or representational fantasies that may or may not attach themselves to the outcome throughout the process, or after the work is completed, may attenuate the psychological meaning but are not in themselves the sole index of aesthetic or psychological value. From a painter's position, and presumably also an alchemist's, the work evolves in each case as a unique entity. It effectively grows from an undifferentiated

state (chaos) through various stages of development, to its final mature stage when what is left consolidates, both physically and metaphorically, thereby mirroring the internal aesthetic sensibilities of both painter and alchemist.

THE THERAPEUTIC IN PAINTING AND ALCHEMY

In the process of this creative transformation, both alchemy and painting are perhaps, by their very nature, essentially therapeutic activities – therapeutic, in the sense that they both mediate and manifest through matter, an imaginative interchange between conscious and unconscious processes – the therapeutic process being *the activity itself*. Such a process involves a constitutional need to act out, through flux and change, the dynamic relationship between primary, intuitive, unconscious drives (operating essentially outside textual language) and conscious secondary elaborations. For painters, exposing their imagining psyche by engaging others in aesthetic appreciation of the work also activates a cultural dimension – thus moving the therapeutic theatre from the individual to the collective and bringing into sharp relief Hillman's thinking on the need to effectively instigate a therapy of culture itself (Hillman and Ventura 1993).

Following this line of thinking, it is not unreasonable to conjecture that most of the experiments of avant-garde art throughout modernism have really, in essence, been strategic and (in an expanded sense of the word) therapeutic, creative reactions to a perceived emptiness and loss of meaning. Such a loss of meaning was perhaps brought about by an overemphasis on the value of scientific rationalism developing from the Enlightenment, where the 'glue' of faith through religious belief was challenged, and non-rational (Otto 1923) modes of being were denigrated and dismissed as experiences without concrete foundations. The ensuing one-sided sickness of a developing modern culture demanded a spiritual counterpoint by those who felt such a loss of meaning, echoing in collective terms Jung's dynamic model of the individual psyche – the experiments of modern art being one expression of such a need.

THE FIGURATIVE AND THE NON-FIGURATIVE IMAGINATION

I started this essay by stating that I wished to balance Jung's thinking on alchemy with that of Elkins in relation to the art of painting. I have throughout tried to think through and articulate my understanding of the meaning of both writers from the point of view of a painter. My feeling is that

Jung, like the alchemists before him, needed to express the inherent psychological meaning of the alchemical process through a secondary and largely (though not entirely) rationalized figurative use of imagery. It almost seems as if, for the alchemist, the actual experiencing psyche, once it had left the laboratory or studio, lost contact with the sensate and innately concrete nature of the transformative aesthetics implicit in the 'stuff' of matter, and because of this a secondary figurative elaboration through symbolic representation was called upon. Rich though that language might be in its use of poetic metaphor and obscure, hermetic figurative symbolism, the fact remains that the original and primary source for practical alchemists must have involved an imaginative engagement with matter and substance *for its own sake*. This being the case, any symbolic meaning would be taking place directly within this engagement, without necessarily having recourse to figurative symbolism as such. In other words, I am suggesting that the symbolic constitutes something innately meaningful and constructive to the experiencing subject and that this 'something' is not necessarily fully consciously or intellectually known or assimilated by figurative imagery alone, neither is it necessarily rational in its psychological meaning. This experience, as Maclagan argues, is essentially an aesthetic experience, i.e. a 'breathing in', an experience which contributes to our inner imaginative life as we 'inhabit works of art imaginatively'. (Maclagan 2001: 10)

Regardless of Elkins' views on Jung's psychology, and their relevance or not to an understanding of painting, I believe his deep reflections on the practice of painting and alchemy (and bearing in mind the limitations of language when discussing such practices) do go some way towards bridging a gap between what we might call the art of psychology and the psychology of art. I am also convinced that Jung's deep research into the significance of alchemical symbols for an understanding of psyche also provides a useful and rewarding theoretical framework in which to discuss aspects of painting. However, I say this with the proviso that painting, like alchemy, is of course a different order of experience to language. Painting is an experience that generates symbolic meaning through aesthetic engagement with the visual and haptic within substances. In painting imagination as Maclagan shows us, is not necessarily tied to its expression through figuration and its relationship to language but can, and does, embrace it.

Following Elkins' lead, I hope I have managed to convincingly argue a case for the crucial symbolic nature of matter and substance in both painting and alchemy. I am more comfortable as a painter than a writer, and I know

intuitively how paintings evolve, and the psychological meaning underscoring them, remains deeply connected to what one is able to consciously assimilate within the medium and structure and what one is unable to consciously assimilate. Also, that it is within this strange dynamic that any meaning and value they may carry as aesthetic objects helps to guide the imagination towards deeper, more meaningful levels of experience. For a painter, the question then, of course, is whether such essentially personal meaning and value is rich enough to carry over beyond individual value and into collective value as an aesthetic and psychologically valuable cultural experience.

JUNG AND THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION

At this point a brief discussion of my perception of Jung's attitude towards aesthetics in relation to psychology seems apposite given that this attempt to conflate the two terms remains fundamental to my argument. On this point then it is intriguing to note the extent to which Jung seemed unable (or at least unwilling) to embrace the aesthetic response as a valid index of psychological content in his few forays into modern art. His insightful attempt to understand the psychology of Picasso's art clearly indicates this: 'I have nothing to say on the question of Picasso's "art" but only on its psychology. I shall therefore leave the aesthetic problem to the art critics, and shall restrict myself to the psychology underlying this kind of artistic creativeness' (Jung 1978: 135). Now, this could simply be indicative of Jung's desire to keep his psychology within the scientific frame in order to preserve its validity – any mention of the aesthetic in this respect being problematic – there are, as always, so many paradoxes with Jung. However, his psychology of Picasso's art rightly engages with the perceived structural and spatial fragmentation indicative of an artist working with powerful internal imaginative sources. Such sources involve the free play of memory and imagination via the discrete activity of painting, perhaps largely independent of directly observed, external sources. Jung then states in his essay on Picasso: 'the main characteristic is one of fragmentation, which expresses itself in the so-called "lines of fracture" – that is, a series of psychic "faults" (in the geological sense) which run right through the picture' (Jung 1978: 137). Jung continues: 'The picture leaves one cold, or disturbs one by its paradoxical, unfeeling, and grotesque unconcern for the beholder' (ibid.: 137). This he refers to as 'non-objective art' (ibid.: 136), presumably meaning without concern for an external objective reality or those forms and structures perceived through a

Euclidian-based geometry and a pictorial space developed from it. What Jung seemed to fail to recognize, or be able to tolerate as an art, was the modern artist's move towards a need to reconfigure space and form as *aesthetic device*. Such a move was perhaps made in order to better express the changing relationship developing between a perceived external reality and a felt internal psychological condition. Modern artists were effectively reinvesting art with content and meaning (essentially psychological) that, of necessity, involved a spatial shift in the relationship between the viewer and the viewed. This was a shift that effectively dismantled the pictorial conventions of representation in order to direct aesthetic experience, and hence regain depth of meaning, by de-objectifying representational content in order to place the viewer psychologically 'within the image' rather than separate and detached without. In effect, a perceptual shift took place – one that broke away from pictorial conventions rooted in a mainly object-based view of the external world. By intuitively grasping the limitations of a dualistic view concerning object and subject, painters were attempting to express the psychological disturbance or insecurity brought about by the new 'Modern' human condition. In this respect, what Jung aimed to address with his scientific psychology modern artists aimed intuitively to address with their art – both were perhaps symptomatic responses to a modern industrialized civilization and its shadow effect on psyche. The differences between Jung and his psychology and modern artists and their art, in relation to the aesthetic response, were perhaps differences of temperament and constitution – paradoxically exemplified by Jung in his study on *Psychological Types* (Jung, 1921). Perhaps constitutionally Jung the scientist saw wholeness or completeness as only being demonstrable within art when such art measured up rationally to an idealized representation of external reality: an aesthetic pleasure based on a consensus reality and a sense of beauty constructed from an optimistic and confident attitude towards the world. Maybe Jung saw modern art as a neurotic and schizoid expression – one which failed to reintegrate emotionally, aesthetically and optimistically – and in this sense perhaps he was right. However if this was so, modern artists such as Picasso might also have been constitutionally driven to work through their problematic relationship to consensus reality by imaginatively re-configuring their emotional experiences in order to better mediate and balance psychological conflicts. Such a reconfiguring demanded an introverted engagement with internal sources of imagery – sources indicative of a withdrawal from an increasingly alienating and emotionally sterile

industrialized social order. A turning inward then, towards a desire to work with unconscious content, within both psychology and art, has the ability to change our perceptual apparatus, providing us with a means to make structural changes to consciousness, both on an individual and a collective level. What is perhaps astonishing is that Jung understood the psychotherapeutic importance of art making personally as well as professionally – the periods of creative play discussed in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung and Jaffe 1963: 168–9) during a period of intense inner disturbance, demonstrates a clear acknowledgement of this. It does seem however that he was unable or unwilling to accept the possibility that what modern artists were creating were significant expressions of value to the collective psyche, and in this sense their art was perhaps effectively a culturally validated psychotherapeutic aesthetic. It is also significant that Jung the scientist/psychologist clearly felt driven to engage his personal unconscious through playful involvement with objects and materials and related methods of handling and application. In this sense, surely the body and its sensual and tactile faculties were vital and necessary to his imaginative process, in his need to negotiate a way through quite traumatic and painful psychological experiences.

CONCLUSION

Both Freud and Jung demonstrated the value of imagination and free association in the development of their respective psychotherapies – and Jung in particular, showed the value of visual activities such as drawing and painting as vehicles for negotiating psychological conditions. However, it seems that within both psychologies, aesthetic responses were considered the domain of culture and irrelevant to psychology as such. Also, that psychology and related therapeutic concerns demanded figurative and or narrative representations to express the latent meaning underlying what might be presented. As a painter, and following Elkins and MacLagan in this respect, I feel drawn to say that, regardless of the particular circumstances under which a painting or drawing might be produced, what is presented as an imaginative response to the materials and substances under transformation contains and reveals a psychological meaning through its specific handling and application. Also, this meaning is determined as much by the medium itself as by the practitioner. It is therefore perhaps as well to consider that what has been explored and presented culturally in painting, via the various manifestations

of abstraction, indicates an emerging aesthetic value rooted in its material condition and psychological and imaginative responses to this – regardless of any figurative or representational considerations. Also, in my view, such psychological responses mirror those of the alchemists in their efforts to discover, through matter, the aesthetically transformative potential of physical processes. Such fundamentally aesthetic responses can act as gateways to the unconscious in psyche and are perhaps the prime movers in the development of emotional and spiritual intelligence within both painting and alchemy.

REFERENCES

- Ehrenzweig, A. (1967/1971) *The Hidden Order of Art*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Eliade, M. (1962/1978) *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Elkins, J. (2000) *What Painting Is*, London: Routledge.
- Hillman, J. (1997) *Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World*, Woodstock, Conn.: Spring Publishing.
- and C. Eshleman (1985) *Part One of a Discussion on Psychology and Poetry*, Publishing on the Internet, Sulphur Online. Available at: http://www.webdelisol.com/Sulfur/hillman_text.html (accessed 4 October 2007).
- and M. Ventura (1993) *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World's Getting Worse*, San Francisco: Harper.
- Jung, C.G. (1923/1971) *Psychological Types*, in CW 6, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- (1966/1978) *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, CW 15, Bollingen Series XX, Princeton University Press.
- and A. Jaffe (ed.) (1963) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, London: Routledge.
- and M. L. Von Franz (eds) (1964/1978) *Man and His Symbols*, London: Picador.
- Maclagan, D. (2001) *Psychological Aesthetics: Painting, Feeling and Making Sense*, London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Otto, R. (1923/1958) *The Idea of the Holy*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Wentworth, N. (2004) *The Phenomenology of Painting*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Worringer, W. (1908/1997) *Abstraction and Empathy*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

Peer Reviewed Published Essay

Published In:

Parker, D. & Evans, M. (2011) *Art & Otherness: An Enquiry into the Experience of the 'Other' in Painting*, Joint article in, *Conversations in the Field* for the peer reviewed publication of *The Jungian Society for Scholarly Studies* (JSSS) and linked to the JSSS website.
<http://www.thejungiansociety.org/Jung%20Society/Conversations/2011/Parker-2010.doc.pdf>

NB: Text in italics indicates material by Parker.

Art and Otherness: An Enquiry into the Experience of the 'Other' in Painting

Introduction

The first part of this paper discusses the raw art of the naïve and primitive "Outsider" in relation to the development of early modernist art. The intention is to elucidate the significance of this art for the development of modernist aesthetics and to offer some insights as to why this art held such a fascination for the modernist avant-garde. Following this we trace later modernist developments, leading to the current postmodern cultural position. Throughout this enquiry, the intention is to present a case for the importance and preservation of a sense of otherness within the arts, where otherness is seen as a container for depth experience touching on the numinous and the spiritual.

Skeletons in Closets

In 1948 the French painter Jean Dubuffet openly championed the artistic significance of the untrained intuitive and visionary (Dubuffet, in Harrison & Wood, 1992, pp. 593-595). When Dubuffet first coined the term Art Brut as an appropriate term to represent such art, he was effectively challenging the aesthetic values held by the mainstream cultures of Europe and America. In effect, Dubuffet was building on discernible movements in this direction begun much earlier within avant-garde art. Both the surrealist and expressionist movements drew inspiration from primitive art and the works that were then beginning to emerge from the mental asylums of Europe in the early years of the twentieth century (Prinzhorn, 1972). Fundamental to Dubuffet's project was his passionate, no compromise appeal to what he considered the superior

*foundational truth of these works as genuine expressions of an art untainted by any perceived cultural compromise. What Dubuffet was doing by following this course was actively undermining establishment artistic values, values that for him represented little more than insincere compromises that were incapable of touching at the core of the human condition. Perhaps, like some of the artists before him, Dubuffet had begun to sense something very special within the strange, often disturbing and unsettling expression found within this art? What then was, or is, this special something, and why did the art containing it have such a profound influence on the development of modern art and aesthetics? Professor Roger Cardinal, the author of *Outsider Art*, the English language equivalent to *Art Brut* writes:*

[I]t is that radical flavour of secrecy slowly becoming openness, of individuality slowly becoming community, which guarantees aesthetic integrity, communicating an eerie beauty born of a tension between our unsettlement and our simultaneous sense of reaching back, nostalgically, to a place we somehow remember. (Cardinal, in Hall & Metcalf, 1994, p. 39).

It is in those key words, secrecy, eerie beauty and unsettlement along with that reaching back, that one can sense being witness to artistic values rooted in the a-cultural or pre-cultural modes of imaginative engagement. It must therefore be highly significant that the art of the outsider had infiltrated and influenced the cultural mainstream of Europe and America. What then were the particular qualities that attracted the modernist avant-garde to imagery and sources that appeared to follow no rules regarding artistic or cultural precedents? What aesthetic interest did outsider art contain, given the largely disenfranchised marginal positions of many Outsider practitioners?

The Expressionist and Surrealist Sensibility

Within the history of modern art, the impact of primitive art and artefacts on nineteenth and twentieth century art and culture is well documented. These influences can be seen throughout the Expressionist and Surrealist movements, both of which had been captivated by the raw emotional effect and mysterious power of the primitive outsider. It comes as no surprise, then, that, the art of the outsider, coming from the closed world of the mental asylum or from within other, perhaps less traumatic but nevertheless equally disenfranchising marginal positions would also attract interest from the new intellectual and artistic avant- garde. We can therefore conclude that Outsider

Art and artefacts entered and affected (some might say infected) western art and culture, thereby re-defining in the process what was to be of aesthetic and cultural value to modernism. This indicates that the underlying aesthetics of this art had a tight hold on the imaginations of the cultural avant-garde, thus providing a rich source of expression and a vital and necessary sense of otherness deemed to be of great value to the development of an art of meaningful resonance and depth. The disturbing and strangely non-rational nature of this art held a deep fascination for the early modernists, promoting that ". . . eerie beauty. . . and . . . reaching back . . ." hinted at in later years by Cardinal. Through an appreciation for the imaginative world of the outsider, working outside the restrictive confines of cultural normality, artists began to test the boundaries between what is culturally acceptable and what is beyond or outside the dominant culture. This aesthetic proved to be a powerful magnet for avant-garde artists in the early years of the twentieth century.

Abstract Painting and Late Modernism

Just as the early modernists were fascinated by the other found in what later became known as Outsider art, so later modernist abstract painters such as the American abstract expressionist painter Barnett Newman (1905-1970) also saw a power and depth in the primitive, as Newman stated:

The new painter is in the position of the primitive artist, who since he was always face- to-face with the mystery of life, was always more concerned with presenting his wonder, his terror before it or the majesty of its forces, rather than with plastic qualities of surface, texture, etc. The primitive artist practiced a non-voluptuous art and concerned himself with the expression of his concepts. The new painter, similarly, is anxious to act as medium for the muse to link the beholder with essences. (Newman, 1992, p. 145)

Newman, when likening the modern painter to the primitive artist, begins to explain the underlying source for the connection. The wonder, terror or mystery of which he speaks seems to have profound similarities with concepts of the "numinous" and the "wholly other" described by theologian Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* (1917). For Otto the wholly other is a spiritual or transcendent experience, something so other to normal experience that it appears, or is felt to be, beyond comprehension whilst still offering the possibility of profound meaning.

For Otto the numinous offers an experience of the wholly other, remaining

ultimately irreducible and unfathomable to the mind, forming the essence or core of all religions. Using the terms "mystery" and "wonder" (both used by Barnett Newman) Otto (1953) writes about the sense of awe associated with the wholly other or numinous:

Taken in the religious sense, that which is "mysterious" is . . . the "wholly other" . . . that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar . . . filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment. (p. 40)

It would seem probable that this was the type of experience to which Barnett Newman was alluding when he sought to establish a connection between "new" American artists and the primitive artist. Otto could see the danger of organised religion losing sight of its original numinous core, and Newman felt this to be the case with art, hence the appeal of the primitive. The irony of this is that Newman's large expanses of single colours, divided only by his trademark "zip" (or line) of another colour, would later become representative of an institutionalised style of modernist abstraction and pave the way for later minimalist art, this can be seen in paintings such as *Be I* (1949) or *Adam* (1951).

While both early and later modernist painters shared an interest in a sense of otherness, there was a shift in the attitude of the early modernist painters to those representative of later modernism, a shift from optimism to either pessimism or realism. Critic Donald Kuspit (2000) describes this divide:

For all the nightmarishness of modern materialistic society, Kandinsky and Mondrian are optimistic that it can be awakened to the spiritual truth by means of abstract painting, while Rothko and Motherwell have no such expectation or illusion. (pp. 68- 69)

Kuspit would even go as far as to call this earlier optimism "absurd and naive" (pp. 68-69). However, beneath what seem irreconcilable oppositions, what still unites these artists is a sense that, however different their views about how society could be changed via an art of spiritual depth or otherness, all still at least shared the view that this form of art was possible. There are many now who believe that in a postmodern era the idea of a spiritual or wholly other art is now impossible. To explore the problems facing the contemporary abstract painter seeking this type of depth we can trace two approaches used by modernist artists to explore the spiritual or wholly other and look at the postmodern complications associated with these strategies.

These two approaches were defined by Kuspit as “silence and alchemy.” He stated:

the means by which today’s best abstract art achieves its spiritual integrity are the same as they were when abstract art first originated, but they are now insisted upon with great urgency: silence and alchemy. (Kuspit, in Tuchman, 1986, p. 314)

What Kuspit means by “silence and alchemy” perhaps needs a brief explanation here. Silence as used within abstract painting could be termed emptiness. Artists such as Kasimir Malevich (1879-1935) and Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) tended toward a reductive approach in painting, using ideas such as absence and emptiness, this can be seen in paintings such as Malevich’s famous *White Square on White* (1918) or in any number of Mondrian’s paintings such as *Composition with Red, Blue, Yellow and Black*, (1929) in which he reduces the pictorial language down to a few simple horizontal and vertical lines and primary colours. Critics such as Robert Rosenblum in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* (1975) have noted an earlier use of this type of emptied out picture space in painters from the Romantic era. This can be seen in the work of painters such as Caspar David Friedrich in paintings such as his almost entirely empty *Monk by the Sea*, (c. 1809) or J. M. W. Turner in many of his misty, dissolving landscapes such as *Snowstorm* (1842). Alongside this, another strand of painting runs concurrently, with an emphasis on the physical and the expressive potential of paint and could be viewed as a type of expressionism. It can be seen in paintings such as Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* (1889), Emile Nolde’s *Drifting Heavy-Weather Clouds* (1928), Chaim Soutine’s *Hill at Ceret* (c. 1921) or in the later abstract expressionist movement, in the paintings of Willem De Kooning such as *Woman I* (1950-1952) or *Whose Name Was Writ in Water* (1975). All of these painters share a deep concern with the physical, expressive capacity of paint, which in part is what Kuspit refers to as “alchemy.” This view of painting emphasizes paint as substance and its transformation by the artist, which then in turn transforms the artist via the process of painting.

Modernist Silence

Let us return to Otto with his rather beautiful definition of silence and the void in Chinese painting. Otto (1953) says:

there are very many pictures . . . which impress the observer with

the feeling that the void itself is . . . indeed the main subject of the picture. We can only understand this by recalling . . . the "nothingness" and the "void" of the mystics . . . For "void" is, like darkness and silence, a negation, but a negation that does away with every "this" and "here," in order that the "wholly other" may become actual. (pp. 84-85)

Although Otto wrote this at a time well before the abstract expressionist use of emptiness by artists such as Mark Rothko (1903-1970), Barnett Newman (1905-1970) or Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967), this serves as a good definition for the spiritual or wholly other use of emptiness or silence in painting. Indeed, it rather strangely predicts the type of abstraction practiced by these three painters. In Rothko's late paintings, housed in the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas, Rothko empties out almost everything from the picture, leaving the viewer only with a luminous field of colour with only subtle and slight variations. Reinhardt takes this even further with his black paintings, typified by *Abstract Painting No. 5* (1962) which undercut even Rothko's sense of emptiness by removing many of the traces of brushstrokes that still animate the surface of a Rothko painting. It is not inappropriate to think of the void and negation here, for Reinhardt was interested in Buddhism and some of his writings on painting bear a striking similarity with Buddhist methods of apophatic thought, they also have a striking resemblance to aspects of negative theology found in early Christian mysticism.

Modernist Alchemy

Kuspit says of art and alchemy: "The alchemical approach emphasizes art's . . . power of transforming materials by locating them in an aesthetic order of perception . . . " (Kuspit, in Tuchman, 1986, p. 315) paint being one such material. Writer James Elkins (2000) focuses on the actual material of paint and the process of working with it when he refers to alchemy. Elkins also uses the term hypostasis:

[Hypostasis] properly speaking, is a religious concept . . . a descent from an incorporeal state into ordinary matter, or in general an infusion of spirit into something inert . . . Hypostasis is the feeling that something as dead as paint might also be deeply alive, full of thought and expressive meaning. (p. 44)

Thus, this second approach, rooted in the physical world of matter and substances can also be seen as a method of engaging with the wholly other and another pathway to what may be considered a spiritual experience.

These are two modes of engaging with the spiritual or other for the modernist painter and two problem areas for the postmodern painter. There is, however,

a strand of postmodernism that seems caught up in irony and critique. As Elkins points out, much contemporary (postmodern) art struggles with the religious or spiritual as "irony must pervade the art, must be the air it breathes" (p. 47).

Post Modern Silence

In a certain type of postmodern context silence or emptiness becomes a problem for the painter. No longer can the modernist strategy of using absence to indicate presence, or the transcending of the everyday reality of appearances for a truer, deeper reality, be used unquestioningly. Emptiness no longer necessarily means a space pregnant with potential. Rather, emptiness may just be blankness, as critic Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe has discussed in *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (1999). For him the smooth, blank surfaces of the world of contemporary objects (typified by automobile design) represent a real challenge to the older model of the spiritually emptied out, silent forms of abstraction. In car design blankness for Gilbert-Rolfe (1999) is "tied not to contemplation but speed . . . one recognizes blankness as a property of the surface, which has to be flawless and, therefore, cannot be said to present blankness as any kind of lack" (p. 120).

All this leads to the conclusion that emptiness can now be viewed in an ambivalent way. We can recall its rich history and contemplative potential, a once seldom visited territory, a rarefied atmosphere. Now it could be compared to the slopes of Everest, once remote and isolated, to walk there signalled a rare and difficult achievement, but now it is covered in rubbish. The territory of emptiness has become extremely crowded.

Post Modern Alchemy

A focus on the physical and transformative nature of paint is often achieved within modernist painting by the expressive brushstroke or gesture. Its currency was tied to spontaneity and the unconscious processes involved in making "authentic" marks and gestures. Within this mode of painting, as with emptiness, the gestural painter now faces the problem of having prior knowledge of what this type of painting looks like. Art critic Timo Valjakka writing in a catalogue about the work of the contemporary British abstract painter IanMcKeever (born 1946) muses on the problems facing the contemporary painter dealing with surface and gesture:

how does one proceed in a situation where virtually all gestures and marks have been used, becoming inscribed into the long history of painting? How should one spread paint on the canvas to ensure that the spectator sees the painting as it is, and not just as a web of references, quotations and pre-existing meanings? (Valjakka, in McKeever, 1997, p. 16)

All this is not to suggest that postmodernism signalled the end of all possibilities except irony, but rather to demonstrate the current complexity of the situation. The Contemporary German artist Gerhard Richter (born 1932) is famous for his semi-mechanically produced abstract paintings, produced by a process of repeatedly dragging wet oil paint across the surface of a painting often with beautiful results as can be seen in paintings such as *St. John* (1988) or *Blue* (1988). Richter acknowledges the unease with which the contemporary painter faces the expressive gesture (and the whole notion of authenticity) when talking about his own work:

. . . there is . . . something about these [my] paintings that sometimes look like great gestural painting but also suggests that there is a lack of conviction that it is possible to paint like that. Unlike people like [Franz] Kline and others who could paint an expressionist painting with conviction . . . They had the conviction that what they were doing was good and right . . . I lack that in every stroke. (Richter, in Storr, 2002, p. 181)

However, Richter still paints, and even with his sense of profound doubt he still finds meaning of some sort within the activity. Perhaps the very act of his continuing to paint demonstrates an underlying optimism and faith within Richter which Hans Kung would define as 'the expression of an ultimately sustained basic trust'

(Kung, 1981, p. 33).

British painter Ian McKeever produces large-scale abstract paintings very different from those of Richter. McKeever's recent paintings such as *Sentinel XI* (2004) often have large overlapping areas of translucent white which produce delicate, highly complex and multi layered spaces. Although powerful, his paintings maintain a sense of fragility. McKeever (2005), does not exhibit the same level of pessimism found in Richter but still sees both the potential and the difficulty involved in contemporary painting, saying, "The question for the painter, in our contemporary world full of likenesses, is not how to make yet another likeness, but how to paint the real thing" (p. 50). What is encouraging about this stance is that McKeever still has a sense of the underlying "real thing," a sense of a continuing deeper aspect of reality to which the artist may occasionally bear witness.

The Importance of Preserving the “Wholly Other”

This brings us back to the heart of the matter. Now that we have looked at modernist and postmodernist interest in aspects of the other or wholly other, the question now arises as to why this is important? What makes it important to preserve our experience of the wholly other? Art and religion have offered ways of approaching (or enduring) what is at the edge of our understanding, offering a method or discipline capable of mediating the potentially hazardous wholly other. The secular mind, stripped of these tools may find the other distressing, resulting in an encounter with something like the “void state” of which Paul Ashton talks (Ashton, 2007). David Tacey has also pointed to the hostility with which the numinous or wholly other may be met by a secular ego dominated mind and the associated potential threat that it represents. Sadly the art world is no exception to this:

‘As soon as anyone touches on the numinous, a kind of spiritual complex is triggered in the culture, which immediately sets up a resistance. Jung said “the gods have become diseases” . . . and they are treated by the modern ego like pathogens in the body. The ego’s anxiety triggers an automatic defense reaction, activating forces of resistance. As with any unconscious complex, the spiritual complex is triggered automatically and is hard to detect.’ (Casement & Tacey, 2006, p. 219)

The parallel here with the strategies of irony presented by some postmodern art is hard to miss. Perhaps depth psychology can help preserve one of the most fundamental aspects of art precisely by resisting secondary interpretation and addressing direct experience. It can help those who do not know, have forgotten, or are busy forgetting, to understand the importance of the numinous, the unknown or the wholly other. Depth psychology could play an important part in articulating a deeper understanding (or experiencing) of the arts. Rather than adding to the already numerous methods for interpreting the arts, it can engage on a level that explores art’s greatest potential, allowing it the full dignity of being an irreducible experience. Being able to live with uncertainty, without full knowledge of self or world, and to accept that sometimes, through this failure of knowledge or understanding, new meaning or experience may emerge, can be a difficult but worthwhile goal. Depth Psychology is, of course, fundamentally a therapeutic practice, and it is in the interface between Depth Psychology and art that we find common ground regarding what is irreducible and what is, at the same time, transformative.

Culture or Therapy?

Writing in 'Modern Man in Search of a Soul' on art making as a therapeutic tool to Self discovery, Jung states:

He [the patient] is no longer dependent on his dreams or on his doctor's knowledge, but can give form to his own inner experience by painting it. For what he paints are active fantasies – it is that which activates him. And that which activates within himself, but not in the sense of his previous error when he mistook his personal ego for the self; it is himself in a new sense, for his ego now appears as an object actuated by the life- forces within. He strives to represent as fully as possible in his picture-series that which works within him, only to discover in the end that it is the eternally unknown and alien – the hidden foundations of psychic life [italics added]. (Jung, 1992: 80)

In this simple statement, written specifically in the context of art as therapeutic healing and not art as cultural aesthetic, Jung is clearly identifying a psychological value in the unknown and alien, curiously though Jung does not equate psychological value with aesthetic value. It would appear that for Jung, cultural art, as a collective expression of value, has no implicit connection to the therapeutic encounter:

Although from time to time my patients produce artistically beautiful creations which might very well be shown in modern "art" exhibitions, I nevertheless treat them as wholly worthless according to the tests of serious art. (ibid. 79)

The issue here, in relation to art as a mediator of cultural values and therefore collective, and art as a therapeutic tool and hence individual, clearly centers on the relationship between an aesthetic transformation and a therapeutic transformation. What was taking place around Jung outside his consulting room, as seen within the experiments of the modernist avant-garde, represented, in effect, a therapeutic cultural aesthetic. This was perhaps a culturally therapeutic corrective to the disturbing social and political values being expressed within the industrialised powers of Europe and America at the time. Does this hypothesis therefore put all "consulting room art" on the same level as cultural art? Clearly, no must be the answer to this question. There is good art and there is bad art, but there is no bad therapeutic art, as such. From the point of view of therapy, if it helps the patient, then it works, and this is all that matters and all that Jung was essentially concerned with as a doctor. What transcends individual therapy

through art is the collective, cultural dimension. When an artwork manages to transcend the known, the easily assimilated, and to carry a multiplicity of possible meanings through all of its constituent parts, then arguably, it has the potential to be of significant cultural value. In Jungian terms, when an artwork carries and expresses, through its formal and informal properties, significant depth potential, then it will echo an archetypal foundation and therefore transcend the particular individual therapeutic value and address a collective unconscious. The great mystery in this of course is what such depth potential might be? We can offer the following suggestion. In the right frame of mind, and in a state of receptive and imaginative engagement, when ego defenses and the will to literal interpretation are suspended, imagination will aid the psyche in a moment of transcendence. This would be both an aesthetic and a therapeutic moment for the viewer, therapeutic in the sense that it would promote an unconscious assimilation of the evolving image, one capable of transcending a purely conscious surfacing reading. In the works of the early modernist artists, as exemplified by both Expressionism and Surrealism, we can clearly see signs of this desire to access the unconscious depths and to find a collective expression for those aspects of life experience that better represented a more fully integrated psyche. It would appear however that this was an aspect of modern art that went largely unrecognised by Jung. This then brings us to the problems now facing the artist in the twenty- first century.

The Contemporary Dilemma

Put simply, the contemporary artist is now faced with the problem of finding a way to reach out beyond the assimilated pictorial languages of a cultural mainstream that has safely absorbed the experiments of modernism. If the desire and motivation are to seek out new forms and structures and hence reinvigorate the aesthetic sensibility with a sense of otherness, how might artists move out beyond the all too familiar? It would seem that a trust in the primacy of imagination holds the key, along with a willingness to remain open and responsive to the unfolding images as they appear. By allowing forms and structures to emerge out of visual complexity, the process works as a lucid, constantly shifting, state of imaginative reverie, where what appears to eye and mind seems to move somewhere other than the instantly familiar. What is of value and therefore most meaning-full, hints at depth experiences transcending the solely rational. To use an alchemical term the work of

psychology and the work of art, as imaginative processes, cannot be transformative by being set to reason alone. What moves within through revelation is beyond reason, to quote Jung himself from his Red Book:

You open the gates of the soul to let the dark flood of chaos flow into your order and meaning. If you marry the order to the chaos you produce the divine child, the supreme meaning beyond meaning and meaninglessness.
(Jung, in Shamdasani, 2009: 235)

References

- Ashton, P. W. (2007). *From the brink: Experiences of the void from a depth psychology perspective*. London: Karnac Books.
- Casement, A., & Tacey, D. (eds.). (2006). *The Idea of the Numinous: Contemporary Jungian and Psychoanalytical Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Elkins, J. (2000). *What Painting Is*. London: Routledge.
- Elkins, J. (2004). *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. London: Routledge.
- Gilbert-Rolfe, J. (1999). *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*. New York: Allworth Press.
- Hall, M., & Metcalf, E. (Eds.). (1994). *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian.
- Harrison, C., & Wood, P. (1992). *Art in Theory 1900-1990*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jung, C. G. (1933/1992). *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. London: Ark.
- Jung, C. G. in Shamdasani, S. (ed.). (2009). *The Red Book: Liber Novus*. New York and London: Norton & Co.
- Kung, H. (1981). *Art and the question of meaning*. London: SCM Press.
- Kuspit, D. (2000). *The rebirth of painting in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
- McKeever, I. (1997). *Paintings 1990 – 1996*. Nottingham: Angel Row Gallery.
- McKeever, I. (2005). *In Praise of Painting*. Brighton: Centre for Contemporary Visual Arts/University of Brighton.
- Newman, B. (1992). *Selected Writings and Interviews*. Los Angeles: University Of California Press.
- Otto, R. (1917/1959). *The Idea of the Holy*. London: Pelican Books.
- Prinzhorn, H. (1922/1972). *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Storr, R. (2002). *Gerhard Richter, Doubt and Belief in Painting*. New York: MOMA.

Tuchman, M. (Ed.). (1986). *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. New York: Abbeville Press.

Peer Reviewed Published Essay

Published In:

Parker, D. (2009) *The Abstract Unconscious in Painting*, in: *The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism (A.R.A.S.)* peer reviewed and published on line for *The San Francisco Jung Institute* extended education programme and available at: <http://aras.org/artandpsyche.aspx>

'...it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified...' (Nietzsche. F. 1872)

The Abstract Unconscious in Painting

I will begin by stating that, for me, what takes place in the studio, and subsequent reflections on the activity and its outcomes, appears to be deeply connected to a vital personal need to engage in some form of highly altered state of mind. Such a need is curiously demanding and inevitably complex in terms of potential meaning - being intensely bound up with formal visual issues and imaginative responses to the developing image.

What is becoming clear, as my experience and conscious understanding develops, is that both process and product appear to be driven by inner (perhaps unconscious) needs - needs that are essentially manifested through highly concentrated perceptual fantasies. Such fantasies on face value seem to be, in effect, what I will call 'hermetic constructs' - having no clear symbolic connection to the external world as such or, apparently, any shared cultural connection beyond the obvious one of earlier experiments in modernist abstraction.

In this sense the work appears to be, in practice, intensely introverted - perhaps even bordering on the autistic. That said, the imagery does seem to carry a level of aesthetic meaning and value, a value rooted somewhere other than any associations that might be made with shared, externally validated, sources of recognition. What then perhaps needs to be addressed from the outset, concerns what such implied inner needs might be, as it seems that these needs drive the initial intention to physically create an image and to act this out imaginatively through a highly specific process of change and development.

The Contemporary Painter

Let me begin by considering what I believe to be the greatest challenge to a contemporary painter living through an age of increased technology and industrial mass-production. Never before has a painter had to navigate through such a diversity and multiplicity of images as those currently available to a globalised visual consciousness. Therefore, what strategies might a painter adopt in the attempt to provide an aesthetic space - one that points us somewhere other than that which is circumscribed by the familiar and instantly accessible? This is of course assuming that the initial intention is stimulated by a desire to find effective ways of visualizing authentic expressions of the human condition. Either, such diverse imagery can be manipulated and reconfigured in order to reveal a potential meaning through deliberate quotation, parody or even absurdity (as much post modern art has demonstrated) or one can reject all such references and turn to some form of inner imagery generated through free-form processes and chance occurrences.

Artists have, of course, long used such processes in order to tap into and liberate imagination. In *Art and Illusion*, (2002) art historian Ernst Gombrich discusses such processes at some length within his chapter "The Image in the Clouds" referring to Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and the English landscape painter Alexander Cozens (1717-1786) both of whom advocated the development of imaginative landscapes from inkblots, stained walls or uneven coloured stones (Gombrich 2002 pp. 154-169). Many such approaches were also heavily employed within both Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism in order to engage and stimulate creative imagination.

For the contemporary painter, looking for a way to engage imagination in order to reveal what might best be described as an inner landscape - one that largely avoids drawing on the use of pre-existing visual models - it is necessary to adopt a strategy that manages to successfully avoid simply repeating past, culturally absorbed, modernist forms of expression. Any such repetition would simply weld the imaginative space of the work to a pre-existent historical point, thus negating any potential contemporary meaning. In effect, the potency of such an image would be compromised by its literal connection to a given historical and cultural index. What then is needed is a method that engages imagination through an active and open-ended process,

one that adopts strategies and techniques from the past but one that also attempts to push the development of the work formally and aesthetically into potentially vital forms and structures.

In my attempts to do this, keeping actively and imaginatively involved in the space of the painting is crucial – avoiding any conscious desire to close down the imagination too soon by tying the imagery to overtly obvious figurative expressions. In this respect, my paintings effectively grow from this pressing need to try and find a way to re-imagine such an aesthetic space – one that does not overtly embrace references to culturally validated sources and yet is capable of carrying meaning and value at an unconscious level. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that psychological life is structured around two modes of being, one conscious and the other unconscious. As Freud has shown us, by definition, what is unconscious is not directly available to consciousness. However, both Freudian and Jungian psychologies suggest that what we experience in consciousness is inflected with and shaped by the unconscious and that addressing the needs of unconscious life can be fundamental to aesthetic appreciation. Starting from this premise, my painting is an attempt to imagine my way through the labyrinth of unconscious form production. Lines, marks, colours etc. begin life without meaning or context and these are slowly and painstakingly brought into consciousness and formed into a structural matrix – one that aims to reveal and integrate unconscious complexes with highly structured conscious assimilations.

On reflection, the paintings appear to contain both personal and trans-personal aspects. The imagery largely avoids direct reference to 'things' and yet seems to be informed by subliminal experiences of said things. The compacted and fragmented space does not encourage the eye to settle in any one space or on any one form, rather, we are stimulated to move in, out and around the space in a trance-like, hypnotic state, akin to daydreaming – a suspension of ego perhaps as the dream image takes hold and draws us deeper into other worlds.

I am interested in making paintings that have the potential to act as gateways to those aspects of psychological life that remain largely unrecognized or suppressed from ordinary consciousness. In this respect, for me, they are images of transcendence in the Jungian sense i.e. capable of raising consciousness by integrating this with the unconscious and its archetypal foundations.

Painting and Psychology

Clearly, I am drawing into this analysis certain key concepts from psychology in order to elucidate my understanding of the practice of painting and it would perhaps be helpful to the reader for me to make clear how I use these borrowed ideas in this context. Before I do this, however, I wish to make it clear that, for me, the actual practice of painting is not in itself structured around psychological theories – I do not make paintings that simply illustrate Freudian or Jungian ideas or images. Such psychological ideas do of course provide a framework in which to explore meaning theoretically, but the activity and language of painting will essentially always remain discreetly beyond any potentially reductive interpretations and, for me, this is its strength.

As an empirical and essentially plastic medium, painting follows its own laws - laws that provide imagination with a material basis in which to express what is, in effect, a state of constant 'being' and 'becoming' for the active psyche. There is a clear parallel here to Jung's active imagination – though this is critically embedded in the materially based activity of painting. What psychology provides for painting is a reflective mirror, one in which we can study, at a distance, the movements of imagination as it works on and through the practice in relation to both the individual and the collective psyche. In order to do this, it is necessary to try to unpack the usefulness and appropriateness of these key concepts in psychology in order to see how these might map onto a deeper theoretical understanding of the potential meaning and value of painting.

Conscious and Unconscious in Painting

Conscious and *unconscious* are concepts used in reflective thought in order to understand what moves and conditions our inner lives. So, it would seem advantageous to begin by exploring more specifically the meaning of these concepts and their relevance to an activity like painting. To my understanding, the terms *conscious* and *unconscious* refer to conditions or states of mind functioning within the psychic structure as a whole. This being so, if consciousness consists of the mental contents that a given subject is able to grasp with a measure of reassurance regarding their temporal perceptual apparatus, i.e. place immediate experience in relation to available

models of reality, then the unconscious embraces all those mental contents that remain slippery, uncertain, multifaceted, yet seem to be commanding, vital and fundamental to an experiencing psyche. Logically, we can deduce the existence of unconscious modalities from our inability to provide a consistent, rational account of all that affects us intellectually and emotionally; hence the need for symbolization and, as Jung shows us, the symbolic points to the, as yet, unclear or unknown. In relation to painting both as process and product, what we think and feel and the intensity of aesthetic engagement, is proportional to the depth of its unconscious content, and by implication, its imaginative texture - that which cannot be fixed in meaning and yet is capable of moving the viewer psychologically away from the temporal (human) present and towards the universal (divine) or archetypal constant. Culturally, and in a different though related context, this state of being in the world is discussed in the work of Mircea Eliade in his *Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954/1991) in which he discusses ideas on ancient man's relationship to the world as cyclical rather than linear in perspective. Such a view of the world follows a model based on repetitions of the same archetypal constants – constants that, at a cosmic level, take us out of human progressive time and into a supra-human or divine state of constant repetition. Eliade (1991, p. xiv) is careful to explain that he uses the word *archetype* in a different way than Jung, but I'm not so sure that there really is such a difference regarding the implicit psychological meaning. Eliade states that by 'archetype' he is referring to archaic man's models for his behavior and institutions - that they are '..."revealed" to him at the beginning of time, [that] consequently, they are regarded as having a superhuman and "transcendental" origin...' (Eliade, 1991, p xiv). Eliade states that '... [he] was not referring to the archetypes described by Professor C.G. Jung... for Professor Jung, the archetypes are structures of the collective unconscious..' (ibid). I am therefore suggesting that the meaning of archetype is perhaps at root the same even though Eliade stresses a different meaning. Contemporary perspectives of Jungian and post-Jungian psychology show that a move towards the archetypal suggests a move towards the imaginal – towards the primacy of imagination and its images and away from linear, directed thinking as expressed in the prosaic language of discourse.

Imagination and the Imaginal

My use of the word *imaginal* comes from reading post-Jungian psychology and the work of the Islamic scholar Henry Corbin. As I understand it, there is a

clear dissociation of the word 'imagination' from mere unreal fancy or fantasy and any associated negative connotations. Roberts Avens (2003, p. 38) sites Corbin (Corbin 1972, p9 cf.pp.7,15):

Henry Corbin, arguing against the equation of "imaginary" with "unreal," emphasizes that in the Islamic tradition, the world of the image, the *mundus imaginalis*, is a primordial phenomenon (*Urphanomen*) situated as an intermediary between the world of the senses and the intelligible world. The mode of being of this world constitutes its own "matter"; it "is" exactly in the way in which it appears. The comparison, regularly used by the Arabic authors, is the mode in which images appear and subsist in a mirror. (Avens 2003, p. 38)

Avens goes on to quote Corbin "... The material substance of the mirror ... is not the substance of the Image... The substance (of the Image) is simply the 'place of its appearance.' " (1972, p9 cf.pp.7,15) Further, Avens points us to the roots of Western Romanticism and Coleridge, in particular, for further comment on the primacy of imagination in the understanding of a truly 'real' perceptual relationship to the world. He notes that '... creative imagination is essentially *vital*, which for Coleridge meant that it is a way of discovering a deeper truth about the world...' (Avens 2003 p. 18).

Now, for the painter, each moment of the act of painting provides the imaginative 'place' for the appearance of the image and this place changes constantly as the painting develops. Therefore, the material substance of the painting and its subtle relationship to the painter, unlike a mirror, contains the imaginative space. A painted image, as a free agent of potential meaning, is intimately connected to, and projected by, its specific material properties - being an extension of the painter's psyche - and in this sense it is a very concrete manifestation of imagination. In this respect, it is likely that a painter occupies a space similar to that of the alchemist - a topic I have discussed in more depth elsewhere (Parker 2008). Imagination, then, is perhaps critical to all life affirming relationships with the world including, as Hillman shows us, all the messy, painful and disturbing aspects (Hillman 1975/92, pp. 55-112). In the act of creation - in this case painting - imagination moves through many varieties of experience stimulated by the marks and colours and their organization. At their very best, such experiences promote deep psychological responses capable of raising consciousness by signaling, in Jungian terms, the archetypal core of being which, having an unconscious source, contains profound significance in its long term impact on the subjective psyche.

Abstraction in Painting

This brings me back to the title of this paper and a key aspect of this inquiry – the use and meaning of the term *abstraction* in relation to painting and the unconscious. The term *abstraction* in the context of modern and post-modern painting (and using the word at its most basic level) simply denotes any painted image that has either:

(a) no representational elements contained within it as intended subject matter

or

(b) recognizable and intended representational imagery that has however, for formal and/or expressive reasons, been manipulated, distorted and exaggerated in order to better convey a particular psychological and emotional relationship to the act of painting and the human condition.

It can be seen that neither of these simple descriptions are really sufficient to describe the full content and meaning of the generic term *abstraction* so further elaboration is necessary. An added complication is introduced by the tendency to bracket together the words *representational* and *figurative* within much art criticism.

Wilhelm Worringer in his pioneering and hugely influential work *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908) argues that representational art derives its aesthetic from man's self confidence in relation to the objective world as perceived in nature – for example, as seen in Ancient Greek or Renaissance art. Conversely, abstract art (for Worringer typified by Egyptian, Primitive or Modernist Expressionist art) signifies an inner insecurity in relation to the natural world and a desire to seek spiritual sustenance and transcendent states of being through the formalizing and configuring of another world - one of non-naturalistic and absolute purity. In effect, his argument stands on theories of psychological security and insecurity in relation to an indifferent natural world – indifferent simply because what happens in the world beyond the human is, in its indifference, deeply troubling unless mediated and mitigated by ritual acts of aesthetic transformation as seen within both art and religion. As Nietzsche shows us, '...it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified...' (Nietzsche 1993, p. 32).

Worringer's thesis is that abstraction refers to all art expressions that are non-naturalistic – including geometric stylizations (e.g. Arabic) as well as figurative stylizations (e.g. Medieval, Byzantine). His general thesis can also be applied to Modernist experiments in pure abstraction as seen within the work of key painters such as Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko. According to Worringer, what seems to be fundamental to the urge towards abstraction in general, in this case in relation to the plastic arts, is a desire – perhaps even a compulsive need – to access and hence find a measure of psychological security and wholeness via an inner image rather than an outer image. Such an image does not have its roots in the directly observed natural world - Worringer writes:

... the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world; in a religious respect it corresponds to a strongly transcendental tinge to all notions. We might describe this state as an immense spiritual dread of space...
(Worringer, 1997, pg. 15)

Worringer suggests that rationalistic developments in consciousness – meaning in particular the Greco-Roman foundations of Western thought: '...pressed back this instinctive fear conditioned by man's feeling of being lost in the universe...' (*ibid.*) and hence developed an art of optimism and empathy towards the natural and organic external world of three dimensional space. However, in cultures other than those developed from such an optimistic and self-confident view of man's centeredness in relation to the external world, art developed a distinctly non-naturalistic form based on abstract stylizations that effectively negated three dimensional space – at least as far as the painted and drawn image was concerned.

Worringer's ideas, when applied to the development of pure abstraction within modern industrialized societies, indicates the self same loss of confidence in the confusion of the external world, an alienation from the given, and a retreat to the inner world of spiritual purity. In such a move, the painter was effectively attempting to reanimate the archetypal core of being through the vehicle of a plastic medium, where what is presented visually provides a space in which to lose the self within the safe boundaries of such a ritual act of creation. The paradox is that an implied archetypal core – the ultimate spiritual reality - of this 'internal necessity' as I think Kandinsky

called it, can only be suggested and never actually known – the artwork being the messenger though perhaps not the actual (archetypal) message.

The contemporary painter Ian McKeever cites the eighth century theologian John of Damascus regarding such a move to abstraction,

'... The image is a likeness that expresses the archetype in such a way, that there is always a difference between the two...' (McKeever 2005 p. 29).

McKeever continues:

They are alike but different, and in that difference, the gap between the archetype and the image, is where we find abstractions. Abstractions which paradoxically can make things more real and concrete than those 'real' things we had presumed to be so... (ibid.)

McKeever seems to be acknowledging, then, that the real and the concrete in fact lie between this implied archetypal core underlying all experience and the painted image before us, that it requires a leap of imagination to access this reality and thus move beyond surface illusions – this of course points us back to Plato. McKeever does then appear to be implying that his notion of 'real' is found in the abstraction – the form that is situated between archetype and image. In other words, 'real' is not representational but presentational and it does not necessarily have to point us to images we can tie to the world of objects or of familiar experiences. Arguably, it may well be the case that the stranger and more unfamiliar the image, the deeper and potentially more life changing the experience.

What I am saying, then, is that fundamental to the move to abstraction, is the desire to access and hence acknowledge the imaginal reality of depth experience and that this experience is essentially sacral in its meaning. For me, it is sacral because the core experience of abstract art creates a state of being that effectively negates the sense of self as a separate and detached entity confronted by the enormity and confusion of a coldly objective material world. Rather, the world through abstraction becomes animated with a meaning that transcends human understanding as such, placing meaning in the eternal divine realm accessed through the 'mirror' of aesthetic engagement in the materially based image. I do not so much, in the conventional sense, *understand* through abstraction, indeed paradoxically the opposite is true – I *experience* the mystery of its hidden meaning in the same way that one might engage in a religious experience.

In his essay "Abstract Painting and the Spiritual Unconscious" (2000), art critic Donald Kuspit discusses the use of the word *spiritual* arguing for its use

as an essential aspect of how we might entertain notions of the unconscious in relation to painting. For Kuspit, abstract painting is fundamentally spiritual in perspective. He says:

... pure abstract painting is meant to lead the spectator to conversion, that is, catalyze a conversion experience, in which the spectator sees the light, as it were, in and through the painting, in the same flash of light that is so often literally represented in religious painting...
(Kuspit 2000, p. 63)

Clearly then, it can be seen that abstract painting, within the trajectory of modernist aesthetics and some post modern developments, appears to be motivated by (if one can entertain such a notion) what are in effect secularized, spiritual concerns. In this sense, the spiritual as a concept finds its voice independent of formalised religious structures and yet, in terms of the essential mystery underscoring its meaning, has a deep resonance with many of the key elements of religious practice.

Painting and Self -Transcendence

I would like to conclude with a return to my own work and what it means for me to try to make significant painting at this point in history. I approach painting with a desire to access what I can only describe as a deeper truth based on a practice that appears to be a form of transcendence through aesthetic transformation. Fundamental to this is the need to visualize and access a form of 'vital image' without recall to representation (representation) and to engage imagination via the formal qualities inherent in the activity.

For my own part, I can only describe such a process as an intensely compulsive - perhaps even ultimately a devotional activity - one that seems to take over and guide me into states of experience that appear to transcend ordinary consciousness and access a numinous core. Such states are indeed, for me, deeply therapeutic and transformative in their ability to provide access to imaginative realms that are essential and vital to the deepening of my whole life experience.

© David Parker – May 2008

References

Avens. R. (1980) *Imagination is Reality*, Putnum Connecticut: Spring Publications.

Corbin, H. (1972) "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal" p.9, cf. pp. 7.15. in Spring.

Eliade. M. (1954/1991) *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gombrich. E.H. (1960/2002) *Art and Illusion*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd.

Hillman. J. (1975/92) *Re-Visioning Psychology*, New York: Harper Perennial.

Kuspit. D. (2000) *The Rebirth of Painting in the Late Twentieth Century*, London: Cambridge University Press.

McKeever. I. (2005) *In Praise of Painting*, London: University of Brighton.

Nietzsche. F. (1872/1993) *The Birth of Tragedy*, London: Penguin Books.

Parker, D. (2008) "On Painting Substance and Psyche." In Rowland, S. (Ed.) *Psyche and the Arts: Jungian Approaches to Music, Architecture, Literature, Painting and Film*, London: Routledge.

Worringer. W. (1908/1997) *Abstraction and Empathy*, Chicago: Ivan, Dee.

Section Six

Peer Reviewed Published Essay

Published In:

Parker, D. (2004) *Outsider Art: A brief account*, in *Asylum* the journal for democratic psychiatry, volume 14 number 1, United Kingdom, ISSN 0955-2030, Spring 2004.

OUTSIDER ART: A brief account

The history of Outsider Art and its place in the corpus of knowledge on art is the history of an art without precedent. Outsider Artists have only one thing in common – the tendency to follow no school of thought and to practice their art with a wilful disregard for any conventions other than those of their own making. Outsiders are viewed by the institutions and structures controlling mainstream art and its dissemination as 'Outside' or on the fringes of society and culture. They are considered outside for a number of reasons - perhaps the most common being that they are usually entirely self-taught, having little or no 'Insider' knowledge or experience of mainstream art and culture.

The term 'Outsider Art' was first coined by professor Roger Cardinal as the English language equivalent to 'Art Brut' or 'Raw Art'. Professor Cardinal's book on the subject was first published in 1972 - becoming the seminal work in English until the growth of interest brought a steady stream of further publications and scholarly papers. It was the French painter Jean Debuffet (1901-85) who gave birth to the term Art Brut. His desire was to champion what he considered to be the quintessential or 'true' art – one untainted by cultural sophistication or academic learning - an art as he saw it, born of the inner need to express raw states of emotional and psychological upheaval and/or visionary experience. Debuffets 'Collection de l'Art Brut' in Lausanne Switzerland in 1975 became the first permanent collection of art made outside the mainstream – a collection drawn from a range of work by diverse self-taught artists - in particular self-taught psychiatric patients.

But the Outsider story begins before Debuffet. As Rhodes has stated:

'...connections between art and madness had been explored by the Romantics in Europe in the nineteenth century' (Rhodes, 2000: 8). By the beginning of the twentieth century, prior to the First World War, Avant Garde artists were

already experimenting with formal distortion in their search for an art that tapped into the deeper layers of the mind and the emotions. In effect, the desire to openly acknowledge and express an unconscious dimension to life was becoming fore-grounded in art, paralleling new developments in the new science of psychoanalysis - interest in the artistic products of psychiatric patients by avant garde artists was therefore an obvious development. Parallel to this development, psychiatrists were also beginning to take an interest in the creative work of their patients - though mainly for diagnostic rather than purely aesthetic reasons. Two key figures in the psychiatric field of the time were - Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933) and Walter Morgenthaler (1882-1965). They were the first to recognise the aesthetic qualities in their patients work; thus paving the way for an acknowledgement of what this work had to offer beyond the closed world of the mental asylum - and eventually for the mutual influences of art and psychoanalysis. As Rhodes again points out 'Prinzhorn and Morgenthaler were influential in shaping the Surrealists reception of the art of psychiatric patients' (ibid.). Clearly, art and culture were beginning to value what these private outbursts of the soul were expressing both psychologically and aesthetically.

From this brief overview of the origins of Outsider Art, it is clear that the history of modernism, in both art and medicine, is also the history of differing attitudes towards mental illness. Fundamental issues to both fields invites the following questions - if works of art produced by 'mentally ill' patients have had a bearing on culture as aesthetic products, then what does this tell us about culture, and what does it also tell us about psychiatric approaches to treatment and cure? To answer these questions perhaps it is necessary to reflect on two key issues - aesthetic attitudes to meaning and significance in both art and psychiatry and the structures of control in the aims and intentions of each. Before attempting to tackle these issues it is necessary to be quite clear on one or two points.

Outsider Art - embracing so called psychotic art - defines a practice that is independent of the rules and conventions of mainstream art activity. Because of this it has largely been excluded from serious consideration as art in its own right. That said, and as indicated above, Outsider Art has (as an aesthetic) permeated and influenced mainstream culture from its particular position of marginality (though there are perhaps some detectable differences between elements of mainstream and outsider work as Newton has suggested

(Newton, 2001: 207). So, is it the case that aesthetic attitudes to meaning and significance in mainstream art are coloured by the provenance of Outsider Art whilst what is acceptable to the mainstream (as art) remains governed by the position and status of the practitioner in terms of mental state, education and/or social class? Of these three conditions notionally pertaining to mainstream acceptability I want to focus, in this article, on the first - that of different mental states.

It is clear that within modernism, art and psychoanalysis have, historically, been mutually influential in the attempt to understand and appreciate the complexities of modern life and the human condition. Freud's formulation of psychoanalysis as a clinical tool for the treatment of mental disturbance opened up a whole new vista for the understanding of how our minds engage with the world and respond to it through both word and image. In turn psychoanalysis, perhaps because it provided a conceptual framework for our deepest anxieties inevitably broke loose from the confines of clinical practice and leaked into the public arena and culture at large. Surrealism, as a modernist cultural aesthetic movement, actively sought to hijack and subvert Freud's ideas and use them to liberate the mind from conventional patterns of thought - thus exposing our inner most fantasies and phobias for shared cultural ends.

But if Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry seek to address and change consciousness and thus cure psychological disturbances within the individual - through the construction of medical models and the use of treatments orchestrated around intervention from the clinician - then art, both as a cultural and notionally non-cultural activity - also appears to address similar concerns through aesthetic absorption in the material and structural properties involved in imaginative play. Perhaps art then, as a cultural and therefore shared public activity, is ultimately seeking to address similar imbalances within the modern mind between collective unconscious drives, and the primal or primitive dimension underscoring these, and the conscious surface dimension to existence - an existence modified by a necessity for social adaptation and survival. This being the case, it is quite understandable that interest in the raw, obsessive outpourings of the self-taught artist, wrestling with his/her innermost being in a desperate need to heal an emotional and spiritual gap or break in their relationship to the external world - would be an extreme, individualised example, of a general cultural malaise.

It is also understandable that an art born of such a condition might then need to be kept at a cultural distance, even though covertly acknowledging it through its aesthetic adaptation to mainstream culture. Manicured to some extent by cultural modification, an outsider aesthetic becomes more palatable and controllable, thereby offsetting the dangers inherent for the status quo in acknowledging the realities of our fascination with extreme states of mind – the fear and social stigma of mental illness has been well documented (Porter; Foucault; Szasz; et.al.)

This leads me to my main point regarding these brief thoughts on the relationship between Outsider Art and altered states of mind. In an earlier unpublished paper, I refer to 'hallucinatory' or altered states of consciousness as possible significant factors in the production of some of the more intense and obsessive examples of Outsider Art (Parker, 2003).

I believe that what we instinctively feel when we are confronted with Outsider Art is this strange hallucinatory quality – a quality that seems to transfix the gaze and open up mental landscapes that seem strangely familiar whilst at the same time deeply alien – a paradoxical state of being both psychologically disturbed and psychologically stable at the same time. I suggest that such states might, in essence, be primitive states of mind that are essentially trans-cultural – states that are deeply connected to a basic human need for spiritual experience and ecstatic reverie which transcend the constructed self and its ego boundaries. I also suggest that we are drawn to images created in such states by an intuitive empathy for the psycho-structural foundations or substrate underscoring them – perhaps even, that this might be due to a pattern/shape/colour matrix 'hard-wired' into our neurological structure. I realise of course that this is a highly conjectural and controversial notion – nevertheless it is a plausible conjecture – one which is not intended to be merely reductive but rather intended as an acknowledgement of a possible synergy between our bio-chemical makeup and our common psycho-structural inheritance.

If such a condition is fore-grounded and at the root of Outsider work (being the engine which drives the fantasies as they are bodied forth into a material reality) then perhaps these extreme trance-like states – on the edges of the self/other dichotomy – simply acknowledge an essential aspect of the human condition that, for many, is socialised out in the process of maturation and social adaptation. Throughout history and probably pre-history, many

societies and cultures appear to have valued altered states of consciousness as gateways into the metaphysical realm of spiritual transcendence. Shamanic practices in tribal healing rituals attest to this. In our modern secular and materialist society, such revelatory states of mind are seen as out of place - irrational aberrations of pathological symptoms of mental disorder. The fact that for some, being drawn back into these states through the experience of art, is testament to a continuing latent need to acknowledge and to satisfy these aspects of psychic transformation in the continuing search for wholeness of being.

I began this piece by outlining in summary form the origins of what has become known, for the time being at least, as Outsider Art. In this outline the earliest examples were drawn from psychiatric patients incarcerated in mental asylums across Europe - human beings shut away from society because of their particular mental condition as diagnosed by the medical establishment of the time. The work produced by some of these people was recognised as possessing considerable artistic merit - thereby influencing art and culture from their position of marginality and exclusion. I then proceeded to suggest some of the reasons as to why this influence might have taken place - referring to the theories of psychoanalysis as a key factor. This led to questions regarding differing approaches to how unusual or difficult mental states might be regarded through clinical and non-clinical perspectives. This then brought into play the suggestion that modern culture itself might be a primary vehicle for individual psychological wholeness through the collective valuing and sharing of what Outsider Art had given to it by default. Perhaps inevitably, I then ventured onto rather more unstable ground with the suggestion that altered states of consciousness bordering on spiritual or ecstatic reverie were conducive to the creation of an Outsider Aesthetic, and that, even more controversially, these states might be fundamental to our neural network or bio-chemical makeup. Throughout this essay the main concern has been to muse on how Outsider Art might be more democratically received in relation to differing notions of mental health and in its relationship or place within culture at large. To this end, I suggest that it might be worth considering that intense human experiences that manifest themselves in creative acts do not necessarily require a cultural framework as a starting point in order to be culturally meaningful in the long term. However, a cultural framework that openly embraces such acts ultimately benefits the collective by acknowledging our common psychological inheritances - blurring the

perceived boundaries between those considered 'inside' and those considered 'outside' culture.

David Parker April 2003.

References

Rhodes. C. *Outsider Art – Spontaneous Alternatives*; pp. 8; Thames and Hudson 2000.

Newton. S. *Painting Psychoanalysis and Spirituality*, Cambridge: University Press 2001

Parker. D. *Inside Outsider Art: reflection on an Outsider Aesthetic in Contemporary Culture*. This unpublished paper was presented at the conference session – “*Inclusive Strategies for a Fugitive Practice: Futures for Contemporary Self-Taught Artists and Outsider Art*” at the Annual Conference of the College Art Association, American Folk Art Museum, New York City February 2003.

Peer Reviewed Published Essay

Published in:

Parker, D. (2009) *Illness and Epiphany: an awakening spirit*, in, *Raw Vision* the International Journal of Outsider and Visionary Art; issue no. 68, pp. 46-48 December 2009. ISSN 0955-1182.

Illness and Epiphany: An Awakening Spirit

Leon Martindale began painting at the age of fifty-eight in an attempt to, as he describes "keep [his] brain active" and to control the increasing physical problems he was experiencing due to the effects of Parkinson's disease. Prior to this, he had worked in a variety of jobs including briefly working on a chicken farm, working in a photography studio and as an assistant photographer for Westland Helicopters. Currently he manages his time between England and the Philippines.

Leon describes his experience of art up to his first attempt at painting as being that of an interested amateur; he had dabbled with various creative activities and even undertaken a three-dimensional design course at some point, though he had, until the onset of his Parkinson's, never tried painting. In two thousand and four, and in response to the advice of a friend who happened to be an amateur painter, Leon attended a recreational class in painting where he tried his hand at painting but quickly found that he was "no good at painting trees and bluebells".

The 'revelation' for Leon took place one day in his study in the house in the Philippines. He became fascinated by the accidental effects created by a tube of burnt sienna, which had burst open when he accidentally dropped something onto it. Rather than waste the paint, he spread it randomly over a sheet of paper and then left it to dry in the hot sunlight streaming through the window. What he saw when he looked at the paper some time later were shapes and images which he describes as "spirits in the paper". He had always liked to make faces and find little images in the random patterns formed in diverse materials and surfaces such as the walls of public toilets, floor surfaces or folds in cloth. Fascinated and stimulated by what his imagination was seeing in the smeared and stained paper, he began to manipulate the image, allowing the figures and images to present themselves to contemplation. Leon began more paintings, stimulated by what he had

discovered by accident and this, combined with his now highly charged imagination, opened up a whole new world of rich and powerful imagery. The figures or 'characters' he began to see in the images also began to be assigned specific roles within his imagination – there was "Tommy" the foot soldier from the First World War who died in 1915 speaking to him through the painting. Then there was "Brick, a strong, tough leader of men and also a pirate". We also have other images such as further scenes from world war one, curiously intermixed with an image of King Henry the Eighth.

At this early stage in his treatment for Parkinson's, Leon had been over prescribed a medication and this began to have the effect of inducing strong hallucinatory sensations and this, as he acknowledges, provided the initial stimulus to the content of his work. He describes this time as disturbing but not particularly frightening with the sensation of for instance "a person suddenly growing fur" as he was talking to them, or being surrounded by "ghostly figures whispering to him". Eventually the medication he was prescribed was brought under control and he ceased to have the hallucinations – his imagination however continued to present a rich world of imagery informed by his particular sensitivity to the marks and colours unfolding in his painting process. He describes his paintings as sometimes feeling like 'spirits' from another dimension trying to communicate through him with, at least in the earlier days of his painting, the sensation that it was "other hands" making the paintings. He later began to acknowledge his own willful involvement however.

It is worth noting that Leon confessed to growing up in a "haunted house" where he regularly would see an "old grey lady" whom he says on one occasion "tried to push him down some stairs" and that ghosts would on occasion talk to him. He was therefore not particularly surprised or disturbed with the onset of his hallucinatory experiences due to medication. He does however still experience communication with spirit presences, which he does not describe as hallucinations in the same way as, experienced through medication. In his study in the Philippines, he regularly experiences contact with spirit presences whilst painting – the house being built on top of an older property long since demolished. He describes his study as sighted over the same spot where the deceased were laid out before burial and he feels the presence of the dead influencing him - though no longer directly.

What is clear when talking to Leon about his paintings and his experiences is that we are being invited into an imaginative world that is genuinely constructed in response to disturbances brought about by changes to his health and circumstances. It is an imagination formed from a lucid mix of inner fantasy and an open and receptive attitude towards the materials of painting and the powerful influences that are perhaps beyond rational interpretation, being all the more powerful for that. Leon clearly values his paintings even though he insists that he isn't, on his terms a "good a painter". The imagery unfolding from his process continues to surprise and fascinate him and he clearly is able to move flexibly between different states of mind without losing a grip on the mundane needs of rational thinking where necessary.

The paintings are beautifully and sensitively produced with a natural, intuitive grasp of composition, colour and form and a minimal palette that invites the viewer into the space of the paintings – the aesthetic is deceptively simple in execution. It is precisely this deceptive simplicity that directs us as viewers into the mysterious content of the images. We are seduced by the sensitivity of touch and sombre tones of the paintings and these qualities then draw us, like moths to a flame, into the enigmatic and alien, creating a dark, wholly 'other' world that nevertheless captivates the imagination in the richness of its Gothic fantasy. If comparison is to be made, I am reminded of some of the work of the Austrian artist Alfred Kubin (1877-1959) or perhaps even Mervyn Peake (1911-1968)

Leon's working method appears to involve a freely playful and relaxed approach. The largely watercolour medium is allowed to find its own expression in a fluid, organic way with minimal, self conscious interference from him, each little stain, mark or blob of colour being allowed to exist of and for itself - figurative connotations being suggested with only a few changes from the brush. He clearly has great empathy for the particular properties of the medium – capitalising on these properties to best advantage in the exercise of his imagination as the paint is allowed to bleed and run into the absorbent paper. He also appears to use the paint in places in a thicker more opaque manner – removing the paint in places as much as applying it. Leon also likes to work on the paintings from different orientations – moving the paper around to present different visual relationships to his imagination. In the context of mainstream painting similar approaches have long been

exploited by artists as stimulants to imagination. In *Art and Illusion*, art historian Ernst Gombrich discusses such processes at some length within his chapter "The Image in the Clouds" referring to Leonardo da Vinci and the English landscape painter Alexander Cozens (1717-1786) both of whom advocated the development of imaginative landscapes from inkblots, stained walls or uneven coloured stones (Gombrich 2002 pp. 154-169)¹. Many such approaches were also heavily employed within both Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism in order to engage and stimulate creative imagination. Leon of course 'discovered' his technique quite independent of received knowledge from such historical precedents, finding and being imaginatively excited by the random shapes and marks through intuitive empathy for their qualities. They are quite unique statements, having no precedents and no direct connection to common experience and yet they are curiously capable of transporting us to a place that feels significant even if this is not open to explication in any directly interpretive way. What we are given is a glimpse into a different world – a world that feels strangely alien and yet also echoes with a 'un-homely' familiarity that speaks to us from somewhere deep within our collective psyche.

Time will tell whether Leon will continue to paint with such intensity of vision. For my part I hope he does, as these works speak volumes about those dimensions to experience that are all too easily lost or ignored in the desire to 'close down' and circumscribe genuine visionary intensity by rationalist formulations concerning what is and what is not of value in art.

References

Gombrich. E.H. (1960/2002) *Art and Illusion*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd.

Peer Reviewed Published Essay

Published In:

Parker, D. (2000) *The Stuff of Life: The Life of Stuff - the Material Imagination*, in, Van Berkum, A., Rhodes, C., Parker, D., (eds.) *Roy Wenzel: Works on Paper*, Zwolle, Netherlands: Museum De Stadshof, pp 23-42. ISBN 90-75284-31-4

Roy Wenzel

The Stuff of Life: The Life of Stuff – The Material Imagination

Roy Wenzel's powerful uncompromising images express an intuitive and highly sensitised imagination. The surety and strength of his personality and vision is both literally and metaphorically embodied in the very texture of his images. There is something deeply significant and manifestly touching about what they seem to be trying to express and this 'something' strikes a chord that rings loud and clear upon my own imaginative sensibilities. It is in the material reality of his imagination— transmuted and expressed as pictorial images— that we detect the full strength of his creative fertility and it is precisely this 'material imagination' that gives us a context in which to discuss the aesthetic and psychological content of his work.

In this essay, I would like to try and sketch out a theoretical framework that attempts to put his work into a psychological context by responding to the aesthetics of the images without grounding them in sentimental platitudes or simplistic notions concerning mental development. The main focus, therefore, will be on ideas concerning the psychological and aesthetic qualities of the work in the pictorial language being used, as I see it. My approach will deliberately steer clear of any direct reference to Wenzel's personal circumstances as such; being more concerned with a general 'face value' response to the form and content of the work. I consider that what we, as viewers, are presented with on face value can be open to analysis regardless of any particular personal circumstances pertaining to its execution. Fundamental to this exercise is my concern to try and reinvest written responses towards images with a deeper understanding of their underlying emotional and psychological complexity. It could be said that, in some respects, all visual images speak to us through a highly complex mixture of materially based structures that include, but go beyond, what they might be

trying to say to us figuratively— it is this concern that I wish to touch on in my engagement with Wenzel's work.

Of course it would be a mistake to ignore entirely the personal circumstances under which this work is made— and Wenzel's circumstances, however we choose to interpret them, are indeed quite special. It is also true to say that because the pictures seem to represent both real and imagined situations or events of considerable significance to Wenzel— filtered through his imagination— it would also be a mistake to discount the important part played by these circumstances in the expression of his world. However, what I am concerned with here rests much more on the particular qualities inherent in the work regardless of Wenzel's personal circumstances— its broader collective value as such— and to some extent what it might hold for us as an art form within the culture at large. I will attempt to stay true to the emotional impact of the work, as conveyed by its form and content. Being concerned with emotional impact this approach will inevitably draw into the discourse some underlying psychological factors that could be said to contribute to its meaning. In order to do this I wish to concentrate specifically on a direct response to the material qualities of the work in order to disclose such psychological meaning since this would appear to be intrinsically tied to the artistic meaning and value as such. Psychological meaning gives us a special context in which to develop and share appreciation of the images, both as human documents of a particular expressive sensibility, and more generally as significantly important cultural products. A psychological approach can help us to open up and share in a rich vein of mutually inclusive, essential fundamental, and deeply moving human experiences. In this brief essay I will only be able to touch upon the issues I have outlined. However, I hope that these ideas will contribute towards an appreciation of Wenzel's work and bring some fresh insight into what seems to me to be an often-neglected area of theoretical understanding.

So, let us consider the medium, the method of application and the form and content of Wenzel's pictures. Most of these works are drawings produced in oil pastels and pencil. As drawings they carry a sense of immediacy and impromptu invention. Within this invention their innate surety of intention and complete conviction to the subjects depicted seem to carry us on a visual roller-coaster ride, leaving us gasping for breath in the spaces between the bunched networks of frenetic marks and large imaginative and spatial leaps. The essentially linear structure and the spatial organisation in general, takes

the eye on a capricious, figurative journey between representation and a pure enjoyment in exaggerated stylistic elaboration. In his excitement with creative activity Wenzel engages fully and wholly objectively with his material imagination, taking us on a grand tour of his psychological world; his sensibility shifting between each highly charged moment. There is no fussy sophistication here, what he sees in his mind at each moment is materialised as a direct, highly physical response to a psychological necessity. Each object, shape, mark or line is clearly and unequivocally inscribed with a clear, intuitive understanding of what is needed to express his highly active imagination at each moment. The resulting image becomes— through a subtle synthesis between memory and creative invention with the medium— a new image with a potentially collective as well as private meaning.

Collective meaning, built as it is from a visual language that is largely divorced from any sophisticated cultural influences as such, relies instead on an inner necessity stimulated by past experiences coupled to the feedback loop provided by the emerging colours, shapes and forms as they appear. Wenzel's imaginative engagement with the tangible reality of the process of making displays an intuitive leaping between what is being suggested and revealed on the paper, and the mental images pertinent to his psychological world. The organizing principle underscoring this process contains, literally and metaphorically, the symbolic meaning behind the work, carrying this meaning to us through the strength of this organisation. This organizing principle is intuitively developed; possessing a sense of urgency and energy that triggers a similar response within us. Drawing on irrational and perhaps largely unconscious mental processes, Wenzel creates a subtle visual dialogue between his memory and his imagination, thus creating a new reality expressed as visual form.

On the face of it, it would seem that it is some highly charged psychological necessity that directs the natural course of Wenzel's fantasies about what has taken place in his life at certain moments— reality mingling with the fantasy in a free play of creative imagination. The works are not of course just empty receptacles for memories— whether those 'memories' are memories of real or imagined events. After all, surely all 'memories' must be coloured to some degree by imagination? The crucial point however is that it is how one experiences an event imaginatively and therefore poetically, which determines to some extent the measure of its psychological reality as such. This is a key

factor in my particular approach towards understanding the content and meaning behind Wenzel's work. In this respect then, the content of Wenzel's pictures, informed as they are by his experience of past events (real or imagined), are also essentially imaginative constructs— they are not simply documents of literally real events. These imaginative constructs seem to be both formed and informed by a subtle oscillation between what is unfolding on the picture surface and the powerful psychological significance of the mental images underscoring his imagination.

If we give our full attention to the pictures, allowing ourselves to enter into the drama of their presence whilst trying to suspend the habit of comparison to received knowledge as such, we can empathize and sense this psychological meaning in their very structure and handling. Their vigorous application of colour, sometimes subtly layered to produce under-colour contrasts of warm and cool, sometimes boldly and vividly uncompromising in its rawness; or the clear, confident and highly descriptive use of line, produces a strange yet somehow peculiarly familiar resonance. We seem to be drawn towards an older, perhaps more basic, and in some sense more inarticulate form of knowledge and understanding that stands rather disturbingly outside what is immediately sensible and articulate. There is a feeling that seems to emanate from this work, a haunting feeling— a complex mixture of shock, excitement, humor and pathos that draws the sensibilities towards a highly self-reflective state of awareness. For me, only the strongest mainstream work induces that level of reflective self-awareness and this is perhaps because it too carries that same mysterious depth of psychological meaning in its fabric. On reflection, one is led to consider the possibility that when mainstream art becomes too heavily mediated by culturally acceptable forms of presentation, or sophisticated, culturally based visual structures, depth of meaning can sometimes become lost. This is point that was vehemently promulgated by Jean Dubuffet with his defense of what he termed 'Art Brut'. So perhaps the 'rawness of vision' explicitly demonstrated in these works— so divorced as they are from any relationship to the cultural mainstream — manages to resonate with this disturbing sense of what I might describe as 'closeness' — closeness to the deeper psychological meanings buried within our own psyches. It seems that this is something that has, for many of us, long been repressed or moderated to satisfy social and cultural acceptance. Perhaps, in essence, it is this uncompromising rawness,

the complete lack of any need for Wenzel to moderate his vision that draws us, on close scrutiny, towards an appreciation of his work.

It is tempting on first acquaintance with these pictures, following our seemingly incessant need to rationalise thought through comparison to other forms, to class them as unskilled and naïve — to dismiss them easily and somewhat condescendingly as little more than childish doodles. This would be a serious mistake to make. The aesthetic content of the work, although bearing some superficial resemblance to drawings made by children, displays a keen eye and visual memory of things seen and experienced, essentially and fundamentally imaginatively. It is true to say that in some respects the drawings do connect stylistically to drawings produced by children in the early stages of their visual creativity, before they learn to copy socially mediated forms of representation. However, the complexity of their narrative content coupled to their compositional unity, inventiveness and the sheer investment of time and energy in their execution is rarely seen within children's drawings. There is also a level of adult understanding of the world woven into these works, a level of adult interest in the figures and forms depicted that carries them beyond childish interest. This adult interest seems to be focused on an essentially erotic response to the world, symbolized poetically through the artist's inner vision and the surety of his intentions as he submits his controlling will to the free play of creative fantasy.

Wenzel's 'Keen Eye' as I have phrased it, linked to the subtle waywardness of his imagination, is crucially tied to the ways in which he interprets the world emotionally and therefore essentially psychologically. What becomes significant to him, and therefore what is ultimately important to us in our attempts to understand this world at any given moment, is then transmuted and symbolized through his materialized imagination. The essential point in this respect is how such essentially private experiences can then take on a broader, more culturally important and collective meaning once these experiences are materialized into art. On the face of it, this would appear to create psychological meaning through symbol formation. The symbolic image conveys meaning by acting as a signifier, pointing the sensibilities towards the unconscious dimensions underscoring our conscious, socially mediated surface life. Ultimately then, perhaps the artistic value of Wenzel's art lies in his highly particular and uncompromising surety of vision and truth to unconscious experience — expressed in a visual language that is able to

speak to us on a fundamentally deep and largely intuitive level. His pictures seem to speak about what really 'matters' concerning human relationships as such and any exchange of value we might care to attach to the deeper significance behind all human needs —be they psychological, aesthetic, intellectual or emotional. Here perhaps we have a key into the possible collective meanings woven into the content of these images. We can sense in their presence, in the form of their handling and execution, a strong, basic and primary desire for an attachment to the world of matter experienced initially and essentially through an unconscious imagination. This desire is focused on a need to express a physical, emotional and psychological contingency — fundamentally an imaginative contingency —a contingency that is rich in simple truths wrought in unsophisticated form yet loaded with a profoundly meaning-full symbolism. Throughout Wenzel's work one senses a powerful, direct and charged 'eroticism' underscoring and effectively directing the execution of the images, a strong feeling of a sublimated libido at work. This libido is not a repressed libido, it is a libido that is given free and uncompromising reign to express a full physical and emotional attachment to the world, a world symbolized and articulated both figuratively and materially through the handling of a plastic medium. This 'eroticism' as I intend it here is not to be confused simply with the purely sexual; it is more a 'lust for life' in all its manifestations, symbolize and exteriorized as images of matter that 'matter' — what the viewer is presented with is a glimpse into his world. We are given clues towards a sharing of Wenzel's secrets concerning what both pleasures and pains him in the contingency of his life, I life lived in the fullness and richness of his being. Though we could never know his private world, or its highly particular meaning and significance to him, being given a glimpse, so forcefully, candidly and directly, encourages us to reflect upon our own private experiences concerning what is both painful and pleasurable in the fullness and contingency of our lives.

Throughout this essay I have been at pains to stress the psychological necessity as I see it, underscoring the production of this work and the part it plays in Wenzel's creative expression. In the process I have attempted to draw the readers attention and sensibility towards an understanding of the work from a largely phenomenological point of view, responding to the images without recourse to secondary sources to support my claims. I have deliberately avoided referring the work to any cultural mainstream precedents as this would, on the face of it, seem an irrelevant exercise given the

particular context in which this work is made. I hope that in the process I have managed to highlight some important issues concerning the significance and relevance of Wenzel's art as a cultural product that nevertheless sits, at present, on the margins of artistic acceptability. There is much within work such as this that is creatively significant though often marginalized and belittled by mainstream culture — although ironically perhaps, that is what gives such work its strength. However we choose to respond to the work, it is well worth bearing in mind that this kind of art will continue to flourish regardless of its acceptability by the dominant cultural machine. Those of us who, perhaps inevitably, live our lives within the complexities of mainstream global culture could gain much from paying closer attention to what such marginalized work has to offer. Wenzel's art intuitively and uncompromisingly opens doors onto a richly imaginative world, without pretention and with a freedom from cultural mores that can be both challenging and stimulating.

CATALOGUE OF WORKS



'Incantation' D. Parker, 39.5 x 30.5 cm oil on canvas (2003)



Eye of Faith - oil on canvas D. Parker 65.5 x 50.5 cm (2004-6)



'Passage' D. Parker, 65.5 x 50 cm oil on canvas (2006)



'Things Not Seen' D. Parker, 65.5 x 50 cm oil on canvas (2005-6)



'Juniper Gulf' D. Parker, 30.5 x 30.5 cm oil on canvas (2007)



'Catabasis' D. Parker, 30.5 x 30.5 cm oil on canvas (2007)



'Untitled' D. Parker, 36 x 30.5 cm acrylic, ink & oil on canvas (2007)



'Emanation' D. Parker, oil on canvas 30.5 x 30.5 cm. (2007)



'En-Trance' D. Parker, 30.5 x 30.5 cm oil on canvas (2007)



'Hallucination Aven' D. Parker, 65.5 x 50 cm. oil on canvas (2008-10)



'Suppliant' D. Parker, 65.5 x 50 cm oil on canvas (2008-10)



'Untitled' D. Parker, 60 x 60cm acrylic & oil on canvas (2009-11)



'A Grain of Sand' D. Parker, 60 x 60 cm acrylic & oil on canvas (2009-11)



'All That Glitters' (work in progress)
D. Parker 60 x 60 cm acrylic & oil on canvas (2009-)



'Untitled' D. Parker, 46 x 46 cm acrylic, ink, & oil on linen (2011-12)

