

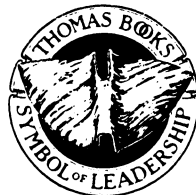
**DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY
OF ART**

DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY OF ART

By

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**DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY
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I

INTRODUCTION

You must descend before you ascend . . . Henry Miller

By descending far down into the depths of the soul, and not primarily by a painful acquisition of many manual skills, the artist attains the power of awakening other souls . . . Ralph Waldo Emerson

Attending to Soul

The subject of art and depth psychology has emerged from my work in the arts and psychotherapy. I am not as interested in the combination of the academic disciplines of art and psychology as I am in viewing art as depth psychology. I have discovered that the arts, as Nietzsche said, “deepen” life. I use the term “depth psychology” because my work within the arts and psychotherapy is directed towards engaging the mysteries of the psyche together with the most intimate and complex aspects of human relationships. Although our artistic methods are different from those of the early psychoanalysts, we work with the same terrain. Depth psychology is soul psychology and there are obvious differences between the goals and methods of depth psychology and the experimental studies of behavioral science. Depth psychology is closer to religion, philosophy and the arts. It is part of a tradition that precedes behavioral science.

Psychoanalysis and early depth psychologies have been described by their critics as religious and artistic creations, and not science. I affirm

this relationship between depth psychology and older traditions for the study of soul. Theories always give way, and ultimately subordinate themselves to life, what I have described as the terrain that we share. The theory, like the artwork, is an interpretation of the terrain, which ultimately generates further interpretations. Life and interpretation continue and not necessarily the theory. We are always working from the basis of our personal experience, our craft and our historical epoch.

A depth psychology of art is without fixed and all-encompassing theoretical explanations. It is more subjective, aphoristic, fleeting and descriptive of multiple aspects of art. My descriptions and dialogues will move from one observation to another in a way that parallels artistic interpretation. The movement of art is constant. There are no permanent resting points. The pause is temporary, and a bridge from one experience to the next. An interplay of ideas increases depth and brings us closer to an experience while giving form to complicated configurations of thought.

I am motivated by a desire to integrate the artistic and psychological traditions at a time when the distance between them is great. I also want to reflect on the soul and the depths of the psyche from the perspective of my experience within the arts and psychotherapy. Our profession has not matured to the point where it can begin to realize its "potential" depth and intelligence that results from its formation in both "art" and "psychology." We have the opportunity to establish a research tradition formed by a full cooperation between art and psychology. I may do little more than stumble along this ambitious path but I hope that my effort will encourage better prepared and more numerous travelers in the future.

Since committing my life to the arts in psychotherapy, I have imagined the discipline as something other than it is at the present time. I do not wish to deny the value of the actual things that people do within the profession on a daily basis. There will probably be little future improvement upon the practice of the art itself, as we can see evidenced by the history of psychoanalysis. The first experimental analytic studies may have in fact moved deeper into the soul than subsequent institutionalized processes. Therapists will revive the tradition of depth psychology by claiming the soul as their terrain. Within my vision, artists will become primary therapists who advocate advanced and lifelong training and self-improvement. The profession will not only transform the nature

of art but it will assist the older art history, studio art and humanities disciplines in the interpretation of the lives and works of artists.

In the past I had difficulty referring to myself as an art therapist because of the discipline's tendency to take on adjunctive roles within medical systems. I now realize that I have the freedom to re-imagine the nature of the profession and the tradition from which it emerges. My definition returns to the classical origins of the word psychotherapy as "attending to soul." The arts are soul's physical manifestations and expressive language. I have found that it is through concentration on organic things that we gain access to soul. Therefore soul psychology, also known as depth psychology, cannot exist without the arts, and art therapy is a primary method of attending.

The discovery of the need for an integration of the arts and psychotherapy has originated in the personal lives of art therapists. By attending to our longing for creative transformation, we learn more about what we can do to help others. The beginnings of our profession together with one of our most important sources of research are in the process of self inquiry. Art therapy is a manifestation of an old and often suppressed religious tradition based upon creativity, imagination and participation in the artistic process.

Style of Inquiry

I see psychology as an interplay of multiple and changing elements. The aphoristic style fits my interests in the breadth, multiplicity and the particulars of life as they manifest themselves on a daily basis. The aphorism relates more to natural dialogue and poetic expression than it does to psychological system making. It corresponds to the process of art where images emerge in synchrony with the emotions and converge into compositions which best articulate their expression. I do not wish to give the impression that this interplay is a process of effortless improvisation and illuminations. The artist knows the lifelong dedication to the improvement of craft. Behind the art object there is often an unrecorded trail of work, critical judgment, selection, rejection, re-structuring and polishing. The illuminations of art flow out of this labor, which when properly

pursued, helps to prepare the artist's ability to see and respond to creative feelings.

My style of inquiry is more concerned with closeness and intimacy than it is with distance. I respect the commonplace and the events of daily life which manifest themselves in successive instants. We give shape to this process through the focus of concentration and the themes of personal perceptions. Images appear and leave while we dream and move through our waking life. Insight, illumination and discovery occur in flashes, and meaning is given after the fact, through the interpretation of the image. Within this flux of instants, depth of experience can be attributed to the convergence of energies and elements of consciousness on particular points of concentration. The history of art and poetics has taught us that the universals are engaged through the particulars, the material things and events of daily living. Through artistic convergence many different elements are gathered together and given a sensuous form which makes them accessible to perception.

The ability to see, to open to what is before us and within us, and to become engaged, are fundamental to the experience of artistic depth. The images of most artworks are relatively constant, and the degree to which we experience them in-depth is dependent on how open and responsive we are at the particular time. Although struggle and perseverance are not foreign to the experience of depth in art, openness demands flexibility and the ability to let go of the pre-occupations of the moment in order to respond to fresh and unexpected events.

Behavioral science has not been an adequate forum for psychological inquiry into the arts. Therefore, we cannot continue to use traditional psychological terminology without a critical rethinking of meanings and definitions. The arts will shine through psychological investigations that use metaphors and language that are native to the creative process. It is not possible for me to begin an "in-depth" study of the arts without exploring a diverse set of ideas. Once the ideas are presented then it is up to the reader to orchestrate their interaction just as the artist shapes the interplay of images.

What distinguishes art as a mode of inquiry is the unequivocal subjectivity and individuality of its perspective. Artistic descriptions do not give the pretense of being without bias. The inevitable projection of a point of view is celebrated and therefore comes closer to soul which is as D. H. Lawrence said, distinguished by its individuality, spontaneity and

contradictions. If we are to explore the depths of the psyche as manifested in imagination, dreams and imagery we gain access through the arts. The artist lives to establish a personal form which allows the soul to take the organic shapes which acknowledge its being and serve its mission. The striving for individuality corresponds to the desires of the soul. Each artwork is an awakening or liberation of soul. The liberation is never permanent as confirmed by the artist's inability to realize full satisfaction from past creations. The eternal drive for more is not possessive and greedy but rather a desire for continuing vitality.

Experts in the psychology of art often present themselves as men and women committed to the discipline of rigorous and objective science. They are perceived by many as the eminent experts who illuminate the dark, passionate soul of the artist. Yet psychology in the classical sense is not behavioral science. My psychological tradition is one where art thinks about itself while inquiring into the nature of life.

Imagination and soul cannot be isolated within scientific formulations. The rules of science are one of many imaginative perspectives. Art is endogenous, produced from within. It is a self-discipline, a deepened sensitivity. There is an unspoken acceptance within the arts that life will never be explained with finality. Labels and analytic judgments simply stop, or temporarily arrest, the ongoing process of self-discovery. Observations, descriptions and explanations are part of our human nature, they express a longing for relationships with other people, life and history. Our attempts at explanation are manifestations of a desire to acknowledge and intensify the experience of life. They inspire others to respond with their interpretations. Art is never an end in itself but exists to stimulate more art.

Art objects embody the events of their epoch, giving form to what is experienced by particular people in specific times and places. Yet there is also a continuity of the fundamental dynamics and forms of artistic expression. Although there has been a recurrence of universal symbols in different cultures for thousands of years there has also been a consistent diversity of meanings attached to them... In *Apocalypse* D. H. Lawrence said:

Symbols mean something: yet they mean something different to every man. Fix the meaning of a symbol, and you have fallen into the commonplace of allegory (1982, p. 53).

There will never be final and fixed explanations for recurring symbols. The intent of the symbol is to do the reverse by keeping the imagination open and fluid. Interpretations are translations from one metaphor to another. Artistic inquiry is an imaginative contagion that keeps the process moving.

This book is comprised of four sections. I begin with a review of "Nomenclature" and a description of the need to think about art with language, images and concepts that correspond to its nature. The subject of "Interpretation" is a longstanding interest of mine as well as the *modus operandi* of a depth psychology of art. The "Re-imagining of the artist" is taking place through the work that we are doing today in the arts and psychotherapy. I deal with it within the context of depth psychology and with a desire to fuel the ambitions of my profession.

What is perhaps most unusual about this study may also be considered the most natural element of an artistically based inquiry into the depth psychology of art. I have decided to create the book with words and with my pictures. The decision to proceed in this way was more of an instinct than a conscious plan. There is a need for art therapists to investigate their personal artistic expression and to perceive art as a mode of psychological research. Inquiries of this kind are not intended to replace the disciplined and sensitive studies that we do on the artworks of other people. Support for one position or method does not imply the denial of others.

I hope that my experimentation with this form of psychological inquiry will help to make it possible for others to arrive at this way of working quicker than I did. For too long my identity as an artist has been on the sidelines. I think that this is true of our profession as a whole. Those of us who are committed to careers as artists as well as therapists and psychological investigators do not have to experience the radical separations that have characterized our work in the past. I think that these separations have been an unavoidable part of our beginnings which result from a coupling of psychology and art within a relationship where the former has been the dominant partner. Art has taken a secondary