

LANGUAGE, SPIRIT, IDENTITY

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BA (Hons) Fine Art

244 words

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Proposed question for Independent Inquiry: What are the differing purposes of representational and non-representational art and how can art interact with both the thoughtful and sensational?

Figures

Figure 1: Carl Jung's painting of the Dragon from "The Red Book"

<https://www.artranked.com/topic/Carl+Jung#&gid=1&pid=22>

Figure 2: Jung's Model of the Psyche: <https://psychmajors.tumblr.com/post/41040080174>

Figure 3: Bladee, 2018: <https://www.paradigmagency.com/music/bladee/> (accessed 12/08/21)

Figure 4: Claire Barrow- Bladee – 333 <https://www.clairebarrow.com/blogs/archive/bladee-333>
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Figure 5: Screenshot from "The Lighthouse"

<https://medium.com/@drerivas/best-of-2019-the-gothic-imagery-of-the-lighthouse-daed13b94cd4>

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<http://www.whataboutart.org/blog/2017/5/1/kandinsky-a-spiritual-experience.html>

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https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/n7vjdm/bjork-and-arca-in-conversation-interview

At the start of writing this essay, I had several ideas that seemed to both be interdependent and to compete with one another... until I started reading about Jung. In particular, the reader's edition of Carl Jung's Red Book, aka Liber Novus. I had heard about Jung's theories of archetypes and the anima/animus before- however reading about his own processes made me realise a lot of his processes of self-discovery linked with my own creation of art as well as his understanding of spirituality revolving around differing mental states combined with cultural icons or "primordial images".

The reader's edition of the book begins with an overview of Jung's life and career, giving context to the Red Book- a book used by C.G Jung to document his research into his own unconscious- the foundation on which his life's work was built on. He used the technique of active-imagination- inviting images and dialogue from external-internal personas, which he recorded in this book. Below is an example of one of his paintings, for anyone who is unaware.



Figure 1

In this essay, I will use the terms animus and anima to refer both to an inner masculine/feminine ideal- but also as the ancient archetypes of 'Eros' which represents "love" and "life energy" and 'Logos' which stands for "order" and "knowledge" in Ancient Greek.
I will revisit artists of interest as well as my own experiences in a new way, in attempts to understand them in relation to Jung's ideas.



Figure 5: Jung's Model of the Psyche.

Figure 2

Eros

Writing in *Black Book II*, he asked himself,

"What is this that I am doing? It is certainly not science, what is it?"

Then his soul replied,

"It is art".

"Perhaps my unconsciousness is forming a separate personality that is not I, and is insisting on coming through to expression." he wrote.

"I also knew with great certainty that this voice [...] had come from a woman, and I emphatically responded that what i was doing was in fact, not art. I felt a great resistance grow within me. No voice came through, however, and I continued on writing. This time, I caught her and told her "No." and felt as though an argument would ensue" (Jung et al, 2009 p. 97)

In November 2020, I found myself figuratively “in the darkness”. I had a fixation on the concept of “light” and “spirit”, but felt to be separated from it. Things were dull.

I began listening to the Swedish rapper/songwriter known as Bladee.



Figure 3

I did not like that I was doing this.

His lyrical style was hedonistic and self-indulgent, naive. It would do no good for me.

Every time I listened, I thought of this.

It got to a point where I found myself listening to Bladee all day. Even when I joined my parents for a walk in a local woodland, I trailed a little behind them with my headphones in.

It was dark, and surprisingly cold- winter was on it's way. Listening while walking (rather than self-isolated in my room) was nice. It gave the sounds some space to inhabit so I no longer had to hold onto them in my head... however the constant grind of analysis wore me out- so about halfway through I took off my headphones to make small talk.

That night, in bed, I closed my eyes and set out to just *listen*.

I began drifting.

I drifted through old memories of being at secondary school, and other images, amongst a hazy vignette of pink. They would fade in and out, leaving when the thoughts of analysis got overpowering, returning in moments of quiet.

Frustration.

I began to focus on everything but the thoughts- the feeling of connection and the wonder at this scape of sounds. I felt it in my core- a feeling that seemed to come out from beneath black rocks- a light.

“More!” I called, feelingly- “shine!”

It got bigger, it got brighter. A crystal shining golden light rose up from the centre of my core, before my mind's eye. In a world of pink pastel clouds, like a children's book painting of Heaven.

The buzzing cloud of analysis, like swarms of flies, now parted around the core, leaving through left and right portals in my periphery, harmlessly.

[illegible]

Figure 4

Like the music on 333, Barrow's painting communicates in symbols an innocence and childlike spirit. There is a distinct girlishness to it, with the powdery pink haze and icons such as a fairy princess, flowers with faces, and a My Little Pony. The imagery was a direct response to the lyrical and aesthetic themes of the album that explored Bladee's own feelings of femininity with lyrical references to Cinderella and the quotes "in this world you gotta work to be the it girl" and "Innocent of all things, feel a second beating of my heart"

The dreamy production combines, calling to a deeper awareness within- what Jung would call *the anima*.

Logos and the Light

Initially, this word "light" seemed to encapsulate something essential within me and religious and spiritual culture. It represented warmth, energy, life.

However, I found that over time, I began to forget what this word originally meant. It became what Baudrillard would refer to as a simulacrum- a concept entirely separate from its original conception, but equally real. I could draw it, write about it, think about it- even locate it in my mind. But I was still, in the dark... studying it.

In Robert Eggers' 2019 film "The Lighthouse", two men working at a lighthouse are either fixated on or extremely possessive over the light box at the top of the tower.

The younger, newer man known for much of the film as 'Winslow' starts working for the lighthouse keeper, an older man named 'Thomas Wake' and although according to the paperwork they should split tasks fairly- Thomas refuses Winslow's entrance into the light room.

Eventually, Winslow desires more than anything to witness the light- but the older man forbids it- keeping it all for himself, valuing it enough to call it his replacement wife.

It would seem that in the absence of love, and a woman, the men manifested all of their desire and belief into that light. The Light became a symbol for a sense of spiritual fulfilment - and thus had become in itself as valuable. At one part of the film, Thomas is observed naked, and masturbating in the light keep.

This represents the projection of the anima and then domination over it as a sexual object. This possessiveness of light results in a locking-away of the anima, leading to Thomas being extremely cold-hearted and controlling of Winslow in the film- whenever he was sober, at least.

This connection to Jungian psychology was not a coincidence, with Eggers referencing Jung as an influence. He also told that the lighthouse itself was symbolic of a giant phallus, further identifying the movie as a commentary on the male condition, and power dynamics as they are projected from the internal to external relationships.



Figure 5

The Power of Symbol

"The spirit of the depths challenges Jung's use of language, informs Jung that on the terrain of his soul his achieved language will no longer serve. All attempts become arbitrary in the depth realm, even murderous" (C.G Jung et al, 2009 p.97)

The Spirit of the depths was what Jung termed the part of the unconscious that communicated in abstracts and images, like the anima, but it is more generally connected to historical and unconscious archetypes contrary to the 'Spirit of the times' that also more generally related to day-to-day functioning, goals and short-term cultural trends.

As mentioned earlier, to define the "soul" or "spirit" is to create a simulacrum. And although-

"The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth-- it is the truth which conceals there is none. The Simulacrum is true."

(Baudrillard, 1983 p.1)

-It may be considered murderous if the words used do not connect the reader to the thoughts and feelings needed to understand the writer's intention. This it open to misinterpretation or, worse, misappropriation.

An example of this would be in certain religious practices, where all of the symbols and iconography originally intended for spiritual fulfilment are used, but now with associations with a different message. Rather than an individual holding the "key" to spiritual fulfilment within themselves- like in the lighthouse- fulfilment may be guarded by a religious leader using dogma to control followers.

Ideas of Gender

Jung labelling his *artistic soul* as feminine read to be especially of-the-time in the early 1900's where gender roles were extremely enforced. In a time where war was breaking out globally, it makes sense that men were repressing their feelings of desire to be free and artistically expressive. This idea of being in "service to the soul" was prevalent in the work of Wassily Kandinsky whose life work was to explore the "spiritual in art" and allow the soul to create freely.

"That is beautiful which is produced by the inner need, which springs from the soul." (Kandinsky, 1912)



Figure 6

Unlike Jung who embraced symbols, Kandinsky grew to avoid symbolic picture, as this would leave the piece open to misinterpretation.

In a little poem he sent Münter in May 1904, he wrote:

*“Die Seele muss verschlossen sein,
hidden away,*

*Kein fremdes Auge gehört herein.
there.*

*Trauern, sich freuen, lieben, hassen,
pleasure, to love, to hate,*

*Vor Glück innerlich zittern –
with happiness –*

*Und es nicht merken lassen!
noticed!”*

The soul must be

No alien eye belongs

To grieve, to take

To tremble inwardly

And not to let it be

(Betsy F. Moeller-Sally, 2002, p53)

Kandinsky had also attributed the same qualities to the ‘body’ of his paintings as he did to his own body: a “cool, smooth exterior containing and concealing a fiery heart.”

In effect, the painting is him hence his painful sense that someone viewing his painting could “open [his] soul, scratch it and scrape it and peer under the veiling crust.” (p56)

The essay by Moeller-Sally sought to unveil an underlying eroticism in Kandinsky’s work, using quotes of his as reference.

Although he chose to speak rarely of sex, not wanting to cheapen his works, he sometimes used language that was highly suggestive of a sexual dynamic between himself, the artist and the art.



Figure 7

Many times in his earlier career, he likened himself to a horse-rider, with the horse representing the artistic talent that was to be guided by the artist that was the rider. (p56)

He had once even used the metaphor of the brush (Der Pinsel) forcing the canvas (Die Leinwand) into submission of its wishes, and also as a “European colonist” penetrating “with axe, spade, hammer”, the “virgin nature”. (p.57)

It would seem that Kandinsky’s approach to the anima was to allow it to be filtered through the choosingly cold exterior the artist, as not to show vulnerability. This is indicative of the time, where gender roles were so strictly enforced that even Jung could not accept the feminine traits of Eros as part of himself as a man, and perhaps had to be cast out as a feminine other.

This is in contrast to the likes of Bladee, who shows vulnerability through his embodying of feminine personas both lyrically and through fashion, incorporating feminine styles into his persona, along with other Drain Gang member Ecco2k.



In a time now, where LGBT+ rights are being more recognised and gender identity and sex are understood as separate concepts, it may be time to revise the concepts of the animus and anima as strictly masculine and feminine personas.

In 2019, Jody Bower wrote an essay entitled “Degendering Anima and Animus”, mentioning a struggle for people to agree on what the terms “animus” and “anima” mean, listing “The **feeling function** in a man, the **thinking function** in a woman” as one option. And although this identification of the contra-sexual self, at the time, served to allow men and women to recognise and integrate these parts of the self, they have become problematic as they use stereotypes to define a mans *feelings* as inherently feminine and a womans *rationale* as masculine.

In an interview with *id.vice*, musicians Bjork and Arca spoke about femininity and masculinity as it related to the creation of art.

“for example “we’re just carrying” is a reference to some queens I met who would say repeatedly, as a compliment: “she was carrying” about an amazing beat she made or a dance move [...] or whatever. And I felt it was such a feminine reference, about being the vessel.” , Bjork said, elaborating on a lyric from “Future Forever”:

“Watch me form new nests

Weave a matriarchal dome”

Arca, (who is transgender and nonbinary) also spoke of a “womb-like leadership, which is about creating an amniotic mood within which other beings feel safe to open up and express themselves in the project in a more collaborative way.” with phallic leadership being more goal- oriented, with the vision of an “auteur-like figure”.

Both artists agreed that there was a time and place for both.

I love this conversation as it truly communicates a utopia where people of differing birth sexes can realise their own selves and come together with a uniting goal of “carrying” an artistic spirit. It exemplifies a positive reclamation of femininity discussed by Lawrence (2013) in *‘Femininity, Self, and the Simulacrum of Divinity’* without the need for discrimination, although still using gendered terms.



Figure 9

Now that genders art sorted- why is art still so difficult? What does it mean for a painting to be good, other than it being made with love and soul?

Where is painting's place in a digital society?

Is there a need for both representational and non-representational art forms? What are their purposes and how can art interact with both the thoughtful and sensational?

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