

Open Space

Tate Modern: Jung modern

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After a handful of visits to the Tate Modern I find myself thinking about archetypal images. What do we consider to be an archetypal image? On what grounds? Does modern art deliberately seek to avoid the 'archetypal image' because its universality has made it stale and clichéd? I feel that in a way it contains an implicit challenge to Jung's anthropological, retrospective approach to the representation of the archetypal. While Jung looked backwards to alchemical imagery and ancient myths, modern art mocks, deconstructs and ultimately re-contains the archetypal. Or does it? On second thoughts I think it is more demanding than that, challenging us to do much more of the containing ourselves.

The frustration many people feel in relation to exhibits/installations at the Tate Modern arises from the lack of easily available containment (in Bion's sense) that is on offer. Experiences of harmony and integration are not generally the aim. The fine line between disintegration and de-integration (in Fordham's sense) is not drawn by the artists – no promise of feeling safe with them. It is up to us to process our emotional and intellectual responses, even feeling ridiculed or nonplussed, so that de-integration rather than disintegration can occur. The Tate, if anyone, is our symbolic mother in this enterprise, helping admirably to make just enough sense of exhibits by supplying words that accompany each piece, but fall short of patronizingly 'explaining' it. Explanation is, of course, impossible but contextualization can help.

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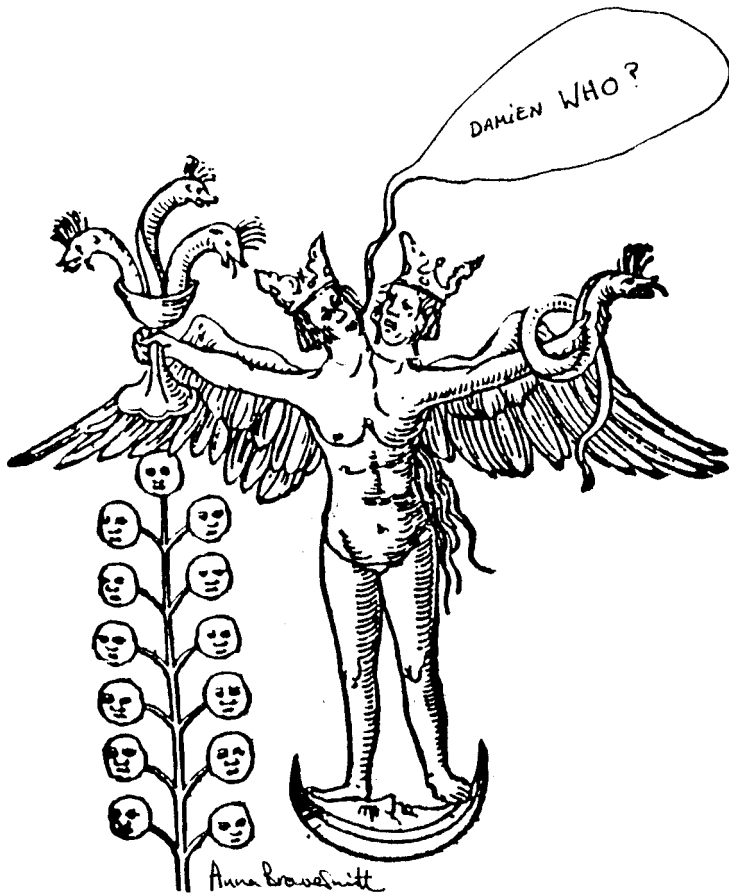
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If the gallery is a symbolic mother, it is also a symbolic father with a penetrative function and a capacity to hold the Oedipal contents of its art works. Here I am harking back to Freud's retrospective borrowing from mythology to provide verbal imagery for human behaviour in the form of Oedipus and his story. Overthrow, murderousness and incest are held by the Tate father in a concrete *and* symbolic container. It will have escaped nobody's notice that the use of a previously disused power station is rich in symbolism in relation to its new function. The phallic chimneys and subterranean engine rooms evoke the powerhouse that is the human body in both female and male forms. It is a cathedral of heresy with spires that are defunct conductors of smoke and irreverent contents.

Jung stressed that he was not an artist, despite the beauty of his mandalas, and he might have said this for many reasons. Perhaps because he thought that to be seen as an artist would undermine his reputation in psychology. Perhaps because his mandalas were personal and created for himself. For me the definitive factor is that he expressed his cutting edge in prose and not in an artistic form – either visual or literary. His use of form was not as innovative as his ideas. I think this preference for conventional prose meant he could be theoretical and leave us that kind of legacy. However, it caused a number of problems too. Archetypal images became stultified as personifications like 'wise old man', 'trickster', etc. Mandalas were calming and soothing, working towards a feeling of wholeness as if with an agenda. I suspect that Jung came up with traditional imagery in order to counter the anxiety incurred by his originality in thinking, but avoided becoming an artist using fragmentation itself as a form of originality in representation. Anton Ehrenzweig wrote, 'It is only in really new art that we can fully appreciate the attack on conscious sensibilities and the anxiety which all artistic innovation entails' (1967: 74). I am thinking about two kinds of images emerging in Jung's work – dream images and drawings/paintings that were his own and images he selected from historical and anthropological sources. I justify this apparent lack of distinction by my perception that he chose both categories and that his unconscious was involved in both kinds of choices. The agenda of integration and conjunction between opposites dominated and subjected his images to a hierarchical systematization.

A notable exception to this agenda is the final image taken from the Rosarium to represent transcendent rebirth and integration. It shows a peculiar hybrid creature, formulaic in its construction of



combined male/female, sun/moon, and various untransformed representational elements thrown together. Jung was not entirely happy with it himself, but I wonder if this image does not come closer to modern art, despite its historical origins. He described it as 'a monstrous and horrific' image (1946: 316) which was 'remarkable' because problematic just where one expected to find a final solution in a suitably harmonious image. I could think of it as disturbing conceptual art with similarities to the art of Matthew Barney, Rebecca Horn, Francis Bacon, who in their different ways all transform the body in bizarre explorations, taking it far beyond its limits. The extent of sensual and conceptual elements in any of these is debatable. Probably the centrality of the body and its boundary/no boundary veers away from the conceptual, yet the

'New Birth' image of the Rosarium seems to me to work on two levels simultaneously. Conceptually it is a completion, aesthetically it is ugly and fragmenting.

Returning to my initial questions: what do we consider to be an archetypal image? On what grounds? I want to relate the questions to some specific works in the Tate Modern in order to argue that archetypal images do not have to be ancient, found in geographically diverse locations or reflect accepted visual conventions. Particularly striking to me is Cornelia Parker's 'Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View' (1991) which is a constellation of suspended fragments – wreckage from a garden shed full of junk that she had exploded. The fragments hang around a light, casting shadows on the surrounding walls. I think the wreckage may move slightly, I am not sure, but in any case that impression is created. It is beautiful and fascinating as a whole, though each piece is broken, perhaps ugly.

There is much that is archetypal in her piece; the fundamental experience of the self after explosion made me think of Joseph Redfean's *The Exploding Self* (1992) and his concern with the 'dehumanization involved in abstract thought' (1992: 142). It is not only matter that explodes; our psychic organization violently disintegrates under the pressure of increasingly abstract thought. Innovative artistic language is needed to represent the experiences of selfhood in the unbounded cultures of abstraction. Cornelia Parker explodes a container with irony – the British army being invited to blow up a garden shed – and then shows us that the never-to-be-joined-again pieces can cohere. The rebirth of forever-altered elements suggests cosmic life undercutting destruction, without any possibility of return to the pre-violent state. The light at the centre made me feel a spirit in the 'cold dark matter', but the breakage was indisputable. Why is this archetypal? I think the answer is that, in its modern form, it evokes what is fundamental and, as far as we know, unchanging, and in widely varied degrees of consciousness, experiential for all of us while outside our routine mental activity.

Another quite different example that I found striking is harder to write about. It is the experience of sitting in the middle of the room entirely filled with Mark Rothko's paintings. Did they attune to me, or did I attune to them? There was some illusion of affect attunement going on as I gazed into the deep reds and paler reds and deeper reds. Floating towards and away through thresholds quite gently. Reluctantly I try to use thinking to penetrate the experience,

but do not really want to. They make me lose a sense of time and can be claustrophobic too. Maybe this is quite like some of Jung's mandalas but less obviously beautiful. The archetypal level is around lack of boundary and the ambivalent, seductive, undifferentiated state which anyway is so important in analysis and childhood, but is also never far away throughout life. In this room with Rothko's paintings one dropped down into a low register, even the walls were grey instead of the white used elsewhere in the gallery.

Exploration with detritus, particularly in Tony Cragg's work, seems to me another area where, in perhaps a humorous way, archetypal levels are present. It sounds pretentious to relate his work to splitting, but fundamentally he redeems rubbish in huge mural/collages that make you wonder about the divisional categories 'valuable' and 'to be got rid of'. Can archetypal images be humorous? Perhaps not, yet humour can gently represent what is self-critical and fundamental. Cragg's work is fun to look at, so in that way it becomes easy momentarily to undo the splitting, or put splits in a different place. His playfulness is the spirit in which I pose my own questions about archetypal images, and hope that Jungians can go on developing a 'Jung modern'.

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