



Sephiroth, Anselm Kiefer

The Visible and the Invisible in Art: the Secret Space of the Image

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“There is a secret stone, hidden in a deep well
Worthless and rejected, concealed in dung or filth
And this stone is a bird, and neither stone nor bird...”
(Mylius, quoted in Jung, 1963, note 441, p. 194)

In certain works of art, the numinous quality comes not through content, likeness to reality, perfection of technique or composition, but rather through the vagaries of the process itself, unfinished and imperfect. The tension of this imperfection is then held invisibly and secretly in the image until the viewer comes along to privately open and engage it in the viewing, and that uncompleted, never ending process comes to life, drawing the viewer into its participatory space. This mysterious quality does not track any direct line through art history, but follows a fine, supple thread, leaping across continents, centuries and even millennia.



Figure 1 Sephiroth, Anselm Kiefer

Works that capture this quality share an affinity or correspondence that doesn't respect mundane time, space, logic, or personal tastes and aesthetic preferences, but rather, connects to the timeless god-like quality in each of us, that essential being at our very core. We occasionally catch a glimpse of this Being, reflected sometimes in nature, sometimes in art, like the startled and startling gaze of an animal caught

unawares, suddenly looking back at us in recognition. The art critic and novelist, John Berger, suggests that to find this “invisible heaven, one must only lift up something as small and as at hand as a pebble...” Quoting Simone Weil, he says “When we know how to turn whatever happens, no matter what it is, into an object of desire...”, this desire “pierces through time to find eternity behind it.”

(Berger, p. 11)

This encounter entails an initiation, a finding as well as creating of an intermediary, mercurial or potential space in which the unconscious can be engaged in meaningful dialogue. This involves, according to the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1973),

“not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated.” (p. 151)

He calls this initiatory dimension

“the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being.” (ibid.)

As the artist engages with the elusive “other” in the creative process, moving back and forth between the visible and the invisible, little by little, each brings the



Figure 2 Sephiroth, Anselm Kiefer

other to life, finally manifesting in that numinous “third” that is born into and lives in the secret space of the image itself. Once this quality has been captured alive in the work of art, it resides there secretly available to the artist and, later, to the viewer willing to be led into its initiatory space.



Figure 3 Heliogabal, Anselm Kiefer

At a particularly lonely and turbulent time in Carl Jung’s early life, when his inner world began coming into conflict with the outer world, he developed a very

strong relationship to nature, with a fascination for plants, animals and stones. He would make caves in an old stone wall, and in them light fires which he considered living and sacred, recalling the “ignis gehennalis” of the alchemists, “the ‘central fire’ by whose warmth all nature germinates and grows.” While this fire is a spark of “God’s spirit...it is also Lucifer...who after his fall became the fire of hell itself.’ (Jung, 1963, para. 632) In front of this wall was a slope with a large stone jutting out, where Jung would often sit and imagine, “Am I the one who is sitting on the stone, or am I the stone on which he is sitting?” He felt that this stone stood in some powerful, secret relationship to him, opening up a mysterious world beyond and often at odds with, what he was taught in school or

church, and convincing him that there was some great secret in life that other people didn't know about. (Jung, 1961, p. 22)

In an attempt to "give shape to that secret", (ibid.) he one day

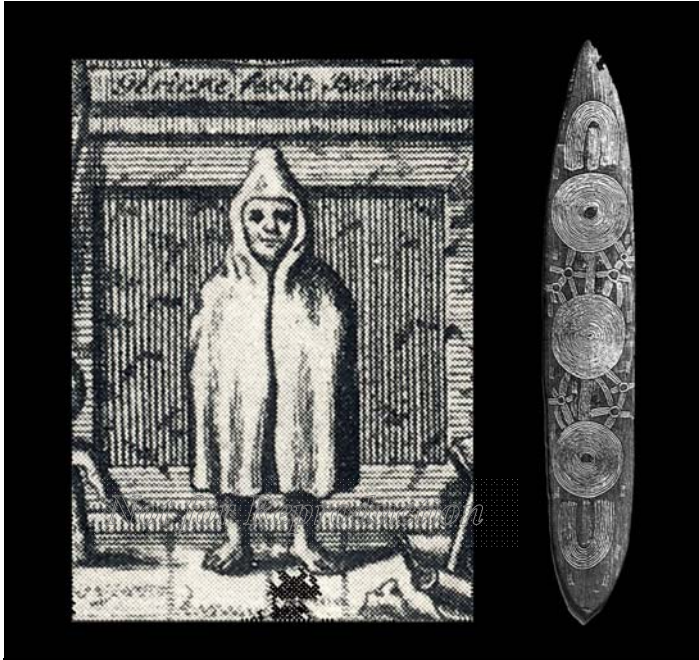


Figure 4 Telesphorus and a Australian tjurunga

spontaneously carved a tiny wooden manikin, dressed it in a cloak with pointed hood, and housed it in his pencil box with an oblong stone that he'd painted. He later connected this manikin to Telesphorus, the dwarflike god embodying both the creative spark and the self-healing faculty of the psyche.

(Jung, 1961, p. 23) These fingerlike or phallic cabiri, often pictured as familiars to Asklepius, the god of healing, or to the Great Goddess, were tiny miners and forgers capable of bringing the creative impulse to fruition in the world. (Kerenyi, 1944) Jung connected the oblong stone to the sacred churingas, (Jung, 1961, p. 22) which the Australian aboriginals protect with their lives, as each carved or painted stone is the "abode of the spirit," and carries the individual as well as the ancestral soul. (Poignant, 1967, p. 116) These figures absorbed and fascinated Jung, and he hid this little carved man, with its companion stone, away in the "forbidden attic" of his house, where he knew "not a soul would find" or destroy it. He would visit it from time to time, bringing it messages he'd written on a tiny

scroll, and feeling “satisfied to possess something that no one knew and no one could get at.” (Jung, 1961, 21-23).

While the pencil box and the attic provided safe spaces in which to hide the “secret”, the carved wood and the painted stone themselves, as well as the very act of carving and painting, were symbolic, potential spaces that would contain as well as express the precious, secret life that was in danger of being lost at that moment in Jung’s life. He considered the creation and care of these secret forms to be the “essential factor” of his boyhood, as it created space for, contained, and protected the tiny germ, the root of what would grow into his life’s work and purpose. (ibid.) Through these childhood experiences, Jung discovered on his own the interchange which can take place between man and matter, between man and spirit, and between matter and spirit, with man as the conduit, medium, or vessel in and through which this exchange takes place, and on whom the whole process can have a salutary, and sometimes even life-saving, effect.

Most people keep these moments locked away “in some secret place of memory”, or forget them entirely, perhaps because they are “too much like the visitations of the gods to be mixed with everyday thinking”, says Marion Milner, a colleague and close friend of D.W. Winnicott’s. (quoted in Walters, p. 128) What distinguishes the artist or poet is the attempt to “convey something of the timelessness” of those moments experienced “from inside, of being a moving, living body in space” (ibid., p. 130), and creating the outside world by finding, through communion with it, “the familiar in the unfamiliar.” (ibid., p. 128)

Milner (2002), in investigating her own creative process in learning to paint, found that there comes a time, while drawing or painting, while “allowing the hand and the eye to play” freely between the image and the medium, when “one becomes lost in a moment of intense activity, in which awareness of self and awareness of the object are somehow fused, and one emerges to separateness again to find that there is some new entity on the paper.” (p. 80) At these times, an inner organizing “urge to pattern and wholeness,” very different from willed planning, is freed and then becomes “externally embodied in the product, there for all to see.” (ibid.)



Figure 5 Alberto Giacometti painting Annette

Milner and Jung both describe two different kinds of attention: a narrowly willed, penetrating kind of focus, in which “things” and the self are grasped separately, and a wider, unfocused, diffused attention, which “brings remarkable changes in perception and an enrichment of feeling”, making the intense reality and significance of the world more accessible. (ibid., p. 81) According to Paul Celan, the method for encountering the elusive “other”, toward which the poem or work of art is always heading, requires this second kind of attention, which he defines as “the natural prayer of the soul.” (Carson, 1999, p. 71) The creative process involves a cyclic oscillation between the narrowly focused, surface mind and the wide-focused, oceanic all-encompassing gaze, not just passively

experienced, but actively used for the purpose of communicating with the unseen and calling up something new. (Milner, p.197)



Figure 6 The Forest, Alberto Giacometti

“Inevitably”, says Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 167), “the roles between [the artist] and the visible are reversed. That is why so many painters have said that *things* look at *them*.” The painter Andre Marchand said:

“In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me...I was there, listening...I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it...I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out.” (ibid.)

Jean Genet describes the movement of Giacometti’s work as an oscillation, out of everyday time and space, between a “boundless past” and a “boundless future,” as he attempts “to work a fragile reality out of the everyday ephemera ... of human interaction” and existence. Giacometti’s statues, he says, work “by virtue of a stillness, an absence of time which allows for the viewer to fall into reverie, to experience being in relation to an immutable and mute nature”,



Figure 7 Standing Man, Alberto Giacometti

restoring in us the “kinship of objects and existences – an inner revelation of “what is most irreducible” in a human being. (Lazare, 1996) Giacometti himself said that what interested him most in all works of art was what he called “resemblance,” which he defined as “something which makes me discover more of the world.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 165)

Making art, says Milner (2002), depends on “the capacity of the conscious mind to have the experience of cooperating with the unconscious depths, by means of the battle to express something living, with [that bit of “dead” matter that is] the chosen medium.” (p. 215)

That “sense of inner ‘beingness’, of ‘dead’ material” acquiring life of its own, is the fundamental test of the

goodness of a work of art; for a good picture is one in which every mark on the canvas is felt to be significant, to be suffused with subject.” (ibid., p. 225)

According to Anselm Kiefer, whose paintings capture with terrible intensity the alchemical paradox of joining impossible opposites,

“The work in its failure - and it always fails – will still illuminate, however feebly, the greatness and splendor of what it can never accomplish.” (Arasse, 2001, p. 206)



Figure 8 Alberto Giacometti in his studio

When this oscillation or struggle between opposites is sustained, an answering presence, even a “you” – begins to emerge through the hand into the created image. (Milner, 2002, p. 82) As Paul Klee puts it, “A certain fire [demands] to be alive; it awakens. Working its way along the hand as conductor, it reaches the support and engulfs it; then a leaping spark closes the circle it was to trace, coming back to the eye, and beyond”. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 181) The artist “ceases to be

his ordinary self, and the picture, ...statue or landscape...is no longer outside [of him]. The two become one entity; time and space are abolished and the artist, and later the viewer, is possessed by one awareness. When he recovers workaday consciousness, it is as if he had been initiated into illuminating, formative mysteries.” (Milner, p. 97)

To allow for this, one must have the capacity to tolerate a temporary loss of self. (ibid.) As Berger (2001) puts it, the painter “has to inhabit [the painting] and find shelter in it..” He works alone, “by touch in the dark,” praying “for collaboration from somewhere else”, for “what he is hoping to touch is not normally tangible”. (p. 31) In the caves, “when an apparition came to an artist, it

came almost invisibly, trailing a distant, unrecognizably vast sound, and he or she found it and traced where it nudged the [facing] surface...on which it would now stay visible even when it had withdrawn and gone back into the one.” (ibid., p. 41) This, says Berger, “is the only real mystery, and it is why some become painters”. (ibid., p. 31) “Deep in the cave”, he says, “...there was everything: wind, water, fire, faraway places, the dead, thunder, pain, paths, animals, light, the unborn...They were there in the rock to be called to,” apparitions coming “*through* the rock to be seen...[as] the limestone opened for it, lending it a bulge here, a hollow there, a deep scratch...a receding flank.” (ibid., p. 41)

As Merleau-Ponty (1964) points out, the animals “are not there in the same way as the fissures and limestone formations... Pushed forward here, held back there...they spread around the wall,” crossing dimensions “without ever breaking from their elusive moorings in it.” (p. 164) The process of examining these images tends to induce a reverie that alters our ordinary, waking state of seeing things. He says, “I do not look at it as I do at a thing; I do not fix it in its place. My gaze wanders in it as in the halos of being. It is more accurate to say that I see according to it, or with it, than that I see it.” (ibid.)

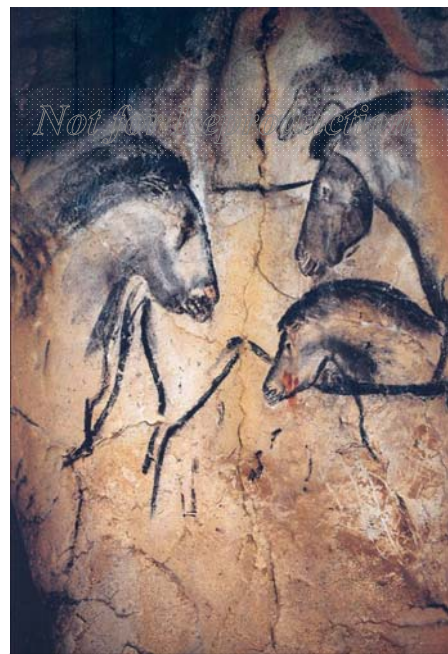


Figure 9 Cave painting, Chauvet, France



Figure 10 Cave painting, Chauvet, France

The imprints of life-size hands, stenciled in ochre, record the presence of the living artist, who was there to “touch and mark the everything-present, the ultimate frontier of the space this presence inhabits.”

(Berger, p. 41) The painter Barnett Newman believed that

“the purpose of man’s first speech was an address to the unknowable... [His] hand traced the stick through the mud to make a line before he learned how to throw the stick as a javelin.” (Bell, 2003, p. 18)

Ancient paintings on rock or bark often served as “vehicles to expand lines of communication between man and the divine force.”



Figure 11 Cave painting, Chauvet, France

(ibid., p. 19) They also confirmed “a magical ‘companionship’” between man and animal, hunter and prey, in an attempt to make this companionship more permanent. Any powerful work of art is about this enriching and “potentially

dangerous participation.” (Berger, 2001, p. 14-15) When a painting is lifeless, says Berger,

“it is the result of the painter not having the nerve to get close enough for a collaboration to start... To go in close means forgetting convention, reputation, reasoning, hierarchies and self, [which] also means risking incoherence, even madness. For it can happen that one gets too close and then the collaboration breaks down and the painter dissolves into the model.” (ibid., p.16)

In the ancient world, the dangers of being devoured or trampled by wild beasts were daily realities, while the remove of the cave provided a protected environment, a symbolic space, for the absentminded reverie which could bring about the intense connection and fusion between man and divine beast. The



Figure 12 Interior, Zaire

sacred ritual hut, separated from daily life, and protected by magical charms and talismans, could also furnish a physical and mental setting, where the confusion of the me and not-me could be

allowed in relative safety. (Milner, 2002, p. 231) In modern times, the studio serves this purpose, freeing the artist temporarily from the need for immediate, practical...action in the outer world, and allowing for, in Winnicott’s words “a

meeting place, an overlap, a stage of illusion, intoxication, transfiguration.”

(Winnicott, 1951, p. 118)



Figure 13 Alberto Giacometti in his studio

For something new to emerge, something that has never been before, one must embrace the more diffused reality of the developing relation between oneself and what one is looking at, suspending the need to know or plan what the outcome will be.

(Milner, p. 222) Giacometti’s studio became for him not only protective shelter, where he ate, drank, worked and slept, but also muse, model, and medium, itself a world of his own creation, as he painted many

images of his studio, as well as using the walls themselves as his canvas.

In the protected space of the studio, the artist works at creating ways in which the inner life may be made knowable, creating symbols for the life of feeling. (Winnicott, 1951, pp. 118-119) This can only be done in terms of the outer life, through the medium, that transitional bit of the external world which gradually takes on the form of the inner conception, then holds and reflects it in the completed work of art. (ibid.) This fusion occurs in the protected, transitional space, “when the object is felt to be one with the dream, as in falling in love with

someone or something.” (ibid.) Through this process, “the inner becomes actualized in external form and as such becomes the basis, not only of internal perception, but also of all true perception...Thus perception itself is...a creative process.” (ibid.,)

Rilke describes both the nature of this capacity or space, and the interchange that takes place there:

“One space spreads through all creatures equally –
Inner-world-space. Birds quietly flying go
Flying through us.”

This “inner-world-space” is produced, says Malcolm Bowie,



Figure 14 Fallen Pictures, Anselm Kiefer

“either by a limitless opening up of individual subjectivity to encompass everything that otherwise lies beyond it, or by a sudden internalization of the outer world, a swallowing of its hard edges and resistant surfaces into the interiority of the mind. Either way, a boundary has been dissolved and an indefinitely permeable membrane has taken its place...that offers a supreme reciprocity between the desiring individual and the objects upon which his or her desire plays.” (Bowie, p. 14)

Works of art are bounded by the confines of the medium, as well as, sometimes, by actual frames, which, like the analytic frame, mark off an area in time and space, between what is taken symbolically, and what literally. (Milner, 2002, p. 225-226) In modern art, these boundaries and relationships are often far more complicated and multi-dimensional, and in the cave, the boundless

image comes nearer to the hallucinated images of dreams. (ibid.) The artist, says Milner (ibid., p. 227), “does in fact make tabernacles to house the spirit, with the result that others can share in [these] experiences, and [the artist him or herself] can have a permanent recording of them after the high moment of transfiguration has passed, [which] may be a moment of rage and horror and pain as well as of joy and love.” In Graeco-Roman religious texts, the term “salvation” designated the desire for, or experience of, a resting place in which to dwell securely, an invisible, otherworldly safe place right in the midst of everyday, earthy reality. (Miller, 1994, p. 132-133)

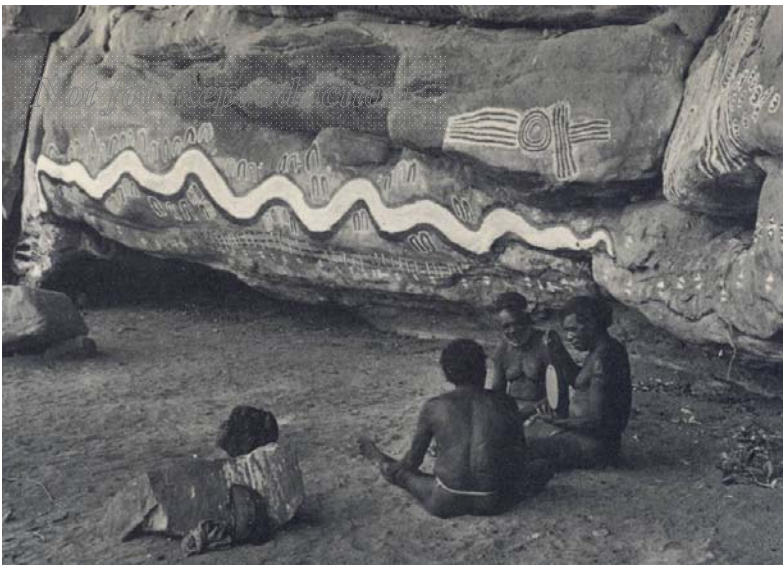


Figure 15 *Walbiri ceremonial site, Australia*

What all art, from the Paleolithic period until our century, has in common is the announcement, “I have seen this”, or when the making of the image was incorporated into a tribal ritual: “we have

seen this,” we have experienced this and we are intimately related to it. The artist changes the world into paintings by lending it his body, which is an intertwining of vision and movement. [Berger, p. 14] Because the body moves and sees, it attracts the world to it like a magnet, holding things around it in a circle.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 163)

“Nature is on the inside”, claimed Cezanne (quoted in Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 164), who in his later years made countless paintings of Mont St. Victoire, which held for him a fascinating resonance, as though it corresponded to some



Figure 16 Montagne Sainte-Victoire and the Chateau Noir, Paul Cezanne

internal imprint. The shimmering “world’s instant” that Cezanne captured, “an instant long since passed away, is still thrown up at us by his paintings.” (ibid., p. 169) *His* Mont St. Victoire is made and remade from one end of the world to the other in a way that is different from, but no less energetic than, that of the hard rock above Aix. “Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them.” (ibid., p. 164) Cezanne’s paintings of Mont St. Victoire became more real and more known than the mountain itself,

“an affirmation of this visible which surrounds us and which continually changes, appearing and disappearing. Without the disappearing there would perhaps be no impulse to paint, for the visible itself would possess the [permanence] which painting strives to find.” (Berger, p. 14)



Figure 17 *Montagne Sainte-Victoire and the Chateau Noir, Paul Cezanne*

The paradox encompassed in this kind of experience and its resulting images, illustrate Jung’s (1963) description of the transformations worked by the alchemists, whose

motto, “as above, so below”, speaks to the affinities and exchanges taking place between matter and spirit in the alchemical vessel. Their persistent but failed attempts to concretely turn lead into gold resulted in the discovery of the psychic and spiritual processes leading to what they called the philosophical gold. “In reality”, says Jung (1963), “the alchemist’s labors elevated the body into proximity with the spirit while at the same time drawing the spirit down into matter. By sublimating matter he concretized spirit.” (para 764.)



Figure 18 *Emanation, Anselm Kiefer*

The alchemist Michael Maier describes his initiatory flight through the seven planets, a visionary rite of ascent and descent, as a circular distillation from

Saturn to the Sun and back again. Returning to the point of origin, he finally meets Mercurius, his “savior”, a figure that was always there, but hidden or unseen without the initiatory eye-opening experience. (ibid., para. 298ff.) The



Figure 19 Chalice, Morris Graves

distillatory movement around the planets creates a magic circle or sacred space, so vacillating between the opposites means eventually being contained in and by the opposites, as they become a holding vessel in which what was previously now one thing and now another floats vibrating. (ibid.) This

initiatory flight takes place in “man’s inner life, the ‘secret place’... where the spark of the light of nature...[is] to be found.” (1963, para. 344) This union and exchange between opposites that takes place there, brings about a “third thing, which represents not a compromise but something new.” (ibid., para. 765) This new thing, like a hidden spring welling up, is the universal medicine that has the potential to poison, as well as to heal all ills – which points both to the dangers inherent in the creative process, as well as to the salutary effect that great



Figure 20 Blind Bird, No. 1, Morris Graves

works of art can have upon the soul. (ibid., para. 148)

Making art is a kind of alchemical world-making which requires an attitude of “seeing with the eyes of the spirit”, allowing “things hidden in the shadow to appear, and letting the “eyes of the...imagination perceive them with true and truest vision. (Jung, 1944, para. 350) The medium of realization is the imaginative faculty of the soul, which Jung elects “the most important key to understanding the [alchemical] opus”. Imagination, that mercurial intermediate realm of subtle reality, is neither mind nor matter, neither abstract nor concrete, neither rational nor irrational, but all of these. (ibid., para 396)

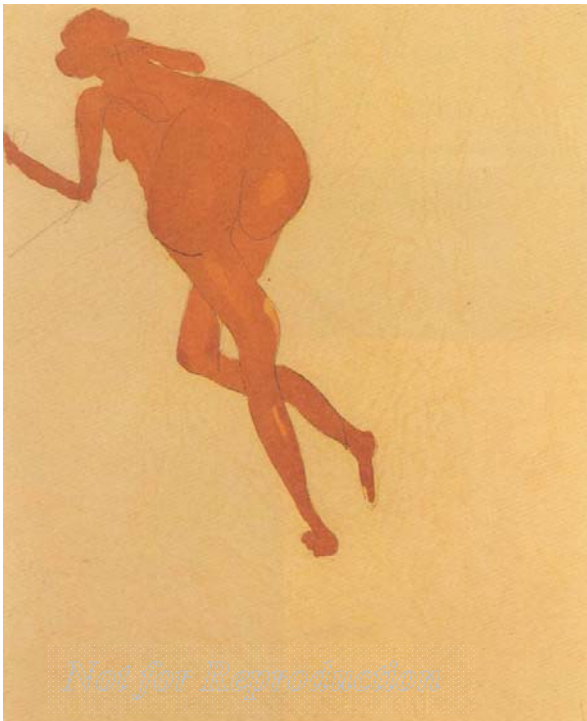
Henry Corbin (1972), writing on the tenth and eleventh century Persian mysticism of Ibn’Arabi and Avicenna, describes the “mundus imaginalis,” that intermediate world between pure spirit and the physical sensible world, as the space of subtle reality where the formation of the authentic symbol and true imagination take place. In this world, he says, spirits become corporealized and bodies spiritualized. This corresponds to a precise mode of imaginative perception, which he considers every bit as real, or even more real, than the sensible world. Through wishing and longing, personification would occur spontaneously, and the figures that would appear were considered not imaginary, but imaginal – not unreal, but both subtly earthly and viscerally spiritual. (p. 1-19)

Describing his process in making the film “Wings of Desire”, Wim Wenders (1986) says,

“At first, it’s not possible to describe anything beyond a wish or a desire... You wish that something might exist, and then you work on it until it does. You want to give something to the world,

something truer, more beautiful... or simply something other than what already exists. And right at the start, simultaneous with the wish, you imagine what that 'something other' might be like, or at least you see something flash by. And then you set off in the direction of the flash, and you hope you don't lose your orientation, or forget or betray the wish you had at the beginning. And in the end you have a picture or pictures of something, you have music, or something that operates in some new way, or a story, or this quite extraordinary combination of all these things: a film..." (p. 73)

And you hope that it hasn't lost its "first flash", its "comet". (ibid.) This "flash" corresponds to the Gnostic spark - that invisible, secret or hidden desire, the pre-existent/nonexistent, innermost Being of god, a fragment of which exists in each of us. (Jung, 1963, para. 699) According to the alchemist Gerhard Dorn, this spark is a shining eye, the sun, which plunges... into the heart of man "as if it



**Figure 21 Untitled (Hare Woman),
Joseph Beuys**

were the secret of warmth and illumination." (ibid., para. 45) This tiny spark of potentiality must be made manifest through the grounding process of creation, necessitating the existence of art-making for human and world survival.

Dialogues, with the "angels" of imaginal reality, (like the contemplation of a work of art), teach us to hear the events of everyday life

symbolically and metaphorically, (Watkins 1990, p. 77) just as paintings teach us to see the world around us with new eyes. Merleau-Ponty (1973, p. 11) says, “It is the thing itself that opens unto me the access to the private world of another...”, the enigma of the propagation of my own most secret life in another; “it is only through the world that I can leave myself.” (ibid.)

When the “experience of the imaginal other” is engaged, there can develop a metaphorical way of thinking, a reflection between mundane and imaginal realities that enriches them both. (Watkins, 1990, p. 77) “Reflection” literally means “bending back” and involves a “turning inwards.” It is this very turning in which creates the space of the vessel that can hold and nurture the inner, animating spirit at the core of the self. (Jung, 1960, par. 241)

Jung calls this the “reflective instinct”, which is responsible for determining “the richness of the human psyche and its essential character. (ibid.) This deepening reflection, the “immense mediation” of the alchemists, is defined as an internal dialogue with another, who is invisible. (Jung, 1944, para. 390) This establishes “a living relationship to the answering voice of the ‘other’, or the unconscious, in ourselves, by means of which things develop from an unconscious, unified potential seed state, to a many-branched, differentiated manifestation. (ibid) It is the long and thorough observation and reflection on life’s experiences that allows for this development of insights and convictions, which Jung compares to the growth of the alchemists’ “philosophical tree” from the prima materia, or “radix ipsius”, the root of itself, “autonomous and dependent on nothing.” (ibid., para. 429)

“Meditating” in this sense creates the inner heat of incubation, which will nurture the growth of the still invisible germ of new life within the unknowable depths of the inner world. (Eliade, 1964, p. 412ff) The individuation and creative processes are very like a state of pregnancy or incubation, which must be submitted to and tolerated for a very long time.

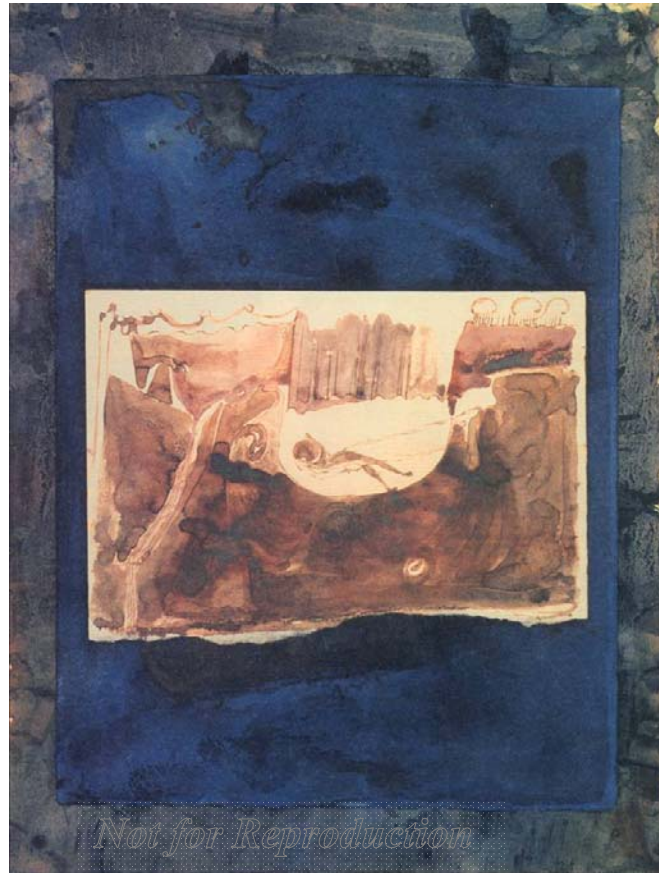


Figure 22 Before Birth, Joseph Beuys

“For the soul”, says Merleau-Ponty (1964), “the body is both natal space and matrix of every other existing space.” (p. 176) New life begins microscopically, hidden in the dark space of the womb, and very gradually grows into a form which becomes as highly evident on the outside as on the inside, as it reaches a size and stage of development that can no longer be hidden, but begins openly and outwardly to show, revealing the presence of potential life within.

This “showing”...makes it “a matter of vision”. (Schenk, 2001) Psychologically, says Jung, “looking...brings about the activation of the object...of one’s vision.” To look or concentrate upon a thing, or a fantasy image, gives it this quality of being pregnant, “and if it is pregnant, then something is due to come out of it.” (Watkins, 1984, p. 43) It soon becomes difficult to keep it quiet; it

is alive; it gets restless, it shifts, produces, and multiplies, so must be watched over patiently until its culmination in the birth of the new. (ibid.)

The artist Grace Knowlton recounts how she was hand-building a round



Figure 23 Reliquary with Female Guardian, Gabon, Africa

clay pot one day when she felt, “an irresistible urge to seal in the space by closing the top”, creating the first of her spheres. She wonders whether this may have come about in resonance to the fact that she was pregnant at the time, as though her maternal reverie made the invisibility of inner space both imaginable and compelling. The external fullness announces the presence of the internal life, while simultaneously protecting it and keeping it hidden, just as the ancient knowledge of initiation rites, mysteries, and alchemical processes were kept

secret, well-guarded by silence, or hidden with language obscure to the uninitiated.

This apparent secrecy or obscurity was a natural consequence of the near impossibility of attempting to describe “inner” process in an outer language, which is the same challenge faced by every artist. Hiding, says Jung (1963), is “an expressive gesture which [marks]...the presence of something [still] unconscious

and 'not to be named'." (para. 312)

This unconscious content requires from consciousness "a tribute of constant regard", the heat of our incubating attention. With this application of interest, the continual perception and assimilation of the

effects of the 'secret' become possible, and can begin to hatch out into new life.

(ibid.)



Figure 24 Broken Sphere, Grace Knowlton



Figure 25 Dirt Pile, Grace Knowlton

Knowlton acknowledges that years later, when she eventually found the nerve to break out of the closed forms she had created, which had been her "fortress", new forms arose from which a part of herself, buried inside, could dare to begin peering out. While taking a walk, she says:

"I came upon a large pile of dirt, the sight of which hit me with a powerful impact: the dirt pile was the exact opposite of the sphere. Whereas the sphere sat elegantly and lightly on the earth, the dirt pile was a big shapeless slump. The contrast was fascinating, and led me into a series of sculptures and mixed

media drawings incorporating dirt of various colors I'd picked up in my travels." (Private communication)

By piercing through the "skin of things", or of reality, the artist seeks to find out, and to show, how things become things, how world becomes world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 181) and how, though "concealed in dung or filth, the secret stone is also "a bird, and neither stone nor bird." (Mylius quoted in Jung, 1963, note 441, p. 194) It is the artist, says Merleau-Ponty (1964), "to whom the things of the world give birth, by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible." (p. 181) "Earth," implores Rilke, "Is it not this that you want,/To arise invisibly in us?" (as quoted in Wright, 2000, p. 87) Art is truly the "inarticulate cry which seems to be the voice of the light", as Hermes Trismegistus said, and once it is present, "it awakens powers dormant in ordinary vision, a secret of preexistence", whose "internal animation, this radiation of the visible, is what the painter seeks under the name of depth, of space, of color." (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 182ff)

The alchemists attempted to describe psychic process in its own language, in its own voice, which is purely symbolic, an expression of psyche by psyche. The whole of philosophy, or



**Figure 26 The Song of Wayland, (with Wing),
Anselm Kiefer**

of art, says Merleau-Ponty (1973), consists in “restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience.” (p. 155) This, he adds, is “everything, since it is the voice of the things, the waves, and the forests...” (ibid.) “Life goes on at such a pace that unless these experiences can be incarnated in some external form, they are inevitably lost to the reflective life...” (ibid.?) Rilke saw this as the mandate of the poet and artist, as he asserts in the Ninth Duino Elegy:

These things that live on departure
Understand when you praise them: fleeting, they look for
Rescue through something in us, the most fleeting of all.
Want us to change them entirely, within our invisible hearts,
Into – oh, endlessly – into ourselves, whosoever we are
(Rilke, Duino, p. 77)



**Figure 27 Christmas Eve (Winter Moonlight),
George Inness**

The artist’s chief
difficulty, said the Hudson
River School painter, George
Inness, is allowing himself to
submit to “the undefinable,”
or “that which hides itself
that we may feel after it”.

(Bell, 2003, p. 53 and 104)

“God”, said Inness, “is always

hidden, and beauty depends upon the unseen – the visible upon the invisible”.

(ibid.) He sought to discover the secrets of what we see, what we know, how our

world is constructed and what relationships it maintains “to other, unseen realms.” (ibid., p. 57) His paintings contain a quiet aliveness and stillness, giving off an almost audible hum from their mysteriously delineated spaces.

His anonymous figures are “so summarily depicted that their very existence seems to depend on us for their completion” (ibid., p. 59), as we “incarnate them with our imagination.” (ibid., p. 66) They gaze deeply into the landscape, “to commune with a nature of which” they (appear to have) “just become aware,” (ibid., p. 59) drawing us into the elusive character of the visionary experience....and making us “increasingly aware of our identity as contemplative beings”. (ibid., p. 58-59)] Swedenborg’s suggestion that the things of the natural world corresponds to and are preceded by the spiritual or internal world ... offered Inness a way to conceive of “an extrasensory form of sight”. (ibid., p. 28)

This differently attuned vision enabled him and, through his paintings, us, to penetrate beyond the appearances of the natural world into what he called the “reality of the unseen.” (ibid., p. 53) The secrets, or truths, of both the earthly and heavenly realms, in his paintings, face in on and mirror each other from within, across separate domains of space and time. In order to, as he put it, “fashion a world where our laws do not apply, where our eyes would not be able to see,” he learned, especially in his late paintings, to “abandon consciousness and vision in the very act of painting”, to turn his hand and eye over to “ungovernable but liberating play...What better way”, he asks, “to insist on the present unknowableness of cosmic design, than to eliminate the knower, letting pictures paint and think themselves?” (De Lue, 2004, p. 234)

Art touches us to the degree to which the model or subject collaborates with and moves through the artist. Joseph Beuys' believed that everything is potentially art, and everyone potentially an artist and his "life's work was a demonstration of, and an appeal for, this kind of collaboration." (Berger, p. 21-22) Beuys took things and "arranged them in such a way that they beg the spectator to collaborate with them...by listening to what their eyes



Figure 28 I like America and America likes me, Joseph Beuys

tell them and remembering". (ibid,) He considered drawing as essential as thinking and breathing, and it was central to his process. (Temkin, 1993) The urge to create is the urge to make and remake the world – both on the ground and in our imaginations. In Beuys' drawing, Adam Kadmon, the Gnostics' original and whole man, extends out between above and below, generated by and generating crystalline world-stuff, spinning the world into being. The aim of drawing is not to imitate nature, but to participate in it in such a way as to find and make new and believable worlds. It involves creating a space, a face, which



Figure 29 Bamana boli figure, Mali

can reflect “what is there to be seen”, not yet visible until reflected. (Wright, in Caldwell, p. 84) The medium is constrained and worked upon until it becomes the resonating form that our subjective life requires. Seamus Heaney says writing a poem is like “an echo coming back to you” (Caldwell, p. 91) and Rilke believed that the poet’s task was to “praise the world”

into being (ibid., p. 93) in response to what he took to be “the mute need of the earth.” (ibid., p. 87)

In the Dreamtime of Australian aboriginal myth, the Ancestors, each “fundamentally related” to a specific life-form, awakened from their “suspended animation in the crust of the earth” and, warmed by the sun, cast off the mud that held them, giving birth to children “who would later become the forms of the living world.” The Ancestors saw their children and called out their names, completing the act of creation by singing their names into verses, and weaving these verses into trails of song all across the earth. (as quoted in Wright, 2000, p. 85-86)



Figure 30 Spirit Giving Birth, Inuit

This singing, naming, and reflecting the world from its pre-existent state into life, aptly describes the world-making of the artist’s process, finding and creating “a sensory semblance, a living form of the thing or experience itself”.

(ibid., p. 88) In this “dialogue with the world...each party (world and self) [becomes] more alive. As the world is transformed by the creative utterance...so the artists themselves are transformed by the world – through their own visionary seeing and praising of it.” (ibid.)

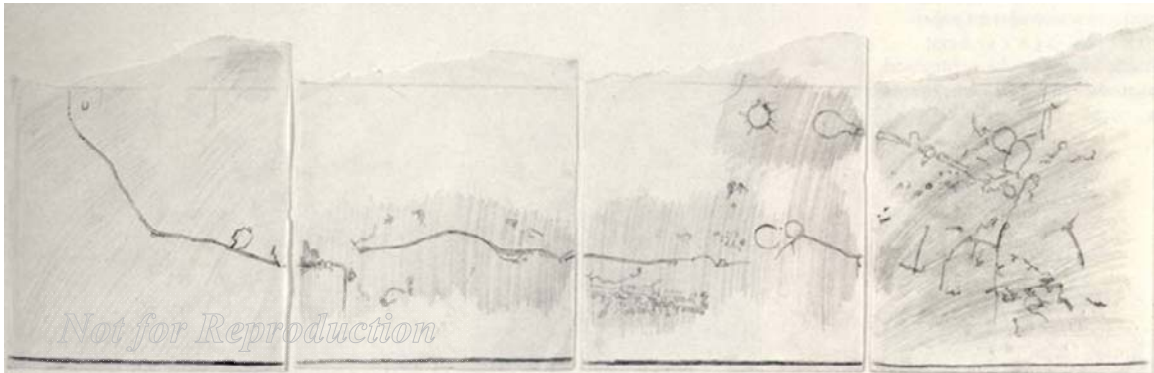


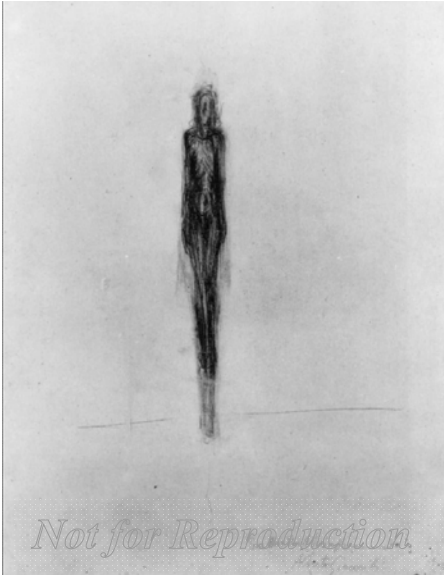
Figure 31 Untitled, Joseph Beuys

Beuys’ delicate drawing, too, seems to trace an ancient path, tiny through its distance, map-like: an intricate, individual, interior route. Looking at, entering, and following these paths draws us into what Merleau-Ponty (1973) describes as

“a genuine conversation [which] gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I *was* not capable of, and sometimes I feel myself *followed* in a route unknown to myself which my words, cast back by the other, are in the process of tracing out for me.” (p. 13)

Making and looking at art connects us

“with the things that surround us and with the forces that shape and animate and move them. It’s a way of taking in the world’s strangeness and power and finding comfort in it.” (Steinhardt, p. 69)



**Figure 32 Standing Nude,
Alberto Giacometti**

What counts is not the finished drawing, but “the time spent outside oneself”, and “the intensity of one’s connection.” (ibid.)

The poet Anne Carson (1999, p. 70) says

that

“to understand and to keep, in however diminished a form, some picture of the inside crystal of things – is a poet’s obligation and laces him in a certain relation of “I” to “you”.”

Giacometti tells of repeatedly attempting,

during an early drawing lesson with his father, to paint a pear, but only succeeding in capturing its likeness by rendering it extremely tiny, much to his father’s irritation. (Lucie-Smith, quoted on Artsright, p. 2) Later in life, once again struggling to find that essential likeness while sculpting figures from clay, Giacometti says,

“To my horror, my statues got even smaller...All my figures stubbornly shrank to one centimeter high. Another touch with the thumb and whoops! No more figure.” (Fletcher, 1988, p. 118)

For a period of three to four years, everything he sculpted was tiny enough to fit into a matchbox – this figure, including its base, is only three inches tall. (ibid.)

What seemed distortions to some, were true attempts to render the nature of reality, the inside crystal of things pressing out into the world.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1973, p. 208), “...every painting, every action, every human enterprise is a crystallization of time, a cipher of transcendence.” In looking at all of these works, we cannot, “establish a hierarchy of civilizations, or speak of progress – either in painting or in anything else that matters.” (ibid, 1964, p. 190) This is not because “some fate holds us back”, but rather, that “the very first painting in some sense went to the farthest reach of the future. If no painting comes to be the painting, if no work is ever absolutely completed and done with, still each creation alters, enlightens, deepens, confirms, exalts, recreates, or creates in advance, all the others.” (ibid.) Creations, “like all things...pass away”, but they also have “almost all their life still before them.” (ibid.)



Figure 33 Guardian, Morris Graves

In her poem, “The Red Bird Explains Itself,” Mary Oliver (2008) says,

For truly the body needs a song, a spirit, a soul.
And no less, to make this work,
The soul has need of a body,
And I am both of the earth and I am of the inexplicable
Beauty of heaven
Where I fly so easily, so welcome, yes,
And this is why I have been sent, to teach this to your heart.

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