



Emily Carr, *Above the Gravel Pit*, 1937, oil on canvas, 77.2-102.3 cm, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.30. Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

“Intruders,” “Animal Roots” and “Mother Earth”: Tracking the Art Complex in the Work of Emily Carr

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In highlighting symbolic events in the life of Canadian artist Emily Carr—her losses, her growing pains, her joys, and her achievements—a case is made for a transformative relationship with the art complex. These events are initially narrated providing a backdrop to the first half of her life. At age 56, however, she had a numinous encounter that symbolized the transition to the second half of life, ushering in a new relationship with an autonomous inner intruder—and so to signal this movement, the narration becomes analysis and interpretation while maintaining the storyline. For the next decade, her psychological maturation was reflected in developing her own painting methods, writing, and a more conscious relationship to self. In tracking these events and her accompanying psychological states, feelings, and emotions, there is support for Jung’s claim that the only genuine cure for neurosis is to grow out of it by attending individuation and thus to embrace “the approach to the numinous.” For Carr, such experiences arose through her relationship with “Mother Earth,” with the wildness of the Canadian west coast.

The early years

Long ago, there was a girl born, the fifth daughter to a devoutly Protestant family. She was the first and only daughter birthed in the rugged west coast of Canada, the first “Canadian” born (on 13 December 1871) to a recently emigrated English family. She was born in wilderness, born during a storm—a symbol with which she identified and has claimed to have “tossled and wrestled with ever since” (Riley, n. d., part 1). Her name was Emily Carr. Emily had a wild spirit that was out of tune and out of time with the Victorian household of her parents. Her father, “ultra English”—straight, stern, and autocratic—was obeyed by Emily out of sheer fear and reverence (Carr, 1966b, p. 14). Her mother provided a buffer to

the harshness of the family but did not mirror, for Emily, the love and acceptance that this extraordinary child so deeply needed. In this way, she was unmothered and remained unseen. Emily's stubborn and independent character constantly challenged her English upbringing and the norms of her society. She was soon dubbed "Small" by her older sisters—not only because as the youngest girl she was small, but also because she knew nothing of the social ways of sipping tea, nibbling cakes, or acting like a proper lady (Riley, n. d., part 1).

The one place where she did belong was among the "untamed beauty" of her father's open lily field, to which she escaped when punished or lonely (Riley, n. d., part 1). These escapes were frequent. This field and her closest friends, an imaginary small boy and a luxurious horse, became the "world of Small."

Unlike her family, who only saw and associated with other English families, Emily was keenly aware of the world around her—especially the native people of the First Nations and the Chinese who kept the city of Victoria, British Columbia, running. In addition, the spectacular coastal environment of Victoria was home to the "cedar and fir that claimed [Emily's] heart and imagination" (Riley, n. d., part 1). Like many children, Emily was full of curiosity and wonder.

When Emily was 15, her mother died; she lost the only person with whom she had resonated.¹ Two years later, her father died. Her eldest sister, "the sternest of them all," became head of the household (Riley, n. d., part 1). Under the strong discipline of her sister, her home life became increasingly unhappy and Emily frequently disappeared, spending most of her time in the woods. At age 18, Emily was granted permission to attend the California School of Design in San Francisco. During this time (1890-1893), she says, "I was a prim prude"—

which also speaks to her work, which, as she observed, was without passion (Riley, n. d., part 1). She had not yet learned to express herself, and her sense of self was undeveloped. However, there were early stirrings of what would beckon her later—“the optional weekly outdoor sketching sessions in vacant lots, cow pastures [and] among stretches of fence and bush” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 26).

After three years she returned to Victoria, dragging her work which she described as “humdrum and unemotional—objects honestly portrayed, nothing more” (Carr, 1966a, p. 203). While there are hints of what lay dormant, Emily had not yet realized that “creativity exists by the grace of an ‘unrestrained’ spirit” (van den Berk, 2012, p. 1) and it has a “capricious and willful character” (Jung, 1966/1978, para. 115). More fittingly, the artistic person has animal roots, that “in and through the ‘artistic drive’ the creative process is propelled ‘from below upwards’ and receives within the psyche a ‘radiating’ numinous aspect” (Jung, cited in van den Berk, 2012, p. 16).

Emily returned to the small parcel of land that came to her from her father’s estate. It held the cow barn, which soon became home. She turned its loft into her studio and began teaching children how to paint and draw among the field flowers, sheepdogs, and cattle. As an art teacher she was again ahead of her time. Rather than teaching children to paint what they saw, she advised, “Paint what you feel!”. For Emily, “art should be a tool [for] the expression of an inner vision of the world, a joyous experience and a road to self discovery” (Riley, n. d., part 1). This was an elusive ethos for her to live at this time—even though she intuited it at a deep level.

The “Indian theme”

Not long thereafter (in 1899), Emily went to London² where she thought the art world too conservative. At the Westminster School of Art, she learned to paint in the romantic European landscape tradition—a style well suited to represent the exquisite gentleness of England’s fields, but which could not capture the ruggedness of the Canadian landscape. In England, she had been trained to see outsides only, not to *pierce*, aiming deep, as west-coast First Nations art did. Their art—long houses, totem poles, and masks—in contrast, captured the mood of the land: the brooding coastal forests and majestic mountains with their mystery and beauty. In 1907, when Emily visited the Queen Charlotte Islands, she was deeply affected: “It was as if everything was waiting and holding its breath” (Riley, n. d., part 1). Here, she began recording totem poles—accurate studies of the declining way of life of the native Haida. Although she made great efforts to paint the poles, their spirit—their essence of particularity—eluded her; for she still tried to “*carefully, and honestly, and correctly*” record dimensions (Figure 1).³ She noted that “no matter how drunken their tilt, Haida poles never lost their dignity” (Riley, n. d., part 1); however, what she felt standing before them had yet to be conveyed in her paintings. To get at beingness, she later wrote, one must “dig way down into self and into [the] subject to get at its spirit” (Riley, n. d., part 1). She, however, had not yet learned that digging by technique alone would never release the spirit of her subject; rather, it required a living from the inside out, a subjective stepping back and an active receptivity, combined with suitable methods and skill. She remained unable to touch this place within herself, even though her “art” had improved.



Figure 1 Emily Carr, *Return from Fishing, Guydons*, 1912, oil on paperboard, 96.2-65.2 cm, collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.51. Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

During an early visit to the village of Ucluelet on Vancouver Island, Emily and the village chief had a profound meeting. There were no words, only eyes and presence. She writes, “the stare of his eyes searched me right through. Suddenly they were done . . .” (Carr, 1961, p. 4). “Seeing that I was not afraid of him or stuck up and on the contrary ready to laugh, he called me ‘Klee Wyck’—*Laughing One*” (Riley, n. d., part 1). The chief, his people, and their remote region had a profound effect on her, and for the next 10 years Emily traveled to the villages,

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doing portrait sketches, figure studies of the people and scenes of village life. These were direct drawings and watercolors of the monumental sculptural art of their more vital times in the past, all stating a commitment to what was called “the Indian theme” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 135):

The Indian people and their Art touched me deeply. . . .By the time I reached home [after a trip to Alaska and back down the coast], my mind was made up. I was going to picture totem poles in their own village settings, as complete a collection of them as I could. . . .With this objective I again went up north next summer and each successive summer during the time I taught in Vancouver. The best material lay off the beaten track. To reach the villages was difficult and accommodation a serious problem. I slept in tents, in road makers’ tool sheds, in missions, and in Indian houses. I traveled in anything that floated in water or crawled over land. (Carr, 1966a, p. 211)

In her autobiography, *Growing Pains* (1966b), she explains:

Indian art broadened my seeing, loosened the formal tightness I had learned in England’s schools. . . .The Indian caught first at the inner intensity of his subject, worked outward to the surfaces. His spiritual conception he buried deep in the wood he was about to carve. (p. 211-212)

This understanding of “Indian Art” is not reflected in her painting until after 1927, when she strips the poles of excessive detail, wipes from them “distracting settings and concentrates on their sculptural strength and expressive energy” (Shadbolt, 1979, p. 30) (Figure 2). Until then, she imposes the role of “other” onto them—either a straightforward, carefully observed, and rendered water color style (as with her work of 1908-1910), or the French-derived manner she brought back with her from Europe in 1911. Neither style was suitable for the awe-inspiring numinosity that she experienced in the presence of the poles.

Between 1911 and 1913 Emily had several exhibitions of First Nations Art in Vancouver, with more than 200 canvases. The attendance was poor and the reviews were horrible. Her work did not sell. Broken and broke, she had to leave for Victoria. With what money was left, she built a boarding house, the “House of all Sorts,” with three rooms to rent and a studio in which to paint. For 15 years she was a landlady and loathed every minute of it. It brought out the worst in her: the work demanded constant extraverted sensation, but she was an introverted intuitive type. Draining, it kept her from painting and being in Nature. By 1927, it looked as if the “art part” of her had died. While not literally true, it had died in spirit. Her art, at this time, was of painterly seeing but not of feeling. There was, however, one enduring and recurrent symbol throughout these years among her few paintings: the single tree seen in strong profile against sea or sky. This theme was also found in the repertoire of the Group of Seven paintings (Shadbolt, 1979).

The Group of Seven was a group of seven male landscape painters from eastern Canada, who believed that a distinct Canadian art could be developed through direct contact with Nature. When she was 56 years old, the long years of suffering and neglect ended when the Group of Seven discovered her work. Among this small group of Canadian painters, Emily was seen and her work was recognized. With an exhibition on the artwork of the Canadian West Coast tribes, the revitalization of her life and art began. For the first time, she felt herself part



Figure 2 Emily Carr, *Totem and Forest*, 1931, oil on canvas, 129.3-56.2 cm, collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.1. Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

of a dedicated, recognized community of artists, whom she knew to be great and who knew that her seriousness and genius matched their own. One could say that this meeting marked the end of the first part of mid-life transformation—of loss, withdrawal, depression, illness and grief—and the beginning of the next period: a time of discovery and a potential expansion of selfhood. It also marked the beginning of her keeping of journals, in which she wrote about her inner life and of the decisive change in direction that her life and work was taking. Upon seeing the work of the Group of Seven, she had a “holy” encounter—a profound numinous experience, a “feeling of the supersensual” (Otto, cited in Stein, 2006, p. 41)⁴: She wrote: “Oh, God, what have I seen? Where have I been? Something has spoken to the very soul of me, wonderful, mighty, not of this world. . . . Something has called out of somewhere” (Carr, cited in Davis, 1992, p. 7). Recall that Jung proposed that one is conditioned not only by the past but also by the future, which gradually evolves out of us. This is especially the case

with a creative person who does not at first see the wealth of possibilities within, although they are all lying there already. So it may easily happen that one of these still unconscious aptitudes is called awake by a “chance” remark or by some other incident, without the conscious mind knowing exactly what has awakened. (Jung, 1946/1954, para. 110)

Carr’s experience was so powerful that it utterly transformed the rest of her life. It marks the shift from spiritual to psychological development, where the goal was no longer “union with the divine or salvation but rather integration and wholeness, the forging of the opposites inherent in the Self into an image of unity and integrating this into consciousness” (Stein, 2006, p. 43). This higher activation of consciousness is what Jung and Otto (1923/1950) call the

numinosum—described as “fascination, mysteriousness, and tremendousness” (cited in Rossi, 2005, p. 12). When she returned to Victoria, she was already responding to this awakening. The experience symbolizes the transition from the first half of life to that of the second. It marks the pivot from ego development and coping with affect, crisis, and traumatic experiences—her personal biography—to an inner-directed life in relation to the archetypal, transpersonal, and noumenal.

Back on the coast, and during the long years ahead, this experience and the sense of belonging to the serious art community,⁵ although challenged at times, would prevent her from again suffering the paralyzing feeling of isolation, or the loss of spirit that had retarded her art for so many years. Now there was something alive taking root within her. “The throb of creation itself” (Jung, 1960/1969, para. 737) had been touched and now shepherded a new relationship with the depths of humanity’s whole ancestry:

Only when mirrored in our picture of the world can we see ourselves in the round. Only in our creative acts do we step forth into the light and see ourselves whole and complete. Never shall we put any face on the world other than our own, and we have to do this precisely in order to find ourselves. (para. 737)

This shift was further encouraged by the strong friendship that developed with Lawren Harris, the Group’s intellectual, theorist and committed Theosophist. Finding someone for the first time with whom she could converse in order to come to terms with deep philosophical and spiritual ideas, she began a three-year struggle to understand the complexities of Theosophical doctrine and to reconcile it with her long-established Christian beliefs (Shadbolt, 1979). In contrast to the brutality of her father, Harris was always gentle, always supportive, and thus

nurtured a new *animus* consciousness (rather than the arrogant Victorian spirit of her father). Being less defended, through this positive relationship with Harris, she was able to contemplate this new understanding of a mystical creative life. One inherent belief in Theosophy was the central role of Nature for the artist and that art must reach beyond the personal while always grounded in it.

The art complex gone wild

Considered psychologically, when the artist creates, it is not the manifestation of her need to communicate some “thing” to the world. Rather, it is an autonomous inner complex, an “art complex”—“an intruder” “gone wild which [has] to emerge, which [needs] to find full expression” (Spielrein, cited in van den Berk, 2012, p. 22). The complex, while “fused with affect and bound to the individual” (van den Berk, 2012, p. 17), is denied a personal element. Further the very “tendency towards dissolution (or transformation) of every individual complex *is the motive for poetry, painting, for every sort of art*” (Spielrein, cited van den Berk, 2012, pp. 24-25).

Jung owes much to Sabina Spielrein for aiding in distancing himself from Freud, for whom the libido was of an exclusively sexual nature. Spielrein argued with and wrote to Jung, “*it is wrong to apply the term ‘libido’ . . . to art or science: the root of affectivity is not a special sexual feeling, but (. . .) an instinct of transformation which can eventually verge on the sexual side.*” You must not forget “*in the enthusiasm for your new theories, the possibility of non-sexual transformation*” (cited in van den Berk, 2012, p. 23, italics Spielrein’s). One might argue that Carr’s libido as psychic energy did not manifest in carnal form

but as erotic expression in her later paintings. Here Jung agreed with Spielrein and added that it is not complexes that dissolve themselves into libidinal activities such as art, but that the libido itself manifests in complexes. It is probable that Carr's libido dissolved into complexes, particularly the art complex. Like any complex, it gripped and directed her, and at times even possessed her. However, as her ego strengthened, she was better able to "channel [its] energy" into painting without completely succumbing to it (p. 19). Jung wrote of the complexes that drive an artist:

The genius, too, has to bear the brunt of an outsize psychic complex; if he can cope with it, he does so with joy, if he can't[,] he must painfully perform the "symptomatic actions" which his gift lays upon him: he writes, paints, or composes what he suffers. This applies more or less to all productive individuals. Tapping the depths of the psyche, the instinctively functioning complex sends up its unknown and inexhaustible treasury of countless thoughts to its slave "consciousness," some old and some new, and consciousness must deal with them as best as it can. It must ask each thought: Do I know you, or are you new? But when the daemon drives, consciousness has no time to finish its sorting out, the flood pours into the pen—and the next day it is perhaps already printed. (Jung, 1912/1944, p. 22)

Daemon-ically driven, complexes are part of something that governs "all that is uncontrolled in [a human]—the *numinosum*" (p. 18)—an awe-full and terrifying mystery. Understood as an "awesome mysterious force keeping the whole universe in motion," libido might come to the surface in the psyche of an individual and can "either implode or explode" (van den Berk, 2012, p. 25). Looking at the creative abundance of paintings and Journals in the last years of Carr's life, one could say that her libido exploded. In myth, one of libido's manifestations is the androgynous Eros who seeks beauty and "vibrates within

the whole cosmos,” thereby sustaining it (p. 25). Because Eros “knows how to erotically move,” the god is related to (7) transformation, “a metamorphosis of libidinal force” (p. 25), as evidenced in the “cycle of life” theme here, in *Fir Tree and Sky* (Figure 3). This theme is “translated into the enormous pervasive sexual energy of her painting—as openings and enclosures vibrate with light and movement; trunks thrust upward into sky; earth fecundates; and death and decay [down below] are assimilated into the irresistible regenerative cycle” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 205). As Harris advised, Carr has learnt to transcend the personal by living through it. She is now in tune with the very process of Nature, as the animating elements of movement, light, and space illustrate.



Figure 3 Emily Carr, *Fir Tree and Sky*, c. 1935-1936, oil on canvas, 102-69 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Bequest of Mrs. J. P. Barwick (From the Douglas M. Duncan Collection) 1985. Photo # MBAC.

The creative surge in Carr's paintings

For the next 10 years, after Carr met the Group of Seven, she captured the extraordinary beauty of the West Coast in her paintings, further developing methods and a style that were aptly suited to a widening range of her personality's expression, including releasing herself to the artistic drive. This creative surge reflected new elements of her personality that emerged unheralded, including being open once again to love.⁶ One senses the healing of old wounds through access to the archetypal mother, the positive feminine, and eros. In keeping with the fact that therapeutically, only the experience of the numinous is of healing value, Carr was able to heal through her increasingly intimate relationship with Nature. Indeed, "the creative process" for Jung "has a feminine quality, and the creative work arises from unconscious depths—[one] might . . . say from the realm of the Mothers" (1930/1978, para. 159). In the most extended case of the numinous maternal, it is the base dynamic of individuation as "repeated immersion in her restorative nothingness as the prelude to a life of enhanced compassionate activity in the world she also authors" (Dourley, 2006, p. 177).

This surge was further accompanied by meaningful synchronicities and sudden intuitions about the unfolding possibilities for her life and painting. This time, however, was not without snags, or the continuing need to smooth over consequences stemming from her sharp tongue. Her ability, however, to trust her feelings and risk their expression had grown considerably. One such example can be found in her final and complete transition from painting totem poles to depicting trees. This shift in consciousness was a most difficult yet profound one.

This transition to trees reflects a psychological maturity, as she had to rely solely on her own feelings—“what was within”; an entirely new process. She had felt this orientation before in the art of the West Coast tribes, but was unable to access it within herself at that earlier time. She was now able to go into the woods and tune in to what *called to her*, rather than following in the steps of others and copying their artistic expression. With strengthened ego, she had learned to feel, trust, and release to what arose, allowing herself to be the conduit for a “vision” that had to emerge—one that “wished to incarnate itself with unyielding force . . . a symbol, without any concern for [her]” (van den Berk, 2012, p. 100).

Significantly, it was through her poverty that she discovered, by thinning house paint with gasoline and using brown paper, that with “great sweeps of her arm” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 185), her brush strokes became alive, unrestrained, embodying the movement of her natural world. Her brush “strokes became forms of energy themselves,” markers of direction, speed or strength, carrying whatever expressive value they released (p. 185). Working with the thin medium, the brush moved in easy waves across the paper, back and forth, creating “one continuous flow,” uniting the sky with the earth and trees in “one fluid movement” (p. 185), as in *Above the Gravel Pit* (Figure 4). This technique suggests that Carr had come to rely on what might be called wisdom to bridge vision, creative drive, practical demands, and the subject itself while releasing previous ego-driven habituations.



Figure 4 Emily Carr, *Above the Gravel Pit*, 1937, oil on canvas, 77.2-102.3 cm, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.30. Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

It is important to note that Carr did not *feel* detached from Nature when she was younger; but her earlier paintings and methods reveal this unconscious separation—that of a detached observer. In her late work (1934 onward), movement, light, and space are used in fresh ways to underline a deeper connection to self. As mentioned, *Fir Tree and Sky* casts “the spell of continuous movement” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 191) wherein the “picture space is simply part of the infinite space that by implication continues in all directions in and out and beyond the frame” (p. 193). It ceases to have a central focus in “the traditional way of composing inherited from the Renaissance, as forms abandon hierarchic

structure to join the compulsive flow of energy” (p. 193). Even in cases where there is a hint of a central figure, such as the fir tree, it becomes apparent that “the rhythm created by wind sweeping all the parts into its dominance, is really the subject” (p. 193). The experience of space, such as the silent, hollow deep in the enclosing forest (*Wood Interior, fig. 7*) or the lifting up and out into endless pulsating skies (earlier), suggests that there is something deeply intuitive at work within Carr. Further, there was her understanding of light with “its potential to reveal and its promise of life, and its disquieting absence, dark” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 203). Here the ideal and real meet; the numinous and the mundane mingle. In a journal entry, she beautifully describes the potential of art to develop the soul. She saw that the plant’s struggle to reach the light was the same as her own:

Look at the earth, crowded with growth, new and old bursting from their strong roots hidden in the silent live ground . . . so, artist, you too from the deeps of your soul, down among dark and silence, let your roots creep forth—(1993, p. 676)

and push, push towards the light. Here one senses that she understands the creative process as “a living thing implanted in the human psyche” (Jung, 1922/1978, para. 115). Similarly, Jung uses the same metaphor to outline the natural process of a work of art coming into being:

Personal causes have as much or as little to do with a work of art as the soil with the plant that springs from it. . . . The plant is not a mere product of the soil; it is a living self-contained process which in essence has nothing to do with the character of the soil. In the same way, the meaning and individual quality of a work of art inhere within it and not in its extrinsic determinants. One might almost describe it as a living being that uses man only as a nutrient medium, employing his capabilities according to its own laws and shaping itself to the fulfillment of its own creative pattern. (Jung, 1966/1972, para. 107-108)

Carr's method of inner work respected the relationship with that which coursed through her and the cosmos and arrived via a tempo and process different than did the speed of her oil-on-paper works. It required that she go far into the woods and, upon finding something that beckoned her, that she light a smoke and sit to contemplate it. She absorbed it at length, then asked herself: "Now what do I want to say about it?". She used a notebook for these "jottings" (a form of free association in relation to the subject), including what she felt in relation to it that was of primary importance, no longer the measure or detail of what she saw. She also sketched in her journals, quietly allowing a pictorial image "to sort itself out of nature's jumble" (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 193). "Instead of trying to force our personality onto our subject," Carr wrote, "we should be quite quiet and unassertive and let the subject swallow us and absorb us into it" (1966a, p. 123). Here the ego has a say and the unconscious has a say. Yet it is crucial not to let the ego lose much of the lead, not to let it be overwhelmed by the unconscious for too long, if at all. This partnership is critical. As Jung describes, "It is exactly as if a dialogue were taking place between two human beings with equal rights, each of whom gives the other credit for a valid [point]" (Jung, cited in Miller, 2004, p. 26). Carr describes it thus:

I am always looking for the face of god, always listening for his voice in the woods. This I know—I shall not find it until it comes out of my inner self, until the God quality in me is in tune with the God quality in [N]ature . . . until I have learned and fully realized my relationship to the Infinite. (1966a, p. 29)

Such a dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious is fundamental for the emergence of the transcendent function, seen here as "information exchange between two equal entities" (Jung, cited in Miller, 2004,

p. 26). Of this exchange, Jung says, “there is nothing mysterious or metaphysical about the ‘transcendent function’” (1916/1960, p. 67). It is a psychological function that is comparable to a mathematical function, “which is a function of real and imaginary numbers” (p. 67). In the case of a psychological function, Jung underscores the ability to listen; to dialogue requires good listening skills and each is required for dialogue with the “other” intrapsychically (via the transcendent function) and interpersonally (in relationships). In terms of Carr’s own development, her ability to dialogue with Harris and his partner Bess, for example, reflects her ability to converse with her inner figures. Her intrapsychic dialogues are notable in her journals, where she writes from the voice of her sensitive and imaginative inner child, Small, and her older self—Emily. For Jung, “the capacity for inner dialogue is a touchstone for outer objectivity,” which becomes increasingly evident in Carr’s work (Jung, cited in Miller, 2004, p. 27).

The role of participation mystique

Behind the drama of daily life, there is an order, where one’s “will” (self) aligns with the will of God (Self); Carr knew this. She was aware of the larger non-egoic powers that existed in the psyche and sought to make them conscious. New directions in her work were visible: what becomes possible when one lives from one’s core, and the riches to be found there. Most importantly, in this integrating phase of individuation, one shows spontaneity, freedom, and a distinctive personality. Here, split off pieces from earlier developmental demands and processes of Carr’s psyche are reunited⁷—a union unconsciously portrayed in her paintings: the stillness of the church compared to the movement of the forest, for

example (Figure 5). These extremes are held together by grace and timelessness. For Carr, this was soul—“unity in diversity” with “one overriding principle” (Davis, 1992, p. 12).

Carr would have found solace and kinship in Jung’s autobiography, especially his expression “God’s world,” to which “belonged everything superhuman—dazzling light, the darkness of the abyss, the cold impassivity of infinite space and time, and the uncanny grotesqueness of the irrational world: ‘God’ for me, was everything.” (1961, p. 72). For Carr, life was ongoing, a dynamic movement of becoming, not an end marked by accomplishments. It was governed by a pulsating continuity and a vibrating erotic interrelatedness with all existence. As when Jung lived in Bollingen, so Carr, too, lived in an uninterrupted *participation mystique*—the exterior world and the interior one are merged in an awareness of unity. Sky, trees and animals are not separated from the “I” and are mentally just as close as loved ones and ancestors; a mysterious bond unites “beneath” and “above”; all things are alive—as can be sensed in her later work (see page 1).



Figure 5 Emily Carr, Canadian, 1897-1982, *Indian Church*, 1929, oil on canvas, 108.6-68.9 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Bequest of Charles S. Band, Toronto, 1970 #2013AGO.

Carr was particularly aware of this primeval union. She seemed to have been able to navigate this union throughout her entire life—although, importantly, in her last few years she was able to embrace it with a fuller consciousness. Jung proposed five phases in the process of becoming an individual (see Stein, 1998). Briefly, the first phase, for all human life is shaped

by participation mystique—individual consciousness is merged with its surroundings, particularly with the mother. As humans develop, especially in Westernized cultures, there is a separating out of consciousness: the child projects in an autonomous psychic response, wherein unconscious material is transferred onto an object in such a way that this content appears to belong to that object. Enchantment or disgust with the object signals that projection is at play. In the third phase, projections are abstracted. They are withdrawn from human caregivers, for example, but usually are re-attached to abstract, loftier values and continued even into worship—of truths, gods, and ideologies. The person who has arrived in phase four, the “modern person,” according to Jung, is typically “secular” and “agnostic” (van den Berk, 2012, p. 40). This person can sometimes see through ideological or moral projections and try to eliminate them in order to follow her own rational ego. The problem is that the modern person does not know how to connect “metaphysical ideas with universal psychic events” (p. 40). These four phases are all part of ego development. In the fifth phase, the ego returns to its own unconscious roots and becomes conscious of its united relationship with others. The modern person must recognize that the source of all her projections is not outside herself, but her unconscious—that which lies within her (pp. 40-42). For Jung, most Western people begin in union with all things and through ego differentiation separate out. Later in life, only some people will return to a state of re-immersion with “her original, purely animal participation mystique” yet informed by greater consciousness, although fleeting glimpses of this union may be witnessed throughout life (p. 40).

Carr's journals and the biographies and documentaries on her life suggest that she stayed in close relation to the root matter of all things; she lived by an "instinctive animism" (Shadbolt, 1979, p. 142). She was of the earth, so it was natural for her to endow rocks and roots with human life, "humans with animal life, Nature with spirit life, or any other combination" (p. 142). She recognized the boundaries of her ego and the experience of the irrational "higher" forces that drive the psyche. Her reclusion and exclusion from society, regardless of how painful, allowed her to maintain a kind of porosity that enabled her to be in feeling, empathetic relation with Nature, an ability to access the "perennial rhizome beneath the earth" (Jung 1952/ 1956, para. xxiv). She did, of course, develop greater consciousness regarding the role of her ego in this process. However, it was as though, through "all the layers of training and conditioning, she had managed, like some educated primitive, to hang on to a vestige of primal spirit affinity with all the forms of creation [sic]" (Shadbolt, 1979, p. 142). As a whole, her late work suggests a more consciously aware connection between the conscious and the unconscious, reflecting the dialogue of her ego with the "other"—both her personal and the collective unconscious.

Works of art can evoke a numinous moment and many experience her later paintings in this way. As numinous, they invite projections by their viewers. The outer world of things—art—thus provides the material through which the unconscious can be activated. For Jung (1930/1978).

This re-immersion in the state of *participation mystique* is the secret of artistic creation and of the effect which great art has upon us, for at that level of experience it is no longer the weal or woe of the individual that counts, but the life of the collective. That is why every great work of art is objective and

impersonal, and yet profoundly moving. And that is also why the personal life of the artist is at most a help or a hindrance, but is never essential to his creative task. (para. 162)

Further, Jung agreed with Worringer, who was known for his study of modern art (theory on abstraction and empathy), that great works of art are created when the leading culture develops itself unilaterally:

Whenever conscious life becomes one-sided or adopts a false attitude, these images “instinctively” rise to the surface in dreams and in the visions of artists and seers to restore the psychic balance, whether of the individual or of the epoch. (Jung, 1930/1978, para. 160)

Such lopsidedness and its effects can be readily seen in the colonizing efforts across Canada in the early 1900s with their denial of other cultures and attempts at annihilation of First Nations peoples, belief systems, and ways of knowing. Central to Jungian thought, psychic energy seeks a dynamic equilibrium. The artist who can touch the psychic depths in which we all partake influences us in a visionary way. This vision reveals itself to our consciousness as a symbol—a symbol that connects consciousness and the unconscious while rooted in participation mystique and appears in our consciousness in aesthetic form.

“A new integration”

During her last decade (from 1934 on), Carr’s paintings possessed “a new integration” (Shadbolt, 1979, p. 137). In them she fused her early formal interests, a maturation from living through illness, isolation and poverty, her growing awareness of self and Nature, the diluted paint-on-paper method, and her particular brand of Christian philosophy. She had rejected Harris’ vague and lofty Theosophical beliefs, though not some of the concepts, including painterly ones

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that she had acquired through the years (Shadbolt, 1990). Now more than ever, her work was based on “intuition” (Davis, 1992, p. 15) or “an instinctive, immediate ‘seeing’” (Jung cited in van den Berk, 2012, p. 93), enabling her close access to images that emerged deep from within the collective unconscious (Jung, 1921/1990). From “down among dark and silence,” she instinctively allowed images to push through her onto paper. She was, thus, paradoxically, able to unite inner opposites in a distinctive “Emily Carr” fashion. As an example, the tree, a potent symbol—both personal and collective—for Carr, marked her relationship with Nature both outer and inner. Many of these tree paintings invoked the “spirit of slumberous, slow, erotic stirring and awakening, of things half-emerging” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 171), as illustrated in Figures 6 and 7.

Since childhood, Carr had avoided human relationship only to discover in the tree the erotic force of the human, passionate union. One can view the conjoined feminine and masculine energies here. For instance, the painting, *Red Cedar* (Figure 6), has the color of interior flesh, a red pulse at its core. The red cedar literally stands strong and singular, yet the background presences, yielding and communal, suggest a feminine relatedness. In this picture the low angle and lines in the tree suggests a phallic force beginning in the earth and vanishing into the mysterious dark above. In contrast, in *Wood Interior* (Figure 7), yellow, hazy, filtered rays are directed down through the tall growth, with low, lush, green underbrush. There is a sense of being submerged, a sense of standing hidden in womb-like curves of the forest’s embrace, surrounded by the rising phallic-like redwoods. Here there is an interplay of complementarities: horizontal and vertical, light and shadow, green and grey, sky and underlay, masculine and

feminine. In contrast to the forceful phallus of *Red Cedar*, the trees are slender, sinuous, more feminine. The gleam of the left foreground plays against the thicker dark trees at the right. The interplay between the thick male and thin female trees seems to offer the means to approach the distant radiance.



Figure 6 Emily Carr, *Red Cedar*, 1931, oil on canvas, 111.0-68.5 cm, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of Mrs. J. P. Fell, VAG 54.7. Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

It was Carr's experience of Nature as numinous that provided psychic energy for a personal and artistic transformation to unfold. More precisely, it was her relationship with Nature evident as symbols—at first sky, then sea and sky, then tree—that reflects her experience as a psychological one; no longer a religious quest that unfolds through thinking, worshipping, and reflecting upon a god outside oneself. One can discern this orientation during Carr's early years when surrounded by Christianity. At this time, she found in the First Nations totem poles a spirit that was portrayed and felt in the outer world, yet had emerged through the experience of the carver (his soul in relation to that of the tree). Then, she was painting poles and Nature that represented the beyond—her outer experience of what the carver captured, without any grounding in her own lived experience. As she psychologically matured and developed more supportive and caring relationships through conscious relating, the things that drew her close were trees. As she engaged her inner figures and with those in her widening world, the things that beckoned became more symbolically diverse, yet held the same feeling of mystery as the poles initially did.



Figure 7 Emily Carr, *Wood Interior*, 1932-1935, oil on canvas, 130.0-86.3 cm, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.5. Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery.

During this transition she was finally free “to express the whole range of experience that she [found] in [N]ature and in herself—the dark side still at times but also the exuberance, the freedom and openness, the joy” (Shadbolt, 1990, p.

167). The range of Nature from which she could now “choose” her subjects extended beyond trees and deep forest to second-growth forests, open fields, airy treetops, driftwood beaches, gravel pits, and logged-off hillsides. This fresh breadth of images was dictated by the new governing paradigm of her psyche and her work: “everything must be alive, nothing static” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 167). The word she used now most often to characterize this animating principle was “movement” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 167). She is now the “aware artist working out of more layers” of her psyche and experience (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 203). “She is totally in her art at this time, nothing essential in her psychic or emotional life held back” (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 203). Because the creative drive works like an unconscious autonomous process, it seized her. Emily Carr surrendered and stood under an unconscious “sacred obligation” (Jung, 1922/ 1978, para 115; van den Berk, 2012, p. 90).

She recorded in her journal, on 17 January 1936:

Over and over one must ask oneself the question, “What do I want to express? What is the thought behind the saying? What is my ideal, what [is] my objective? What? Why? Why? What?” The subject means little. The arrangement, the design, color, shape, depth, light, space, mood, movement, balance, not one or all of these fills the bill. There is something additional, a breath that draws your breath into its breathing, a heartbeat that pounds on yours, a recognition of the oneness of all things. (cited in Davis, 1992, p. 16)

In the last few lines, Carr suggests that little by little, people can unite the scattered worlds of love, thought, feeling and action into one. Here there is commitment to and certainty in a larger, more purposeful life, a dedication to the Whole that transcends yet remains rooted in the earth, in the personal. In the end, Carr lived this—spending summers in the Elephant (her painting caravan),

with her animals (Susie, her pet rat, Woo, her Javanese monkey, dogs, cats and bullfinches) and favorite books—“loving everything terrifically”—and painting (Riley, n. d., part 2). She had ceased to analyze and surrendered herself to her own newly liberated soul.

The artist as a “creator and educator”

Carr suffered through her personal crisis, un-medicated and un-analyzed (in a Jungian sense). Indeed, an analysis might have thwarted this very process of living through suffering and its inherent insights and discoveries. Like Jung, she found a path within herself and charted its unfolding through art and journaling. Both were powerfully influenced by the wisdom of the collective unconscious and suffered through their integration of opposites while creating outer expressions of their inner movements. As Jung poignantly describes, and as Carr would attest,

the creative urge is often so imperious that it battens on [artists’] humanity and yokes everything to the service of the work, even at the cost of health and ordinary human happiness. The unborn work in the psyche of the artist is a force of nature that achieves its end either with tyrannical might or with the subtle cunning of nature herself, quite regardless of the personal fate of the [person] who is its vehicle. The creative urge lives and grows in him like a tree in the earth from which it draws its nourishment. We would do well, therefore, to think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche. (1966/1978, para. 115)

Particularly in times of crisis, for artists and those who partake of it in various mediums, art matters both personally and collectively. It has prophetic force—as do the intuitive types who attend it, even when the intuitiveness of an artistic

creative process has a strong estranging character, situating the artist outside of society and often even outside of herself. Artistic images, despite their cost of emergence to the artist, are indispensable to society; they are “indispensable to . . . the psychic life of a people” (Jung, 1921/1990, para. 658). These images are potentialities of ideas from which new sources of energy and consciousness might emerge. They indicate what the spirit of that age most needs. “The artist,” Jung (1921/1990) wrote, “is . . . a *creator* and *educator*, for [her] works have the value of symbols that adumbrate lines of future development” (para. 720).

Therein lies the social significance of art: it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking. The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present. The artist seizes on this image, and in raising it from the deepest unconscious [she] brings it into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of contemporaries according to their powers. (Jung, 1922/1978, para. 130)

From this point of view, as artist, creator, and educator—two entries from Emily Carr’s Journals to close. First a dream, dated 23 June 1934:

Dream. The sky and the earth are one. The light pours down, is lapped up by the greatest sea and absorbed by the receptive earth. All runs through, all the same to express the oneness and allness. Moving, living, being together, to surround everything with atmosphere, to show the direction of its thought and growth, to show that thing coming and going, breathing through the object’s life, to become a part of it yourself and feel its life and growth as your own life and growth, and the sunshine and the night passing though you. . . . (Crean, 2003, p. 78)

Second, a note to Nature, the Great Mother, herself:

Dear Mother Earth, I think I have always belonged to you. I have loved from babyhood to sit close to you in my sorrows; loved the look of you and the smell of

you and the feel of you and when I die, I should like to be in you the leaves of grass against my flesh and you covering me up. (1966; Riley, n. d., part 2)

Notes

1. Emily also quit school at age 15. This is noteworthy because she won the Governor General's Award for non-fiction for *Klee Wyck* in 1942, just in time for her 70th birthday.
2. Emily was in London for five and a half years. Most of her stay was plagued by physical ailments that interrupted her work. She spent two years with tuberculosis, confined to a bed in a Suffolk sanatorium. She experienced great depression and gained much weight as they force-fed her. She returned to Victoria in mid-October 1904.
3. All of the figures in this article (in the IJJS version) are available in color in the online version at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19409052.2013.828318>.
4. Jung presented on his complex theory at the Technical School of Advanced Education in Zurich, on 5 May 1934. He said: "Where the reality of the complexes begins the freedom of the ego comes to an end, for complexes are psychic agents whose deepest nature is still unfathomed. For they are part of something that directly affects all that is uncontrolled in man—the numinosum, to use an apt expression of Rudolf Otto" (Jung, 1934/1960, para. 104). Otto's vision of this experience influenced Jung throughout his entire life. The "numinous," Jung thought, was not only a source of religion, but also of sexuality, science, and art.
5. Besides Lawren Harris and other members of the Group of Seven, modern painter Mark Tobey also became a friend and supporter of her work.

6. While her initial hope of an intimate relationship with Lawren Harris and later Ira Dilworth were not reciprocated, what did unfold with each man was a deep friendship, imbued with considerable care and interest. Carr also became very fond of Harris' second wife, Bess (Housser), one of her few female friends. Her earliest loves were the strongest—her brother Dick (Richard), who died of tuberculosis at age 23; her mother; her (unnamed) first and only erotic love; and, of great note, Sophie Frank (a North Vancouver Squamish woman who was a lifelong friend).

7. For instance, the undervalued pieces of potential development that were earlier separated from consciousness and repressed at earlier stages of individuation (so that one's ego could grow and enter into relation to the world of reality in an adaptive way), now come back for integration. For example, the lack of recognition or interest by Emily's sisters bothered her immensely, but she learned to support herself through art and appreciate it through others who were not family. The lack of acceptance and recognition by family and community were evident later at her funeral, with only 50 people in attendance. She died 2 March, 1945 at 73 years of age.

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