

Who Is Revealing/Veiling What to/from Whom?

In the aesthetic experience we are captured by the image; we are dropped inside the image where we are taken beyond the bounds of our everyday experience into a place where we are both fully present and yet strangely not ourselves. The aesthetic experience takes us out of time where there is a suspension of ego that allows us to experience something new, something beyond ourselves. What we are feeling, in fact, is the presence of the archetypal. The archetypal is felt in its effect on us, and in the form that it takes: the archetypal image. The archetype is, as described by C.G. Jung, “instinct in consciousness”.

Crossing the border between the conscious and unconscious into this “instinct in consciousness”, takes us into the mythic realm where there is always an aspect of the unknown present. This ‘unknown’ is the piece of the unconscious asking, in a sense, to be engaged. We are thirsty for this piece, this knowledge, this symbol making capacity of creativity, and the aesthetic experience offers itself up for us to have access to this piece of the unconscious, this archetypal energy. This is the ‘aha’ feeling the aesthetic experience creates through the meeting of the conscious and unconscious. The “I get it” feeling that is so uplifting and full of insight and emotion. However, before this meeting can occur we must create space for it, invite it, as it has its own time in coming. It cannot be coerced by the conscious mind, and at the same time, needs the skills of the conscious mind to give it shape, form, an image to be received by.

Through this ‘inviting’, this creating space and giving form, we become conscious of what was previously unconscious. We bring known and unknown together in a creative dynamic that allows us to recognize a pattern we could not perceive before. In art making we can both witness and experience this process as it becomes visible, concrete. Through the attending and attention this kind of engagement requires, a heightened sense of consciousness and emotion is created in the form of the aesthetic experience.

The archetypal is the emotional experience of perception. Oddly enough, however, it is necessary that we step outside our usual way of being in order to engage the archetypal, as we do not have an aesthetic experience in just any day to day emotional

state. Remember that it is through the dynamic of the **conscious** and the **unconscious** coming together that we have that ‘aha’, that lifting out of self, that uplifting feeling the aesthetic experience offers so beautifully. In the art making process we are **consciously** deciding to enter the world of image, the imaginal, the **unconscious** and live by the rules of the moment. The art invites the unknown to be present. When we do this I believe we are entering the deepest form of learning. When we do this we step into the uncanny and the realm of myth and know ourselves as if for the first time and yet, as always.

Art as invitation to the unknown, where the unknown is called into ‘play’, we enter the creation of symbolism and integrate a new level of consciousness into everyday life. We make space for the imaginal – a world not always obvious to us even though it is central to our being, our psychic being. It is the realm of image between sense and intellect where the mythic resides. Direct awareness of the imaginal, of the mythic is sensed through the imagination. Perceived by the function of the imagination it affords a different experience, an aesthetic that captures meaning beyond the intellectual.

The imaginal holds the archetypal through its capacity to offer image. The archetypal cannot be perceived. Only the archetypal image can be seen. So without image the archetypal cannot be apprehended. And conversely, without the archetypal, the image does not strike a chord. It does not resonate. Art is an entranceway to the imaginal where the archetypal can be experienced through the archetypal image. The art as entranceway to the imaginal takes us into the symbolic function of inner meaning.

The picture is a spontaneous emergence from the imaginal, the mythic, the archetypal (McNiff). It is living in the imagination. We are living in the imagination rather than the imagination living in us. We are part of the imaginal rather than it being a part of us. It is vast, beyond dimension so that we may wander within it and bump into other aspects of it other than ourselves. In this realm, this dimension, things are veiled, hidden, and yet things are also strangely revealed to us, as in the ‘aha’ moment when suddenly something makes sense in a way it never could before.



So when we are making art, I wonder who in fact is making it, who is revealing or veiling what to/from whom?

I believe our personal aesthetic plays an important part here in its connection to who/what is making the art (revealing/hiding, known/unknown, visible/invisible); how the personal aesthetic is operating beneath the conscious volition of the conscious mind. The personal aesthetic is the system that is determining the nature of the images created, as well as the meaning made from these images. The emphasis here would therefore be more about allowing one's aesthetic to express itself vs. creating an aesthetic; Letting the personal aesthetic reveal itself through the creative process – inviting the unknown to be present – guiding the individual, or group, community, culture etc. in the direction the aesthetic intrinsically knows. This would allow the symbolic function of meaning making to connect the underlying operating system of the aesthetic (as yet unknown) with the conscious (known) aspect of the experience.

I have been wanting to find a language to speak about this – Wittgenstein: meaning of a word is its use in a language, [meaning of an image is its use in a myth,

personal or collective], and have found that my first love, art, in partnership with the discourse of Archetypal Psychology and Mythology, allows me - as James Hillman has proposed the real truth to be - to live in my imagination vs. living in myself. In this manner I can enter that vaster field of experience and play, knowing that the mind is really in the imagination rather than the imagination being in the mind (Hillman). Using this “method of the imagination” (Hillman), I see image not as what I see, but as the way I see. Image as a way of seeing (Hillman). Seeing through is the activity of the mythic sensibility and creative process.

In this uncanny fashion, image has the capacity to reflect – make conscious - as well as to offer identification with, the archetypal. This combination – reflection and identification – objective and subjective viewpoints constitutes Hillman’s ‘seeing through’. It allows one to be safe within the presence of an archetypal energy because it offers experiencing and understanding at a symbolic level, which always includes a piece of the unknown **and** the familiar. Double resonance. This offers a hermetic as well as a hermeneutic engagement of image/experience that completes the cycle of the creative process in the joining of the polarities: conscious/unconscious, known/unknown, image/interpretation, expression/impression, receiving/creating etc. Jung called this joining of the opposites **individuation** and the energy it creates, the **transcendent function**.

To see the revelation of personal and collective themes - the collective being archetypal - we can look to mythological motifs as they present sets of archetypes in action i.e. hero on the heroic journey, creation myths. The more we make and look at art, the more we begin to recognize our own mythic themes. By becoming aware of the recurrence of certain motifs, what is unconscious is revealed, unveiled to us by our own images. When we then also begin to see image as language, and words as images, we understand that this perspective can offer us much. We develop a deep capacity for play, playing with language as way of coaxing the unknown to join in a dance with the known, wedding the conscious and unconscious into wholeness.

From the play of the art making we see the form an archetype takes in image. Then the archetype/image contemplates us as we contemplate it. And it is then that we enter into dialogue, an I/thou vs. me/it relationship (Wilber) - between the conscious and

unconscious, between the known and the unknown, and in this process we are symbol making. We are engaged in the symbolic process of inner meaning, allowing the meaning that has always been present, to enter us through the unknown.

The symbolic is not literal or historic. It is mythic. What archetypal presences are revealing themselves in the image is the question. And how we can dialogue with these archetypal presences through the image, is the action. Contemplation – Action.

References

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