



PERMEABILITY

***“the degree to which a solid allows the passage of fluid
through it.”***

Text: Margot McLean and James Hillman

Artwork: Margot McLean

Margot McLean:

Milkweed

While I stood here, in the open, lost in myself,
I must have looked a long time
Down the corn rows, beyond grass,
The small house,
White walls, animals lumbering toward the barn.
I look down now. It is all changed.
Whatever it was I lost, whatever I wept for
Was a wild, gentle thing, the small dark eyes
Loving me in secret.
It is here. At a touch of my hand,
The air fills with delicate creatures
From the other world.

James Wright



Permeability is a state of being porous so that images may alight and find a resting place, and set off elaborations. These happen not necessarily in the

studio when concentrating on the work. They may even be impeded there. Similarly, elaborations of a dream into insights and recollections and interpretations do not necessarily happen in the analytic session but require a permeability throughout the day after the session and the days after the session, here, there, or anywhere, and not with the analyst but with anyone.

Artists work in an imagistic space. A space that has no beginning, no end, no middle. When is an artwork finished? When is a dream finished? The image seems to want to go on. Cézanne said a painting is complete at every stage of the work even if it is never finished.



James Hillman:

INCURSIONS

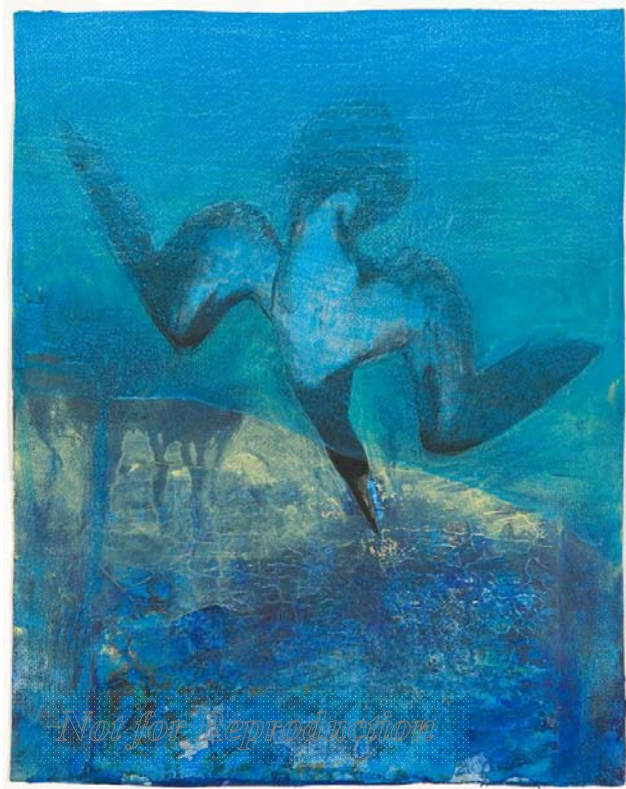
I am concerned, beyond art-making, with the psychology of the incoming, which the San Francisco poet Robert Duncan called the *invenio*, Catholicism calls the Annunciation—the descent of logos into physical matter, the all-too-solid flesh. I am concerned less with what comes in than with the incurring, the fact of human permeability, the ordinary, quotidian and ubiquitous fact of visionary, ideational, auditory, symptomatic, and personified incursions.

Why can fantasy-thinking not be shut out?

The composer, the painter, the writer are not special human exceptions. They are the subtle more vulnerable examples—not of “weak ego,” but of the essential nature of the human mind, that it is membranous, osmotic, susceptible, suggestible, seducible, seditious, hysterical.

If so, then directed thinking’s ego is not the center of consciousness. Rather, this “ego-gesture” lives in the Zuyder Zee, below sea level among sandbags, thumbless against the holes in the dikes. “Close the door, they’re coming thru’ the window. Close the window, they’re coming thru’ the door.”

How did Jung put it? The Psyche is not in you; you are in the psyche.





BIRDS

I walked out the back door, pulled it shut and headed to my studio. The birds were extremely loud forcing me to look up to see what was wrong. I saw nothing

unusual and didn't break my pace walking across the driveway. BUT, as I kept heading in that very determined forward direction, I wondered to myself why was I thinking something was wrong. Perhaps something was very right. Or just was what it was. In this split second of thought, in the very short distance from house to studio, I was taken up, walked up, so to speak, to those yackety birds and then down again towards my studio. I hardly broke my pace. I was carrying a lot of "intentions," things I wanted to do, finish, ideas I thought I had better get a start on, and even worse, I was already late. Once inside and closing the door the birds sounded even louder. What in the hell was going on up there? I was so utterly distracted by their raucousness, I had to go back out. There they were—medium sized crows some sitting and others jumping from branch to branch yacking away. I stood in the driveway for a long time and watched them until the last one, two, and three flew off. It was hard for me to go back inside—very similar to the feeling one has when not wanting to wake out of a dream.







TWO KINDS OF THINKING

In the beginning Jung declared two kinds of thinking, directed and dereistic or fantasy, one above and one below. These two kinds of thinking open the great

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book, *Symbols of Transformation* which explores the ways of the second, fantasy kind, or the *Psychology of the Unconscious* as that great book was first titled in the English translation by Beatrice Hinkle in 1916.

Only later in the revised version of 1952, did the above and below become the ego and the unconscious, concepts latched onto and clutched still by Jungian orthodoxy. Conventionalists. The word “ego” however, does not show up in the Hinkle index, and is inserted into the edition we study in the *Collected Works*, as part of Jung’s much later expanded revisions.

Two kinds of thinking, directed and dereistic, frame our psychological cosmology. They belong to our creation myth, and they are given testimonial witness by Jung in his autobiography as Personality Number One and Number Two. How does fantasy thinking proceed, what is it like? William James—upon whom Jung here relies (CW5: para 18)—describes it as “trains of images,” “spontaneous,” “irresponsible,” “accidental,” and composed of “empirical concretes.”





Trains of images that are empirical concretes. The train crosses over into the terrain of Bachelard's material imagination. The stuff of things; the sensate, the tactile, the colored, noise and smell, and strings of words. The stuff of the arts: "empirical concretes."

"Aesthetics is for the artist as ornithology is for the birds."
Barnett Newman.



EMPIRICAL CONCRETES.

The stuff of the arts. But not just anything colored, anything soft and sensuous, or smelly, allows for the imagination to materialize. Because: Bachelard says these concretes must themselves have a fundamental and lasting *ambivalence*.



Compare: Jung's bipolarity of the archetype.

Compare: Freud's "Antithetical Sense of Primal Words" (1910).

This fundamental ambivalence of the material itself is conceived by aesthetic theory as the *sublime* aspect of beauty. Let me explain: "Singleness of meaning is only superficial imagination," says Bachelard. Material that only is what it is, uncomplicated, unambiguous yields only the sentimental and the pretty. The

concrete must offer depth to be truly imaginative and this depth is conceived in the theory of the sublime as dark, vast, boundless, awe-full, terror-arousing, etc.

The incredible beauty of Hades and Persephone in the studio, unintended but imported by the concrete, the empirical materials themselves—their composite mystery. Even a simple tube of bought paint presents an awe-full intensity of possible depths. Wherever incurring: as the objet trouve, the bird's wing, bit of shell, or bark, pebble, reed, clawfoot, old newspaper, rag, button, downward descending drip, or invasive overvalued word, or sudden pang or pain.....



“In art there is only one thing that counts; the thing you can't explain.”

Georges Braque, *Notebooks* (1917-47)



Hades and Persephone, their complexity, their ambivalence; their horror in the beauty. Thanatos inside all empirical concretes; death inside all things. Artist as thanatologist, psychopompos.





One of Proust's characters, the writer Bergotte, expires in front of a Vermeer.

"The circumstances of his death were as follows. . .Bergotte ate a few potatoes, left the house, and went to the exhibition. At the first few steps he had to climb,

he was overcome by an attack of dizziness. He walked past several pictures and . . . at last he came to the Vermeer which he remembered as more striking, more different from anything else he knew, but in which he noticed for the first time some small figure in blue, that the sand was pink, and, finally, the precious substance of the tiny patch of yellow wall. 'That's how I ought to have written,' he said. 'My last books are too dry, I ought to have gone over them with a few layers of colour, made my language precious in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall.' Meanwhile he was not unconscious of the gravity of his condition. In a celestial pair of scales there appeared to him, weighing down one of the pans, his own life, while the other contained the little patch of wall so beautifully painted in yellow. He felt that he had rashly sacrificed the former for the latter. He repeated to himself; 'Little patch of yellow wall, with a sloping roof, little patch of yellow wall.' Meanwhile he sank down on to a circular settee; whereupon he suddenly ceased to think that his life was in jeopardy and, reverting to his natural optimism, told himself: 'It's nothing, merely a touch of indigestion from those potatoes, which were under-cooked.' A fresh attack struck him down; he rolled from the settee to



the floor, as visitors and attendants came hurrying to his assistance. He was dead."

Don't come to me with the entire truth.
Don't bring the ocean if I feel thirsty
nor heaven if I ask for light;
But bring a hint, some dew, a particle,
as birds carry only drops away from water,
and the wind a grain of salt.

Olav H. Hauge (translation Robert Bly)



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Each stone its shape
Each shape its weight
Each weight its value
In my garden as I dig them up for Spring planting,
and I say, lifting one at a time,
There is joy here
In being able to handle
so many meaningful
differences.

David Ignatow



THE AVIARY

Socrates, in Plato's *Theatetus* (197 ce), says the mind is "like a man who has caught some wild birds and keeps them in an aviary he has made for them at

home. In a sense, of course, we might say he 'has' them all the time inasmuch as he possesses them. . . . But in another sense he 'has' none of them, though he has got control of them, now that he has made them captive in an enclosure of his own. . . . So now let us suppose that every mind contains a kind of aviary stocked with birds of every sort, some in flocks apart from the rest, some in small groups, and some solitary flying in any direction.”



BAG LADY

I have a large, invisible sack I carry with me at all times. It's full of miscellaneous folders and envelopes where I try to keep "things" in order. It is never always full and at the same time, it is hardly ever empty. Sometimes the "things" get lost inside but I try not to worry about it too much. Images, thoughts, impressions, questions, insights, voices, ideas, emotions, reactions are flying past all the time. I just have to wait long enough for one to land. And, everything that lands goes

into the sack as I don't feel it's a good idea to make a hasty decision as to whether or not, whatever it is, is worth keeping. I've made mistakes—have gotten rid of “things,” wishing I hadn't. But that's the way these “things” operate. Their movement is mysterious—fooling you whenever they can—shapeshifting into things they are not, making you work to find out what they are.

I can't say I really understand—but I do somehow comprehend. I actually resist trying to make sense of these things because, again, I have no idea what



“making sense” means. And as we all know, the will has its own distinct tendency to go beyond its own borders, making it very difficult for anything else to participate. The will becomes blind to everything but what serves its ultimate goal. It can corrupt itself easily.

CHALLENGE

“By the turn of the century—1900—nothing, absolutely nothing, was on certain ground; everything was being challenged; this is the main fact of our lives.” Alfred North Whitehead.

Psychoanalysis met the challenge of uncertainty by constructing theories, schools, methods of practice, certification, and protective authorization by the state. Psychoanalysis built a strong box in which

the fearful toxic effects of uncertainty—“the age of anxiety” as Auden named it—could be safely held. By renaming uncertainty “the unconscious” psychoanalysis incorporated the challenge within its own system, and depotentiated the autonomous, unpredictable, spontaneity of uncertainty.

The nomenclature, diagnostics, codes and rules wall-off the alien immigrants who are translated, required to express themselves in the hosts’ language, and so they no longer threaten the status quo. The DSM—a textbook from homeland security.

The artist, however is left exposed and actually lives “this main fact of our lives” (Whitehead’s phrase) unprotected. Hence, the artist represents the never-ending challenge of uncertainty. Artist: emissary of the strange, the alien. The artist is an *angelos* of anxiety, the fearful, while the analyst has been instructed in anxiety-allaying techniques, knows re-framing, providing a “safe container” with “unconditional positive regard.”



VULTURES: THE TRUE ENVIRONMENTALISTS

Just the word *VULTURE* sets off fear. They feed on the dead. It is precisely this appetite for the dead and what they do with it that interests me. They consume the rotten, decaying, often disease-ridden, and they poop out clean biodegradable stuff that composts. Without their amazing enzyme system we would be in danger. But—aren't we already in danger? Vultures entered my life perhaps because of the abundance of deadness in our political leaders, in our regard for the environment, in the education of our people, in the actual dead of war.

The sad trouble is: the vultures are dying—poisoned—primarily in Asia—by the use of the anti-inflammatory drug, diclofenac, given to cattle from which the vultures feed.



AGENCY

What about agency? Who, after all, is the maker in art-making? Someone holds the mallet, the chisel, the brush, the camera, the spray can. Yes, indeed, that someone is a hand. Hands are the agent in response to the empirical concrete. The hands sometimes do try to take orders from the personality above, Number One; then, of a sudden, they find themselves being pushed around by the material. Off they go. A caprice.

A story: a monkey came out of the sack one day—a baby monkey. A sad baby monkey, I thought. “This is not a happy situation here and the darkness is evident.” I worked a very long time, a VERY LONG time on this painting—squeezed black paint mixed with powdered charcoal and deep blue pigments—over and over, again and again. My intention had been set, was determined, vision clear. The monkey rebelled. Before I obliterated the poor thing that I was actually very fond of, my hand went for the white gesso. I don’t remember how it happened—the monkey calmed down—I calmed down and the painting came to a conclusion.



When painting, you think your way through by “doing” your way through.

AGENCY, con’t.

May we imagine psychoanalysis as a hand-work, as alchemy was? Why not imagine ourselves as butchers and bakers, weavers and potters, as firemen even, containing a blaze. “Practicing” applies as well to musicians who sit on a chair for hours at a time working their trade much as we do. Though our analytical hands are sheerly metaphorical, nonetheless, it is a handwork in the material. Like alchemy.

As James Wright said in the opening poem: “It is here. At a touch of my hand,
The air fills with delicate creatures from the other world.”

The eye and the mind engage the concrete by following the hand, as the pianist says, “my hands follow the music.” By analogous extension—the dancer’s foot, the poet’s ear and heartbeat and breathing; the actual feel and flow of the empirical concrete.

The agent is matter (philosophically, since Aristotle, wrongly conceived as utterly passive). Hence Bachelard’s corrective volumes on the *agency* of elemental matter. The agent is matter(—but not desiring to escape as a bottled up spirit) instead, the liquidity of Mercurius enjoying the heavy, uncertain idiosyncrasies of the metal.

Human control, says Jung about agency, is not able “to separate that unruly and evasive Mercurius from the autonomy of matter” (CW 13: 286).

Sometimes, the hands grab the matter by the throat and try to force it to obey. Rather than agency as the human will, its Willfulness; more the Shakespearean feeling of service, “willingly, my liege,” “willingly, your humble servant.”

Agency: “Nature fights nature,” say the alchemists, but then they say “nature conquers nature.” But alchemy leaves uncertain which nature conquers, does not say who finally submits, willingly.





THE IMAGE

Mikel Dufrenne says, to experience a painting in order to learn its lesson, receive its gift, one must inhabit its world. This experiencing is instructive precisely in the

sense that after entering the image, after experiencing its embrace, the seer experiences the real more deeply, sees what was previously “invisible,” feels what was previously “inaccessible.” In this way “aesthetic experience tends to correct the deficiency inherent to perception.”

An artist friend emailed me after a studio visit to say she has been seeing crows very differently at her house upstate since her visit.

In this way “aesthetic experience tends to correct the deficiency inherent to perception.”



DEAR ANNA FREUD,

I remember watching and hearing you lecture 50 years ago—lovely, frail, poised. Yet, your book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* my goodness! Such political, military language! Clausewitz, Wolfowitz.

(p. 6) ego and id as “two neighboring powers”; impulses as “intruders” “forcing their way”

(p. 7) “hostile incursions”; “inroads” (p. 9)

(p. 8) “All the defensive measures of the ego . . . are carried out silently and invisibly.”

(p.8) “The ego . . . counter-attacks . . . to put the [intruders] permanently out of action by means of appropriate defense measures.”

May we suggest re-titling your important book by shifting the “and” to “is” *“The Ego is a Mechanism of Defense Against Permeability.*

“Militarism” is that what the idea of ego does to us?



FLAMINGOS

Years ago, a friend gave me two white plastic flamingos wearing Santa Hats—you know, the kind you stick in your lawn (she was from Southern California).

Well, these flamingos appeared one day, as I opened the shed to get a shovel needed to bury a chicken that had just died. There they were, lying on top of a pile of junk. As I began digging, I thought about my friend who gave me the flamingos as she had just died the week before and I was with her when she took her last breath. I was never attracted to the idea of painting flamingos simply because of their appropriation by kitsch. Like dolphins, they are difficult subjects. But something happened. The plastic flamingos started moving. Into my studio they came.







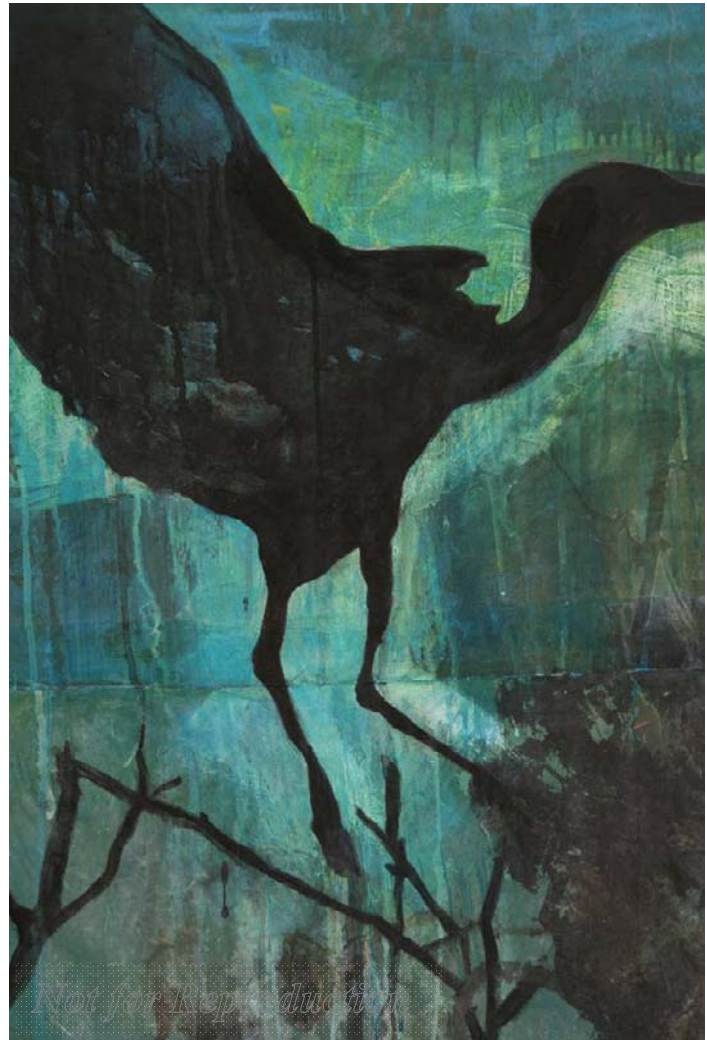
LIQUIDIFICATION

“Perform no operation until all has become water.” The *solutio* in alchemy. So, what has to dissolve?

Coagulated structures, attachments, habits of mind and feeling, cages. Shall we say “adaptations that work,” for which the shorthand, “ego.” Jung spoke of directed thinking as an effort, tiring. Freud said maintaining repression uses energy.

Then what is the liquid that permeates and effects the solution? What happens, Jung asks (CW 5: para 18), when we no longer direct our Thinking? Well, we no

longer compel our mind along a definite track, but let its contents, he writes,
“float, sink or rise according to their specific gravity.”



“For my part I want to lose myself in nature and grow again with her, like her . . .
in a patch of green, my entire brain will flow with a sap-like tide of the tree . . .
The immensity and torrent of the world, in a tiny inch of water.”

Cezanne

And, when Jung discusses origins of language he turns to the sound of flowing water (CW 5, para 12).



Bachelard: “Liquidity is in the very desire of language.” “Language needs to flow”” Logorhea! Bachelard (188) “The great domain for studying the imagination is not painting; it is literature, the word, the sentence . . .How dominant matter becomes! What a great master the stream is!”



Permeability: inflow,
ongoing streaming.
Joyce's everongoing
Wake. The River Liffey's
last line of *Finnegan*: "I
sink. . .humbly, dumbly,
only to washup . . . We

pass through grass behush the bush. . .Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming,
far! End here. Us then. Finn, again. . .mememormee. . .A way a lone a last a
loved a long the. . ."

Speech without punctuation; beware
fricatives, labials. The vowels of
permeability: Ah. Oh. Eee. "Liquidity
is the principle of language," says
Bachelard, "language must be filled with
water."

"Everything in the Universe is an echo"
says Bachelard "And birds," he says "are
the first creators of sound." From their
sudden permeance, we learned poetry.
"A gull," says the river Liffey, "Gulls. Far



calls.” Bachelard: “Imagination is a sound-effects man; it must amplify or soften.” That is the agency, that is the willing work: tuning in, turning up, dying down. “Amplify or soften.”

All things flow: *Panta Rhei*: The oldest insight of Western philosophy.



PERMEABILITY, AGAIN

The deepest divide, the biggest bulwark blocking permeability is that wall between the living and the dead. The absolute either/or behind, below, within all

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our Western opposites: the living are positively not dead, and the dead are positively not living. *Tertium non datur.*

Suppose we were to shift our geographic privileging of Greece, its delight in sunlight, its Apollo. Shift from Descartes clear distinctions opposed to Dionysian confusions and opposed to Hades indiscernible silent shades. Shift to the geography of China, Korea, Japan—the coming in and going out of images. Is the mountain emerging from the fog or receding into it? Near and Far, both.

Suppose we imagine the dead are partly living and the living are partly dead, inhabitants of both all the time, essentially. Receding and emerging always.

Does this account for the romantic fantasy of the artist as courting death. Perhaps, in fact, the artist courts death, must court death. So that his/her living is a living death. Courts death with romanticized “self-destructive tendencies”; illness, drugs, drink, risk and folly. A vibrant life among shades.

So that someone with softened or amplified permeability—the artist say— is a companion of the dead and is more with the dead than those who live



only on this side of the wall, walled off, merely living—the denial of death.

Artist. Resident of bothville.



ANTHROPOS

Recovering Jung's million-year old ancestor.

Stanley Diamond writes: indigenous peoples and artists “focus on the singularity of the object to such a degree that everything seems at once marvelous, strange, familiar and unexpected . . . the [phenomenon] has become incandescent. He is perpetually recovering his primitivism” (Cheetham; Diamond 1974, p.196).

Paul Radin writes: Not all reality resides in our external perception of it. The reality of a [phenomenon or] object is proved by . . . internal effects. The primitive is thus literally living in a blaze of reality.”

“We do not look, we shall never look enough, never carefully enough, never passionately enough.”

Colette

Oscar Wilde: “Looking at something is not seeing it, and seeing it is seeing its beauty.”

