

# **THE ARTIST AS A VISIONARY**

**A CONSIDERATION OF JACKSON POLLOCK, JOSEPH BEUYS AND  
JACKSON HLUNGWANI AS VISIONARY ARTISTS.**

**BY  
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## **DECLARATION**

Except where the contrary is acknowledged, this dissertation is the original work of the candidate. It has not been, nor is submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Michelle Coetzee  
Pietermaritzburg 1996

## **ABSTRACT**

This study is a consideration of the notion of the artist as a visionary. This perception of the artist is explored in relation to the work and ideas of three twentieth century artists; the American painter Jackson Pollock (1912-1952), the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1983) and the South African artist Jackson Hlungwani (1918 - ). The work and ideas of these artists is discussed primarily in terms of the similarities and differences between their art and ideas and those encountered in traditional shamanism and the visionary aspects of Romantic and Gothic art and culture as represented by the work and ideas of eighteenth century English poet and painter William Blake (1757-1827) .

Each of the twentieth century artists who are considered represents a different strain of the idea of the artist as a visionary. Pollock is discussed in terms of his implicit identification with the artist-shaman. This identification is revealed by the influence Jung's writings and Native American (Indian) art and culture had on his work. Beuys is considered in relation to his explicit adoption of a shaman-like persona. Hlungwani is a practising healer in a traditional community whose art explores an apocalyptic vision of redemption.

The comparisons between the artists under investigation and the visionary aspects of traditional shamanism and Gothic and Romantic culture entail an analysis of pictorial elements, subject matter and content in the work of these artists. The intention was to explore those properties in the work and ideas of these artists which correspond to the notion of the artist as a visionary.

## **PREFACE**

The words 'traditional' and 'tribal' have been used in the dissertation not without awareness of the problems involved in the use of these terms. They were used to avoid clumsiness as no suitable alternatives could be found and any derogatory associations towards pre-capitalist and ancient societies were not intended. The term 'primitive' also occurs in the study. Although this is a 'loaded' term it has been used only as it applies to specific primitivist ideas expressed by various critics.

Although the use of 'man' and 'man's' (when used to refer to humanity as a whole) is considered by some feminists to be sexist, these words are used because they tend to be the terms used by the artists and authors discussed in the text.

Illustrations tend to appear approximately a page after each one is first mentioned. The illustrations are in the form of photostatic copies. These serve as a reminder of the actual image. A list containing references to a photographic copy of each image can be found at the end of the dissertation.



## **CONTENTS**

<b>1. Introduction:</b>	<b>1. The Artist as a Visionary: Traditional Shamanism .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>2. The Twentieth Century Artist as a Visionary.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. William Blake: Visionary and artist.....</b>		<b>19</b>
<b>3. Jackson Pollock: Artist-Shaman?.....</b>		<b>32</b>
<b>4. Joseph Beuys: The Artist As a Visionary .....</b>		<b>59</b>
<b>5. Jackson Hlungwani: 'Wounded Healer' .....</b>		<b>84</b>
<b>6. Conclusion.....</b>		<b>107</b>
<b>List of illustrations.....</b>		<b>112</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>		<b>117</b>

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1. THE ARTIST AS A VISIONARY: TRADITIONAL SHAMANISM.**

Michael Tucker, in his study Dreaming with open eyes: The shamanic spirit in twentieth century art and culture (Tucker 1991: 1), proposes that central “to the perception of the artist as a suffering visionary ... lies the archetypal, essential idea of the artist as seer and healer - as shaman”. Contemporary conceptions of the artist as a visionary are thus integrally related to the prehistoric and ‘tribal’ traditions of shamanism. In order to investigate contemporary conceptions of the artist as a visionary as evident in the work and ideas of Jackson Pollock (1912-1952), Joseph Beuys (1921-1983) Jackson Hlungwani (1918 - ) it is thus necessary to investigate shamanism.

In the traditional sense of the word, shamans are healers, mystics, priests and artists. The term ‘shamanism’ is sometimes associated with terms such as “witch-doctor”, “medicine-man/woman” and “magician” or “sorcerer” (Vitebsky 1995: 6). Shamanism is usually identified with ancient and ‘tribal’ cultures.

Central to the role of the shaman as artist and healer is the ability to transcend the normal boundaries of reality. It is believed that through transcendence the shaman enters into a realm of visionary knowledge and power. This ability allows the shaman to engage the creative imagination and explore the unconscious depths of the psyche.

By bringing into consciousness previously unknown imagery and experiences, the shaman is able to rediscover a sense of a mythical original unity that existed before the creation of the material world. It is this process that is seen as having potentially healing qualities, as it is believed to bring the community closer to psychological integration.

While recent studies tend to emphasise the healing side of shamanism, it is worth noting with Piers Vitebsky that this is only one aspect of shamanism (Vitebsky 1995: 11). For the purpose of this dissertation, however, the focus will be on the shaman as a visionary artist and healer.

The role of the shaman varies in importance from culture to culture. There is also no formal doctrine or religion of shamanism. Nonetheless, there are remarkable similarities between shamanic ideas and practices all over the world (Halifax 1982: 5; Vitebsky 1995: 10), the most significant parallel being the ability to transcend the normal boundaries of reality. Joan Halifax, in her study Shaman: The wounded healer, elaborates: “An awakening to other orders of reality, the experience of ecstasy and an opening of visionary realms form the essence of the shamanic mission” (Halifax 1982: 5). Creative processes are vital in shamanic activities for inducing transcendence and for recording visionary experiences. It is these aspects of shamanism, which are central to the association of shamanism with the idea of the artist as a visionary (Tucker 1992: xxii).

The origins of shamanism have been traced back to the Palaeolithic period, some fifteen to twenty thousand years ago. Our knowledge of shamanism in this period followed the discovery of prehistoric cave paintings towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the middle of the twentieth century. These ancient paintings were found in the Altamira caves in Spain in 1879 and the caves of Lascaux in France in 1940. They illustrate the earliest images known to us of the shaman (Tucker 1992: xxi). The cave of Lascaux, for example, depicts as part of its fresco an entranced shaman (Figure I). This skeletal, stick-like creature has been identified as a shaman because it is portrayed with a bird’s head (Tucker 1991: xxi). In shamanic mythology the bird is seen as symbol of transcendence. In this respect, the shaman’s association with bird figures is found all over the world (Halifax 1982: 86). As will be illustrated in chapters three and five, shaman-like bird images feature in the work of both Pollock and Hlungwani.

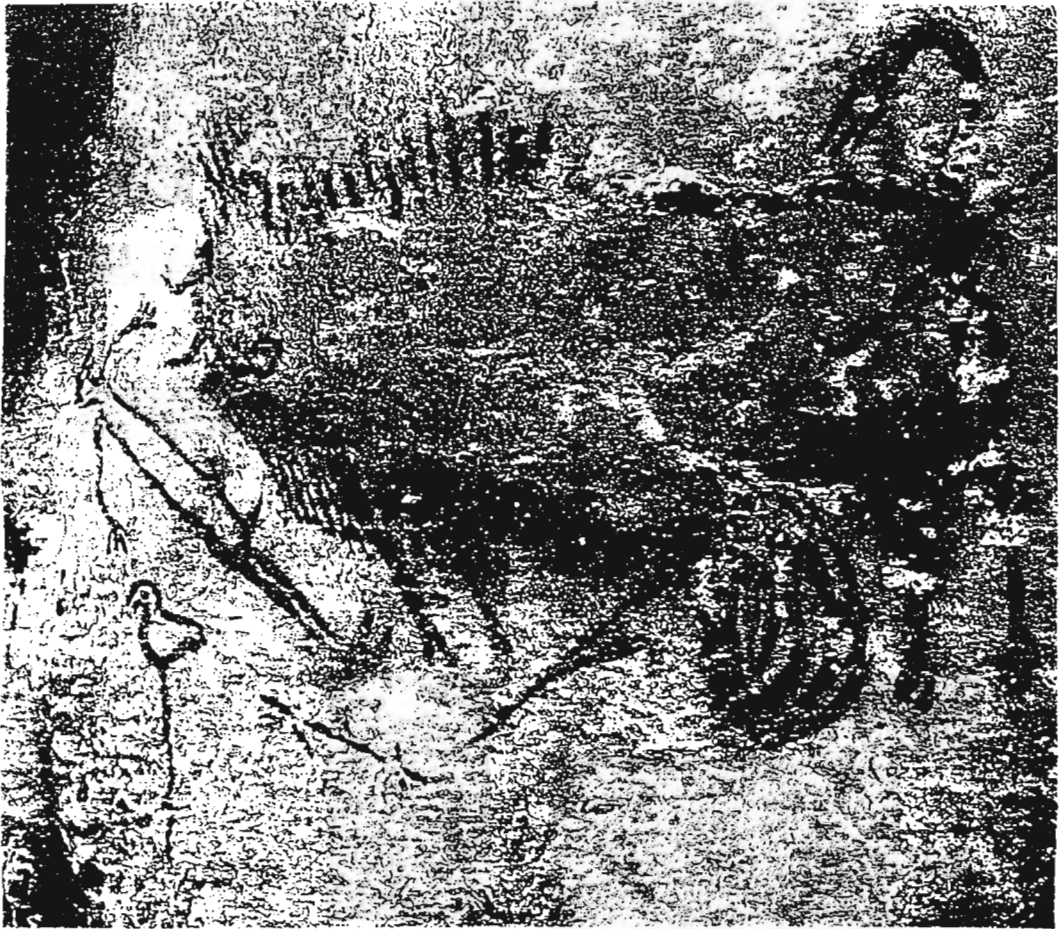


Figure 1. Anon. Shaman and the Wounded Bison, The Crypt or Well, Lascaux Cave.  
(Upper Palaeolithic)

Today the prominent shamanic areas appear to be Siberia and Mongolia (Vitebsky 1995: 34, 38, 42, 46, 50). However, the shamanic tradition is also deeply entrenched in American Indian and Mexican cultures of North, South and Central America. It is also common among the San people of the Kalahari in Africa and within some communities of South and East Asia (Vitebsky 1995: 34, 38, 42, 46, 50).

Traditionally shamanism is associated with the idea of a 'calling'. The term 'calling' in this instance refers to the idea that the potential shaman receives a 'call' or a sign from the spirit world - the realm of the dead. The 'call' is mostly in the form of dreams or visions and can be experienced by anyone who shows the potential to be a shaman.

Tucker elaborates:

Such individuals often become very vague and abstracted from everyday life. They may complain of headaches or fainting spells; sexual identity can be confused or ambiguous. Elders in the tribe recognise the signs and alert the chosen ones to the fact that the spirit world is calling for them to abandon their current identity and become shamans (Tucker 1992: 80).

The Siberian Chukchee tribe believes that a potential shaman can be recognised by a look in the eyes. This is described as a look which is not directed toward a listener during conversation but is fixed on something beyond. In such a case the eyes are characterised by an unusual brightness which, in the mythology of the Siberian Chukchee, symbolises an ability to see visions and spirits. In shamanic belief this is a sign that the individual has an awareness of another reality. According to shamanic tradition, such symptoms indicate that an individual has a special insight or inner vision. This symbolises a spiritual condition which transcends that of the profane world. It indicates that the individual has received the call from the gods or from the spirits of the dead to healing whereby he or she must go through an initiation (Tucker 1992: 80). During initiation the shaman has to

experience a spiritual transformation in order to assume the role of visionary artist<sup>1</sup> and healer.

The individual's initiation into shamanism is often determined by a visionary experience resulting from a crisis involving an encounter with death. Such an experience is seen as a spiritual awakening which symbolises the transformation of a profane individual into one who is sacred. For this transformation to occur the initiate shaman has to embark on a spiritual journey, usually undertaken in a dream or trance state. This 'journey' symbolises the shaman's descent into the visionary realms, the underworld or the realm of the dead. Through visionary experiences the initiate shaman receives sacred knowledge from the souls of the dead and the gods (Halifax 1982: 16). Of the twentieth century artists considered in this thesis, only Hlungwani can be said to have undergone such an archetypal shamanistic 'journey'.

Sickness, death and suffering are closely related to the call of the shaman. In Shamanic belief visionary knowledge and wisdom is only attained through great suffering (Halifax 1982: 19). This is why the initiate shaman has to symbolically die in order to be transformed from a profane individual to a sacred one (Halifax 1982: 16). In Tucker's words: "Having accepted the call from afar, the initiate shamans have to 'die' to the limits of their old selves, mastering their initiatory sickness during the painful and testing process of rebirth into various degrees of shamanic awareness and power" (Tucker 1992: 82).

Mircea Eliade, in his book Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy, defines shamanism as: "Shamanism = Archaic techniques of ecstasy" (Eliade 1974: 4). Here Eliade is

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<sup>1</sup>The use of the term 'artist' in this case relates specifically to the role of the shaman in traditional shamanic cultures. In these cultures the shaman's function is to record visionary experiences through creative processes. This 'artistic' activity is inextricably linked to the shamanic mission which focuses on (spiritually) healing the community.

suggesting that shamans use special techniques in order to reach a state of ecstasy or trance. This state allows the shaman to "...demolish the barriers between dream and present reality, open windows upon worlds inhabited by the gods, the dead, and the spirits" (Eliade 1974: 508,11). The shamanic trance, therefore, has two important functions. Firstly, it attempts to induce dreams and visions. Secondly, shamans believe that it is through these visionary experiences that they are able to communicate with the gods and ancestors. In shamanic mythology communication of this sort is vital to the community as it is focused on an attempt to rediscover a spiritual unity which existed before the 'fall' of man (Eliade 1974: 508,11).

This 'fall' is not to be confused with the 'fall' of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It refers rather to paradisaal myths or creation stories of shamanic, 'tribal' cultures. Such a myth was related to the arctic explorer Knud Rasmussen by the Netsilik Eskimo woman, Nâlungiaq (Halifax 1982: 8). According to the myth, before the advent of the material world a holy time existed where there was a perfect unity between man, nature and the gods. This was a time when distinctions between worlds - the overworld (the realm of the gods), the middle world (earth) and the underworld - were unknown. People lived in a state of physical and spiritual harmony. According to this myth some "mysterious deed" occurred whereby the connection between man and the spiritual was broken, resulting in man's 'fall' from paradise (Kalweit 1992: 8). Tucker suggests that this 'fall' was a consequence of man rising above nature and thereby creating a division between the sacred and the profane (Tucker 1992: 85). Man's actions thus symbolically drove the divine away from earth. According to the myth, as related by Nâlungiaq, this event caused man to lose his original wisdom as it marked the end of an exchange between different levels of existence (Kalweit 1992: 8).

Since the 'fall', communication with the spiritual world in shamanic societies has only been possible in a trance-like state where only the soul can leave the body in order to recover paradise. Furthermore, transcendence of this kind is only possible for a chosen

few - the traditional shamans. It is their traditional role to recover, through transcending material reality, the original state of man. In this way the shaman is able to rescue the souls of others.

The shaman communicates visionary experiences to the community through creative processes. In doing so he or she is able to rediscover, for the community, a sense of an original harmony. Halifax elaborates:

Accounts of the shaman's inner journey of turmoil and distress, sung and poeticised, condense personal symbolism through a mythological lens that encompasses the wider human experience. Through creative expression, the human condition is elevated, mythologised and collectively understood (Halifax 1982: 19).

It is in this sense that the shaman is seen as an artist whose creative processes are potentially healing. These creative processes are what Eliade refers to as "special techniques" (Eliade 1974: 4). As well as recording transcendental experiences, these techniques form the structure and details of the shamanic trance. Creative activities in the form of image making, drum playing, dancing, singing, acting and mask making function to bring the shaman closer and closer to the spiritual journey which is finally undertaken in trance.

Drum playing is a common activity of the shamanic trance. The repetitive beat and resonant tones of the drum is believed to transport the shaman into trance. The Siberian shamans sometimes paint images onto their drums. These are often maps of the underworld which are meant to guide them during their spiritual journey. The images painted on the drums can also take the form of animals, usually birds, horses and deer which are seen as symbols of transcendence (Halifax 1982: 35). In shamanic mythology animals are considered to be closely connected to the spirit world. They are seen as spirit helpers who guide the shaman into the visionary realm and protect him or her during the journey. The Siberian Yakut shamans, for example, sing "the drum is our horse" as its rhythmic beat transports the shaman into trance (Eliade 1974: 233).



A common activity or performance done in preparation for the mystic journey is the imitation of animal behaviour. It is during this activity that shamans speak in a secret language, sometimes referred to as “the language of the animals” (McEvelley 1979: 34, 36). Therefore, in order to be transported into the spiritual realm shamans will dress up like animals, make animal masks and imitate animal behaviour. As will be discussed in chapter four, such behaviour was imitated by Beuys during a number of performance pieces

## 2. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY ARTIST AS VISIONARY.

The idea of the artist as a visionary in twentieth century Western creative processes does not necessarily mean a literal transposing of shamanism onto modern art. It refers rather to a shamanic spirit which emphasises a need to explore the (potentially healing) depths of the psyche; to rediscover a lost contact with the unconscious. Tucker uses the term ‘shamanic spirit’ to refer to the influence of prehistoric art on twentieth century Western creative processes and discourse. He sees this influence as determined by the need for artists to “abandon many previous conceptions of form, and to create work in the light of highly-charged visionary imperatives” (Tucker 1992: xxii). He also associates this shift toward an exploration of “primal levels of inspiration” with the writings of Freud and Jung who were concerned with exploring the unconscious (Tucker 1992: xxii). Other influences on twentieth century visionary art include the innovations of Picasso as well as Gothic and Romantic art and culture.

The author Neville Drury believes that the idea of shamanism in twentieth century Western creative processes makes it possible “for each of us to discover our own inner mythology, to explore our own transpersonal archetypes, to find our own dream-time” (Drury 1989: 101-2). Evidently Drury is referring to the exploration of the unconscious which he perceives as a “dream of knowledge” (Drury 1989: 101-2). This view is

reminiscent of the shamanic belief that sacred knowledge can only be attained through dreams and visions.

The idea that the unconscious, irrational part of the mind is seen as a valid source of knowledge is perceived as a controversial theme within nineteenth and twentieth century thought (Kalweit 1992: 257). In this regard Holger Kalweit, in her book Shamans, Healers and Medicine Men, asserts that in the West knowledge is primarily associated with the rational, conscious part of the mind. This way of thinking was predominantly shaped by the Early Renaissance's embrace of Cartesian rationalism. Underlying Renaissance thought was the conception that truth is defined by the "concrete reality of the visible world" (Haftmann 1965: 10).

Some twentieth century artistic traditions symbolise the decline of this conception of reality. Some modern Western artists have rejected a purely practical approach to reality. They wanted an art which would lead "beyond visible reality" (Haftmann 1965: 167). Some of these artists have found their feelings confirmed in the art of prehistoric and 'tribal' cultures. Awareness of primordial painting and of shamanism in the West came about as a result of the discovery of prehistoric shamanic cave paintings in the late nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries (Tucker 1991: xxi).

In some instances the rejection of rationalism in the twentieth century has been called primitivism. Tucker asserts that primitivism in art refers to "the desire to return to the origin of things" (Tucker 1992: 3). Tucker's view of primitivism seems consistent with the generally accepted definition of this term. According to the Encyclopaedia of World Art, primitivism is "a conscious return to the art of an undeveloped state, whether in subject, technique, or form..." (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 706). Although this definition

seems to underlie most interpretations of the term, it seems that the meaning of primitivism is determined by its historical context.<sup>2</sup>

Tucker's consideration of primitivism suggests that primordial man was much more governed by intuition and instinct than modern, Western man. Such a belief was asserted by the author John Graham in his article 'Primitive art and Picasso' in 1937. Graham wrote: "Primitive races ... have readier access to the unconscious mind than so-called civilised people...It should be understood...that the unconscious mind is the creative factor and the source and storehouse of power and all knowledge, past and future" (Naifeh and Smith 1991:348). By "primitive races" Graham is evidently referring to prehistoric and non-Western 'tribal' cultures. He believed that the art of prehistoric and 'tribal' cultures expressed an intrinsic knowledge and awareness of the unconscious depths of the psyche (Naifeh and Smith 1991: 348). Moreover, Graham maintained that the "purpose of art in particular is to reestablish a lost contact with the unconscious... with the primordial past" (Rhodes 1994: 188). This definition of the creative process has significant similarities to the role of the traditional shaman. Central to the shamanic mission is the re-discovery of man's mythic origins (Eliade 1974: 508,11)

A late nineteenth century artist whose work and ideas conveyed primitivist concerns was Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). Gauguin, in his search for an art based on the imagination and inspiration, left Europe for Tahiti at the end of the nineteenth century. Like Graham, Gauguin believed that Modern man had lost his original sense of intuition. He wrote of Western art in the face of industrial society: "Art has just gone through a long period of aberration caused by physics, chemistry, mechanics, and the study of nature. Artists, having lost all their savagery, having no more instincts, one could even say imagination,

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of primitivism in art has also been applied to the art of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries by the humanists of the sixteenth century Renaissance (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 705). This interpretation of primitivism explicitly referred to an art that was ignorant and inferior. This is contrary to Tucker's view as he, along with critics such as John Graham, associates primitivism with the acquisition of knowledge.

went astray on every path..." (Chipp 1968: 86). One of the primary concerns of primitivism is thus the need to transcend the present, to recover a sense of origin by exploring the mythic imagination. It is in this sense that primitivism echoes the traditional shamanic mission. In this regard Tucker believes that the ancient shamans might be called "the first great primitivists, insofar as they periodically sought to return to the Paradisal time of origins" (Tucker 1992: 4).

Graham saw Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) as the epitome of the Modern artist who, like the prehistoric and 'tribal' artist, could spontaneously express forms and imagery from his unconscious (Langhorne 1989: 83). When regarding a work such as The Three Dancers (1925) (Figure 2) this view does not seem unfounded. The simplified, abstracted forms of the three dancing figures have similarities to the imaginative, unconscious forms of 'tribal' art. These forms are reminiscent of the entranced, dancing figures of prehistoric cave art. The spontaneous expression of total abandonment and ecstasy evoked by the dancing forms of The Three Dancers gives the impression of ceremonial ritual not unlike the form of the shamanic trance. Although Picasso may not have been aware of the meanings and functions of shamanism, his forms have significant parallels to 'tribal' depictions of the shamanic trance.

Picasso's affinity with the distortions of 'tribal' art is emphasised by the influence which Inuit Eskimo masks had on his work (Langhorne 1989: 84). This influence can be seen in the contorted mask-like faces of the figures in The Three Dancers. The face of the dancing figure on the far left, for instance, has prominent stroke-like teeth and stylised hair remarkably similar to the image of the shamanic Eskimo mask (Figure 3) of painted wood and feathers which Graham published in his 1937 article. A mask-like form similar to that in The Three Dancers is evident in Pollock's painting entitled Birth (1938-41) (Figure 4). Claude Cernuschi, in his book entitled Jackson Pollock: Meaning and Significance, finds similarities between Birth and the same shamanic Eskimo mask discussed in Graham's article (Cernuschi 1992: 52). Cernuschi asserts: "The curved

mouth and row of teeth in Eskimo Mask (c1900) may have influenced the ... central forms in ... Birth" (Cernuschi 1992: 52). Pollock's presentation of an artist-shaman identity is illustrated by his portrayal, in his paintings, of 'primitive' symbols (like the Eskimo mask) from shamanic cultures. Similarly, Tucker sees the influence of the 'primitive' Eskimo mask on Picasso, visible in The Three Dancers, as contributing to the shamanic theme of the image (Tucker 1992: 119).

The shamanic notion of healing in The Three Dancers is evident in the pose of the central figure which is strongly reminiscent of the crucifixion of Christ (Tucker 1992: 119). The crucifixion theme is considered to be a symbol of the suffering and self-sacrifice which accompanies spiritual awakening (Blunt 1974: 81). This interpretation of the crucifixion is reminiscent of the shamanic belief that the individual must symbolically die in order to be (spiritually) healed (Halifax 1982: 16).

Picasso looked to the formal qualities of African art (Hughes 1993: 20). He was not interested in the 'tribal' meanings of African artworks but was rather drawn to the freedom of distortion which characterises much African 'tribal' art (Hughes 1993: 20,21). Picasso was also aware of and impressed by the primitivism of the Middle Ages, particularly the Catalan primitivism of Spain. He saw examples of Gothic Catalan primitivism at the Exhibition of Ancient Art in Barcelona in 1902 (Richardson 1992: 246). The art of the Middle Ages was also regarded as primitive by the humanists of the sixteenth century Renaissance because it does not comply with conventional Western classical forms (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 705). It is perhaps this aspect of 'primitive' art that Picasso was drawn to as it allowed him to express forms freely from his imagination. Picasso's concern with expressing images of his imagination is verified by his statement: "Painting is stronger than I am. It makes me do what it wants" (Tucker 1992: 119). His description of the creative process resembles Jung's ideas on art and creativity. Like



Figure 2. Pablo Picasso The Three Dancers (1925):

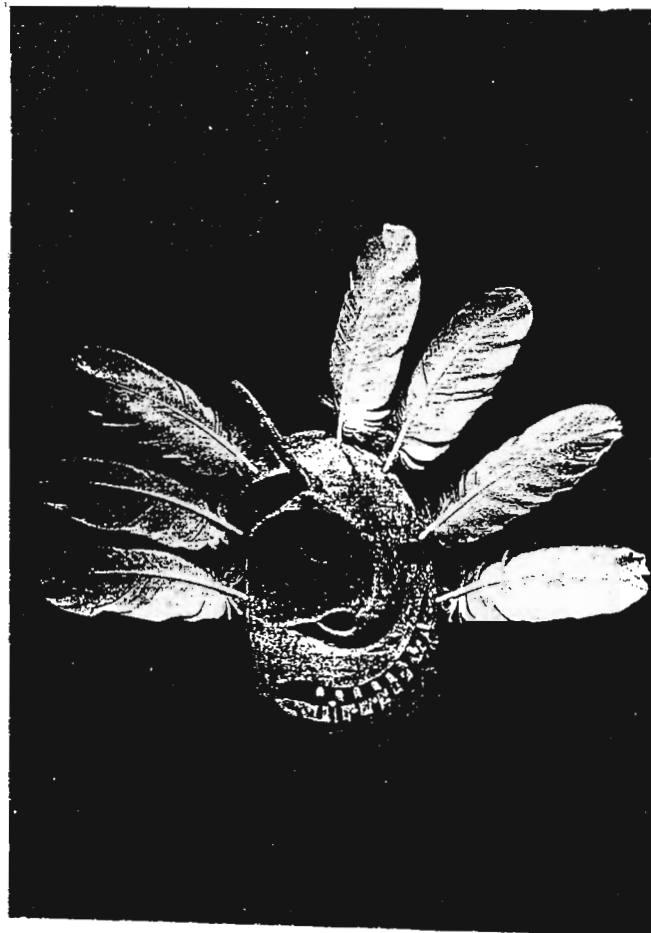




Figure 4. Jackson Pollock Birth (1938-41)

Picasso, Jung believed that the creative process is one that is unconscious (Jung 1945: 195). He wrote: "Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realise its purposes through him" (Jung 1945: 195).

x The writings of Jung have been a major influence on the twentieth century shamanic spirit. The idea that the unconscious is a source of knowledge is one which underlies much of his writings. Jung's belief that the exploration of the unconscious brings into consciousness previously unknown archetypal images and experiences is central to the twentieth century shamanic spirit (Jung 1966: 82-83).

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Jung's notions of the collective unconscious and of the individuation process are closely related to traditional shamanic mythology and ideas. Jung believed that each individual was born with a "collective unconscious" (Jung 1983: 67). In his theory, the collective unconscious contains archetypal imaginary, behaviour and experiences of a particular race. He believed that the origin of archetypes and primordial images "can only be explained by assuming them to be deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity" (Jung 1983: 70). Furthermore, Jung believed that in order to become a balanced and integrated individual these archetypal images have to be brought into consciousness (Jung 1966: 83).

Jung called this exploration of the psyche the process of individuation (Jung 1983: 212). By this he meant "the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual', that is, a separate, indivisible unity or whole" (Jung 1983: 212). He thus believed that the function of an archetypal symbol is therapeutic and that each time an individual recognises an archetypal symbol in his or her unconscious he or she moves closer to integration (Jung 1966: 83).



This idea is closely related to Jung's belief in the healing powers of art and the role of the artist as a visionary. Jung wrote: "The creative process, insofar as we are able to follow it at all ... consists of the unconscious activation of an archetypal image" (Jung 1966 : 82). He believed that artists are gifted with an inner vision which he termed the "visionary-mode". In his view the visionary-mode gives the artist a special access to the unconscious mind, its archetypal images and experiences (Jung 1966: 90).

Jung's idea of the artist as a visionary is clearly related to the role of the ancient shaman. Drawing on writings by Marie-Louise von Franz and Emma Jung, Tucker relates shamanic practices and ideas to Jung's notions of the collective unconscious and the individuation process. According to these authors, the shaman is completely in touch with his or her collective unconscious. Moreover, they assert that certain "aspects and stages" of shamanism reflect the process of individuation (Tucker 1992: 92). These "aspects and stages" no doubt refer to the shamanic ability to explore unconscious archetypal imagery through transcendence.

In Jung's view the artist is: "...one who carries and shapes the unconscious, psychic life of mankind. To perform this difficult office it is sometimes necessary for him to sacrifice happiness and everything that makes life worth living for the ordinary human being" (Jung 1954: 195). Jung's idea that suffering is a prerequisite for attainment of psychic knowledge is one that is integral to shamanic belief.

While the notion that the creative process can express images of the imagination is a dominant theme in twentieth century art and discourse, it is an idea that was also explored in Gothic and Romantic art and culture. Indeed some of the visionary art of the twentieth century has been inspired by this art.

It is important to note, however, that the Gothic and Romantic interpretation of the idea of the visionary artist is independent from that of the shamanic tradition. Shamanism is a tradition about which the Gothic and Romantic cultures lacked knowledge. However, there are significant parallels between these two distinct notions of the visionary artist. The most important parallels are the belief that reality is essentially spiritual and that the role of the artist is to portray visionary experience.

William Blake (1757- 1827) can be seen as a precedent of this conception of the artist. Blake's visionary world view had its roots in Gothic and Romantic traditions. Chapter two is thus a consideration of the idea that the artist is a visionary as it applies to the Gothic and Romantic traditions. The chapter explores the work and ideas of Blake which are seen to embrace the visionary aspects of the Gothic and Romantic traditions.

Three twentieth century artists who have been located within the visionary tradition are Pollock, Beuys and Hlungwani. The work and ideas of these artists represent different aspects of the idea that the artist is a visionary. Pollock, Beuys and Hlungwani will be considered in terms of possible influences from both the shamanic and the Gothic and Romantic visionary traditions as epitomised by Blake.

The work and creative processes of Pollock reflect the influence of the shamanic tradition of native American (Indian) cultures and the writings of Jung. Although he stopped short of explicitly adopting the persona of the artist-shaman, there is evidence to suggest that Pollock identified with this perception of the artist. Chapter three traces his identification with the artist-shaman. It also explores the possible influence of Blake on his composition and subject matter.

In Chapter four, Beuys' identification with the role of artist-shaman is discussed. Beuys is an artist who, unlike Pollock, openly assumed the role of the artist-shaman. That he alludes to a shaman-like figure is a result of a personal experience of a traditional shamanic community. His direct knowledge and experiences of shamanism is evident in much of his work and creative processes. Beuys stresses that his identity with the role of the shaman is not a return to this ancient tradition. Rather, he argues that he assumes this role in an attempt to restore a sense of the spiritual in twentieth century modern Western society (Tisdall 1979: 23). Parallels between Beuys' antipathy towards aspects of twentieth century Modernism and Blake's attitude towards the dominant traditions of his time are also explored.

Chapter five investigates the work and ideas of Hungwani, an artist who has strong links with traditional shamanism. He sees himself as performing a role in his community which resembles that of the traditional healer. Moreover, Hlungwani is regarded as a traditional shaman as he has experienced the traditional call or initiation into shamanism (Powell 1989: 22). Furthermore, his belief in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and his interpretation of the Bible are compared to the religious vision inherent in Gothic thought and to the visionary ideas of Blake.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **WILLIAM BLAKE: VISIONARY AND ARTIST**

Although a knowledge of shamanism only appeared in Western culture in the late nineteenth century, the notion that the artist is a visionary<sup>1</sup> is not entirely new in this culture. The idea of the artist as a visionary has its precedents in Medieval and Romantic art and culture.

A central characteristic of Romanticism was the “mystique of nature” (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 558). From this characteristic two artistic trends were derived. These were the naturalistic and the visionary tendencies in art. For the purpose of this study the emphasis will be on the visionary. This aspect of Romanticism optimised the inclination to express an inner reality or vision. It signified the intention to explore “...beneath the surface into the intricacies, functionings and malfunctionings of the human psyche” (Lister 1989: 12).

The Romantics emphasised the importance of the creative imagination. They held the belief that the mind is not merely reflective or imitative but can conjure forms which are derived from an inner vision. This was a vision that was not reasoned or perceived from the external world (Le Bris 1981: 7). The common underlying idea of the somewhat diverse and complex Romantic tradition is thus the belief in the value of the imagination with regards to artistic perception. In this regard, the German Romantic painter Casper Friedrich (1774-1840) wrote: “The painter must not only paint what he sees before him, but what he sees within him ... Close your bodily eye so that you may see your picture

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<sup>1</sup> As explained in the previous section, the Gothic and Romantic idea of the visionary artist is distinct from the notion of the artist-shaman. However, significant parallels do exist between these different strains of the concept of the visionary artist.

first with the spiritual eye. Then bring to the light of day that which you have seen in the darkness, so that it may react upon others from the outside inwards" (Le Bris 1981: 7).

Romanticism in the eighteenth century was not so much a specific style as an attitude of mind. To an extent, eighteenth century Romantic artists rejected that part of Enlightenment philosophy that was based on the primacy of reason and the intellect (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 558). The Enlightenment was characterised by a scientific, pragmatic approach to reality. These notions of reason and empiricism resemble ideas inherent in classical art and the Renaissance (Lister 1973: 4).

The belief that art should express an inner vision is encapsulated in the work and ideas of Blake whose visionary psychology encompasses aspects of both Medieval and Romantic art. Blake's paintings, engravings and poetry were intended primarily to express his visionary psychology and its underlying message of redemption. All of the crucial stages of Blake's visionary message are revealed in the images of his prophetic books. These take the form of illuminated manuscripts where, to an extent, the text informs the images. Nonetheless, according to Jean Hagstrum, while Blake's images may bear a strong relation to the words they embellish they are also "visual translations" of his visions and his prophetic mythology of redemption (Hagstrum 1964: 16).

X Blake has often been located within the Romantic tradition (Lister 1989: 26). This is due to his belief that art should depict the spiritual nature of reality. His idea that reality is essentially spiritual in nature was integral to his conception that the artist is a visionary. Blake believed himself to be a visionary whose works and ideas were formed by his mystical experiences which included visions. Blake considered his visions to be products of his creative imagination. He wrote, "One power alone makes a poet: Imagination, the Divine Vision" (Blunt 1974: 22). It is significant to note that Blake had rather unorthodox and complex ideas regarding the relationship between visions and imagination. He believed that the imagination and prophetic vision were synonymous,

hence his statement “All that we see is Vision ... Permanent in the Imagination” (Damon 1979: 195).

In keeping with Romantic thought, Blake’s opinion that vision or imagination is the basis of all art ensured his incompatibility with those Renaissance values which dominated the cultural life of London in the eighteenth century (Damon 1979: 195; 318). This approach was reinforced by eighteenth century London’s identification with Isaac Newton’s mechanistic universe, and its proud association with the term “the Age of Reason” (Damon 1979: 298). Writing in A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake, S. Foster Damon observes that Newton’s universe: “...was a neat, compact, self-sufficient, three dimensional, and impersonal machine ... It was completely material ... this universe involved no spiritual intelligences’ or other supernatural forces, it appealed to the anti-magical trend of advanced thought, and was accepted everywhere” (Damon 1979: 298).

Given Blake’s visionary opposition to the materialism of his time it is not altogether surprising that Newton was perceived by Blake “... as the exponent of Urizen’s religion of reason on earth” (Blunt 1974: 60). In Blake’s visionary mythology Urizen is the name given to the creator god of the material, rational world. The name ‘Urizen’ comes from the Greek ‘to fix a limit’ (Blunt 1974: 55). To Blake Urizen symbolises the attributes of reason, limitation and law; notions which he associated with eighteenth century reality and its identification with Newton’s Age of Reason (Blunt 1974: 56).

Particularly noteworthy in this regard is Blake’s image Newton (1795) (Figure 5), a colour-print from his prophetic book The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. In the design the figure of Newton is shown sitting on the bottom of the sea, holding a pair of ‘Urizenic’ dividers. In Blake’s mythology Urizen used the dividers to separate the material world from the spiritual. Both these aspects relate to Blake’s vision of the fallen

material world. That the sea or water are, in Blakean terms, a symbol of materialism is further indicated by another image of Blake's showing Urizen submerged under water entitled Urizen submerged in the waters of materialism (1794 ) (Figure 6) (Blunt 1974: 57).

Apart from Blake's affiliation with Romanticism, his visionary world view reflects an affinity with the religious vision of Gothic art and culture. In Gothic art the imaginative nature of imagery and iconography found its source in the visionary tradition of the Bible. This aspect of the Bible is characterised by its apocalyptic spirit of prophecy, revelation and redemption (Frye 1974: 149). It was this religious vision which formed the Gothic world view. Such a vision emphasised the idea that reality is essentially spiritual in nature; an idea which is explored by Barbara Nolan in her study The Gothic Visionary Perspective (1977: xiv). She asserts that the Gothic belief "that visions were not only possible but probable in this world suggested to theorists and artists the possibility of transforming matter into spirit, of spiritualizing human sight and understanding..." (1977: xiv). Northrop Frye expounds further: "It is because of its innate Hebraism that the Middle Ages, with all its faults, provided on the whole a better milieu for the visionary" (Frye 1974: 49).

As in Gothic culture, Blake's spiritual world view was inspired by his reading of the Bible. Damon opines that "Blake read the Bible spiritually, 'in its infernal or diabolical sense', as his irony once phrased it" (Damon 1979: 45). It is the prophetic, visionary tradition of the Bible and its underlying redemptive message that inspired Blake's work, and which lead him to believe that his visionary experiences were essentially prophetic. Hence Blake's belief, expressed in his vision and prophecy, "that we may Foresee ... Redemption ..." (Damon 1979: 45). This interpretation of the Bible echoes the Gothic sentiment of mysticism and revelation.



Figure 5. William Blake Newton (1795)





Central to this study is the exploration of similarities between Blake and the visionary traditions of ancient prehistoric shamanism. In this regard, Milton Klonsky in The Seer and his Visions posits:

As a painter he seems to belong to the same totemic clan as those magic-working shaman artists of prehistory who once drew their own giant forms on the cave walls of Lascaux and Altamira; and as a poet, to the conclave of anonymous scribes and rhapsodic bards who invented the creation myths of the ancient religions (Klonsky 1979: 31).

Although Blake evidently had no knowledge of shamanism, his ideas on the role of the artist as a visionary display some significant parallels to this ancient tradition. Blake's notion that inner perception or awareness gives one direct access to the spiritual, visionary realm is a central notion of shamanism. In this respect, Blake believed that a visionary artist is one who has an awareness of the spiritual realm and who records his visionary experiences through creative processes. Like the traditional shaman, Blake believed himself to be a visionary who was in direct contact with spirits who revealed to him his visions which inspired and informed his work (Blunt 1974: 22).

His primary link to shamanism is thus represented in his belief that he is a visionary artist whose creative processes record and interpret his visionary experiences. Blake's (unconscious) affinity with the artist-shaman is further indicated in his visionary mythology of mankind which has significant parallels to the archetypal creation myth of 'tribal' and prehistoric cultures.

Both Blake's myth and the archetypal creation story describe an eternal paradise which existed before the creation of the material world. Both mythologies define the 'fall' of man as a consequence of the separation from an original unity. Like the shamanic creation myth, Blake maintained that the creation of the material world was not, as defined in Genesis, the beginning of existence. In Blake's mythology, man existed before his creation in Eden, which was only his materialising, an episode of his 'fall' (Damon

1979: 129). He believed that the 'fall' came about as a consequence of man's separation from the spiritual realm. This is argued by Damon:

The process of Creation is one of dividing up of the original Unity. Beginning with the separation of light from darkness, it proceeds through the six days of Creation, culminating in the separation of man from God. After that the sexes are divided, in the creation of Eve; Good and Evil, in the eating of the fruit; man and happiness, in the expulsion from the Garden; soul and body, in the first murder; man from his brother, in the confusion of tongues at Babel ... To re-attain Eternity, all these divisions must eventually be reunited (Damon 1979: 94).

Blake's vision of a created and fallen world is illustrated by his prints: The Ancient of Days (1795) (Figure 7) and Elohim Creating Adam (1795) (Figure 8). Blake's colour print The Ancient of Days is the frontispiece to his prophetic book Europe (1794). He claimed that the source of this image was a vision which he saw hovering above his staircase (Lister 1986: 75.) The Ancient of Days also recalls lines from Blake's First Book of Urizen (1794) where Blake describes the creation of the world according to his visionary mythology: "And Urizen ... formed golden compasses, And began to explore the Abyss" (Lister 1986: 75). The image portrays Blake's mythic Creator-God, Urizen, creating the material world. He identified Urizen with the Creator God of Genesis who he associated with an original force of evil, due to his creation of the material world and the subsequent separation of man from God, reason from imagination. In Blake's belief, the Creator God of Genesis was opposed to the Jesus of the New Testament whom Blake believed symbolised imagination, freedom and love (Blunt 1974: 56).

The composition of The Ancient of Days shows the figure of Urizen, in front of a cosmic sun and framed by clouds, reaching down into the abyss, his left hand holding a pair of dividers. The dividers symbolise the limit placed on the earth through the separation of an original unity (Blunt 1974: 56). Blake associated the creation of the material world with Error as it represented the separation of man from eternity. He



Figure 7. William Blake The Ancient of Days (1795)



Figure 8. William Blake Elohim Creating Adam (1795)

believed that redemption could only be achieved through an apocalypse which would result in a radical change in man's perception of reality; a spiritual awakening (Klonsky 1979: 7). Such a spiritual awakening will, in Blake's mythology, be determined by the union of reason and imagination and subsequently the material and the spiritual. In this regard Michael Davis writes:

In a memorable fancy ...with the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, Blake defines his own true function as a prophet, poet, artist and craftsmen. He looks forward to the impending apocalypse, when ' the whole creation will appear infinite and holy whereas now it appears finite and corrupt ... if the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern (Davis 1977: 60).

Blake considered redemption to be dependent on the of the union of opposites. This idea is emphasised by his doctrine of contraries which illustrates the belief that the existence of contradictions ensures the creative potential of perception (Damon 1979: 262). Hence Blake's belief: "Without Contraries there is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence" (Damon 1979: 262). Thus in Blake's mythology of redemption, the essential opposites reason and imagination, God and man, man and nature, body and soul, good and evil are reconciled (Damon 1979: 262).

Blake's doctrine of contraries is illustrated in the title page of the prophetic book The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (Figure 9). The composition is divided in two - the top half representing Heaven (Blake's notion of reason) and the bottom half symbolising Hell (or imagination). Blake's concept of redemption is realised in the union of these opposites. This union is symbolised by an embrace. The idea of an embrace or union of opposites is illustrated in the image by floating, embracing figures. This is further indicated by the flame-like forms of the bottom section of the composition (Hell) which move up into the top section (Heaven) thus implying the 'marriage' of Heaven and Hell or reason and imagination (Bindman 1977: 68).



Figure 9. William Blake Title page to the prophetic book The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1795)

Blake's belief in the co-existence of opposites prefigures both Freudian and Jungian ideas. His doctrine of contraries on the one hand anticipates Freud's conception of the libido. The Id represents the unconscious (Blake's imagination or "Energy") and the Superego is the conscious, rational part of the mind (Blake's "Reason") (Damon 1979: 262). On the other hand Blake's ideas prefigure Jung's idea of animism. In Jung's writings the anima (female) symbolises the creative unconscious and the animus (male) the rational consciousness (Jung 1983: 91). Both Freud and Jung consider these contraries to be essential to psychic integration (Damon 1979: 262).

The idea of the co-existence of opposites illustrated in the ideas of Freud, Jung and Blake echoes aspects of shamanic mythology. Integral to the shamanic mission is the attempt to restore a sense of an original unity (Eliade 1974: 508,511). This is achieved by bringing into consciousness (through creative processes) previously unknown visionary experiences. By virtue of such an activity the artist-shaman brings together the necessary opposites (imagination and reason) as articulated in the writings of Blake, Freud and Jung. Jung's ideas about psychic integration are evident in his account of the individuation process (Jung 1983: 212). Central to this process is his notion of the visionary mode whereby the artist is described as one who is able to express images of the unconscious through creative processes (Jung 1966: 90). This description of the artist is reminiscent of Blake's statement: "Vision is Determinate and Perfect and [the artist] Copies that without Fatigue" (Damon 1979: 318). Moreover, Jung's notion of the visionary-mode appears to correspond with Damon's description of Blake's creative process:

The thought emotions which rose from his subconscious inevitably took human form in visual symbols, with a vividness and completeness comparable to the colour-visions of peyote...This happens to everybody in dreams; Blake's visions might be considered waking dreams (Damon 1979: 436).

Both Jung's theory of the visionary-mode and Damon's description of Blake's creative process have parallels to the meaning and function of the shamanic trance. The shaman

experiences visions during a trance state. These visions are communicated to an audience by the shaman through creative expression (Halifax 1982: 19).

Blake's (unconscious) affinity with the role of the artist-shaman is reflected in his attitude towards the 'primitivism' of the Middle Ages and of the Archaic period. The term 'primitive' was applied by the humanists of the sixteenth century Renaissance to the art of the Middle Ages and the Archaic civilisation as it was considered to be inferior and in opposition to the classical ideal of art (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 706). Blake, however, was one of the first Romantic artists to consider the imaginative forms of Gothic primitivism and pre-Classical Archaic art beautiful (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 706). To Blake the art of these periods expressed "the extent of the human mind" (Frye 1974: 100).

According to Mc Graw-Hill (1966: p706): "Blake and others evoked the world of the progenitors, with their gigantic forms and the visionary character of their images. They created a style to exalt the primordial world". The notion that Blake wanted his visionary images to "exalt the primordial world" is representative of the eighteenth century idea of the 'noble savage' (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 706). This idea was popularised by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau believed in the "inherent purity and nobility of man" (Damon 1969: 16). His theory explores the idea of an original mythical paradise or Arcadia. This idea was also evoked following the 'discovery' of America and its indigenous inhabitants. The native American was seen to symbolise the 'noble savage' - "the mythical creature who seemed to represent the survival of the earthly paradise, and who aroused the aspiration toward the state of nature that exists in every individual" (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 706). The idea of the 'noble savage' epitomised the Romantic preoccupation with the exploration of man's original spiritual and material condition. The idea is also evident in the myth of an original 'golden age' (Mc Graw-Hill 1966: 706). In this regard Blake wrote: "The nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative, it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients called The Golden Age" (Frye 1974: 109).

+ This statement recalls traditional role of the artist-shaman whose creative expression was focused on the restoration of an original paradise.

Thus although Blake's conception of the visionary artist is entrenched in the Gothic and Romantic traditions, his conception of the artist's role has significant parallels to the role of the artist-shaman. The most essential parallel between Blake's visionary psychology and that of the shamanic tradition lies in the fact that the artist is a visionary whose visionary experiences are focused on the realisation of man's redemption<sup>2</sup>. It is important to add, however, that Blake's location within the shamanic tradition is implicit. He had no knowledge of the shamanic 'artistic' traditions or of the artist-shaman.

Apart from the parallels between Blake's mythology and that of traditional shamanism, his work and ideas have significant similarities to twentieth century Western interpretations of the visionary role of the artist. The similarities between Blake's ideas, Jung's writings and Graham's understanding of 'primitivism' are a further link between Blake and the twentieth century Western idea of the visionary artist. It is in this context that parallels can be drawn between the works and ideas of Blake and those of Pollock, Beuys and Hlungwani.

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<sup>2</sup> It has already been noted that man's redemption in Blake's mythology and that of shamanism is dependent on his spiritual awakening.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **JACKSON POLLOCK: ARTIST-SHAMAN?**

Jackson Pollock played a leading role in the Abstract Expressionist movement in America during the 1940s and 1950s. Abstract Expressionists sought to explore and create visual equivalents of unconscious imagery and experiences. The Abstract Expressionists' attempts to explore and understand inner experiences, images and emotions was an endeavour to come to terms with the social and cultural reality of post-war twentieth century. In Donald Kuspit's words: "Unable to face up to the reality of the world they lived in and indirectly acknowledged in their personal suffering, they created a world of their own which for all its artistic novelty was not able to free them from their suffering" (Kuspit 1980: 116). To Peter Fuller the Abstract Expressionists were not so much trying to escape an external reality as cope with it. In his view, they were rather attempting to find "a route back to reality, much as an analysand does, through an exploration of their own subjectivity" (Shapiro 1991: 171).

Kuspit's and Fuller's descriptions of the Abstract Expressionist project echo descriptions of the role of the shaman in shamanistic society with the notable exception that the role of shaman was not to escape from the material world to an inner world. Instead, the exploration of an inner spirituality by the shaman was focused on an attempt to heal the wounds inflicted by life in society. Hence, while there are parallels between Abstract Expressionism and Shamanism, there are also differences. Pollock, however, has been directly located within the shamanic tradition (Langhorne 1988: 81). Despite the artist's statements to the contrary, evidence suggests that he actively identified with the role of the artist-shaman (Langhorne 1989: 82).

Critics such as Tucker (1992: 319) and Langhorne (1989: 81-82) argue that Pollock explicitly identified with the artist-shaman. In support of this contention, Native

American art and culture and Jung's writings on the unconscious have been cited as influences on his work. The strongest evidence, however, is that offered by Pollock's work process and imagery.

Pollock's concern with exploring his unconscious through art has been related to his turbulent personal life and search for psychic integration. He has been portrayed as an aggressive, self-destructive personality (Hess 1988: 39). He had a history of depression and alcohol abuse and for many years underwent Jungian therapy (O'Connor 1967: 85). He became familiar with Jung's writings during psychotherapy sessions with Jungian analysts Joseph Henderson in 1937 and Dr Violet Staub de Laszlo in 1941 (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 329). His interest in Jung, however, may have begun earlier in 1934 when he met Helen Marot, a teacher interested in Jungian psychology (Wolfe 1972: 65). Although Pollock refrained from commenting on the influence of Jung's ideas on his work he nevertheless was familiar with Jung's writings (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 334-5).

Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, in their study entitled Jackson Pollock: An American Saga, elaborate:

Although reluctant to discuss Jung's ideas in any depth, and at times incapable of doing so, Jackson was nevertheless intrigued by them. Certainly he appreciated both the high standing Jung conferred on artists and his emphasis on the role of the unconscious in art. But he also responded to the mystical undertones of Jungian concepts like the collective unconscious, the visionary mode, and the archetype (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 334 - 335).

During his sessions with Henderson, Pollock apparently became interested in the therapeutic value of automatic drawing (Wysuph 1970: 53). At this time he was believed to be well read in Jungian psychology and was thus aware of the psychological relevance of visual symbols (Wysuph 1970: 53). Pollock produced numerous automatic drawings for Henderson during his period of psychoanalysis. These drawings apparently began because of Pollock's difficulty in discussing his problems. What he could not express in words he articulated through drawing. According to Henderson, the drawings facilitated Pollock's mental recovery. In Henderson's words the drawings "... seemed to

demonstrate phases of his sickness ... showing a gradual psychological reintegration which allowed him to recover to a considerable extent during the next two years” (Wysuph 1970: 52). Henderson’s description of Pollock’s recovery during the period in which he executed these drawings echoes Jung’s idea of the healing powers of art as well as his consideration of the artist as a visionary (Jung 1966: 90).

Although Pollock was clearly aware of Jung’s writings and ideas, he only produced one drawing which specifically demonstrated one of Jung’s theories (Kuspit 1979: 77-78). Nonetheless, with regard to Pollock’s automatic drawings, it is obvious that he identified with Jung’s notion that the accessing of unconscious imagery through art is an activity which brings one closer to psychic integration.

An image which, according to Judith Wolfe in ‘Jungian Aspects of Jackson Pollock’s Imagery’, directly refers to Jung’s writings is Pasiphaë (1943) (Figure 10) (Wolfe 1972: 69). This image was previously called Moby Dick. In Wolfe’s view, Herman Melville’s Moby Dick was a favourite book of Pollock’s (Wolfe 1972: 69). Although it is speculative, it is possible that Pollock’s first title may have been influenced by Jung’s interpretation of the original story of Moby Dick. Jung considers the images and content of the novel Moby Dick to be derived from the author’s subconscious. What was significant to Jung about the novel was that he believed that Melville was intuitively expressing his subconscious through the creative process of writing. To Jung, the novel, Moby Dick, differed from the psychological novel. He believed the psychological novel fails because the author consciously tries to raise experiences from his or her subconscious to the level of psychological discussion. In Jung’s opinion, this process obscures the direct expression of the subconscious (Jung 1966: 88). If Jung’s interpretation of the novel Moby Dick was the source of Pollock’s title then it is possible that Pollock intended the first title of his painting to symbolise the unconscious.



Figure 10. Jackson Pollock Pasiphaë (1943)

That Pollock meant the title Moby Dick to symbolise the unconscious is further explained by Wolfe. Quoting Wysuph she writes: "In mythology ... the unconscious is portrayed as an animal, for instance ... as a whale ..." (Wolfe 1972: 69). Furthermore, she equates the central form in Pollock's work to an animal-like being which she perceives as a symbol of the unconscious (Wolfe 1972: 69). Wolfe declares that both Pollock's titles, Pasiphaë and Moby Dick, reflect the obsession of a human with an allegorical animal. In her view, according to Jung, the relationship between the human (or rather a mother figure) and animal, symbolises the unconscious. Wolfe writes: "The relationship of both the mother and a large animal with the unconscious is clear in Jung's writings" (Wolfe 1972: 69). Wolfe believes that Pollock was acquainted with Jung's book Psychology of the Unconscious in which this relationship was discussed (Wolfe 1972: 69).

Pollock's interest in the unconscious had previously been evident in the late 1930s when he turned to the Mexican muralists, particularly Clemente Orozco, for inspiration (Polcari 1991b: 99). Orozco's art dealt with themes of death, birth, violence and copulation. The themes of Orozco's paintings were central to his mythological Mexican heritage. The images included masked divinities and mythological animals of traditional Mexican beliefs. Orozco's images are expressions of the inner spiritual world of Mexican mythology. In this sense, they were images of the artist's unconscious. It has been suggested that Orozco's images provided Pollock with the imagery he needed to form a pictorial language (Polcari 1991b: 99). Moreover, this influence may have predicted Pollock's later identification with shamanism in Native American art as Orozco's images are considered to echo those of Mexican shamanic mythology (Hess 1967: 63).

Pollock's views on Native American Indian art may have been influenced by the painter and writer John Graham whom he met and befriended in 1939 (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 348). Pollock was particularly impressed by Graham's 1937 article on 'primitive' art (Naifeh and Smith 1992: p348). Naifeh and Smith suggest that Pollock was influenced by Graham's description of the 'primitive' artist plunging "into the canyons of the past

back to the first cell formation” in an attempt to “bring to our consciousness the clarities of our unconscious mind” (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 348).

Pollock’s affinity with Graham’s description of the ‘primitive’ artist in conjunction with the influence which Native American culture had on him connect Pollock to the tradition of primitivism. In addition, according to Cernuschi primitivism was one of the primary issues in Abstract Expressionism (Cernuschi 1992: 207). Primitivism, characterised by the “thematic and stylistic borrowings from non-Western cultures”, took different forms in Abstract Expressionism<sup>1</sup>(Cernuschi 1992: 207). Cernuschi considers Pollock’s work to reveal a more “conceptual and cerebral kind of primitivism” than that of the other Abstract Expressionists (Cernuschi 1992: 209). As well as being influenced by the thematic and stylistic characteristics of ‘primitive’ art<sup>2</sup>, Pollock was inspired by the “inner workings of the primitive mind” (Cernuschi 1992: 209). This obviously refers to Graham’s idea that the ‘primitive’ artist is in touch with the workings of the unconscious.

In view of his affinity with Native American art and shamanism, Elizabeth Langhorne in her article entitled ‘Pollock, Picasso and the Primitive,’ posits: “Pollock’s .... engagement with primitive American Indian art .... ultimately provided him with a sense of his own identity as shaman-artist. His very success in working out this identity confirmed him in his own mode of art making, that is, elaborating intuitively on his basic archetypal awareness ...” (Langhorne 1988: 81-82). In Langhorne’s view, Pollock strongly identified with the role of the shaman artist (Langhorne, 1988: 82). She writes:

[W]hen Pollock’s attention turned to the American Indian and his art he was quick to gain a feeling for their nature religion and mythologies, especially as presented by the American Museum of Natural History. Not only were artefacts on display, but models, dioramas and

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, however, different manifestations of the general phenomena of primitivism will be discussed only as it applies to Pollock’s work and ideas.

<sup>2</sup> Pollock’s thematic and stylistic influence from primitive art is evident in his painting *Birth*. As discussed in the Introduction, it is believed that the central forms in *Birth* are direct borrowings from the image of the Inuit Eskimo mask published in Graham’s article.

accompanying written explanations made clear their relation to mythology and ritual use. It was clear that through visionary experience and suffering, shamans were led to make sacred objects for use in rituals to heal the sick of the tribe. In effect shaman were tribal artists. This fact would have been brought home to Pollock at the 1941 exhibition of Indian Art at the Museum of Modern Art by the presence of Navaho sandpainters, whom he knew were traditionally shamans, at work in the museum. At this point one can imagine how irresistible the identity of artist-shaman must have seemed to Pollock.... It allowed him to integrate aspects of his life, mystical promptings and psychological needs, in the one persona of a shaman-artist (Langhorne 1988: 81).

In addition, Langhorne considers Pollock's concern with images of the unconscious as "vitalized by his broad-ranging engagement with the primitive, that is with American Indian symbols, shamanic attitude, and artistic style" (Langhorne 1988: 67).

Although critics such as Langhorne place Pollock within the visionary tradition of the artist-shaman, Pollock's lack of commentary on this subject makes this kind of interpretation speculative. However, it appears that Pollock's interest in shamans and shamanism is remembered by his friends Reuben Kadish, Fritz Bullman and Tony Smith (Langhorne 1988: 78). Furthermore, Pollock's particular creative process, his imagery and iconography have significant parallels to shamanic activities and imagery.

Pollock's painting Bird illustrates the influence which shamanic imagery had on his work (1941) (Figure 11). In the center of this image a large bird-like creature stretches its wings almost to the edges of the canvas. Beneath it lie two severed heads. At the top a single eye peers threateningly from the canvas. The dominant image of the bird could be borrowed from Native American art. In shamanic mythology the bird is a common symbol for the shaman.

In this regard, the form of Pollock's image bares a striking resemblance to a sculptured bird which forms part of a Haida grave-figure. This is a commemorative sculpture of a shaman's grave in the American Museum of Natural History. The bird symbolizes the



Figure 11. Jackson Pollock Bird (1941)



deceased shaman's soul which has been released into the spiritual realm (Polcari 1991b: 99). Pollock would have been familiar with this image as there is evidence that he frequented the Museum of Natural History (Polcari 1991b: 99). Like Pollock's bird, the bird of the Haida grave-figure is placed centrally within the format and has similar outstretched wings. It is possible, with respect to Pollock's knowledge of shamanism, that his bird image might be a symbol of his own transcendence into his unconscious. Naifeh and Smith consider the image to be directly related to Pollock's unconscious. According to these critics, "...the image is unequivocally Jackson's because the terror is Jackson's. The bird is, in fact, a barnyard chicken, dredged up from memories of the Phoenix farm, terrifying a two-year-old boy confronting it eye-to-vulnerable-eye, but also terrified of its own fate ..." (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 354).

Pollock's painting Naked Man (1941) (Figure 12), which contains elements of shamanic iconography, is considered by Langhorne to have associative links to Bird (Langhorne 1988: 78). Naked Man portrays the naked standing body of a youthful muscular male figure wearing an unusual circular, facial mask. The shape of the mask intimates the presence of a bird's head and beak. This mask could be based on a Northwest Indian eagle or hawk mask (Landau 1989: 58). The image of one eye locked into a yellow crescent shape exists within the mask-shape (Langhorne 1988: 78). The man holds a more traditional tribal mask with his right hand, reminiscent of the plumed ceremonial masks of the Eskimo and American Indian shamanic cultures (Polcari 1991b: 259).

Pollock's portrayal of the figure in this image has obvious parallels to the traditional identification of the shaman with a bird figure. In this respect, Pollock's figure is depicted as a shaman-like figure, a male nude with bird's head (or bird mask), not unlike the shamanic figure depicted on the fresco of the famous Paleolithic Lascaux cave. In the Lascaux image the shaman's ecstasy or transcendence is partly indicated by his erect penis (Halifax 1982: 11). Similarly in Pollock's Naked Man the genital area has been emphasized. The significant parallels between the iconography in Naked Man and traditional shamanic symbolism makes this image a recognizable rendition of the tribal

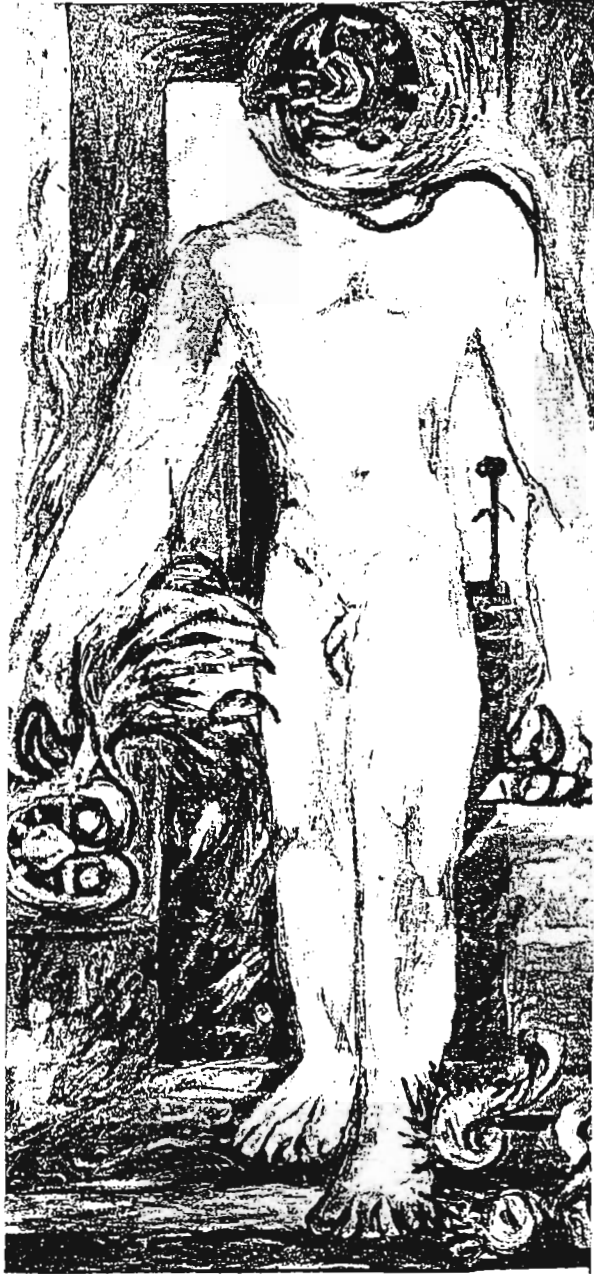


Figure 12. Jackson Pollock Naked Man (1941)

artist-shaman. Moreover, if the shamanic symbolism in Naked Man indicates Pollock's affinity with the idea of the artist-shaman, this could in effect be a self-portrait.

Pollock's identification with the artist-shaman is further indicated in his paintings Moon woman (1942) (Figure 13) and Moon woman cuts the circle (1943) (Figure 14). Langhorne believes these works to be reminiscent of the shamanic myths of the Plains Indians (Langhorne 1988: 78-79). In this mythology the Moon Woman is a vision that would appear to an American Indian if he were meant to become a shaman. According to Langhorne, Pollock was familiar with this myth (Langhorne 1989: 79). If this is the case he not only knew of shamanism but associated it with being an artist.

In Wolfe's opinion, however, the subject of a moon woman, as illustrated by Moon woman and Moon woman cuts the circle "clearly derives from Pollock's Jungian interests" (Wolfe 1972: 68). Wolfe expounds, quoting from von Franz: "The painting Moon woman, with its cursive arabesques and the slim aspects of its stick figure, appears to deal with the anima-spirit: 'vague feelings and moods, prophetic hunches, receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for personal love, feelings for nature, and .... [a man's] relation to the unconscious'" (Wolfe 1972: 68).

Jung believed that an individual reaches integration through a synthesis of the anima and animus. If these paintings are, as implied by Wolfe, derived from Pollock's knowledge of Jung's writings then it is likely that Pollock was aware of Jung's interpretation of the moon as a symbol. Jung conceived the moon as an archetypal image representing man's "initial psychic situation" (Jung 1959: 155). If Pollock intended his moon images to echo Jung's symbolism then it can be said that the subject of Moon woman and Moon woman cuts the circle is a direct reference to Pollock's concern with exploring the unconscious in paint. Hence, even if Moon woman and Moon woman cuts the circle are given a



Figure 13. Jackson Pollock Moon woman (1942)



Figure 14. Jackson Pollock Moon woman cuts the circle (1943)

Jungian interpretation, parallels can still be drawn between Pollock and the traditional artist-shaman<sup>3</sup>.

In response to the belief that Pollock's images reveal a shamanic spirit which is inspired by Jung and Native American art William Rubin, in his article 'Pollock as Jungian Illustrator: The limits of psychological Criticism', opinions:

[Jungian critics] both imply and on occasion declare - that Pollock 'consciously' introduced Jungian references, indeed, a whole 'program' of them. Given Pollock's working method, I find such a *priori* planning for the pictures inconceivable and alien to the nature of the painting. As Pollock himself said in 1944, doubtless referring to *Moon woman cuts the circle* among other pictures: 'Some people find references to American Indian art... in parts of my pictures. *That wasn't intentional*; [it] probably was the result of early memories and enthusiasms'...If the influence of Indian art on an Indian motif was "unintentional", how much more so would have been the use of any literary/psychoanalytic source? (Rubin 1979: 116).

Leaving aside Rubin's reservations regarding the relationship between Native American art and Jung's ideas and Pollock's imagery, the shamanic nature of Pollock's exploration of his unconscious and his so-called identification with the artist-shaman is nowhere more evident than in his execution of his 'drip' paintings. Here the association is not so much evident in the visual dimension as in the creative process itself. Pollock considered the technique he applied to his 'drip' paintings to be "*akin* to that of the Indian sand painters of the West" (Cernuschi 1992: 209). Both these techniques involved a direct, spontaneous approach without any preconceived ideas. As with Pollock's 'drip' paintings, it is through the process of making the sand paintings that the Navaho Indians were able to intuitively express the unconscious. Once the process was completed the sand paintings were swept away (Rhodes 1994: 190-1).

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<sup>3</sup> The artist-shaman attempts to restore man's original spiritual condition through the unconscious exploration of archetypes.

During the creation of the 'drip' paintings Pollock appeared to assume or act out the role of the artist-shaman. This process was captured in a series of photographs and films taken by Hans Namuth of Pollock at work in 1951 (Figure 15a and b)). Pollock would place the canvas on the floor. This allowed him to step in and around his work while he poured and dribbled paint freely from pots or worked the surface with a brush, a stick or with his hands. The films and photographs helped define what is commonly known as Pollock's 'drip' technique. Rather than dripping the paint the films show how Pollock controlled the flow of liquid paint across a canvas. By speeding up or slowing down the pouring process and by employing different physical hand, arm and wrist gestures Pollock obtained various effects (O'Connor 1967: 49).

Although Pollock was ultimately in control of his process, this spontaneous approach was open to accidental and chance effects. In addition, according to Naifeh and Smith, it was an approach which allowed a "rapid unspooling" of Pollock's imagination or unconscious (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 539). In this way the 'drip' technique echoed the automatism of surrealists such as Joan Miro and Jean Arp who experimented with spontaneous processes which were supposedly devoid of preconceived ideas and conscious thought or planning. These processes, they believed, led to forms which were direct products of the unconscious (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 412). With regard to Pollock's 'action paintings' Harold Rosenberg wrote: "The innovation of action painting was to dispense with the representation of the [artist's psychic] state in favour of enacting it in physical movement" (Rosenberg 1969: 27).

Wysuph suggests that the aim of the 'drip' method was not to express the unconscious but "to veil those unconscious experiences which had already been tapped in the preliminary process of eliciting automatic imagery" (Wysuph 1970: 55). This view is possibly demonstrated by Pollock's painting Number 1 (1948) (Figure 16). The iconography which had dominated works such as Naked Man and Bird is gone. The figurative element is still there, however, hidden or veiled beneath skeins of paint. In Number 1, underlying the ribbons of white and black paint and traces of blue, red and



Figure 15a. Pollock at Work (1951) Photographs by Hans Namuth.





Figure 15b. Pollock at Work (1951) Photographs by Hans Namuth.

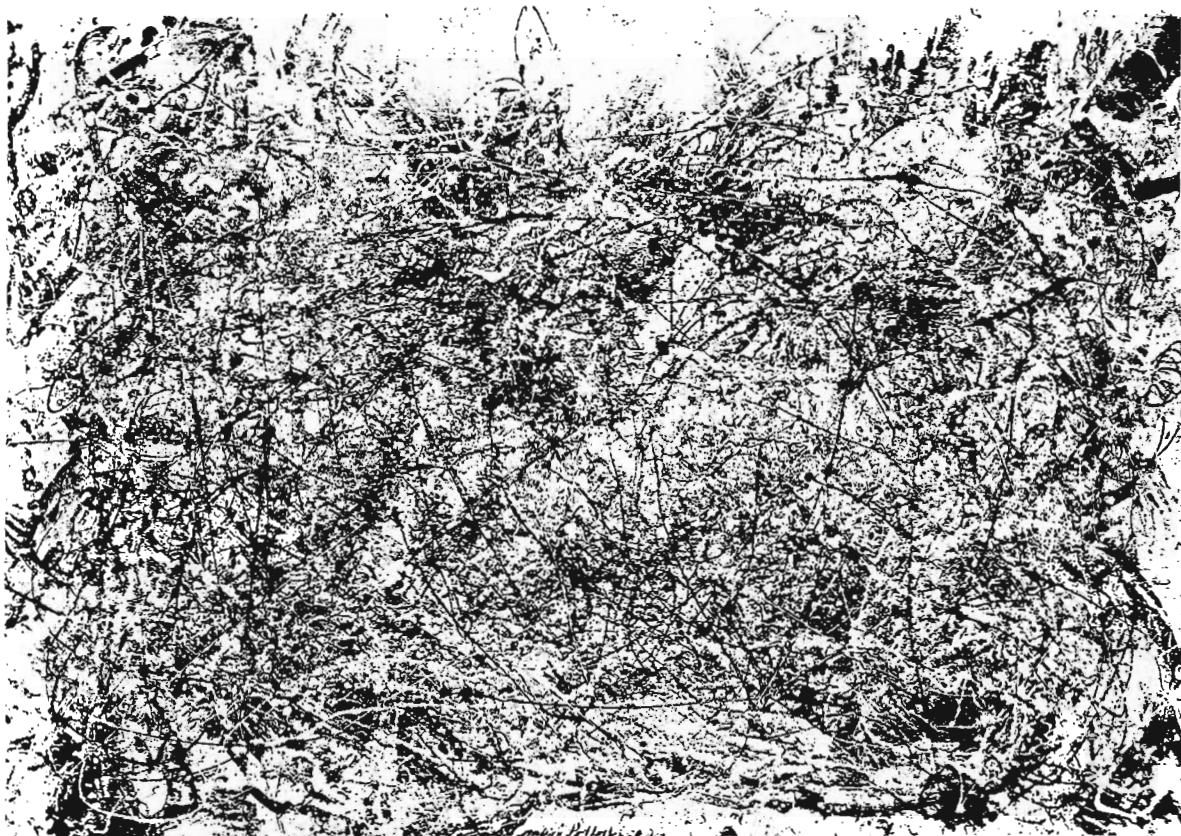


Figure 16. Jackson Pollock Number 1 (1948)

ochre, Pollock has imprinted the canvas with repeated hand marks. The hand prints are considered to be reminiscent of the marks of authorship of the ancient artists of Prehistoric cave painting (Landau 1989: 90)<sup>4</sup>.

The successive marks of Pollock's hands emphasise his attempt to be 'in' or a 'part' of his paintings. That he physically became part of the painting reflects an attempt to ensure that gesture and mark, body and soul were united. Moreover, Pollock's swirling lines recorded the details of his process similar to the way the shaman records the details of his or her spiritual journey. His marks made visible the actions and motions of his creative process. Pollock aptly described his new images as "memories arrested in space" (Landau 1989: 182). Tucker maintains that Pollock and his creative process "are as one in the shape-shifting line which drips and dances its way across the canvas, endlessly alive, endlessly transformed - a calligraphy of consciousness in total, metamorphosing tune with itself" (Tucker 1992: 319). Moreover, Tucker opinions: "Like the great shaman, Pollock swept far down into himself in these paintings...into a healing, mythopoeic space: the space of cosmos, of ecstatic reverie, of *participation mystique*" (Tucker 1992: 319). It is in this way that Pollock's 'action painting' echoes the form and details of the shamanic trance. It is during a trance-state that the shaman is able to move, through creative processes, further and further into the healing depths of his or her unconscious toward an integrated state.

With regard to the parallels between Pollock's process and shamanic Navajo sand painting Colin Rhodes, in Primitivism and Modern Art, describes Pollock's creative process as a "painterly method of shamanic self-discovery" (Rhodes 1994: 90). Rhodes maintains that these ideas are contained in Pollock's statement:

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<sup>4</sup> Hand prints in ancient cave paintings are believed to be the artist's mark of authorship.

My painting does not come from the easel.... On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West.... I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess (Rhodes 1994: 190-1)

Rhodes relates Pollock's process to Jung's notions that "myths are archetypal forms that codify basic human experiences, and that conscious and unconscious are fused" (Rhodes 1994: 190).

Unlike Naked man and Bird, Pollock's 'action paintings' do not resemble shamanic iconography. Rather, in these paintings Pollock appeared to act out the role of the shaman - a role which involves the exploration of the potentially healing depths of the unconscious. The healing activities of the artist-shaman, of course, have strong parallels to Jung's idea that the creative process allows the artist to "draw upon the healing and redeeming forces of the collective psyche" (Jung 1954: 198). Moreover, this description of the creative process echoes Graham's view that the 'primitive' artist (as represented by the ancient shaman) retains the ability to intuitively explore the unconscious through his creative processes. Pollock's 'drip' paintings, therefore, seem to investigate an identification with the role of a shaman-artist - a role which may have been inspired by the writings of Jung, Native American art and primitivism.

Regarding Pollock's association with the idea that the artist is a visionary, there is evidence that he was aware of Blake's visionary psychology (Wolfe 1972: 66). Apparently Pollock had a reproduction of one of Blake's prints pinned up on the wall of his Long Island studio (Wolfe 1972: 66). This is an indication that Pollock was at least aware of Blake's work. In addition, Naifeh and Smith claim that Pollock had read, and was thus familiar with, Blake's writings (Naifeh and Smith 1992: 610). Wolfe believes that Blake influenced both the conception and the composition of some of Pollock's paintings, namely Guardians of the secret (1943) (Figure 17) and Painting (1938) (Figure

18) (Wolfe 1972: 66). In her view, the format and content of these three paintings, particularly that of Painting, is derived from Plate XI in Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job (Figure 19) (Wolfe 1972: 66).

The series of designs and accompanying text of Blake's Plate XI in Illustrations of the Book of Job is an interpretation of the Biblical Book of Job. In the Bible the Book of Job deals with the problem of human suffering. Job, who is a fair and kind man, suffers at the hand of God for reasons he can't understand. Nonetheless, Job comes to realise that he should not contemplate the mystery of human suffering but that he should have an unquestioning faith in God. In the end Job is saved by his faith. Blake was not satisfied with this version as he believed it left the problem of human suffering unsolved. To Blake, the Biblical Book of Job signified "an evasion of the great world problem" (Damon 1969a: 223). He thus re-interpreted the Book of Job in terms of his visionary mythology.

Blake's twenty one illustrations of the Book of Job portray Job as a materialist, God as "divine humanity with poetic vision" and Satan as the epitome of the materialist's false values (Davis 1977: 143). In Blake's mythology such false values were represented by the dominance of reason (evil) over imagination (good). In Blake's belief Job suffered because he lacked spiritual perception. In the Illustrations of the Book of Job the true nature of Job's suffering is revealed to him. Job experiences a revelation by seeing his true spiritual self and is thus transfigured.

In Plate XI of Illustrations of the Book of Job, Blake presents God in Job's dreams as the personification of both reason (evil) and imagination (good). The composition shows Job lying stretched out on his bed. Floating horizontally above him is his vision of the God of his evil dreams. In Wolfe's view, God, with his cloven hoof and a serpent entwined around his body, appears as a Satanic God - thus revealing his dual nature.

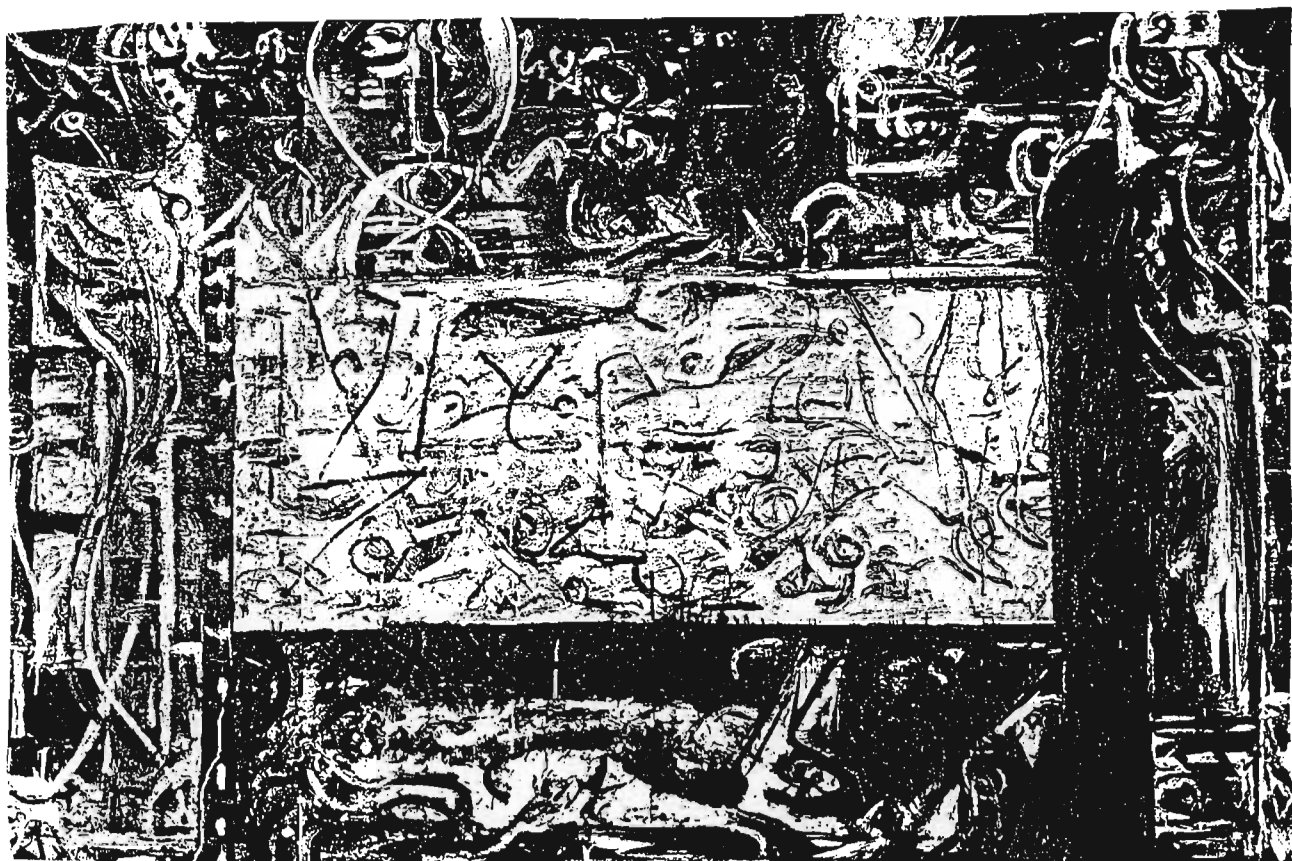


Figure 17. Jackson Pollock Guardians of the secret (1943)



Figure 18. Jackson Pollock Painting (1938)



Figure 19. William Blake Illustrations of the Book of Job: Plate XI (1795)



This, she believes, is emphasised by the caption from 2 Corinthians above the image which reads: "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (Wolfe 1972: 66).

Blake's portrayal of God here is similar to Jung's perception of God. Jung stresses the importance of God as a dual power - a being who is both good (unconscious) and evil (conscious) (Jung 1983: 318). Blake expresses a similar conception of God Plate XI in Illustrations of the Book of Job. This is shown in his image of God whose leg changes from a manlike calf to a cloven hoof (Wolfe 1972: 66). Blake's notion of God forms part of his visionary psychology. He saw man's redemption as determined by man's realisation of his own Divinity (Damon 1969a: 224). Hence Blake's story of Job - "that of the descent of God and the ascent of Man" - depicts the union of the conscious and the unconscious (Damon 1969a: 224).

The notion of a Satanic God (revealed both in Blake's print and in Jungian theory) is considered by Wolfe to be reflected in Pollock's symbolism in Painting (Wolfe 1972: 66). The composition is made up of interlocking mask-like shapes. These shapes suggest a beaked bird-like head, a human head and a bull's or horse's head. Wolfe suggests that the "beaked bird-like head may represent reputed spiritual qualities, a false god with the capacity to torture" (Wolfe 1972: 66). If Pollock were aware of the symbolism in Blake's image then perhaps the bird-like form is influenced by Blake's depiction of God as a dual power.

Wolfe also considers Pollock's image of a Satanic God to be reminiscent of Jung's discussion of Job: "Here Job is voicing the torment of the soul caused by the onslaught of unconscious desires; the libido festers in his flesh, a cruel God has overpowered him and pierced him through with barbed thoughts that agonise his whole being" (Wolfe 1972: 66). According to Wolfe, it is likely that Pollock was familiar with these lines (Wolfe 1972: 66). Blake evokes a similar image of God in the text accompanying the image of Job: "With dreams upon my bed, Thou scarest me and affrightest me with

Visions" (Wolfe 1972: 66). Both Jung and Blake present Job as an individual tormented by the images of his unconscious. It is also possible that Blake's accompanying text would have appealed to Pollock's sense of the unconscious.

Compositionally, Painting can be seen to resemble Blake's Plate XI. This is evident in the emphasis of the horizontal elements which correspond in both images. Pollock's painting also echoes the curvilinear shape of the headrest of Job's bed. Furthermore, both images have similar jagged forms in the top left hand corner of the format which appears in both cases to emphasise the menacing form of the upper horizontal. Pollock's format in this image is also reminiscent of Blake's Elohim creating Adam (1795) and Pity (1795). Like Plate XI in Illustrations of the Book of Job both these compositions emphasise the horizontal rectangle.

Similarly, the compositions of Pollock's Guardians of the secret and Pasiphaë can also be attributed to the influence of Blake. As in Blake's Plate XI of the Illustrations of the Book of Job, Pollock's format has a central horizontal rectangle with horizontal registers above and below. However, the composition is more fully developed in Pollock's Guardians of the Secret in that Pollock has closed the rectangle off at the sides (Wolfe 1972: 66). That Pollock closed off the sides of the rectangle may have been to emphasise the idea of a secret (the unconscious) symbolically enclosed in the rectangle. The rectangle in Pollock's image is flanked by the guardians who, in Wolfe's view, symbolise the male and female aspects of the psyche -the rational and the intuitive (Wolfe 1972: 66). She also asserts that the lower guardian (resembling a dog) represents the animal world. Jung considered animals to have retained the intuitive, natural instincts that modern man has lost (Jung 1966: 66).

According to Wolfe, Pollock's composition is reminiscent of a Jungian diagram which illustrates aspects of the psyche such as the ego, the conscious and the unconscious (Wolfe 1972: 68). If this is the case then it is possible that Pollock borrowed Blake's

composition of Plate IX in Illustrations of the Book of Job because the content of the Blake's image implies an exploration of the psyche.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Pollock actively identified with Blake's visionary world view, it appears he was influenced by the compositional elements and content of Blake's work. Moreover, it is possible that Pollock used these compositional elements to the same ends that Blake did - to indicate the existence of inner reality. Therefore, even if Pollock was unaware of Blake's notion that the creative process should record visionary experiences it is possible that he was drawn to Blake's images because they invited an appeal to the unconscious.

In conclusion, while Pollock may have not admitted to being a visionary artist there is substantial circumstantial evidence that Pollock was influenced by shamanistic art and culture. Moreover his supposed affinity with Jung's ideas on art locates him within the twentieth century shamanic spirit. There are also links, although somewhat more tenuous, between Pollock and the Gothic and Romantic idea of the visionary artist. These links are reflected in the influence Blake's work had on Pollock's.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **JOSEPH BEUYS: THE ARTIST AS A VISIONARY**

Joseph Beuys (1921-1983) is another artist who is considered to have identified with the role of shaman-artist. Unlike Pollock, Beuys openly assumed a role similar to that of the shaman-artist. His work and ideas are seen by various critics and by Beuys himself to be invocations of his identification with a shamanic figure. His knowledge of and familiarity with shamanic rituals and themes is connected to his interest in Siberian central Asian shamanism (Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 71).

While Beuys' work and world view expressed shamanic themes and ideas, he interpreted these shamanic ideas in the context of twentieth century Western society. Beuys' concern was with the spiritual condition of Western man. He argued that the dominance of rational, materialist values in western society had suppressed man's sense of the spiritual (Tisdall 1979: 23).

Beuys' work was directed at evoking a sense of the metaphysical and of the transcendental. In Beuys' words:

...thinking has become so positivist that people can only appreciate what can be controlled by reason, what can be used, what furthers your career. The need for questions that go beyond that has pretty much died out of our culture. Because most people think in materialistic terms they cannot understand my work. This is why I feel it's necessary to present something more than mere objects. By doing that people may begin to understand that man is not only a rational being (Sharp 1969: 45).

Beuys also reacted against the Nazi perversion of artistic traditions such as Romanticism, Expressionism and primitivism (Hughes 1993: 405). He sought to reclaim and develop these traditions in terms of a deeper spirituality (Hughes 1993: 405). Beuys' innovative approach to sculpture was primarily determined by this consideration. Robert Hughes elaborates:

His gift for taking conventionally repellent materials and socially abhorrent memories and converting them, as by a shamanistic act, into oblique visions of history was what touched off the Expressionist revival of the late seventies. He managed to integrate German longings for a mythic past back into modern culture, enabling Germans - for the first time, in the visual arts, since 1933 - to move with an easy conscience amid their inherited Romantic imagery, so fatally contaminated by Hitler (Hughes 1993: 405).

Central to Beuys' philosophy was his conception of a 'social sculpture'. By 'social sculpture' he meant that sculpture is the transformative process man should explore in order to become closer to the spiritual (Sharp 1969: 45). He believed that everyone is a creative being and that creativity can be channelled into many different things (Beuys 1986: 25). To Beuys, it was irrelevant whether a product came from a painter, a sculptor or a physicist. What was important was the engagement of the creative unconscious during productivity. He asserted that in order for humanity to achieve a spiritual transformation it must reflect upon the power of creative activity insofar as it is able to rediscover the spiritual nature of humanity (Schellmann and Kluser 1980: Part 1<sup>1</sup>).

As regards his own work, Beuys' notion of a 'social sculpture' took the form of a radical reappraisal of traditional sculpture. He was concerned with the idea of creating an anti-image (Schellmann and Kluser 1980: Part 1). This led him to reject the traditional conception of sculpture as an aesthetically constructed and decorated art object. Beuys was concerned with "a more process-bound and architectural understanding of sculptural production and perception" (Buchloh 1979: 41).

For Beuys, the essence of sculpture is thought. In this sense, language or speech becomes a sculptural process in that it is an expression of thought (Adriani, Konnertz

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Beuys: Multiples by J. Schellmann and B. Kluser has no page numbers. The text is divided into two sections - Part One and Part Two.

and Thomas 1979: 94). In Beuys' words: "If I produce something, I transmit a message to someone else. The origin of the flow of information comes not from matter, but from the 'I', from an idea" (Sharp 1969: 39).

The process orientated nature of Beuys' sculpture is also reflected in the specific nature of his sculptural materials. For example, Beuys' made use of fat in two states - liquid and solid - and hence evoked the idea of process and transformation. Moreover, the changing quality of this substance is, in Beuys' view, indicative of emotion, ideas and thought. This is clarified by Beuys:

Fat in liquid form distributes itself chaotically in an undifferentiated fashion until it collects in a differentiated form in a corner. Then it goes from the chaotic principle to the form principle, from will to thinking. These are parallel concepts which correspond to the emotions, to what could be called soul" (Sharp 1969: 47).

Beuys also saw qualities such as heat and cold as having sculptural properties. Heat sensitive substances such as wax and fat retain heat when in liquid form. Beuys used felt in many of his works partly because of its ability to retain warmth. He interpreted this usage as a representation of "spiritual warmth" (Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 39).

Beuys' rejection of traditional sculptural forms and processes is demonstrated in his use of live and dead animals, found objects and the presentation of himself as sculpture. However, according to Benjamin Buchloh the originality of Beuys' approach is overestimated. Buchloh claims that these influences were probably absorbed from Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism, as well as the Fluxus activities (in which Beuys took part) (Buchloh 1980: 41). Buchloh recalls Boccioni's Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture (1912): "We claim that even twenty different materials can be used in a single work to achieve sculptural emotion. Let us mention only a few: glass, wood, cardboard, horsehair, leather, cloth mirrors, electric light etc. etc ..." (Buchloh 1980: 41).

Thierry De Duve also questions the originality of Beuys' approach. In his article, 'Joseph Beuys or The Last of the Proletarians', De Duve asserts that Beuys' promise of redemption through creativity is:

what all of artistic modernity never ceased to promise, to hope for, to invoke as the emancipatory horizon of its achievement ... the will to emancipation and the desire for dis-alienation has always meant: everyone is an artist, but the masses don't have the power to actualise this potential because they're oppressed, alienated, and exploited (De Duve 1988: 55-56).

For De Duve the idea that art and spirituality, religion, philosophy, science and politics are inextricably linked, as expressed in Beuys' 'social sculpture', is an idea that is intrinsic to artistic modernity.

Hence, although Beuys may have rejected aspects of modernism, in particular those aspects which reflected the domination of rationality over spirituality, he assimilated modernist ideas into a personal mythology that was very much his own. The main distinction between Beuys' ideas and those of other Modernist artistic trends lies in his explicit identification with the role of artist-shaman. Although modernist artists such as Pollock and Picasso have been associated with the role of artist-shaman they never openly declared an affinity to the shamanic tradition as did Beuys (Tisdall 1979: 23).

Beuys did not view his identification with the role of artist-shaman as a nostalgic return to the ancient tradition of shamanism (Tisdall 1979: 23). He was concerned rather with the function of the shaman as a spiritual healer - one who restores an awareness of the spiritual in society. To Beuys, his role as a artist-shaman was an attempt to stress, through his work and ideas, the necessity of man's spiritual transformation in the face of twentieth century rationalism. In Beuys' words:

I take this form of ancient behaviour as the idea of transformation through concrete processes of life, nature and history. My intention is obviously not to return to such earlier cultures but to stress the idea of transformation and of substance. This is precisely what the shaman does in order to bring about change and development: his nature is therapeutic ... while shamanism marks a point in the past, it also indicates

a possibility for historical development ... So when I appear as a kind of shamanistic figure, or allude to it, I do it to stress my belief in other priorities [than those of twentieth century industrial society] and the need to come up with a completely different plan for working with substances. For instance, in places like universities, where everyone speaks so rationally, it is necessary for a kind of enchanter to appear ... (Tisdall 1979: 23).

Many of Beuys' pieces explored themes of sickness, death, rebirth and transcendence. These concerns are central to shamanism (Tisdall 1979: 23).

Caroline Tisdall records that one event in Beuys' life was vital in determining the shamanic nature of many of his works and ideas. In 1941 Beuys joined the air force where he trained as a dive bomber pilot in Königgrätz. In 1943, during the second world war, the Ju-87 aircraft that Beuys was flying was hit by Russian flak and crashed in a snowstorm in the Crimea. He was subsequently found unconscious among the wreckage by Tartars. They were a nomadic people of the Crimea (Tisdall 1979: 16). Tisdall quotes Beuys:

...yet it was they [the Tartars] who discovered me in the snow after the crash, when the German search parties had given up. I was still unconscious then and only came round completely after twelve days or so, and by then I was back in a German field hospital. So the memories I have of that time are images that penetrated my consciousness ... They covered my body in fat to help it regenerate warmth, and wrapped it in felt as an insulator to keep the warmth in (Tisdall 1979: 16-17).

Fat and felt thus became the material for many of Beuys' works. These materials with their familiar associations with life-giving, healing substances became visual metaphors of survival. On another level they functioned as symbols of transcendence and rebirth, indicating Beuys' intention to convey a sense of the spiritual. The nature of felt, the fact that it is made from compacted animal hair and plant fibres, emphasises Beuys' theory of sculptural material. Beuys considered that sculptural materials should be an invocation of transformation and feeling rather than the description of a permanent image (Larson 1980: 127).



Furthermore, Beuys' idea that fat symbolised spiritual warmth had evolutionary connotations (Schellmann and Kluser 1980: part1). In his mythology, the notion of evolution suggests a rediscovery of mythic origins, the beginning of evolution. This is expounded by Beuys who believes that notions of "... spiritual or evolutionary warmth ... reach way back and are, first of all, represented by and continue to have a psychic effect through my performances, above all through the character of felt and fat" (Schellmann and Kluser 1980: part 1).

Beuys' assertion that his creative processes, his performances and his use of materials (such as fat and felt) are focused on an attempt to rediscover a sense of origins is reminiscent of the role of the shamanic trance. The shaman goes in to a trance-state in an attempt to restore an original, primordial harmony. Through transcendence the shaman is able to rediscover his mythic origins by connecting with the spirit world. He then communicates his spiritual experiences to the community through creative processes (Halifax 1982: 19). Similarly, Beuys' sculptural process was aimed at evoking a sense of the spiritual and the transcendental, a realm which does not exist in the material reality of the image. Beuys wrote:

... it's a matter of evoking a lucid world, a clear, a lucid, perhaps even a transcendental, a spiritual world through something which looks quite different, through an anti-image ... So it is not right to say I'm interested in grey. That's not right. And I'm not interested in dirt either. I'm interested in a process which leads us away beyond these things (Schellmann and Kluser 1980: part 1).

Beuys' preoccupation with the transformation from rational thought to an awareness of the intuitive or the spiritual was illustrated in his performance piece How to explain pictures to a dead hare (1965) (Figure 20). During this performance Beuys spent three hours explaining his art to a dead hare. His head was covered with gold leaf and honey. Tied to his right foot was an iron sole which echoed a felt sole tied to his left foot (Tisdall 1979: 101). Beuys remained mute (yet he mouthed words) throughout the whole performance, carrying the hare from picture to picture. To Beuys, the whole



Figure 20. Joseph Beuys How to explain pictures to a dead hare (1965)

action spoke about the problem of human consciousness, language and rational thought. It is this condition which, in Beuys' mythology, denies the existence of the spiritual. He argued that, unlike man, animals have retained an intuitive sensibility and understanding of the spiritual. In this performance piece Beuys takes this idea to the extreme because he is using not just an animal but a dead animal. He is thus asserting that "even a dead animal preserves more powers of intuition than some human beings with their stubborn rationality" (Tisdall 1979: 101).

Beuys' performance with the hare can be seen as a shamanic ritual. He was symbolically acting out the role of the shaman in the 'communication' with a dead animal. This echoes the shamanic ability to understand animal languages and to adopt an animal mind set which enables him to become spiritually transformed. In shamanic mythology animals are conceived as having direct links to the spiritual realm (Halifax 1982: 78). Animals are regarded as spirit helpers who accompany the shaman's soul into the beyond (Halifax 1982: 78).

The process of spiritual transcendence is implied in How to explain pictures to a dead hare by Beuys' use of honey. He uses honey on his head to suggest the transformation from the purely intellectual to a consciousness which includes an awareness of the rational and the spiritual. In Beuys' view the honey, being a living substance, symbolises living thought. To Beuys, this is the process of thought that involves an awareness of both reason and intuition. Consequently, Beuys conceives rational thought (without the existence of intuitive thought) as dead (Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 132).

Throughout Beuys' work there is a relationship with the animal world that echoes the shamanic belief that animals have retained their sense of intuition. In this regard, Beuys perceives the hare as a symbol of birth and of incarnation and spirituality (Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 132). Beuys also perceived the stag as an animal gifted with spiritual powers and insight. The stag appeared in works such as Dead man on

stag's skeleton (1956) and Stag hunt (1961). For Beuys the stag was "the Accompanier of the soul" (Tisdall 1980: 34). This view is directly paralleled in shamanic mythology where the animal is conceived as a spirit helper because it guides the soul into the spiritual realm. In Siberian shamanism, a tradition which Beuys was aware of, animal helpers can appear as bears, wolves, stags, hares and birds (Eliade 1970: p93-4, 89).

Beuys' preoccupation with the animal world was further pursued in Coyote (1974) (Figure 21). Beuys spent a week with a coyote in a caged space, where he established a mute dialogue with the animal. Like the hare in Siberian myths, in shamanic American Indian culture the coyote is a symbol of transcendence and transformation (Tisdall 1979: 228). Beuys' activity in Coyote took the shamanic concerns of How to explain pictures to a dead hare a step further as his experience was with a live, wild animal. His interest in the mythical connection of animal and man did not mean that he was reverting to traditional shamanic ritual. Rather, he was adapting this idea to his personal mythology. In Beuys' words: "I do not want to go back to the magical or mythical world, but I want to pursue with the help of these pictures a visual analysis, and also to bring an element of visual analysis to consciousness" (Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 71).

The shamanic themes of death and suffering and their spiritual implications were illustrated in Beuys' work Show your Wound (1976) (Figure 22). This was an environment which Beuys assembled following his own serious illness. The work was installed in an underground pedestrian area in Munich. Assembled at intervals around the edges of the space were objects in pairs. These were two sets of old agricultural implements laid on the ground: two hoes, two forks with red tags tied around their handles, middle prongs removed, and beneath them incomplete circles; two bundles of the Italian political newspaper Lotta Continua, two blackboards registering the words "Show your wound" and two used dissection tables from a pathology laboratory. On the wall above these tables were two zinc-covered boxes coated with translucent fat. Under the draining-holes of the two tables were two covered glass jars and next to them

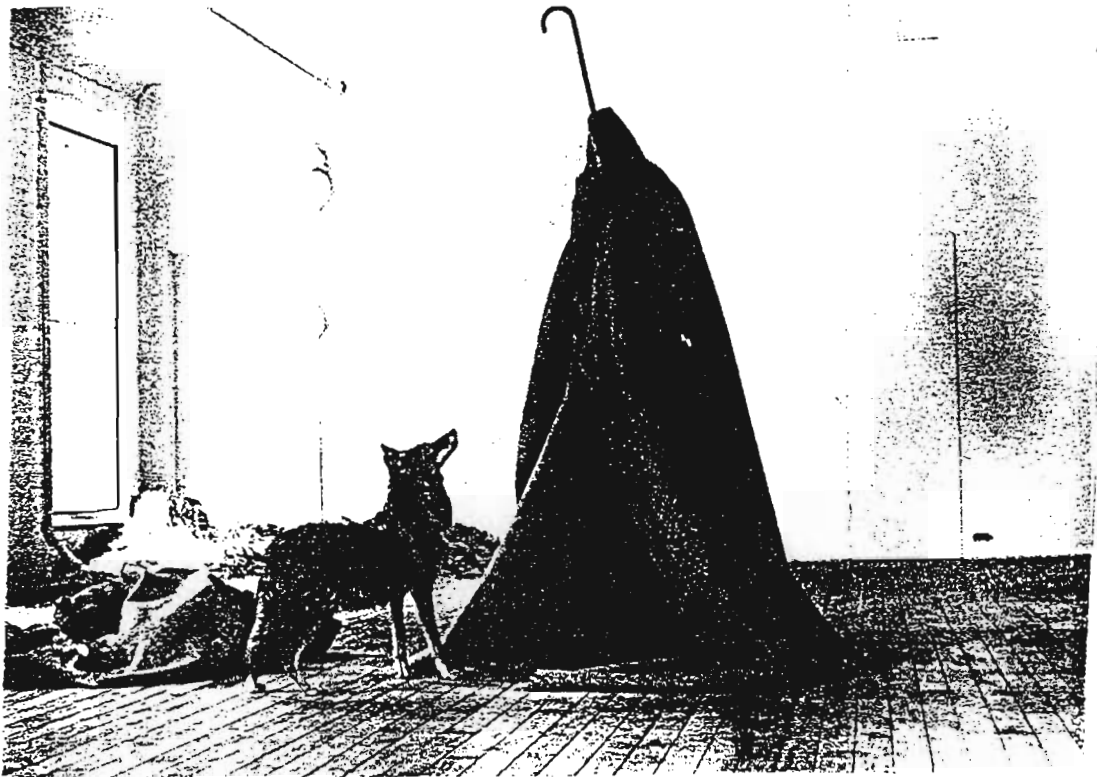
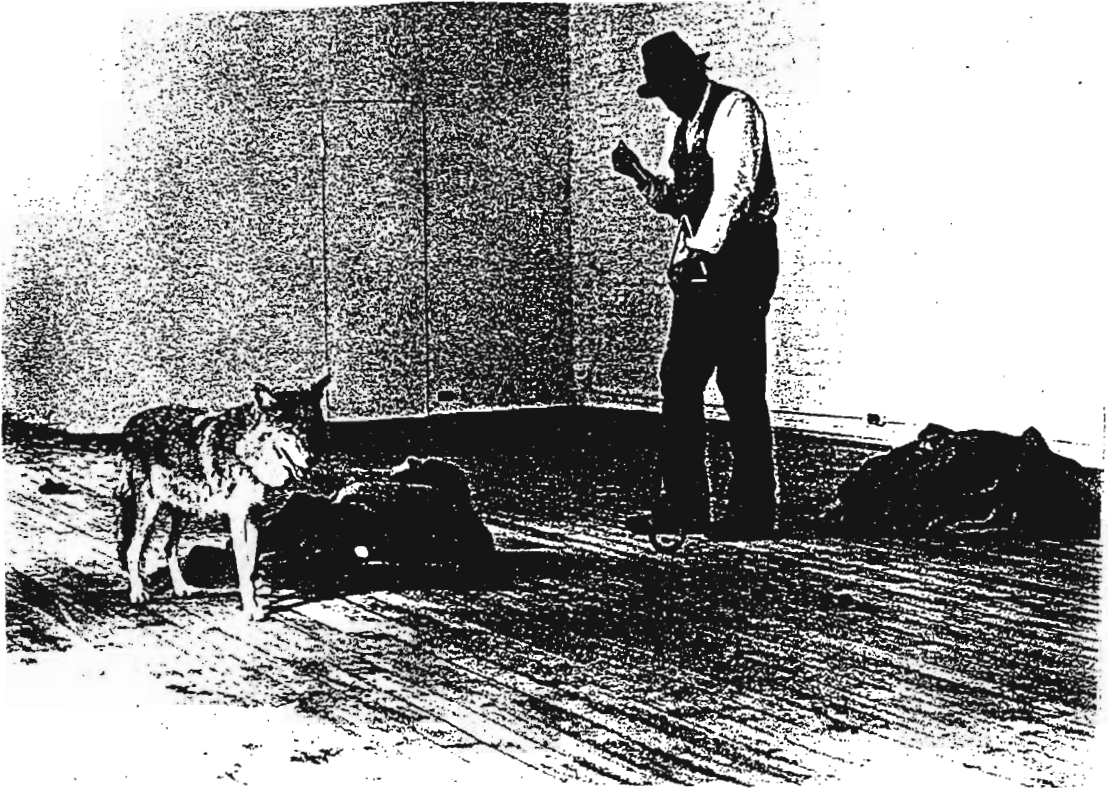


Figure 21. Joseph Beuys Coyote (1974)

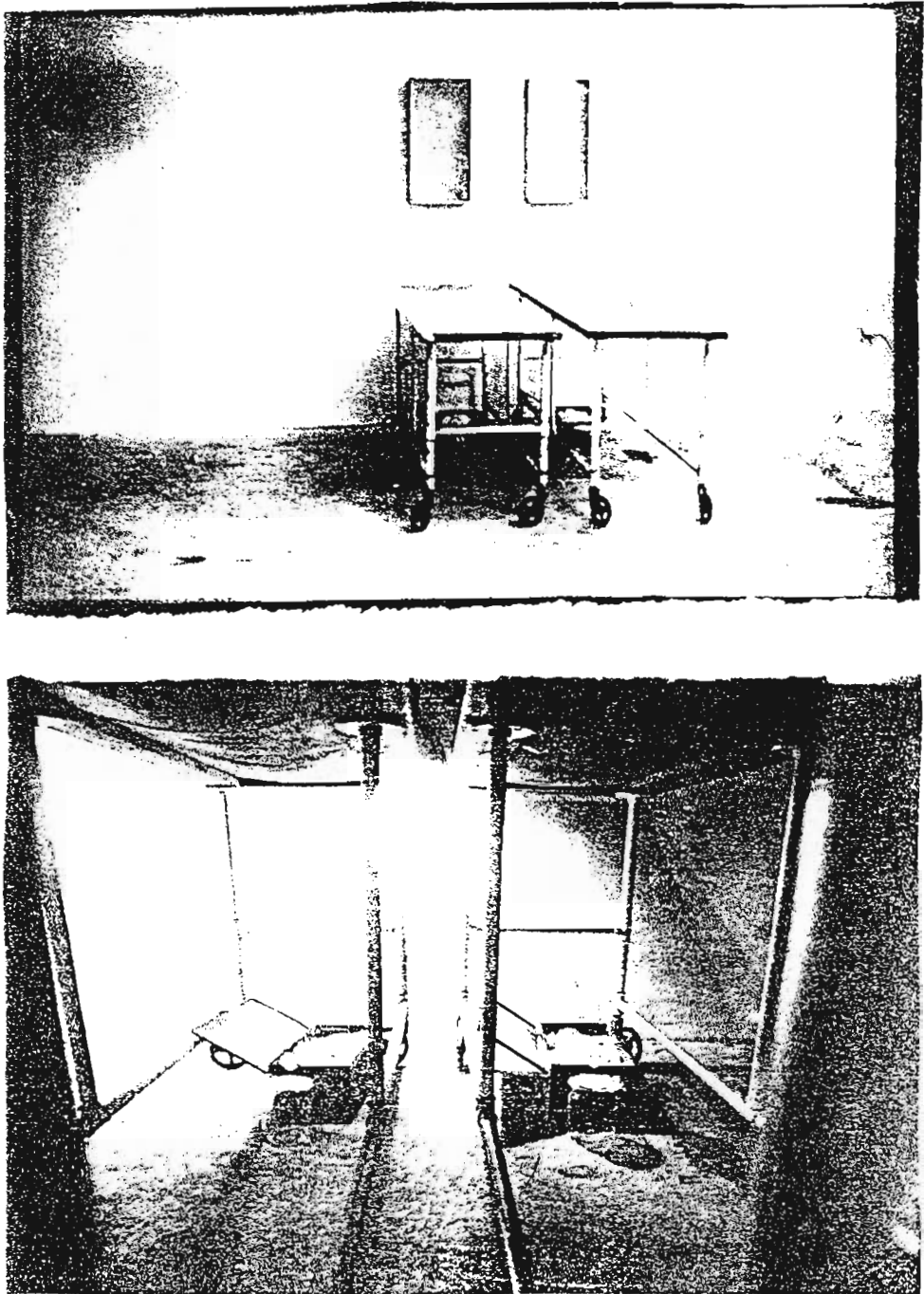


Figure 22. Joseph Beuys Show your Wound (1976)

boxes filled with fat, each with a thermometer. The only unpaired object was a thrush's skull emerging from a test tube (Tisdall 1979: 214).

The notions of sickness and death were depicted by the arrangement of the agricultural tools and their red tags which are suggestive of corpses in a mortuary. These themes are also prevalent in the "Show your wound" slogan on the blackboards and in the presentation of the much used dissecting tables. These themes of sickness and death were counteracted by Beuys' use of fat as the presence of this material symbolised mental warmth and healing.

The objects and substances in Show your wound are considered to refer to individual and collective sickness and healing in the spiritual sense of the word. For Beuys the idea of a spiritual sickness was symptomatic of the contemporary human condition - man's loss of soul. As in shamanic traditions, he believed that before society can be healed, the wound must be located in the individual as well as in the collectivity. Beuys' idea of showing the wound indicated a move, as in shamanic tradition, towards healing, transformation and spiritual enlightenment (Tisdall 1979: 214).

Beuys' affinity with the relationship between creativity and spiritual healing is considered to be reminiscent of Freud's definition of the artist (Larson 1980: 127). In Kay Larson's view, Freud regarded the artist as someone "whose trauma finds power in making its inner world public" (Larson 1980: 127). Moreover, although Beuys never acknowledged any influence of Jung's writings and ideas, his consideration of the healing powers of art echoes Jung's writings. Like Beuys, Jung believed in the therapeutic nature of art and of the artist's role. He too considered suffering a precondition for psychic integration (Jung 1954: 195). Beuys' allusion to a shamanic figure stresses, at the same time, his concern with the artist as a healer and the creative engagement of the unconscious as a healing process. Similarly, Jung saw the exploration of the unconscious as integral to the process of psychic integration (Jung 1966: 90).

What is important about Beuys' identification with the artist-shaman was his concern with his own physical illness and imminent death. He explored this concern as it applied to shamanic tradition. Beuys' preoccupation with his death was predicted in the performance Iphigenie /Titus Andronicus (1969) (Figure 23) and, shortly before he died, in the installation Palazzo Regale (1986) (Figure 24).

Beuys was asked to design sets for Goethe's Iphigenie and Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus. Instead, according to Tisdall, he offered to perform both these plays simultaneously (Tisdall 1979: 182). Tisdall links this performance to Beuys' theory of a 'social sculpture'. Central to this theory is the idea of the union of opposites - namely reason and intuition, order and chaos (Adrianni, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 2). The union of these necessary opposites is, in Tisdall's view, symbolised in the bringing together of "German 'idealism', represented by Goethe's Iphigenie, and English 'realism', represented by Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus" (Tisdall 1979: 182).

The performance consisted of amplified pre-recorded versions of both plays read by actors. A white horse occupied a section of the stage. The other half of the stage was empty - this was meant to symbolise Titus (Tisdall 197: 182). Beuys, who represented Iphigenie, was wrapped in white fur which mirrored the white horse (Tisdall 1979: 182). During the performance Beuys clashed cymbals. Because animals are symbols of transcendence in shamanic mythology they are believed to have connections with spiritual realm. The horse in Iphigenie /Titus Andronicus, therefore, could well have been intended to represent a symbol of transcendence. The theme of transcendence is also clarified by Thomas McEvelley who states that Beuys "seemed to be acting out a summons for doors to another world to open, the white stallion, as in the Book of Revelations, waiting to carry him through" (McEvelley 1986: 131).



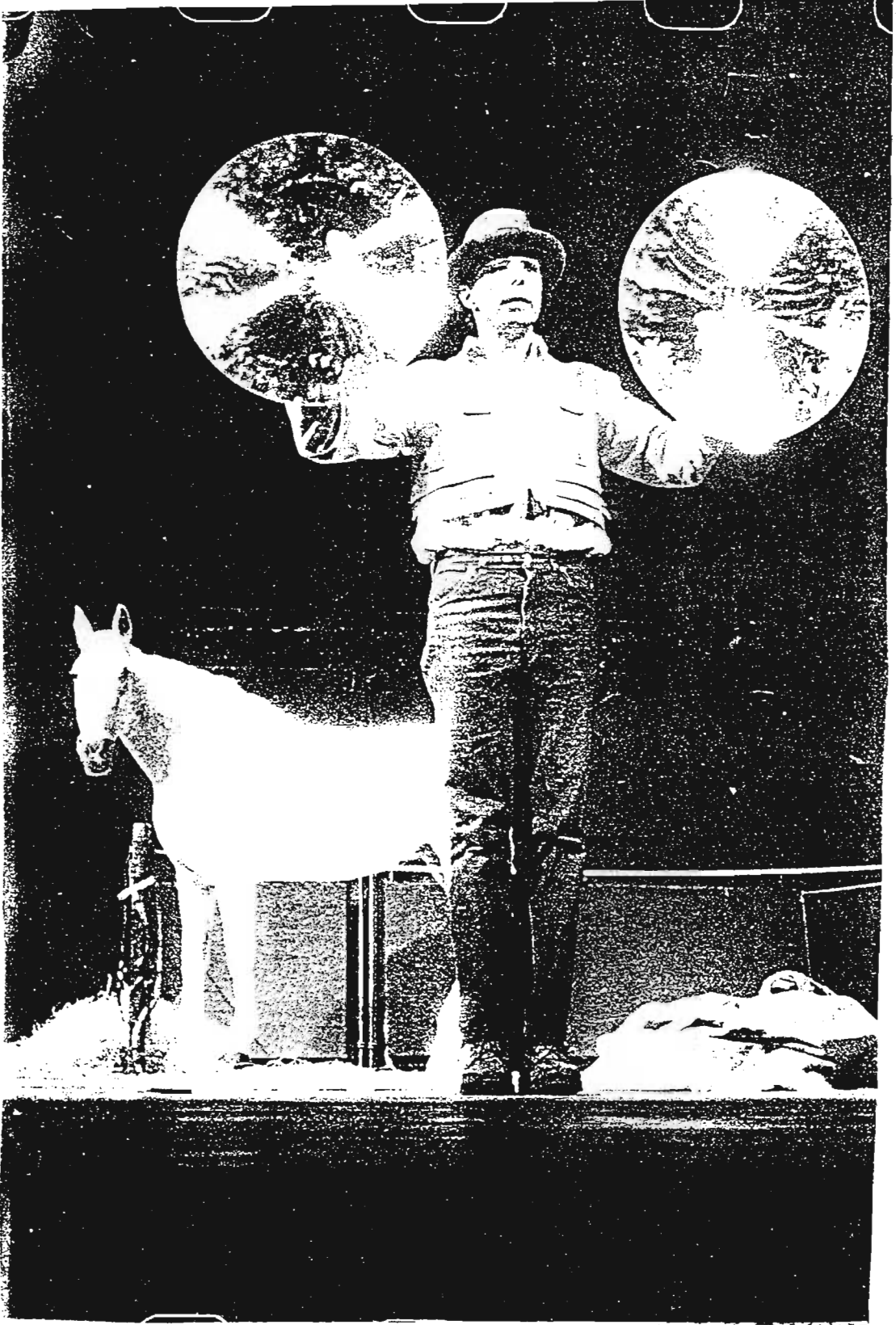


Figure 23. Joseph Beuys Titus/ Iphigenie Andronicus (1969)



Figure 24. Joseph Beuys Palazzo Regale (1986)

Echoes of this performance appeared years later in Palazzo Regale. This installation is considered to be “a summing up and testament” of Beuys’ relationship with notions of death, suffering and transcendence as he intended this piece to be an invocation of his own impending death and transcendence (McEvelley 1986: 130). At this time Beuys had been suffering from cancer and heart disease. He died of a heart attack shortly after the installation was completed.

The central form was a golden coffin-like box. This held Beuys’ hare skin coat (an emblem of Beuys himself) that he so often wore during performances. It was laid out lengthways in the box like a corpse in a coffin. The coat, like the rolls of fat and felt, signified spiritual warmth (McEvelley 1986: 131). Approximately where the head would be Beuys put a blackened iron head. This was rolled to one side; the mouth open suggesting a scream. Where the feet would have been was a conch shell. According to McEvelley, the conch shell is a Palaeolithic symbol of returning to one’s source (McEvelley 1986: 131). Finally, in place of the hands Beuys placed the cymbals he used in Iphigenie / Titus Andronicus. In McEvelley’s words: “The objects ... are like the traces - the relics - of a final performance in which the absent figure clashed the cymbals to announce its own demise or disappearance...” (McEvelley 1986: 131). Shamanic notions of death, suffering and transcendence illustrated in this piece were direct indications of Beuys’ actual physical suffering and his approaching death.

Although Beuys’ ideas were influenced by his knowledge of traditional shamanism they do echo certain aspects of Blake’s visionary world view. The most obvious similarity between the ideas of these two artists is that both actively identified with the role of the artist as a visionary. Moreover, both regarded the function of the visionary artist as one which is concerned with the spiritual transformation of man.

Blake, like Beuys, reacted against the materialism of his time - as optimised by the Age of Reason (Damon 1979: 195, 318). Neither Blake nor Beuys rejected rational thought.

Both regarded human existence as defined by the coexistence of intuition and reason. Both Blake and Beuys sought the restoration of a lost unity between the spiritual and the rational. In the words of Adriani et al: "Beuys seeks in his life and work the restoration of the lost unity of nature and spirit, of cosmos and intellect, and places against goal-determined rationalism a way of thinking which includes archetypal, mythical, and magical-religious associations" (Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 2). Beuys' perception of human existence as an original unity of reason and intuition has significant parallels in Blake. Blake's preoccupation with the restoration of a lost unity is described in his visionary mythology of mankind (Damon 1979: 129).

In Blake's mythology this restoration can only come about through man's development and nourishment of his spiritual nature. He believed that the realisation of the spiritual is contingent upon a radical change in man's perception (Damon 1979: 130). Blake described his task as a visionary artist as an attempt "... to open the external worlds, to open the immortal Eyes of Man inwards into the world of thought, ... the Human Imagination" (Damon 1979: 130). He asserted that "if the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (Stevenson 1989: 114).

Similarly, Beuys' works are focused on "regenerating man's creativity, submerged beneath constant use of reason" (Beuys 1986: 19). He too wanted to re-awaken man's sense of 'primordial' unity - and hence his awareness of the spiritual (Beuys 1986: 19). Peter Frank in his article, 'Joseph Beuys, the most fascinating of enigmas' states that as an artist "Beuys intends to provide a 'spiritual lift' to his audience, instructing them in the perception of objects and situations on a metaphysical plane" (Frank 1973: 51).

Both Beuys and Blake were influenced by occultism. This is a philosophy which supports the belief in the spiritual nature of reality. It is based on ideas of Neo-Platonism, a combination of Platonic thought and Eastern mysticism. Blake's interest in

occultism was inspired by the sixteenth century alchemist and philosopher Paracelsus and the seventeenth century mystic Jacob Boehme whom Blake believed was “divinely inspired” (Klonsky 1979: 25). Both these men, in Klonsky’s words, were “transmitters and enrichers” of the medieval book of Occult Philosophy, written by the German author Cornelius Agrippa (Klonsky 1979: 25). This book caused a sensation in sixteenth century Europe due to its defence of Oriental wisdom (Klonsky 1979: 25). Importantly, Beuys was also inspired by Paracelsus - particularly his thoughts on religious philosophy and alchemy (Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 23). He was particularly inspired by the spiritual world view expounded by Eastern thought. To Beuys, the East and the West symbolised the spiritual and the rational respectively (Adriani Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 142).

Beuys’ and Blake’s affinity with the ideas of Paracelsus was shared by Jung. Jung’s consideration of the existence of the spiritual was also inspired by Paracelsus. Jung described Paracelsus as “a remarkable man” who had a “medieval mind” (Jung 1966: 3). Jung saw Paracelsus as the epitome of the “spiritual man” - an individual who had achieved a spiritual transformation (Jung 1966 p3).

Similarities between Beuys’ and Blake’s personal interpretations of Christian themes can be seen in the use of the crucifix form in the work of both these artists. Beuys’ design of the Koch Cross (1953) (Figure 25) is based on the form of a cross beam. This work is cast in iron and today is part of the installation Fond O (1966) (Adriani 1979: 44) (Figure 26). The cross symbol conveys Beuys’ belief in the resurrection which he saw as a symbol of death, suffering and self-sacrifice (Adriani 1979: 47). In Beuys’ words “... man himself must also suffer this process of crucifixion and complete incarnation in the material world, working right through materialism. He must himself die, and he must be completely abandoned by God as Christ was by his Father in that Mystery. Only when nothing is left does man discover his self-knowledge...” (Beuys 1986: 31). Beuys thus sees suffering as a basic experience which implies an awakening to an inner spirituality (Adriani 1979: 135).

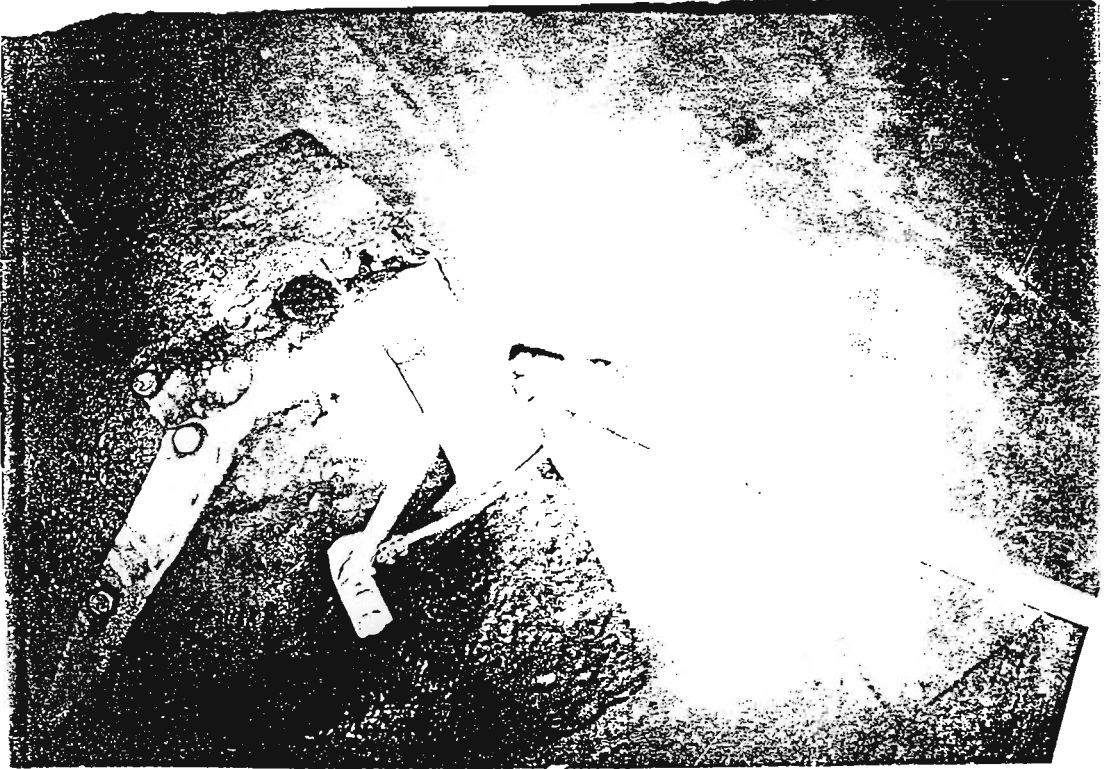


Figure 25. Joseph Beuys Fond O (1966)

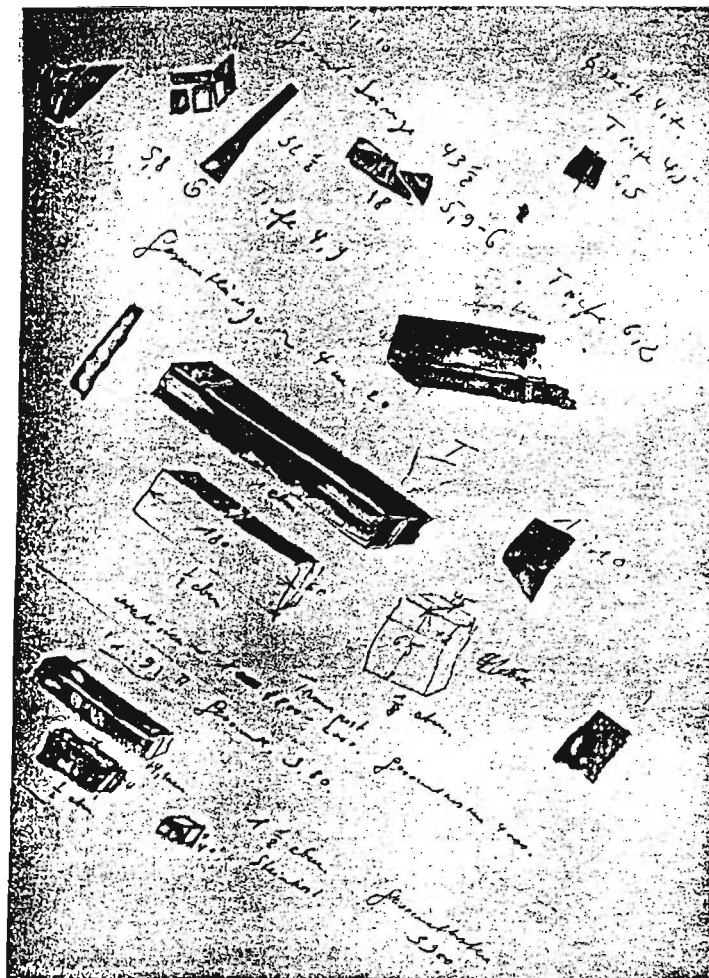


Figure 26. Joseph Beuys Proportions and Measurements of the Koch Cross (1953)

Like Beuys, Blake saw the crucifixion as a symbol of suffering and self-sacrifice (Blunt 1959: 81). In Blake's vision of man's spiritual redemption man must repeat in himself the suffering and self-sacrifice shown by Christ in the crucifixion. This idea is illustrated in Blake's plate Albion and the Crucified Christ (1804-20) (Figure 27). Albion, Blake's mythical being who symbolises 'fallen' man (man dominated by reason) stands before the crucified Christ. Albion stands with his arms extended, a stance which echoes that of the crucified figure. This pose thus signifies the sacrifice that man must make in order to achieve an opening of the senses.

Both Beuys and Blake conceived of the artist as an individual whose knowledge is determined by the union of creative and rational thought. In this regard, both considered Leonardo da Vinci to be their ideal (Beuys 1986: 18) (Davis 1977: 114). As an artist Leonardo represented Beuys' expanded notion of art which stresses that art or creativity is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. In the words of Peter-Klaus Schuster:

For the first time both experience and mathematical knowledge became crucial for both art and research into nature within Leonardo's encyclopaedic interests. Art was thus not any special discipline devoted to beautiful uselessness but rather played its part in the process of knowledge (Beuys 1986: 18).

Likewise, Blake considered the work of Leonardo and Michelangelo to symbolise the true meaning of art and the value of spiritual perception (Davis 1977: 114).

A further similarity between Beuys and Blake is their shared affinity for Dürer's humanistic belief in the re-establishment of man in God's image (Beuys 1986: 21). This put the artist in the position of creator. Dürer illustrated this idea in his Self Portrait (1500) (Figure 28). He represents himself as a Christ-like figure. His features resemble the conventional depiction of Christ with his hand half raised in blessing. Dürer extended this conception of the artist to everyone. In his view, everyone has the ability to obtain "divine wisdom" through creativity (Beuys 1986: 23). This view of the artist is also



Figure 27. William Blake Albion and the Crucified Christ (1804-20)





Figure 28. Albrecht Dürer Self Portrait (1500)

reflected in Beuys' 'social sculpture', hence his slogan "Everyone an Artist" (Beuys 1986: 23).

According to Peter-Klaus Schuster, Dürer's idealised Self Portrait and Beuys' slogans "La rivoluzione siamo Noi" (We are the Revolution) and "Power to the Imagination" evoke a similar idea of the artist (Beuys 1986: 23). Schuster considers Beuys' slogans to affirm Beuys' belief that individual creativity is "a transforming revolutionary power" (Beuys 1986: 23). Schuster describes a staged photograph of Beuys which accompanies the slogan "Power to the Imagination". He asserts that in this image Beuys puts himself forward as a model in the role of the artist as demanded by his 'social sculpture'. Schuster maintains that Dürer presents a similar model of himself in Self Portrait (Beuys 1986: 23). As in Beuys' self-depiction, Dürer uses his own image as an example of the "creative power" man should aspire to (Beuys 1986: 23).

Like Beuys, Blake also believed in the divine image of man. In Blake's mythology man can re-establish a sense of the divine through spiritual perception. To Blake imagination or intuition was the "central faculty of both God and man" (Damon 1979: 195). Moreover, in this perception of imagination God and man become indistinguishable. In Blake's words: "The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is God Himself, The Divine Body, Jesus: We are his Members" (Damon 1979: 130). In Lister's view Blake's idea of the "divine man Jesus" is evoked in his painting Christ Blessing (1810) (Figure 29) (Lister 1979b: 50). The image portrays Christ, before the crucifixion, in the image of man. In this regard, Lister considers the image of Christ to evoke "a vision of the Word, which St John tells us (1:14) 'was made of flesh, and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth'." (Lister 1979: 50). The painting thus shows in pictorial form Blake's belief in the divinity of man.

Blake's Christ Blessing has significant parallels to Dürer's Self Portrait. Like Jesus in Blake's image, Dürer has portrayed himself looking straight ahead. Whereas Jesus' right



Figure 29. William Blake Christ Blessing (1810)

hand is raised in blessing, the position of Dürer's right hand, although not fully raised, gives the allusion of a blessing. Lister describes the brilliant depth of Christ's eyes and the absence of tension in the image as symbolising "a state of spiritual bliss" (Lister 1979:50). Dürer's Self Portrait evokes a similar spiritual presence thus evoking his notion of the "divine wisdom" of man (Beuys 1986: 23).

Both Beuys' and Blake's visionary mythologies emphasise the idea that the artist is a visionary. However, Blake's mythology was entrenched in the Gothic world view whereas Beuys' was influenced by shamanic culture. Nonetheless, Beuys' view that creative processes should be aimed at re-awakening an original spirituality is significantly similar to Blake's. And, most importantly, both of these artists associated their identification with the role of a visionary artist with a rejection of the domination of rationalist ideas.

Beuys' perception of himself as an artist-shaman was an invocation of his reaction against the predominance of rationalist concerns of modernism. His reaction to the dominance of these ideas is articulated in his notion of a 'social sculpture'. Moreover, just as the shaman was concerned with healing the community, Beuys' identification with the role of artist-shaman was one which he related as intensely to his own transformation as to that of his audience.

prophets for the future  
'Shamans' - have natural spiritual abilities, eg. bringing the dead to life. Visionaries of a certain clan with different beliefs.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### JACKSON HLUNGWANI: 'WOUNDED HEALER'

Jackson Hlungwani, or Xagani (Shangaan) as he sometimes signs himself, lives in Mbhokota in Gazankulu, a former homeland of what is now Mphumalanga, South Africa. His official documents record his date of birth as 1923. However, Hlungwani claims that he was born at the time of the "Kaisers war", that is the First World War (1914-1918) (Burnett 1989: 4). Hlungwani is Tsonga and comes from a poor, rural, farming area in Mbhokota. He works as a sculptor and a spiritual healer in the community of Mbhokota (Abrahams 1989: 14). Although Hlungwani is an artist working in the late twentieth century, his visionary world view appears to be more entrenched in Gothic culture<sup>1</sup>, ancient shamanism and in the visionary ideas of Blake than in modernity.

Central to criticism and commentary on Hlungwani is the idea that he works in the tradition of an artist-shaman. Hlungwani readily concurs with the notion that he is a visionary artist or a prophet although he rejects the 'shaman' label (Schneider 1989: 59). He claims to have received a vision from God which prophesied the advent of an apocalypse which would result in man's salvation.

why?

← shamanistic characteristic

Most of Hlungwani's work is focused on an attempt to portray this visionary message. Hlungwani's religious instruction is central to his healing activities. His unusual teaching materials include a Time/Life flyer which advertises a set of books on ancient Egyptian art and a grade one reading book. Hlungwani interprets the text from the reading book and the Egyptian images and symbols in terms of his unorthodox understanding of the

<sup>1</sup>This reference to Gothic culture refers to that part of the Gothic tradition that emphasised the spiritual nature of reality (Nolan 1977: xiv)

use to comment on social standing in society and stability as an artist

Judaean-Christian tradition. Ivor Powell in 'In The Soul of the Shaman' maintains that from this unusual teaching material "Hlungwani fleshes out Christian and traditional truths, with the snake becoming Satan, the Sun God, the God of the Judaean/Christian world, and so on" (Powell 1990: 67).

While Hlungwani considers himself to be a visionary artist, he objects to being regarded as a traditional healer or shaman on religious grounds: ["African medicine men are dangerous people."] The only safe doctors are those of the white people, and African medicine-men who have become Christians" (Schneider 1989: 59). In his view he is a Christian equivalent of a traditional healer. The distinction is important to Hlungwani:

Magical healing practices are used by Satan, but they can be brought back to God. In the book of Genesis, we read of how the Lord created human beings and decided to give them wisdom ... Yes, for me who is a Christian, the Bible is my bag of divining bones. While for the traditional healers, the bones are those they throw and consult. I heal them and convert them. From then on, their divining bones and their remedies are again at the service of the original order of things described in the Bible (Schneider 1989: 62).

In spite of Hlungwani's argument, he is seen as a traditional shaman because he has received the archetypal call to healing. The initiation which follows the 'call' to healing determines the transformation of a profane individual into one who is sacred - a shaman (Halifax 1982: 16). Hlungwani's 'call' to healing is illuminated by Ivor Powell in his article 'Gazankulu's wounded shaman sculpts his strange temples':

Hlungwani is an artist of what is possibly the most ancient kind. As much a visionary, a prophet and a healer as he is maker of objects, he manifests the classic complex of the 'wounded healer', the shaman. The shaman, because he has crossed over to, or has access to 'the other side' (death), has a special knowledge to impart to the living and special powers with which to serve them (Powell 1989: 22).

Joan Halifax describes the shamanic journey as an awakening to another order of reality or "an opening of the visionary realms" occasioned by deep suffering (Halifax 1982: 5).

Such a 'journey' can be regarded as intrinsic to the shamanic tradition (Halifax 1982: 5).

\* A crisis involving an encounter with death is important to shamanic mythology in that the shaman has to symbolically die in order to be spiritually redeemed. Writing of such journeys Joseph Campbell notes: "One thing that comes in myths, for example, is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment is when the real message of redemption is going to come" (Campbell 1988: 39). Hlungwani, like the traditional shaman, experienced his "voice of salvation" at a time of deep suffering when he experienced a close encounter with death.

Hlungwani has spoken at length about this visionary episode. He dates this experience to 1978 when he was employed as a construction worker near Louis Trichardt in the Northern Transvaal. While working at this construction site he developed an ulcer on his left shin which he claims was the result of an attack by Satan. In Hlungwani's mythology, Satan shot arrows through both of his legs. This caused terrible abscesses on each leg. The one leg eventually healed while the other went from bad to worse. His condition became so painful that he decided to kill himself by drinking the poisonous sap of the Nkondze tree (Schneider 1989: 11).

\* It was during the night, after this fatal act, that Hlungwani claims to have received his Divine calling. He believes he was visited by Christ and two companions. According to Hlungwani, Christ gave him a triple promise - he would be healed, he would become a healer himself and he would see God pass by (Schneider 1989: 60). Hlungwani believes he did see God pass by, or rather God's feet, visible beneath the clouds and adorned with eggs, walking "in the direction of KwaZulu" (Schneider 1989: 60).

no.1  
\* God's Leg with Eggs (1984) (Figure 30) is a sculpture depicting Hlungwani's vision of God. The sculpture is in the form of a stylised, monumental foot with egg-like shapes carved onto its surface. The relationship between this image and Hlungwani's own wounded leg is unavoidable as the eggs on God's shin undoubtedly correspond to the

ulcers on his own. The image of the wounded foot is regarded as a symbol of the necessary relationship between suffering and redemption. This idea is, according to Lionel Abrahams, illuminated by James Hillman's words:

The complex through which we gain our profoundest insight is also our greatest hindrance. One aspect is the native sensitivity through which we receive the gods, another aspect, however, continually hurts and may kill us" (Abrahams 1989: 14).

Hillman's idea that profound insight is often gained through great suffering is of course related to the shamanic call to healing. This can also be linked to the shamanic idea that the shaman must be healed first before he or she is able to heal the community. This includes the notion that the 'wound' which symbolises a spiritual sickness, or the lack of spiritual awareness, must be located in the individual before the collective can be healed.

Today Hlungwani continually scalds his wound, the one that never heals, with fire. This, he claims, is to keep the devil out (Powell 1989: 22). Hlungwani's festering wound seems to symbolise the relationship between suffering and visionary knowledge, ideas which are intrinsic to shamanism. In this way, his wound can be seen as the mark of the shaman - the wounded healer.

In Hlungwani's vision, it was God who gave him the message of the imminent realisation of peace and harmony, and the passing away of the old order. For Hlungwani then the apocalypse, the passing away of the old world, leads to redemption. This redemption will be heralded by the descent of heaven to earth - the realisation of a cosmic harmony (Schneider 1989: 11 and Burnett 1989: 5). An image which portrays this vision of redemption as revealed to Hlungwani during his divine vision is a carved wooden panel entitled Stellar Panel (1983) (Figure 31) (Schneider 1989: 13). The composition depicts an explosion of stars and crosses, intermingled with images of goats, donkeys, buses and human figures. It is seen to represent Hlungwani's prophecy of cosmic unity; the merging of heaven and earth (Schneider 1989: 13). This vision is reminiscent of the





Figure 30. Jackson Hlungwani God's Leg with Eggs (1984)

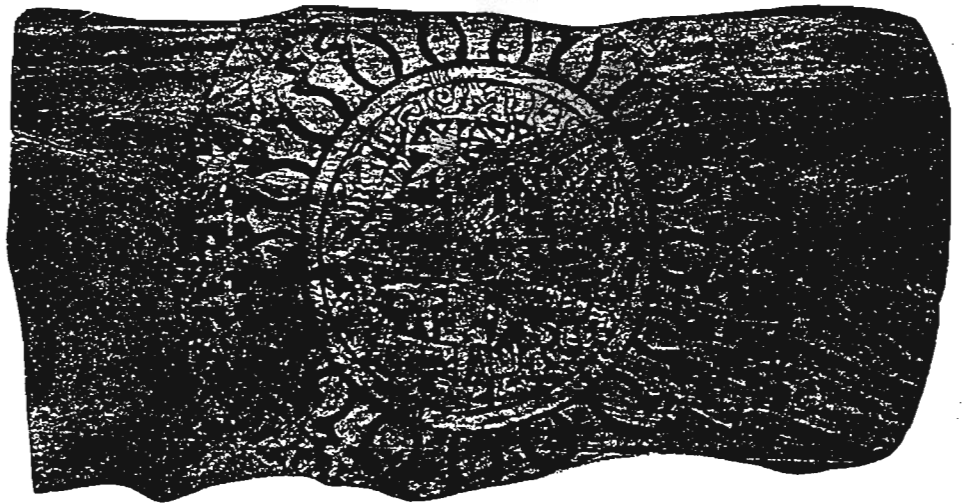


Figure 31. Jackson Hlungwani Stellar Panel (1983)

eternal paradise represented by the archetypal creation story of shamanic mythology. As in traditional shamanism, the healing potential of Hlungwani's work is indicated by its communication of his vision of redemption. / \*

Hlungwani's fish sculptures have also been interpreted, by Abrahams, as symbols of redemption. The fish sculptures, notably Large Swimming Fish (1989-1990) (Figure 32), are considered to embody Hlungwani's prophecy that after "the apocalypse man will acquire the ease and freedom of fish" (Abrahams 1989: 15). Rayda Becker in 'Visions and the Viewer', notes that there is no evidence to suggest that Hlungwani is aware of Christian symbolism inherent in the fish image (Becker 1989: 20-21). Nonetheless, Hlungwani's fish tend to be understood as the Christian symbol for Christ by Hlungwani's audience because of his Christian standpoint (Becker 1989: 20-21).

\* MB

Hlungwani's visionary works are integral to his prophetic psychology insofar as they reveal his visionary message of redemption. This relates to the role of the traditional artist-shaman who heals the community by communicating, through creative processes, a vision of an original unity or sense of the spiritual. Despite his Judaeo-Christian convictions (a tradition not usually possessed by shamanic cultures), the archetypal shamanic vision of spiritual redemption is not unlike Hlungwani's, in that both visions speak of a world of spiritual harmony. Hlungwani's Divine calling locates him further within this tradition.

Hlungwani's visionary world view is also reminiscent of Blake's ideas. However, due to Hlungwani's isolation from outside stimuli for much of his life and his illiteracy, it is unlikely that he has any substantial knowledge of Blake's ideas or of the Gothic tradition. Hlungwani's ideas have conspicuous similarities to the Gothic tradition because his visionary psychology is based on his apocalyptic interpretation of the Bible. As we have seen, the Gothic world view is considered to be a realisation of the apocalyptic spirit

contained in the New Testament - that of revelation, prophecy and redemption (Essick and Pearce 1978: 151).

✱

As well as reflecting a similar world view to the Gothic tradition, Hlungwani's body of work depicts thematic, formal and stylistic features of Gothic art. Gothic art and its representation of a particular religious vision invites an appeal to the imagination not unlike that of Hlungwani's. Like Gothic art, Hlungwani's, works are based on themes from the Bible. He has done many sculptures of the crucifixion, the angel Gabriel and the creation of Adam and Eve. It is both the Biblical themes and Hlungwani's interpretation of these themes which are reminiscent of the Gothic visionary tradition. NB

Hlungwani's affinity with Gothic form is evident when comparing his work Crucifix (1982) (Figure 33) to Gothic representations of the crucifixion such as Christ on the cross (1307) (Figure 34) and Christ on the cross (first third of the thirteenth century) (Figure 35). Hlungwani's depiction of this theme parallels the conventional depiction of Christ which was, according to Becker, handed down from Medieval times (Becker 1989: 21). In this convention "the anguished bearded Christ is represented naked except for the loin cloth tied around his waist, his feet crossed and pinned with a single nail" (Becker 1989: 21).

The image of Christ on the cross in all three works shows a similar treatment and stylisation of torso and limbs which are puppet-like in their rigidity and thinness. The figure of Christ in Christ on the cross (first third of the thirteenth century) resembles Hlungwani's image in the thin elongated torso and in the position of the arms on the cross. In Christ on the cross (1307) the torso differs slightly in that the artist has emphasised Christ's ribcage. The emphasis of the ribcage adds to the agonised depiction of Christ. In Hlungwani's image and in Christ on the cross (first third of the thirteenth century) Christ's arms are more or less in line with horizontal unit of the cross. The unnatural position of the arms in both images seems to emphasise the rigidity of the

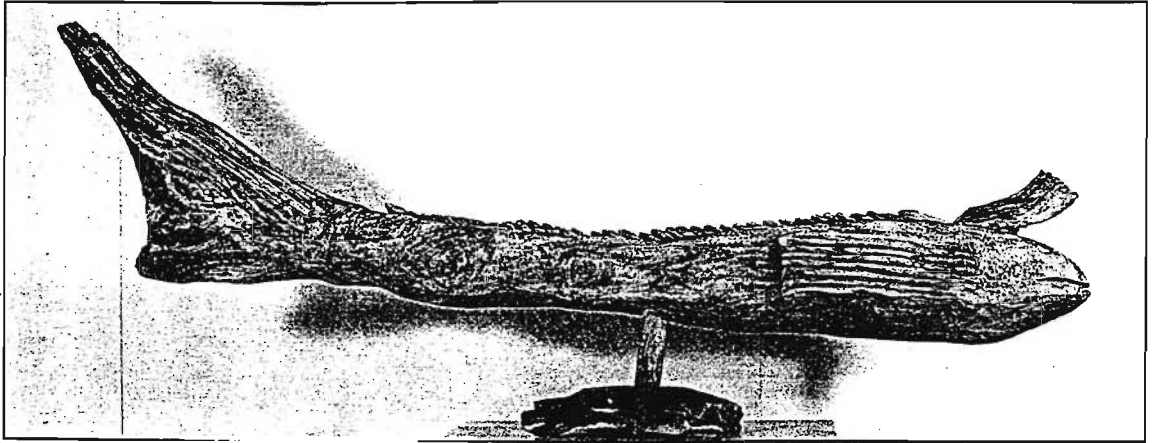


Figure 32. Jackson Hlungwani Large Swimming Fish (1989-90)

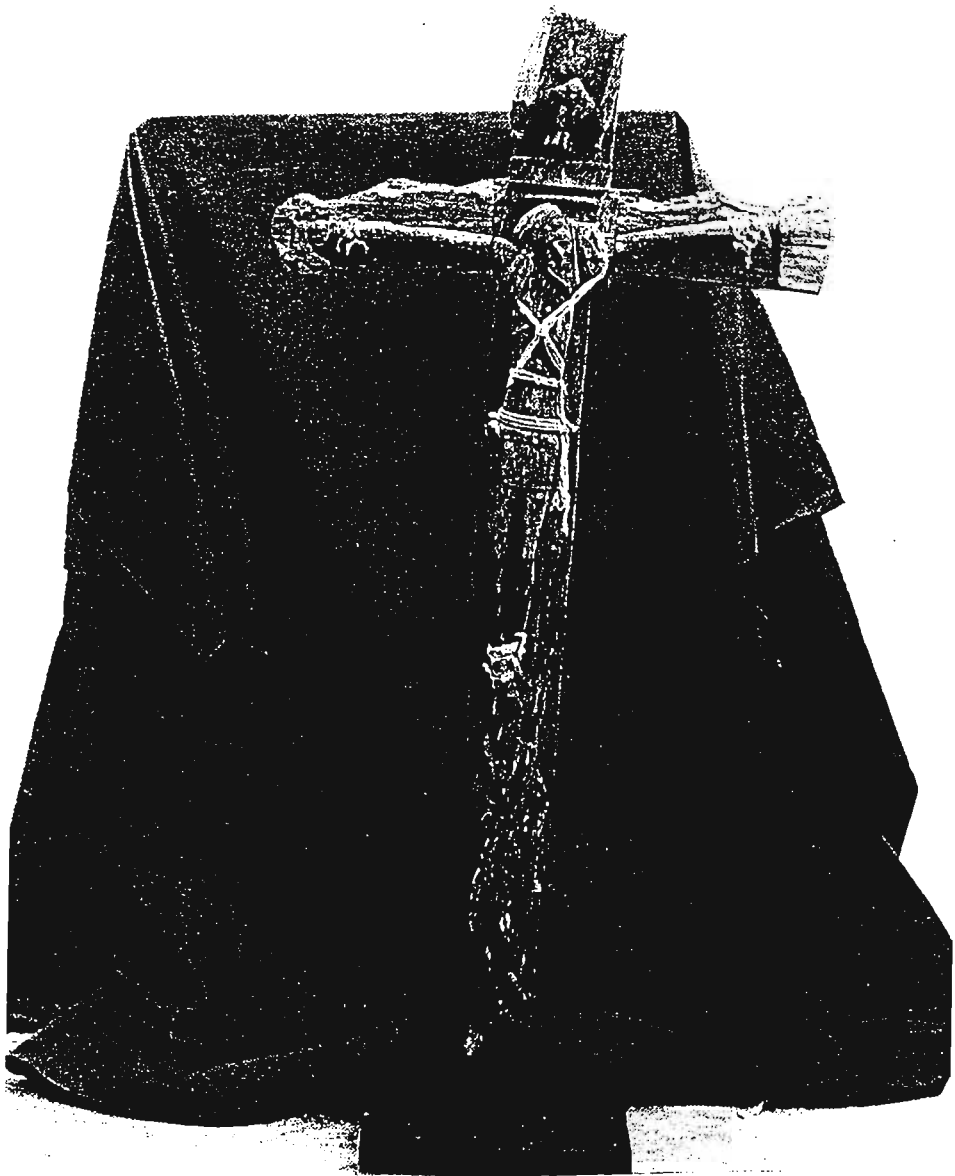


Figure 33. Jackson Hlungwani Crucifix11 (1982)

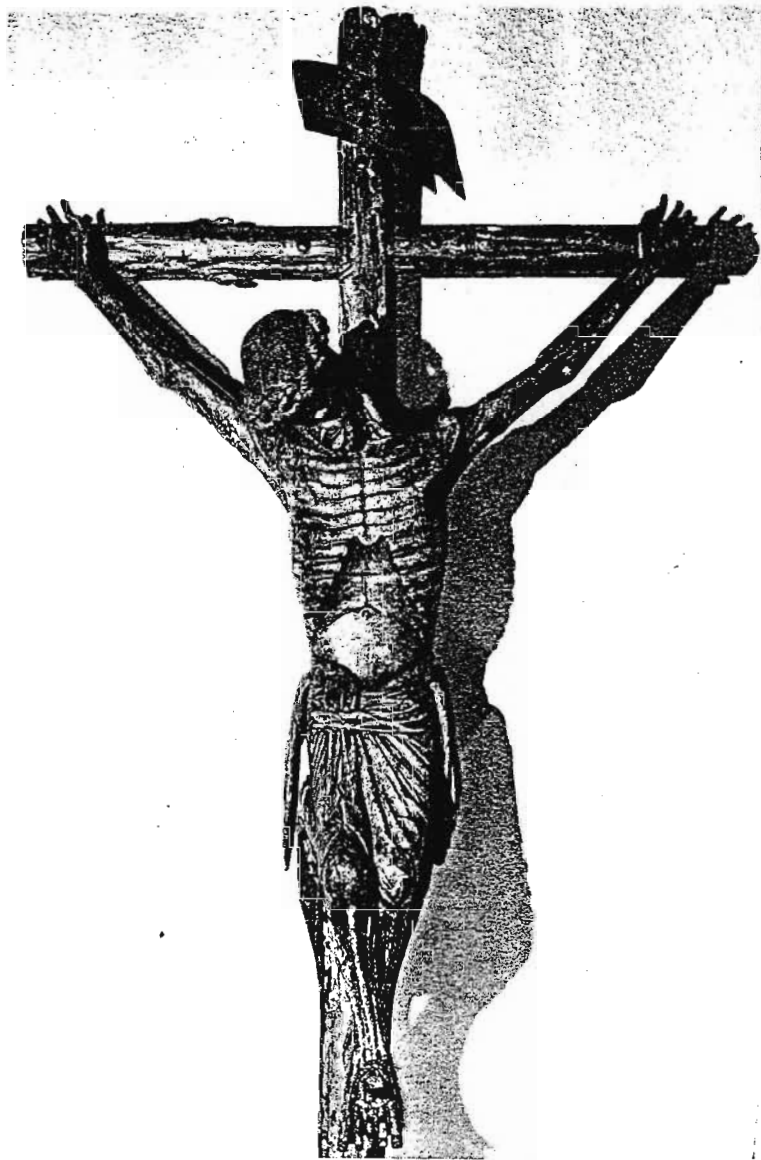


Figure 34. Anon. Christ on the cross (1307)

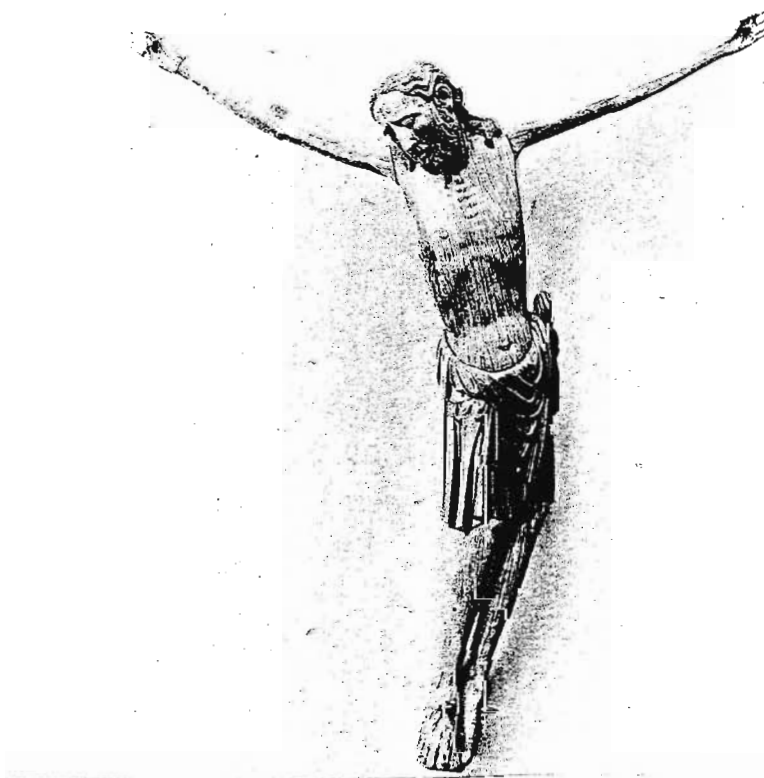


Figure 35. Anon. Christ on the cross (first third of the thirteenth century)

figures. As in Hlungwani's image, the head of Christ in the two Medieval images are tilted forward - revealing a furrowed, anguished expression.

Apart from stylistic details, an important parallel between Hlungwani's image and the two Medieval images is that that they are not naturalistic portrayals of the human figure. It can be said that these works were formed by the imagination. A primary function of Medieval art was to evoke, in the audience, a sense of the spiritual. In this regard, Abrahams states that Hlungwani's sculptures reveal "surprising re-embodiments of forms and stylistic features identifiable with farflung artistic traditions, for example the Byzantine, the Gothic ..." (Abrahams 1989: 15). According to Abrahams, it is these stylistic elements derived from Medieval sources which "invite an appeal to something like the collective unconscious" and hence the imagination (Abrahams 1989: 15).

Hlungwani's crucifixion differs somewhat from conventional depictions of the crucifixion in that he has carved a bird above the head of Christ in the place of the standard 'I. N. R. I.' (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews). Becker suggests that the bird could be equated with an angel - an idea which is accepted by Hlungwani (Becker 1989: 21). However, to him it is more specifically a Rain Bird - a symbol of rain, rich harvests and an abundance of food (Becker 1989: 21). In either case Hlungwani's bird image echoes the shamanic idea that birds are a symbol of transcendence.

The similarities between Hlungwani's visionary mythology and that of Gothic art and culture is what links him to Blake's visionary ideas. An important parallel between Blake's and Hlungwani's ideas is their shared identification with the idea of the artist as an inspired prophet and visionary (Abrahams 1989: 14). This affinity, however, appears to relate more to their ideas than to visual, stylistic or iconographic features of their work, although certain thematic similarities do occur. It is also necessary to note that, notwithstanding their noted parallels, there are substantial social, cultural and intellectual differences between these two artists.

The most obvious differences are Hlungwani's illiteracy and tribal Tsonga ancestry as opposed to Blake's literate, European, English background. These differences are emphasised by the fact that they are separated by more than two hundred years. These contradictions do have an effect on the nature and details of their visionary mythologies but not their basic affinity with the notion of the artist as visionary prophet. Most importantly, Hlungwani is further removed from Blake (and from the idea of the visionary artist in twentieth century Western society) in that he is an initiated 'tribal' healer who performs the functions of a traditional, shaman.

Abrahams in his article 'Mbokhota is everywhere' describes the affinity between Hlungwani's and Blake's ideas as a shared identification of "imagination and visionary insight" where prophecy and imagination merge (Abrahams 1989: 14). Whereas Blake consciously declared his belief in the identity of vision and imagination, in Hlungwani's case we can only speculate. Nonetheless, like Blake, Hlungwani believes that he experiences prophetic visions. He claims that he is Divinely inspired and that he is in constant communication with the Christian God (Schneider 1989: 60). This belief has direct parallels with Blake's visionary ideas. Blake wrote: "I am under direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily and Nightly" (Blunt 1974: 22).

Both Blake and Hlungwani look toward the prophetic tradition of the Bible with its promise of redemption as the source of their visionary experiences. Hlungwani claims that he has received a vision from God which tells of an impending redemption. According to Hlungwani, his creative and healing talent was assigned to him at the time of this vision by God so that he could proclaim, in the words of Theo Schneider, "...in wood and stone the emerging new world of peace and harmony, convinced as he is that the apocalyptic 'dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil or Satan', has already been 'thrown into the pit' to deceive the nations no more!" (Schneider 1989: 12).



Both Blake and Hlungwani claim to prophesy the advent of an apocalypse which they believe will result in the emergence of a new dispensation. In both Blake's and Hlungwani's mythology this dispensation will be the advent of man's salvation, his return to paradise or Eden. Moreover, both refer to this paradise on earth as the New Jerusalem.

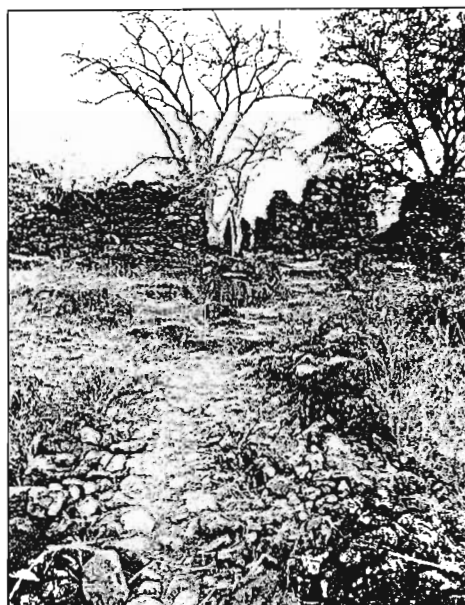
Hlungwani's vision of the New Jerusalem is depicted in his work The New Jerusalem (1979) (Figure 36) - a large stone sanctuary built on a hill at the edge of his village, Mbhokota. Hlungwani claims to have received instructions from God to build a temple on this site. His idea of the New Jerusalem as a realisation of his vision of peace is an obvious reference to the Biblical 'Holy City of Peace' (Revelations 3:12), which symbolises the perfect society (Damon 1979: 206).

It is the underlying idea of The New Jerusalem, rather than its architectural structure that has significant affinities to Blake's notion of the New Jerusalem. Both Blake and Hlungwani conceive of the New Jerusalem in terms of Isaiah's prophecy of cosmic harmony which looks forward to a return to paradise or Eden: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth ... I create Jerusalem ... The wolf and the lamb shall feed together ... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain ..." (Isaiah, 65:17-25). Unlike Blake, however, Hlungwani believes that the apocalypse has already occurred and that his vision of the New Jerusalem came into operation in 1985. This was, he claims, a consequence of Satan's death. The reason the world still appears unchanged is because Satan's servants are still active. In Hlungwani's words: "Satan has disappeared, leaving his servants behind. He has been thrown into the pit. Look it up in Revelation<sup>2</sup>, chapter twenty" (Schneider 1989: 62).

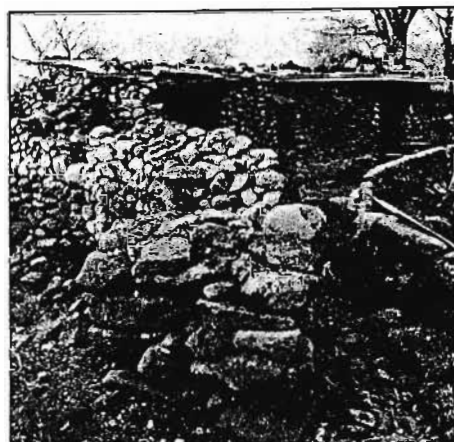
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<sup>2</sup> Hlungwani refers to the Biblical book of Revelations as 'Revelation'.





*The ascent.*



*Dwelling and reception area.*



*A view over Christ's office towards the chapel area.*



*Inside Christ's office.*

Figure 36. Jackson Hlungwani The New Jerusalem (1979)

While Blake's vision shares with Hlungwani's the promise of redemption and a new world of cosmic harmony, it is somewhat more complex. In Blake's vision of salvation the apocalypse will only occur as a consequence of man's spiritual awakening which Blake believed was yet to occur. This awakening, in Blake's mythology, includes the realisation that the creative impulse is contingent upon imaginative perception and prophetic vision. This idea is elaborated on by Frye: "... all imaginative acts, being eternal, go to build up a permanent structure,...above time, and when this structure is finished, nature, its scaffolding will be knocked away and man will live in it ... the city of God, the New Jerusalem" (Frye 1974: p91).

Blake's vision of the New Jerusalem is articulated in his prophetic books of writings and prints. These books are titled The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and Jerusalem. Blake's print The soul Reunited with God (1795) (Figure 37), the title page for the prophetic book Jerusalem, represents the final stage of man's redemption - his spiritual awakening. This is depicted by the spiritual union of man and God. This union is emphasised by flame-like forms and the rushing of one figure into another in such a way that they appear to merge.

The notion of spiritual awakening, which is central to Blake's vision of redemption, is considered to be evident in the layout of Hlungwani's New Jerusalem (Burnett 1989: 4). This can be conceived of as a pilgrimage route. The beginning and end of the route function as religious metaphors for life, death and spiritual awakening (Burnett 1989: 4). This idea of the route as a spiritual journey recalls the central idea behind the shamanic trance. It also suggests that Hlungwani perceives redemption in terms of spiritual perception.

The New Jerusalem site incorporates what is believed to be the ruins of a former Iron Age settlement, which has oxidised over the millennium. The stone is according to Hlungwani baked "like bricks in the ground by God" (Rich 1989: 27). Hlungwani has



Figure 37. William Blake The soul Reunited with God (1795)

transformed these ruins into a kind of stone temple, by burrowing, carving out and building up the land. Throughout this process he has made or sculpted raised platforms and passages which link up to outdoor rooms which are open to the sky. In the architecture of the New Jerusalem Hlungwani reflects his Tsonga roots. The way he uses space in his architectural construction can be seen as a direct reference to the cylindrical hut forms of his Tsonga culture (Rich 1989: 27).

Hlungwani describes the New Jerusalem as "the centre of the world ... the meeting point of heaven and earth" and the place where "the laws of God are being enacted" (Schneider 1989: 58). At the centre of the New Jerusalem complex, the centre of the centre of world as it were, one finds Hlungwani's sculpture the Aerial of God (1980's) (Figure 38). This is a cross based on a silver painted telephone pole which tapers into a complex of smaller crosses and shiny objects at the apex. For Hlungwani, this represents an extension of the middle point of the world. It symbolises the three realms of life; the upper (heaven), the middle (the realm of the dead) and the lower (the material world) (Burnett 1989: 5). The idea that Hlungwani has used a telephone pole (a symbol of communication) in this piece which doubles as a cross suggests the linking of heaven and earth or the imminent descent of heaven to earth. Powell suggests that Hlungwani has created a powerful metaphor in this work as he has turned a "broadcast aerial into a cross and a cross into a broadcast aerial" thus creating "channels of communication with heaven" (Powell 1990: 66).

This notion of a cosmic harmony, the linking of heaven and earth or God and man, is also evident in Hlungwani's woodcut entitled Wisdom Circle (1983) (Figure 39) and his sculptures Large Crucifix (1990) (Figure 40) and Adam and the Birth of Eve (1985-1989) (Figure 41). Wisdom Circle was made by Hlungwani for the cover of the Tsonga edition of the Book of Proverbs. It is a circular design representing a pageantry of human and animal figures on the march. These figures can be seen as heading for a new world where they will peacefully share the same environment, thus realising Isaiah's prophecy of cosmic harmony.

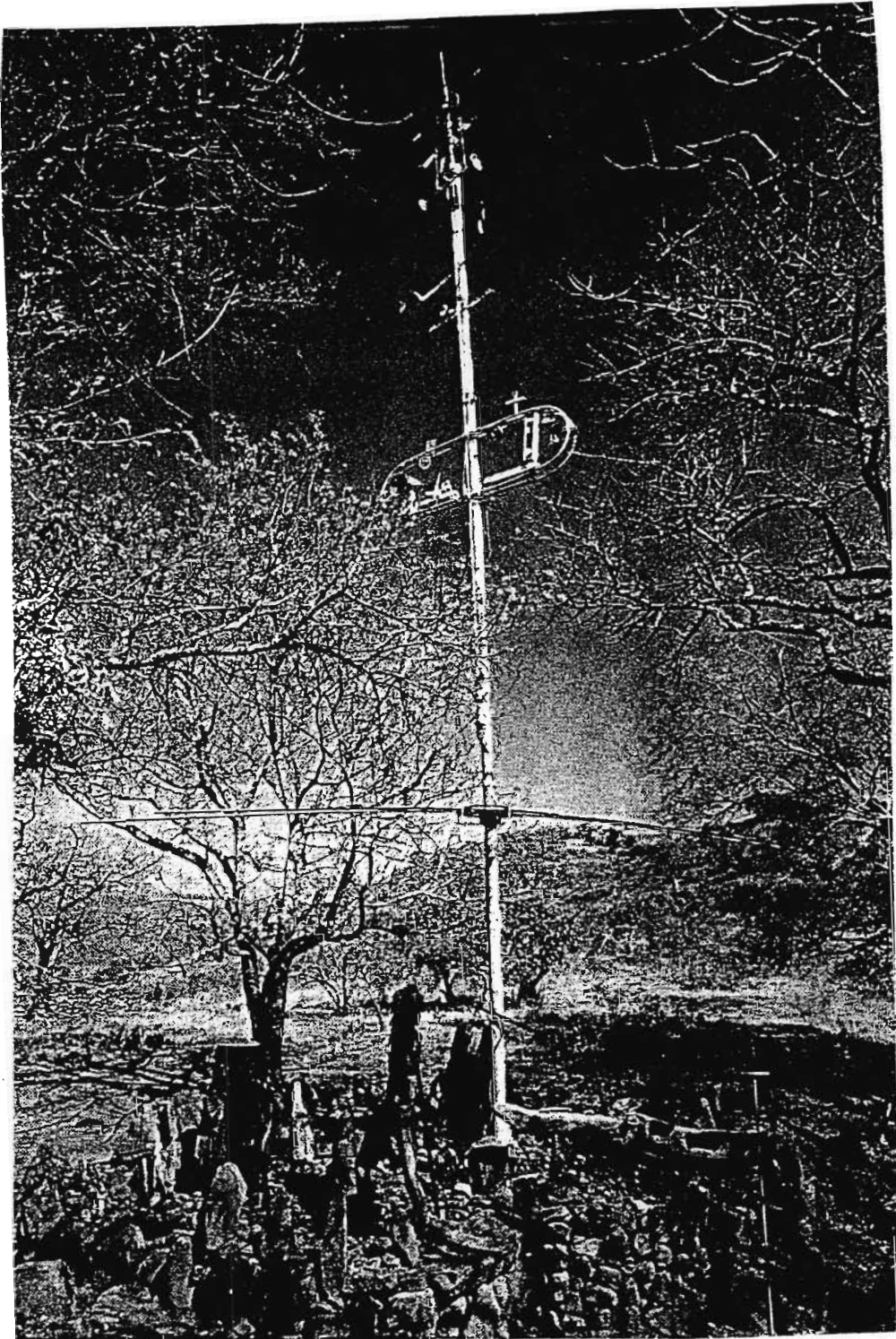


Figure 38. Jackson Hlungwani Aerial of God (1980's)





Figure 39. Jackson Hlungwani Wisdom Circle (1983)

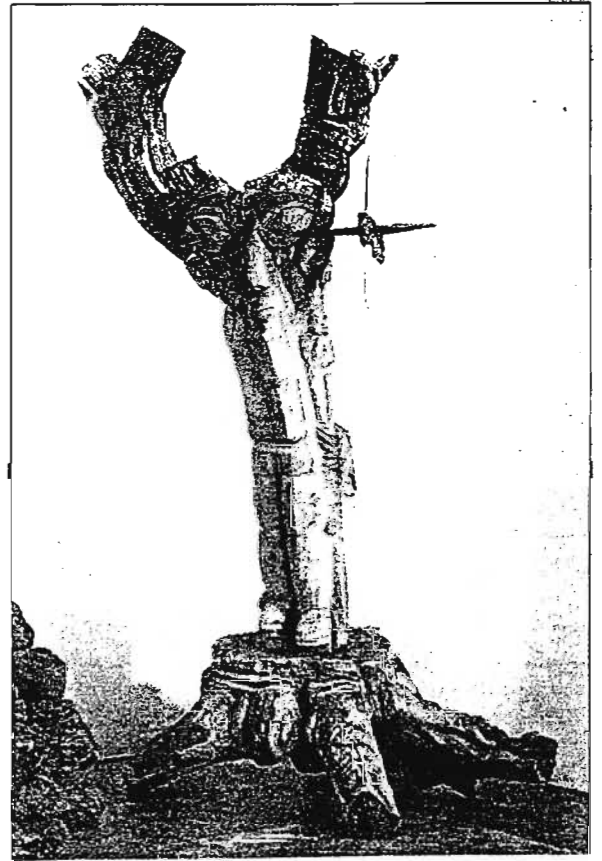


Figure 40. Jackson Hlungwani Large Crucifix (1990)



Figure 41. Jackson Hlungwani Adam and the Birth of Eve (1985-9)

Large Crucifix is a crucifix with raised arms carved into a tree trunk. It is decorated with a complex series of carvings including an elephant, people and fish at its base. Hlungwani believes that this sculpture symbolises that it is "possible for man to live in harmony with nature" (Cohen 1993: 22). By placing man in the same space as the Divine, Hlungwani evokes his vision of a cosmic harmony - the union of man and God. The depiction of man's redemption as an eternal realm where God and man share the same space is an idea that is reminiscent both of Blake's ideas and Gothic art.

Blake portrayed this idea, as Hlungwani did, by placing God and man in the same created environment. This is illustrated in Blake's The Soul Reunited With God. In Gothic painting, to portray man's redemption or the eternal realm, man and God share the same pictorial space (Essick and Pearce 1989: 148). In the words of R. Essick and D. Pearce "God and Man, Christ and the Multitudes stood in the same space. The material world was considered as the active body of God, a conception reflected in the sacred buildings of the period and in the artworks that adorned them" (Essick and Pearce 1989: 148). This idea is articulated in works such as The Crucifixion (13th Century) (Figure 42) and The Santa Trinita Madonna (13th Century) (Figure 43) by the early Gothic painter Cimabue.

In The Crucifixion, Christ, the angelic hosts and the human witnesses of the crucifixion occupy the same pictorial, and hence spiritual, space. The figures at the foot of the cross appear 'flipped up' rather than receding into the distance. The flattened pictorial space is further emphasised by the flatly painted halos which frame the heads of the figures. This spatial device is also prominent in The Santa Trinita Madonna. The angels which surround the Madonna and Christ are vertically arranged along the same pictorial plane. Moreover, they share the same space as the Madonna and Christ and as the patrons - who are situated below the throne.

Both Hlungwani's and Blake's visionary world view consider man's salvation as contingent on the union of opposites. The dualistic nature of Hlungwani's philosophy is





Figure 42. Cimabue The Crucifixion (13th Century)



Figure 43. Cimabue The Santa Trinita Madonna (13th Century)

often present in his work. In Becker's view, Hlungwani "talks constantly of man/woman, Adam/Eve, Cain/Abel, black/white, good/evil, old world /new world" (Becker 1989: 23) In Adam and the Birth of Eve, for example, Hlungwani made Adam and Eve into one figure. This was, according to Hlungwani, to symbolise unity. The combining of opposites (male and female) to facilitate redemption relates to Blake's notion of contraries.

To Blake, the necessary union of opposites is illustrated in his doctrine of contraries. This doctrine is demonstrated in the title page of the prophetic manuscript The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. The image portrays eternity (Blake's universe of unity) as an embrace signifying the union of opposites. This is emphasised by the caption beneath the image which reads: "Without contraries is no progression, Attraction and Repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence" (Stevenson 1989: 105).

In conclusion, it can be said that Hlungwani is a visionary artist whose work and ideas display similarities with two visionary traditions - that of Gothic art and culture and traditional shamanism. Hlungwani's affinity with the Gothic visionary world view is revealed in terms of his parallels to Blake. His sculptures have thematic and stylistic features common to Gothic sculpture and his world view has some striking similarities with that of Blake. As has been asserted, Hlungwani's relationship to shamanism is not only evident in his work and ideas, but also stems from his position as an initiated healer in a rural Tsonga community.

## CONCLUSION

Three twentieth century artists, Pollock, Beuys and Hlungwani have all been discussed in terms of the notion that the artist is a visionary. Each of the artists discussed fit into a different strain of the idea of the artist as a visionary. More specifically they have been considered in relation to shamanism and the Gothic and Romantic tradition as epitomised by Blake.

Beuys and Pollock have been discussed mainly with regard to their positions as Western artists. To a greater or lesser extent their work epitomises a return within the West to the shamanic notion of the artist as a visionary. This rediscovery of the shamanic spirit had a number of sources including the discovery of ancient shamanic paintings towards the end of the nineteenth and in the middle of the twentieth century, as well as the influence of the writings of Freud and Jung

Blake's ideas indicate that the notion of the visionary artist was prevalent in Western society before the discovery of traditional shamanism by the West. Furthermore, by using Blake's work and ideas as a precedent, it has been established that there are significant parallels between the perception of the visionary artist as it applies to Blake<sup>1</sup>, the twentieth century shamanic spirit and traditional shamanism.

Hlungwani's visionary call to healing has notable similarities to traditional shamanism. Nonetheless, the fact that he is a Christian places him, to an extent, outside of the context of this tradition. Even so, the notions of prophecy and redemption form an integral part of both Christianity and Shamanism. Hlungwani's apocalyptic world view and his idiosyncratic interpretation of Christianity - "freely mixed though it is with

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<sup>1</sup> Blake's work and ideas are entrenched in the visionary world view of Gothic culture and the visionary ideas of aspects of Romanticism.

Tsonga myth and symbology" (Powell 1990: 69 ) - can be seen to straddle both traditions.

Pollock's location within this visionary tradition is the most tentative as he never openly pursued the identity of the shaman-artist. However, criticism and commentary on Pollock suggest that the notion of artist-shaman was a factor in his work (Langhorne 1989: 82). Moreover, his imagery and his creative process show that he was influenced by both Jung's writings and traditional shamanism. As discussed in chapter two, both Jung and traditional shamanism emphasise the idea of the visionary artist. This visionary aspect is revealed in the stylistic features of Pollock's Images such as Pasiphaë, Moon Woman and Moon Woman Cuts the Circle. Nonetheless, it has been established that Pollock's invocation of a shaman-like figure is best illustrated by his 'action' or 'drip' paintings (Tucker 1992: 319). In these paintings Pollock's creative process echoes the forms and details of the shamanic trance - and therefore the traditional artist-shaman. Moreover, although Pollock's works such as Naked Man and Bird are seen to reveal specific shamanic iconography, it can only be assumed that such influences were an indication of Pollock's artist-shaman identity. The closest, it seems, that Pollock came to consciously identifying with the role of the artist-shaman was when he described the creative process of his 'action painting' as "*akin to that of the Indian sand painters of the West*" (Cernuschi 1992: 209).

Beuys is an example of an artist who actively identified with the role of shaman-artist (Tisdall 1979: 23). Unlike Pollock, Beuys consciously pursued the persona of the artist-shaman. Moreover, he openly explored shamanic mythology in his installations and performance pieces. In performance pieces such as How to explain pictures to a dead hare and Coyote he symbolically acted out the role of the shaman by 'communicating' with a dead hare and a live, wild coyote. In his act of 'communicating' with these animals Beuys was emphasising the shamanic ability to transcend conscious reality. However, he stressed that his identification with the role of artist-shaman was not simply a return to traditional shamanism (Tisdall 1979: 23). Rather, he assimilated his artist-

shaman identity and his understanding of traditional shamanism into his controversial idea of a 'social sculpture'. Beuys' innovative ideas on sculpture reflect his rejection of the dominance of rationalist ideas in Modern twentieth century discourse (Sharp 1969: 45). Moreover, like the traditional shaman, he was concerned with re-establishing an original spirituality (Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas 1979: 2). This concern is central to Beuys' idea of a 'social sculpture'.

The commonality between Pollock's and Beuys' association with shamanism lies in their concern with exploring the unconscious. In this regard, both these artists looked to primitivist ideas. Beuys never explicitly referred to himself as a primitivist. Nonetheless, his associations with shamanism and his identification with the role of the artist-shaman places him within the context of primitivism in the twentieth century. Primitivism (at least as it was defined in Graham's 1937 article) is integral to the shamanic 'spirit' in Western twentieth century art. In keeping with this interpretation of primitivism both Pollock and Beuys were concerned with exploring the depths of the unconscious - and thus their own mythic origins. Moreover, both Pollock and Beuys looked to the traditions of so called 'primitive' cultures: Beuys was influenced by ancient Siberian shamanism and Pollock by the shamanic traditions of the American Indian culture (Adriani, Konnertz, Thomas 1979: 71 and Langhorne 1988: 82). The influence of these shamanic cultures on the work and ideas of Pollock and Beuys formed their respective identification with the artist-shaman who can be regarded as the epitome of the 'primitive' artist (Tucker 1992: 4).

Whereas both Pollock and Beuys are modern Western artists who draw on traditional shamanism, Hlungwani is an artist who has direct roots with this ancient tradition. Moreover, although he is an artist working in the twentieth century, Hlungwani's visionary world view relates more to that of Gothic culture and the ideas of Blake than it does to the twentieth century shamanic spirit as evidenced in Pollock and Beuys. His isolation from outside (Western) stimuli and his illiteracy may, in part, account for this disjunction.

All three artists have points of likeness with Blake. However, similarities between Blake's visionary ideas on the work Pollock's, Beuys' and Hlungwani vary in extent.

As seen in the compositions of Guardians of the secret (1943) and Painting (1938), Blake's influence on Pollock is limited to stylistic borrowings. However, it was established that Pollock used compositional elements to the same ends as Blake - to indicate the existence of inner reality. Moreover, it was concluded that Pollock was drawn to Blake's images because they invite an appeal to the unconscious.

Parallels between Beuys' ideas and those of Blake's, however, can be seen in the personal mythologies of these two artists rather than in stylistic details. Although their mythologies were entrenched in separate visionary traditions, there are significant similarities between the two. Most importantly, both Beuys and Blake considered themselves to be visionary artists whose creative processes focused on their message of redemption. Moreover, both conceived their vision of salvation as a rejection of the dominance of reason.

Blake and Hlungwani share a vision of mankind based on an apocalyptic interpretation of the Bible. In both Hlungwani's and Blake's visionary mythology man's redemption is represented by the idea of the New Jerusalem. Although Blake's notion of the New Jerusalem is somewhat more complex than Hlungwani's, both conceive of the New Jerusalem in terms of an earthly paradise. Most of Blake's and Hlungwani's work is intended to express their visionary message of redemption.

It appears that while the three twentieth century artists who have been discussed in this thesis represent different strains of the phenomenon of the visionary artist, they all see their art as part of a healing process. Pollock pursued his own psychic integration through art. In his work Beuys was concerned not only with his own spiritual healing

but also with that of society. Hlungwani, who practices as a healer within his own community, expresses an apocalyptic vision of human redemption through his art.



## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

**Figure 1.** Anon. Shaman and the Wounded Bison, The Crypt or Well, Lascaux Cave. (Upper Palaeolithic): Ruspoli, M. 1987. The Cave of Lascaux: The Final Photographic Record. P. 51. London: Thames and Hudson

**Figure 2.** Pablo Picasso The Three Dancers (1925): Penrose, R. 1966. The Masters: Picasso. Vol. 50. Plate X. Bristol: Purnell and Sons Ltd.

**Figure 3.** Anon. Eskimo Mask (c1900): Cernuschi, C. 1992. Jackson Pollock: Meaning and Significance. Plate 15. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers.

**Figure 4.** Jackson Pollock Birth (1938-41): Pollock, J. 1982. Jackson Pollock. P. 112. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne.

**Figure 5.** William Blake Newton (1795): Blunt, A. 1974. The Art of William Blake. Plate 30c. New York: Harper and Row publishers.

**Figure 6.** William Blake Urizen Submerged in the Waters of Materialism (1794): Blunt, A. 1974. The Art of William Blake. Plate 23a. New York: Harper and Row publishers.

**Figure 7.** William Blake The Ancient of Days (1795): Lister, R. 1986. The paintings of William Blake. P. 75. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Figure 8.** William Blake Elohim Creating Adam (1795): Lister, R. 1986. The paintings of William Blake. P. 12. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Figure 9.** William Blake Title page to the prophetic book The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1795): Blunt, A. 1974. The Art of William Blake. Plate 22a. New York: Harper and Row publishers.

**Figure 10.** Jackson Pollock Pasiphaë (1943): Robertson, B. 1960. Jackson Pollock. Plate 98. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 11.** Jackson Pollock Bird (1941): Robertson, B. 1960. Jackson Pollock. Plate 102. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 12.** Jackson Pollock Naked Man (1941): Pollock, J. 1982. Jackson Pollock. P. 113. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne.

**Figure 13.** Jackson Pollock Moon woman (1942): O' Connor F. V. and Thaw E. V. 1978. Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings Drawings and Other Works. Vol. 1. Plate 86. London: Yale University Press.

**Figure 14.** Jackson Pollock Moon woman cuts the circle (1943): Jackson Pollock. P. 118. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne.

**Figure 15.** Pollock at Work (1951) Photographs by Hans Namuth. Robertson, B. 1960. Jackson Pollock. Plates. 6, 7 and 9. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 16.** Jackson Pollock Number 1 (1948): Robertson, B. 1960. Jackson Pollock. Plate 136. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 17.** Jackson Pollock Guardians of the secret (1943): Robertson, B. 1960. Jackson Pollock. Plate 54. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 18.** Jackson Pollock Painting (1938): O' Connor F. V. and Thaw E. V. 1978. Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings Drawings and Other Works. Vol. 1. Plate 61. London: Yale University Press.

**Figure 19.** William Blake Illustrations of the Book of Job: Plate XI (1795): Wolfe, J. 1972. Jungian Aspects of Jackson Pollock's Imagery. Artforum. 11(No. 3) (Nov.): 66.

**Figure 20.** Joseph Beuys How to explain pictures to a dead hare (1965): Tisdall, C. 1979. Joseph Beuys. Plate 153. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 21.** Joseph Beuys Coyote (1974): Tisdall, C. 1979. Joseph Beuys. Plates 398 and 399. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 22.** Joseph Beuys Show your Wound (1976): Tisdall, C. 1979. Joseph Beuys. Plates 365 and 366. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 23.** Joseph Beuys Titus/ Iphigenie Andronicus (1969): Tisdall, C. 1979. Joseph Beuys. Plate 299. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 24.** Joseph Beuys Palazzo Regale (1986): Mc Evilly, T. 1986. Hic Jacet Beuys. Artforum. 24: 131.

**Figure 25.** Joseph Beuys Fond O (1966): Tisdall, C. 1979. Joseph Beuys. P. 29. London: Thames and Hudson.

**Figure 26.** Joseph Beuys Proportions and Measurements of the Koch Cross (1953): Adriani, G., Konnertz, W. and Thomas, K. 1979. Life and Works of Joseph Beuys. Plate 26. New York: Baron's.

**Figure 27.** William Blake Albion and the Crucified Christ (1804-20): Lister, R. 1986. The paintings of William Blake. P. 35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Figure 28.** Albrecht Dürer Self Portrait (1500): Strieder, P. 1982. Dürer. P. 29. London: Frederick Muller Ltd.

**Figure 29.** William Blake Christ Blessing (1810): Lister, R. 1986. The paintings of William Blake. P. 50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Figure 30.** Jackson Hlungwani God's Leg with Eggs (1984): Burnett, R. (ed). 1989. Sparks of Recognition. Jeksemi Hlungwani Xagani: An Exhibition. p 16. Johannesburg: The Communication Department, BMW (South Africa).

**Figure 31.** Jackson Hlungwani Stellar Panel (1983): Burnett, R. (ed). 1989. Sparks of Recognition. Jeksemi Hlungwani Xagani: An Exhibition. p. 11. Johannesburg: The Communication Department, BMW (South Africa).

**Figure 32.** Jackson Hlungwani Large Swimming Fish (1989-90): Cohen, L. 1993. Jackson Hlungwani: A Resource Book. Figure 24. Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

**Figure 33.** Jackson Hlungwani Crucifix11 (1982): Burnett, R. (ed). 1989. Sparks of Recognition. Jeksemi Hlungwani Xagani: An Exhibition. p. 20. Johannesburg: The Communication Department, BMW (South Africa).

**Figure 34.** Anon. Christ on the cross (1307): White, J. 1966. Art and Architecture in Italy 1250-1400. Plate 333. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

**Figure 35.** Anon. Christ on the cross (first third of the thirteenth century): White, J. 1966. Art and Architecture in Italy 1250-1400. Plate 637. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

**Figure 36.** Jackson Hlungwani The New Jerusalem (1979): Burnett, R. (ed). 1989. Sparks of Recognition. Jeksemi Hlungwani Xagani: An Exhibition. p. 28. Johannesburg: The Communication Department, BMW (South Africa).

**Figure 37.** William Blake The soul Reunited with God (1795): Blunt, A. 1974. The Art of William Blake. Plate 49a. New York: Harper and Row publishers.

**Figure 38.** Jackson Hlungwani Aerial of God (1980's): Burnett, R. (ed). 1989. Sparks of Recognition. Jeksemi Hlungwani Xagani: An Exhibition. p. 32. Johannesburg: The Communication Department, BMW (South Africa).

**Figure 39.** Jackson Hlungwani Wisdom Circle (1983): Burnett, R. (ed). 1989. Sparks of Recognition. Jeksemi Hlungwani Xagani: An Exhibition. p. 10 Johannesburg: The Communication Department, BMW (South Africa).

**Figure 40.** Jackson Hlungwani Large Crucifix (1990): Cohen, L. 1993. Jackson Hlungwani: A Resource Book. Figure 15. Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

**Figure 41.** Jackson Hlungwani Adam and the Birth of Eve (1985-9): Cohen, L. 1993. Figure 14. Jackson Hlungwani: A Resource Book. Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

**Figure 42.** Cimabue The Crucifixion (13th Century): White, J. 1966. Art and Architecture in Italy 1250-1400. Plate 49. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

**Figure 43.** Cimabue The Santa Trinita Madonna (13th Century): White, J. 1966. Art and Architecture in Italy 1250-1400. Plate 50. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

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