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"I let the piece sing its own stories" : Post-Modern Artistic Inspiration

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CREATION BETWEEN ONE AND MANY

Mara Miller

I let the piece sing its own stories: Post-Modern Artistic Inspiration

Abstract

This paper distinguishes three common definitions of inspiration, dismissing both the Platonic (defining inspiration as a superior and seemingly frenzied performance carried out without regard to rules) and "Germ" or "Springboard" (defining inspiration as taking an idea and developing it) theories as both philosophically uninteresting and inadequate to art-making's complexities. "Radical alterity," by contrast, examined through the work of three contemporary women artists (Reiko Mochinaga Brandon, Kei Tsuji, and the author), recognizes art-making as seemingly originating outside the artist (in divinities for Hesiod, in the collective unconscious for Carl Jung, in landscapes and/or events, in dreams that seem unrelated to the artist's life). It explains why interpretation of a work of art can be difficult for the artist herself, yet others interpret the work readily.

The paper argues that the sense of transmission from sources outside the artist demands the rejection of dichotomous views of inspiration (a work is inspired or not) such as Plato's and Jung's, and permits a more multifaceted and continuous definition of inspiration to emerge. Radical alterity, especially when the source of inspiration might be the Jungian collective unconscious, allows artists to justify their work, and both artists and patrons to justify expense. Correctly understanding inspiration turns out to matter for many reasons.

Keywords: *Brandon, Reiko Mochinaga, collective unconscious, dream, inspiration, Japanese artists, Jung, painting, Plato, radical alterity, Tsuji Kei*

I. ONE ARTIST'S ACCOUNT – OUR FIRST MODERN EXAMPLE

Let me begin as an artist, and I promise I will end as a philosopher – although only after a brief journey as an art historian as well. For most of my adult life

I have emphatically *not* wanted to be an artist. Since I have taught in several art departments, and even three art colleges, art-making was an activity with which I was familiar. I was glad I didn't have to do it. There was so much amazing art in the world already – why go to the bother of making more?

But some years ago I awoke with a clear memory of a vision I had dreamt – and an equally clear sense that I had been "ordered" to paint it. There are artists on both sides of my family, so it is not surprising that I had had such dreams before. But that had been as a child and again just after college. Now it was twenty-seven years since I had last made any visual art. I had no materials, no studio, and no practice. I confided my dream to my husband, though; as Jungians we often discuss our dreams. He said I should paint it; I dismissed it. He insisted over the next few days, and eventually just stopped at an artists' supplies store and led me in. I had no idea what I needed. What size canvas? What size is a dream? It could be anything – from a miniature's few centimeters to an enormous mural. Yet faced with the stretched canvases on display, I found I knew immediately what size it must be – surprisingly large: three feet high by four feet long. (Its direction was also obvious.)

Taking it home to our back yard, I propped it against the wall of the garage and began to paint a flat steel-gray for the background, all over, as smooth as possible. And stored it in the garage. For four months. In November, I brought it out again, and started to work, outlining circles all the same circumference in deep blues and black (they seemed the colors of deep space, of ether), using a tin can to trace the shapes – which had to be perfectly circular (though with outlines of uneven width), just as my grandmother had used them to cut biscuits from dough. I "had" to use the implements she had used as much as possible (where had this idea come from? what relation had she to my dream?), so I applied this first painting's circles with knives.

The difficult part was discerning where to put the circles and how many to use. Also, I didn't remember the dream image as clearly as I had thought. Were some circles overlapping? (The dream conveyed a sense of enormous depth, as of outer space, which painters commonly indicate by overlapping forms.) These were matters of great importance, but little certainty. So I finished the first as best I could, and painted ten more with different numbers and distributions of circles. At first, none were near the edges (a dream has no edges); then they began to drift off the canvases, even as their distribution became more ordered. It was hard to say why; it just "felt right" for each new canvas, one after another. I began to fill in some, then all, of the circles. To change the sizes. Some introduced a different palette, blood reds escaping as droplets – or were they explosions? Blood or fire? Eventually the series became something else entirely, with one enormous circle in a corner and smaller ones circling around it. Or were they emanating from it?

For eighteen months I couldn't stop painting. I painted one series after another – nearly all the paintings were in series with permutations; only a few (the "self-portraits") with a single form each.

Is It Inspiration?

Why talk about this?

The process certainly resulted in "art works," fulfilling most or all of Denis Dutton's "twelve criteria for art" – whether good or not need not concern us.[1] They were also creative, in that they seemingly came from nothing. (The notion that "creation" means making something from nothing, as God made the world in Book One of *Genesis*, is an inheritance from Christian thought.) Most important is that their making raises very directly the problem of inspiration, for five overlapping reasons. Most saliently, 1) they never seemed to me to be "my idea." There was a sense of alterity, what I will call the "utterly other"[2] – their estrangement from "myself" and everything I thought of as *my* psyche, my activities, wishes, plans. As a person who had studied depth psychology and philosophy from my teens on, and had by then both published and taught on comparative views of selfhood, I had some sense of what this meant. It *felt* as if the "command" had come from someone else; was this a case of what Derek Parfit called q-intentioning? Not exactly – in q-intentioning, the q-intender is another person, and there was no such person.

I knew from both study and personal experience that the utter otherness of some dreams could indeed be part of oneself, and that such knowledge could lead one to "owning" what ego or consciousness *could not* acknowledge – I knew that the "other," Jung's Shadow, the part one refuses to or cannot see as oneself, is indeed part of oneself. Indeed, Jung's version of dream analysis had kept me alive during my suicidal late teens. (More on dreams below.) Yet there was my impression of an imperative – presumably emanating, like Hesiod's, from somewhere (though I had not then read Hesiod).

There was also 2) a gap between its creation and everything else I was doing. They were not part of any ongoing attempt (to paint, to imagine some picture). 3) There was almost no effort – to the original imagining, or to the creation of the "artwork" (if such it was, and it is certainly more an artwork than it is anything else). 4) Nor were they part of any on-going sense of identity, successful or otherwise. (I was not, before them, an unsuccessful artist; I was not an artist at all.) Finally, 5) there was the difference, or distance, between this work and any problems I was working on at the time, so that while I eventually saw it as the solution to a problem, that happened only after a) the artistic production, b) the transformation of images into symbols in my – or others' – interpretation.

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1 They conform to some criteria of artworks according to the (admittedly problematic) "institutional theory of art": they have been exhibited as such, after being accepted by juries and curators into exhibitions; they have been purchased as such; they bring intrinsic pleasure, according to some of their owners and the artist herself (the author). They also fit all Dennis Dutton's twelve criteria for art: "direct pleasure, skill and virtuosity, style, novelty and creativity, criticism, representation, special focus, expressive individuality, emotional saturation, intellectual challenge, arts traditions and institutions, and imaginative experience." Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 52-59.

2 This contrasts with many experiences of the other as part of us, as someone with whom we have overlapping feelings, projects, and/or identity, share co-subjectivity, etc. Regarding co-subjectivity, see Mara Miller, "Art and the Construction of Self and Subject in Japan," in *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice,* ed. Wimal Dissanayake et al. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Defining Inspiration and an Ancient Example

Today we use "inspiration" and "inspire" in several different senses:

1) It refers to any activity that is really whole-hearted and enthusiastic: "she danced as if inspired," such as Janis Joplin's renowned singing of "Ball and Chain" at Woodstock. Although it comes from Plato's sense of particularly gifted poets' performances, an especially confident or original or enthusiastic or enlivened execution of a well-practiced or well-understood performance, idea or image, even a laborer may be "inspired" to complete his work before quitting time, or to try a different tool. Plato restricted "inspiration" to poetry, excluding it from visual arts (because he believed they operated by means of rules, and thus were *techne*), but over the past couple centuries we began using the concept regarding the visual arts and, more recently, the sciences and life in general. I will consider this usage metaphorical (though for Plato it may have been literal) and set it aside.[3]

2) It often means taking a mundane outside source as the basis for work or action, so that it serves as a springboard for a course of action or thought, providing a certain germ of an idea to be developed into an eventual progression of ideas. I will call this the "weak" sense, the sense in which an artist may be inspired by Socrates' biography to paint his death, without any sense of how to convey it. This is not very interesting, and I do not discuss it further – although it provides the preponderance of cases of "inspiration" discussed and indexed by philosophers.[4] Indeed, despite issuing from the writer's or artist's own mind, it is like receiving a commission to undertake a portrait or a particular landscape. This seems to be the sense in which novelist Kristin Bair O'Keefe, author of *Thirsty* and *The Art of Floating,* uses dreams in her magical realism – a very different use than mine.[5]

3) Or one may, by contrast, discover the idea *plus* many or all indications of how to implement it (the fulfillment or implementation of the original germ) "out of the blue," seemingly from nowhere, as I did with my dream and the ancient Greek poet Hesiod did with the Muses' command to write poetry to honor them and the gods. For this third, "strong" definition applies to the first documented case of inspiration in Western history, the early Greek shepherd-turned-poet (and economist), Hesiod. Hesiod describes his transformation from a shepherd to poet as due to the commands of the semi-divine muses:

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3 While, in "inspiration," important parts are carried out without referring to "rules," defined as *generally* applicable instructions, some rules *always* apply; in my paintings, I a) used pigments b) on a surface; they were, moreover, rectangular, although some artists break this last rule. Inspiration applies to those aspects where ideas, instructions, methods, were needed, but there were no applicable rules (as in Hesiod's case, it seems), or those that there were, were ignored. Usually if one just reverses the rules, it's not really inspiration; more is required. (But what? Where does this "more" come from? See below.)

4 In fact it doesn't seem to matter to most philosophers. The first forty or fifty (I stopped at that point) references to "inspiration" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press's *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, and *Wikipedia* (disappointingly) refer only to the weak sense – someone was inspired by someone else's work or ideas in the sense that it gave them an idea to develop into their own. They give no primary entry. Few discuss work whose ideas do *not* follow from previous concerns (their own or another's). If the concept is rooted in antiquity, a survey of indexes of modern aesthetics/philosophy of art anthologies suggests it should stay there.

5 Kristin Bair O'Keefe, "Making Magic." *Writer's Digest*, July/August 2014, 30-33. www.Writers-Digest.com.

> And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon, and this word first the goddesses said to me -- the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis:
> (ll. 26-28) "Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things."
> (ll. 29-35) So said the ready-voiced daughters of great Zeus, and they plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvelous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things there were aforetime; and they bade me sing…[6]

Hesiod implies that their command included *how* to carry it out. I will call this the "strong" sense of inspiration. These three definitions (weak and two versions of strong, the all-at-once and the intuitive feeling-one's-way to the finished product) apply to my experience making some of my works, discussed below (though not to all my art). Hesiod's appeal to divinity suggests both alterity and superiority to the artist.

Jung's Artistic Dichotomy

Psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung wrote extensively on artistic inspiration, in works now collected in Volume XX of the Bollingen Foundation series.[7] His main purposes in those essays were distinguishing his theory from Freud's regarding art, clarifying the nature of art, explaining symbols, archetypes, differentiating the psychology of art from the psychology of the artist, and, most importantly for us, determining the roles of the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious in and of themselves and in relation to art. Jung separates artworks into two mutually exclusive categories, based primarily on which of these two types of unconscious is "in charge of" the art making. Inspired works (Type I) are those:

> which flow more or less complete and perfect from the author's pen. They come as it were fully arrayed into the world, as Pallas Athene sprang from the head of Zeus. These works positively force themselves upon the author; his hand is seized, his pen writes things that his mind contemplates with amazement. The work brings with it its own form; anything he wants to add is rejected, and what he himself would like to reject is thrust back at him. While his conscious mind stands amazed and empty before this phenomenon, he is overwhelmed by a flood of thoughts and images which he never intended to create and which his own will could never have brought into being (72-3 ß110).

At the other extreme, for Jung, is Type II work that follows the intention of the artist, who remains in charge of his process throughout:

> But… There are literary works, prose as well as poetry, that spring wholly from the author's intention to produce a particular result. He submits his material to a definite treatment with

6 Hesiod, *The Theogony of Hesiod*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (SacredTexts Classics Hesiod Greek [1914], http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm).

7 Carl Gustav Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" and "Psychology and Literature," both of which are in Part IV of *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, English translation by R. F. C. Hull, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 15, Bollingen Series XX (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966). All following page and section numbers are to this text.

Cf. also: "Uber die Beziehungen der analytischen Psychologie zum dichterischen Kustwerk," in *Seelenprobleme der Gegenwart* (Zurich: Rascher, 1931) and "Psychologie und Dichtung," in *Gestaltungen des Unbewussten* (Zurich: Rascher, 1950).

> a definite aim in view… His material is entirely subordinated to his artistic purpose; he wants to express this and nothing else… In either case, the artist is so identified with his work that his intentions and his faculties are indistinguishable from the act of creation itself… (72; ß109).

Some of my art is of this type. I conceive a plan and carry it out, I know exactly what effects I want and why. My miniature paintings of flowers on a gold background "after" the style of Japanese Rimpa painters Sotatsu and Kiitsu's large folding screens translate their style and subject matter to American wildflowers and a tiny scale. They're fun, pleasurable – maybe even beautiful. Other people want them and tell me they enjoy them. The creativity, however, is mundane at best: applying a known quantity and known quality to new size and new subject matter by means of logical extrapolation. The "inspiration" is of the weak and metaphorical varieties. And there is no need for interpretation. You just enjoy them. I doubt they're symbolic.

Dichotomous Categories Don't Help in Understanding Inspiration in Art

I disagree with Jung's (and Plato's) dichotomous characterization of inspiration, for several reasons. First, when we talk about an artist or work being "inspired" it may apply to any or all parts of the process/product: to the basic idea, what it should look like (its form), how it should be carried out (materials and techniques), and the degree of enthusiasm or rapture or planning that the artist uses. As a result, many artworks combine the types. For example, my paintings depicting (in gold and silver against an indigo background) a tiny bear in the sky of a landscape, occupying the Buddha's position in the frontispieces to Heian-period sutra scrolls, are largely Jung's type II (like the flowers on gold after Sotatsu): I knew exactly what I wanted to do and how to do it. But the original idea presented itself out of the blue as an inspiring "waking vision." They are a hybrid. In this case, while they are enjoyable, they are also open to "meaning." For in addition to personalizing an ancient Japanese format and motif, they suggest the opening up of Buddhist enlightenment/salvation to animals, an idea implicit in Chapter Twelve of the *Lotus Sutra* ("The Dragon-King's Daughter") that became pervasive in Japan in the middle ages.

Second, if we take intention as the deciding factor, we immediately find we have three categories, for artists may *intend* to incorporate chance, serendipity, accident. And there are also the cases of "planning" for interference or direction by the unconscious, as with my "White Music" paintings (*Sztuka i Filozofia* 37-2010, 97), where leaves are allowed to fall into the wet paint and are kept there.

Third, in my experience, inspiration is not always a complete, all-at-once phenomenon. (We may call such works "subitist," from Lat. *subito*, sudden, like the term used in Zen scholarship to denote schools with sudden rather than gradual enlightenment.) Sometimes it occurs only more or less, or gradually, one feels one's way, in steps – some of which are inspired, others not. This is one of aspects of the artist's talent, originality, or "genius" – another word for inspiration, since the "genius" was originally a minor god. The temporal dimension of inspiration must be remembered.

Fourth, there is a basic question about "who is in charge." Jung tries to capture this by the term "intention," but intention is present in both cases, I would argue, though for Jung only in the second (or "uninspired" – though it is not meant to carry the usual pejorative connotation of work that is humdrum or undistinguished). In Hesiod's and my cases, though, intention applies to the carrying out of the work, which does not, however, arise from anything we recognize as ourselves. It is the distinction between the intention to carry out a work and coming up with the idea in the first place. Hesiod and I certainly intended to do our work – Jung's "this and nothing else" – but it was not originally *our* intention, but someone else's, the "utterly other" I spoke of earlier. In my case, once I had been given this vision with its command to paint, my intention was "to produce a particular result" as in Jung's uninspired cases.

Fifth, once we look at how artists actually work, we often find them charting a course between the weak and strong senses identified above: "taking inspiration" from something outside themselves – typically a material – but in such a way that the material determines a whole new form or course of action. It has a much more powerful, even determining force. A sculpture of mine was definitely inspired (weak sense) by my accidental discovery of two identical strips, fifteen feet long and three inches wide, of copper flashing discarded in a roofing. It was instantaneously evident that this was perfect for something, and only a further couple minutes were needed to be inspired (strong sense) as to what that was: a knot signifying marriage; I "saw" the two strips in their knot, but only because the material had presented itself to me. Japanese gardeners often speak of "listening to the rock," an experience in which what needs to happen to the artwork arises from an outer source, from an independent being. Artist Reiko Mochinaga Brandon says, "I let the piece sing its own stories."[8]

Such misunderstanding of these issues can lead to further misunderstandings. The hybrid example of the Buddhist bears described above, in addition to combining logical/planned aspects and processes with an inspired idea and intuitive execution, prompts us to confront issues of pleasure and meaning, as well. In many cases, my dreamed art is not especially pleasurable. Enjoyment is not their point. It is that perplexity arising when we face a work of art that is not especially enjoyable that prompts us to wonder what it "means" (even when it is our own work, even when we dreamed it – it came "out of" us). Beauty can stop thought. Sometimes by distraction, but sometimes because aesthetic pleasure can be – is defined as – inherently valuable. It arouses no need for understanding. This, of course, is one of the main services art can play to ideology.

Jung's and Plato's dichotomy has the advantage of simplicity, but it overlooks these important complications.

Why Does It Matter? Medieval and Chinese Examples

Why does inspiration matter? This is two questions. First, what is it there for? Why does it exist? I believe this is simple: it explains *to the maker herself* and

8 Email response to my questions, July 23, 2014.

to others why she creates art. This is very useful for people like Hesiod and me who don't create art – until they do. It provides, for artists/non-artists who otherwise feel unjustified in creating their work, a cloak of protection – a justification – must we say a rationalization? – for the hubris of making something utterly new,[9] or for making anything at all. This was the case with Hildegarde von Bingen (1098-1179), the nun whose *Book of Divine Works*,[10] musical compositions, and paintings became so well known. Paintings of her show her inspiration flowing from billowing clouds in wavy red lines through the window.[11] In my case, although women had begun to take their place in the art world well before me, it was psychologically necessary to avoid even the possibility of "outshining" my father and my mother's brother, both of whom had devoted their lives to becoming (professional) artists but who had fallen far short of their dreams – and who had suffered terribly from this inability. And how in god's name does a shepherd like Hesiod explain how and why he suddenly finds it necessary to write a poem praising the gods – and get it written down – if not in gods' names?

Inspiration is also useful in justifying expenditures that may be necessary, either to make the art itself, or on behalf of the deity or belief system expounded.

The second question, "why do we need *to understand* inspiration?" has more answers, for there are several reasons. First, socially, psychologically, politically, artists and their publics benefit. Artists need to find the right way to take responsibility for our work – we can't do that if we're pretending it's not ours. But at the same time, if we claim it's entirely ours in the usual sense (the sense in which I'm writing this article, which was inspired by the journal's call for articles, my own and other artists' work, and Jung's theories – but only in the weak sense), we're deceiving ourselves and others – and we're also not capable of reaching the answers we want, because with inspiration we're not in the same position of knowing that we usually are in. Cases of *inspired* art are inherently mysterious.

Second, if we're wrong about it, if it implies – or conceals (depending on your belief system) – a superior being who informs us about our work – it's misleading. Truth always matters. It may be shoring up illusions (of deities who tell us what to do, of our own importance, of our intimacy with gods).

And inspiration is expensive – we put a lot of resources (time, money, energy, labor, attention) into carrying it out – so we should know why we do

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9 I avoid the term "creation" so as not have to go into the philosophical debates about whether creation is restricted to God.

10 Hildegard von Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, manuscript 1942, Biblioteca Statale di Lucca, reproduced in Sabina Flanagan, *Secrets of God: Writings of Hildegard of Bingen* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1996).

11 For analysis of these images of Hildegard's inspiration, see Mara Miller, "The Lady in the Garden: Subjects and Objects in an Ideal World," in *Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, edited by Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho (New York: Plagrave, 2000). Madeline Caviness argues, in "Artist: 'To See, Hear, and Know All at Once,'" in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 110-124, that portraits of Hildegard writing from her Book are from her own designs.

this, what we are doing it for. Particularly when we do it – or have others do it – at the bidding of divinities, it easily justifies exploitation of those who do the work or finance it.

Fourth, our understanding of inspiration deeply affects our understanding of artists. On the one hand, we may, as painter Mark Rothko asserts (and Plato thought), end up believing that because they are inspired, artists are "mad," foolish and not responsible for their work: "What is the popular conception of the artist? Gather a thousand descriptions, and the resulting composite is the portrait of a moron: he is held to be childish, irresponsible, and ignorant or stupid in everyday affairs. …Biographers contrast the artlessness of his judgments with the high attainment of his art, and while his *naïveté* or rascality are gossiped about, they are viewed as signs of Simplicity and Inspiration."[12] Thus does a Platonic view of inspiration trivialize them and their work, and that can make it harder for the artists.

Fifth, our understanding of inspiration deeply affects our understanding of the artistic process as well. This is true especially as regards time. We may seriously underestimate the time and effort and intelligence and dedication that go into an inspired work. The answer by Brandon (whose work is discussed below) regarding how long it took her to make one of her sculptures indicates the disparity: "All my life." Similarly with my copper marriage-knot. It took a couple minutes to request the discarded metal and wind it up to carry home, a couple hours looking for the right kind of knot in knot books (and a couple hours finding the right knot book), an hour or two to tie the knot. (The copper was two inches wide, and didn't tie easily.) But how many hours, over how many years, had I spent as an art historian looking at copper, to realize its possibilities instantaneously? How many years had it taken to understand the meaning of marriage as a tying together? To learn the ceremonial sense of Japanese gift-wrap knots and Chinese good-luck knots – not just fishermen's knots for accomplishing a purpose? To gain the social skill and emotional maturity to ask a complete stranger for what I wanted?

The theory of inspiration therefore challenges the labor theory of value as applied to art.[13] What is valuable in art is not necessarily what took longest to make – or rather, we have to re-examine what we mean by making art. And for good reason. What goes into the inspiration-generation (the years of looking and living) are essential but don't show up in the making. Taking time in its manufacturing is not necessarily related to results.

This is seen also in the sixth implication, the way our understanding of inspiration also challenges our sense of how effort is related to results. In everyday life we have a fairly reliable sense of how much effort it will take to carry on our daily lives (with certain major exceptions: we can buy our way out of labor by paying workers; farmers take a chance on the year's work being undone by weather; computers have changed the ease with which we can make huge mistakes, and so on). But inspiration suggests a whole other way in which effort

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12 Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1.

13 Thorsten Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: The Modern Library, 1934; first published 1899).

is unrelated to results. Writing articles, I struggle to find the words and syntax that will convey my meaning to my readers. Painting, I put no effort into that at all, yet people of all kinds understand it.

For finally (seventh), how we understand inspiration affects our understanding of the meaning of form, of symbols, of art itself, of dreams, of the unconscious – personal or collective.

II. INTERPRETATION, SYMBOLS, AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

DREAMS

How do art-inspiring dreams differ from other dreams? How does art prompted by a dream differ from other art? Is it different when it comes from a dream, a well-known route from the unconscious, than if you just "see it" or "know it," somehow?

The dream that prompted my first paintings differed from my other dreams, in that a) it issued a command to act; b) it had neither plot/action nor characters; c) it *seemed* meaningless (but not "crazy" or nonsensical, as dreams commonly do) – all features shared by the dream of a monk at Dunhuang that inspired the painting of hundreds of caves illustrating Buddhist paradise.

As a follower of Jungian psychology, of course, I certainly recognize my dreams as my own mental and/or emotional activity. In my case, both Jungian and Gestalt dream analysis reveal purely personal interpretations to many dreams.

But "I" don't devise the images or activities in my non-art dreams – if I dream of my school, that image comes from my experience with a building/institution outside of myself; my contribution to the dream is the "choice" of it and the memory – and of course the significance or reason for its appearance (assuming, as a Jungian would, that there is some). But there was no such physical or experienced correlates/precedents to the image(s) on whose realization this dream insisted. The images arising from my dreams that appear in my paintings, however, are *readily understood by people who don't know me*.

JUNG'S COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

What seems to be a private language coming from a dream or a (waking) vision is often intelligible to other people. How is this possible? For those of us who accept a psychoanalytic theory of dreams as arising from our unconscious, how is it that it can present information or perspectives that are new to us?

A. "Reception" and Interpretation by Others

Art inspired by dreams presents meaning in terms that are widely shared. Such is the loneliness in one of my paintings noticed by a locksmith who was fixing my door – although my own understanding of the painting was not in terms of loneliness or solitude, but fear. (That painting was part of the *Landscapes of*

Fear series.)[14] "Indeed," Jung claims (rightly) "the special significance of a true work of art resides in the fact that it has escaped from the limitations of the personal and has soared beyond the personal concerns of its creator (71)."

But sometimes it is in terms of the viewer's purely personal life – only *after* which I recognize them as related to experiences of my own. An example: one of the paintings in a series with deep reds, purples and browns – face it, blood colors – streaked vertically in thick paint covering the entire canvas, with two small overlapping squares indicated only by their edges, which are lime and emerald green and almost sky blue. A seventeen-year-old guest asked: "Did my father tell you about me?" I said no. "I had to go into a mental hospital for observation. It was a condition of my not going to jail. This painting," he went on, "reminds me of me and my psychiatrist when I was in the hospital." I myself had made the connection between the background colors and messiness and blood, equaling intense emotion, and the squares as rationality, being "measured," and their colors representing peace and calm. But I had not seen a) the possibility of the linkage between two beings – a linkage b) via a calm rationality, nor that c) the squares could readily symbolize persons. I had not seen that I might have, in fact, painted a self-portrait – the squares representing myself and another. Once he said it, of course, I could see it; and now having written it, I see it more clearly still – and draw further implications. This would seem to be what Jung meant when he wrote, "We would expect a strangeness of form and content, thoughts that can only be apprehended intuitively, a language pregnant with meanings, and images that are true symbols because they are the best possible expressions for something unknown – bridges thrown out towards an unseen shore" (75-6, ß116).

But what makes it possible for someone to see into the heart of someone else's psyche – through their art – in that way? Jung says this is the wrong question. We are not seeing into the artist's psyche, but into the collective storehouse of humanity's symbols. The artist's dreams come not from the individual unconscious that is the source of most dreams (here he says Freud is wrong) but from the collective unconscious:

> I am assuming that the work of art we propose to analyze, as well as being symbolic, has its source not in the personal unconscious of the poet, but in a sphere of unconscious mythology whose primordial images are the common heritage of mankind. I have called this sphere the collective unconscious, to distinguish it from the personal unconscious.

He proceeds to define the two:

> The latter I regard as the sum total of all those psychic processes and contents which are capable of becoming conscious and often do, but are then suppressed because of their incompatibility and kept subliminal. (80, ß125).
> …The collective unconscious is not to be thought of as a self-subsistent entity; it's no more than a potentiality handed down to us from primordial times in the specific form of mnemonic images or inherited in the anatomical structure of the brain. There are no inborn ideas, but there are inborn possibilities of ideas that set bounds to even the boldest fantasy and keep

14 *Sztuka i Filozofia* 37-2010, 98-99, reproduced two of this series, "Twist of Fate" and "Where Are the Mothers for Us?."

our fantasy activity within certain categories: a priori ideas, as it were, the existence of which cannot be ascertained except from their effects. They appear only in the shaped material of art as the regulative principles that shape it; that is to say, only by inferences drawn from the finished work can we reconstruct the age-old original of the primordial image (80-81, ß126).

So: many people understand my painting.[15] More remarkably, they do so without trying – automatically; some of them read my paintings emotionally as fast as they would read a traffic sign on a highway. How does this happen? Why is it able to? And why is it that someone with no background in either my art or in "art appreciation," no conversation with me about it, can understand a deep meaning of my painting? Jung suggests that such works convey by means of symbols, "…For a symbol is the intimation of a meaning beyond the level of our present powers of comprehension" (76, ß118):

A symbol remains a perpetual challenge to our thoughts and feelings. That probably explains why a symbolic work is so stimulating, why it grips us so intensely, but also why it seldom affords us a purely aesthetic enjoyment. A work that is manifestly not symbolic appeals much more to our aesthetic sensibility because it is complete in itself and fulfills its purpose (76-7, ß119).

The collective unconscious offers two additional solutions to questions raised by artistic inspiration. As far as the source of this "command" I was given, if it comes from Jung's collective unconscious, that could explain the "utter otherness" I experience, since this is neither personal nor conscious nor available to consciousness in therapy:

In contrast to the personal unconscious, which is a relatively thin layer immediately below the threshold of consciousness, the collective unconscious shows no tendency to become conscious under normal conditions, nor can it be brought back to recollection by any analytical technique, since it was never repressed or forgotten (80-81, ß126).

It also helps explain the commonality of *recognition* – the frequency with which we find ourselves reacting to (someone else's) work of art as if it tells *our own* experience.

B. "Reception" and Interpretation by Me

Inspiration raises questions about meaning and interpretation not only in regard to the viewer/audience, but to the artist herself. Unlike art conceived by conscious me, in my art inspired by dreams and visions, not only is there need for interpretation, but the interpretation may be just as problematic for me as for anyone else. I say "may be" because, as we have seen, some viewers look at one of these paintings and have an immediate sense that it "makes sense," whereas I struggle to make sense of it until one day it suddenly falls into place (by means of one of two different processes).

What did my first (dreamed) paintings mean to *me*? Since they present themselves to me as if they come from someone else, the task of interpretation falls to me as it would to anyone else. They seem to come from outside me

15 I believe not all my painting has "meaning" or is "understood." One collector said of a painting that he "liked looking at it; it makes me feel calm." Enough said.

– not just outside my ego, but unrelated to my experience. In this sense they resemble two experiences I have had of "ghosts," both with a strong – nay, utterly convincing – presence of the dead person, one of which was accompanied by a message from him that seemed impossible for me to have conjured up: that what I was worried about, caught up in regretting, was no longer happening (for my dead visitor), so I was free simply to let it go myself.[16] With both the dreams and the "ghosts," I craved something: a way to understand the meaningless events in my life, as I had craved the presence of the two men whose ghosts visited me. But there were two significant differences. The two ghost visitations are readily interpreted as wish fulfillment, as the paintings were not (more evidence that Jung, not Freud, is right and that art-dreams do not come from the personal unconscious). And the men whose ghosts came. The paintings were not.

They seemed to represent something, but what it was unclear, vaguely reminiscent of a number of things, such as planets revolving around a sun or moons around a planet (though in the first images there was nothing like the sun, nor a comparable discrepancy in size). They were a little like jugglers' balls or billiard balls – but the colors were wrong (far too drab) and there was no reason to assume their presumed "motion" was confined to a plane (nor that it had any pattern at all, recurrent or *caused*, as with planets). Were they attracted by an unseen gravitational pull – even falling? Or were they escaping, like bubbles only without the iridescence? I kept trying to "explain" them verbally to myself and others, using terms such as these. And eventually, once all this occurred to me, I suddenly saw that it was the very *ambiguity* of the interpretations that was the key to the meaning.

It was their very inability to conform to a model of anything I knew to exist that eventually clued me in to their significance. Actually "ambiguity" is not quite the right word, requiring as it does choice between two interpretations, whereas the key to my paintings was that there were several potential meanings. Logicians call such a situation "vagueness." But that too is inappropriate, suggesting as it does indecipherable boundaries and lack of clarity, like a ghostly apparition. My paintings had competing interpretations, many of which were each quite clear.

They were visual analogs to my cognitive and emotional experience of "having too many balls in the air" while being unable to discern any order – my experience of the confusion of my life, confusion that had been at that point uncomfortably prolonged.

I had been feeling for several years as if too much was going on, too many different kinds of demands, with little perceptible order. Was there an order to the events in my life? Was someone, or something, controlling the motion – the constant sense of movement in my life? Was this an ongoing self-perpetuating system (like a solar system or a repetition compulsion), or an illusion of freedom actually following intelligible (if imperceptible) laws of physics, like escaping

16 John Le Carre's novel *The Constant Gardener* is a fascinating study of a contemporary ghost giving the protagonist information, knowledge, and perspectives he cannot himself muster.

helium balloons or bubbles? Or a collapsing cascade of events following the inescapable laws of gravity – everything falls eventually?

It was the very amorphousness, the vagueness, of the "spheres" (were they rock or air? material or ethereal?) and their positions that caught my internal struggle. The dreams gave me symbols that, as Jung put it, "should be understood as an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way" (70, ß105).

I have subsequently been "inspired" to paint other series representing abstract ideas or principles intimately related to my experience, whose meaning became clear only in the assemblage of many different such images. They continue in a similar vein – sets of images that provided a specific and concrete form for what was abstract. I ended up considering such paintings a sort of "abstract expressionism" – though it gives form not to emotion but to a primarily intellectual confusion. In these cases, only after completing several of these paintings and looking at them as a viewer, as I would anyone else's paintings, did a "meaning" related to my experience occur to me.

But is there any reason to believe that the accounts I eventually gave to the separate series have any greater validity than the interpretations assigned to Rorschach images? That is, one can always find a pattern, but is the pattern "there," somehow, in the image, or only in the mind's eye? (How and why this will matter will depend on one's purposes, of course.) Is there any difference here between my interpretations of my own work and my interpretations of someone else's? – of Chagall's or Picasso's?[17] Or someone else's interpretation of mine? Jung's theory compels the conclusion that no individual has proprietary rights over the interpretation – not even the artist.

III. MORE CASE STUDIES: JAPAN AFTER WWII

All this is well and good, but are there any cases where it really matters? I might have continued confused about my life, and my young friend would have thought no one could understand the nature of his relationship with his psychiatrist or his emotional relief at "overlapping" with a calm and ordered being (which he might not have even put words to without my painting). But we are just two individuals whose everyday desperation pales before the force of great art, which Jung argues is to embody the symbol, the archetype, that "transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night" (82, ß129).

Such symbols are crucial at times of mass disasters such as war – and the atomic bombings. Novelist (and art collector) Yasunari Kawabata, Japan's first

17 I don't want to get into the issue of interpretation here, beyond insisting that any sound interpretation minimally a) requires evidence correlating the form and the meaning; b) must have been within the artist's realm of possibility at the time of creation (no attributing Christian meanings to pre-Hispanic Mexican art), although c) she need not have intended it; d) usually allows multiple interpretations on different levels: a psychoanalytic interpretation does not preclude a historic or Marxist one.

Nobel laureate for literature, once wrote, regarding his stopover in Kyoto to see art, temples and gardens after an official visit to the ruins of Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, that "looking at old works of art is a matter of life and death."[18] What makes art so important after such devastation?

Japan's situation was dire.[19] It demanded a complete rebuilding of the nation and the culture. How did Japanese artists contribute?[20] Were they able to "transmute our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evoke in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night," as Jung put it? And if so, how did this work? Jung argues that

> with [inspired] works … we would have to be prepared for something suprapersonal that transcends our understanding to the same degree that the author's consciousness was in abeyance during the process of creation. We would expect a strangeness of form and content, thoughts that can only be apprehended intuitively, a language pregnant with meanings, and images that are true symbols because they are the best possible expressions for something unknown – bridges thrown out towards an unseen shore (75-6, ß116).

This is a complicated question. A penetrating set of complex answers (focusing on their positions, attitudes, group affiliations, and personal histories) is provided by Alexandra Munroe's, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*.[21] Japan After World War II offers us many examples of artists taking inspiration from either prehistoric or traditional historic arts and artists, using their materials, techniques, and even their physical locations and relations to the earth. The situation is worth our attention for several reasons. First, this deliberate return is not at the cost of modernism (and post-modernism), but comprises a *part* of modernism, a powerful stream within it.[22] Second, it reflects a need to connect with something outside the artist.

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18 He was "defending" his need to reconnect with his country's past after an experience of tertiary trauma. See Mara Miller, 2014. "«A Matter of Life and Death»: Yasunari Kawabata on the Value of Art After the Atomic Bombings," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 2014, 72-3, 261-275. Donald Keene translated, in *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era,* Volume I (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 827; (1st ed. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984), 805. "Tertiary trauma" is my new term for distress experienced by those who hear or see images of trauma to others. See Mara Miller, "Terrible Knowledge And Tertiary Trauma," Part I: «Teaching About Japanese Nuclear Trauma And Resistance To The Atomic Bomb», in *The Clearing House*: *A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 86(05), 157-163; published online 05 Jul 2013.

19 Regarding those losses and their effects on identity, see Mara Miller, "Japanese Aesthetics and the Disruptions of Identity after the Atomic Bombings" *kritische berichte. zeitschrift für kunst- und kulturwissenschaften,* 2/2010, 73-82, special issue on Japanese identity after the atomic bombings.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the Yokohama Museum of Art, the Japan Foundation, the Guggenheim Museum, and San Francisco Museum of Art, 1994). The subtitle refers to Yoko Ono's poem "Voice Piece for Soprano:"

Scream.

1. against the wind

2. against the wall

3. against the sky.

22 On the deliberate combination of old and new, see Mara Miller, "Agency, Identity, and Aesthetic Experience in Three Post-Atomic Japanese Narratives: Yasunari Kawabata's *The Sound of the Mountain*, Rio Kishida's *Thread Hell*, and the *anime* Film *Barefoot Gen*, Minh Nguyen, ed., *New Studies in Japanese Aesthetics*, edited by Minh Nguyen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); for architecture, see Dana Buntrock, *Materials & Meaning In Contemporary Japanese Architecture: Tradition & Today* (New York, 2010).

Reiko Mochinaga Brandon

Reiko Mochinaga Brandon is a Japanese-born artist who has lived in the United States for several decades.

The power and complexity of her work and the multiplicity of her sources of inspiration make her work ideal for our study.[23] Finally, hers is *great* art, according to my definition: finding a form that is adequate to the expression of an important human issue.[24]

To understand Brandon's work fully, it may help to recall Jung's notions of the symbol and the archetype, which captures humanity's needs – and solutions. While this definition deliberately includes several kinds of activities: the formulation of questions, the expression of emotional reactions and attitudes toward such problems, I believe Brandon's work goes further in that it expresses (a range of?) solutions to the excruciating existential problems facing Japan as a nation and Japanese individuals after World War II.

On a trip back to Japan with her American husband in 1980, Brandon told me, she found herself in a state of recognition she had not thought possible.[25] She had originally come to the U.S. as a Fulbright Scholar, returned to Japan for several years, where she met and married her husband, then returned to Honolulu to live with him, where she studied textile arts at the University of Hawaii at Manoa – leaving her Japanese identity behind. The conflict with her family over her choice of an American husband – one who had worked for the Occupation forces, no less (although her father had not fought in WWII, he had been a general in the Japanese Army) – may have assisted with this sense of separation from origins. This trip back home in 1980 found her identifying as a Japanese more strongly than before, and "inspired" some of the strongest work by any twentieth-century artist, her series of Guardian sculptures, among them Winter Guardian, 1987 (Plate 1) and White Guardian, 1986 (Plate 2).[26]

Physical Description and Results/Effects

The Guardians are freestanding – three-dimensional sculptures ranging from five to ten inches high to two feet – incorporating materials of three kinds:

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23 While generally accepting a definition as art "which is not merely superb formally but which has… significant human content," I define great art as "universally understood to reveal the human condition" (32), some of which "offer[s] a whole society new ways of understanding itself and portions of itself and its situation, thus paving the way for political and other changes in the society – and [sometimes] eliminating the need for further [action of that type]…" (*pace* Bertram Jessup, *who require great art to be enduring*) (118), Mara Miller, *The Garden as an Art* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

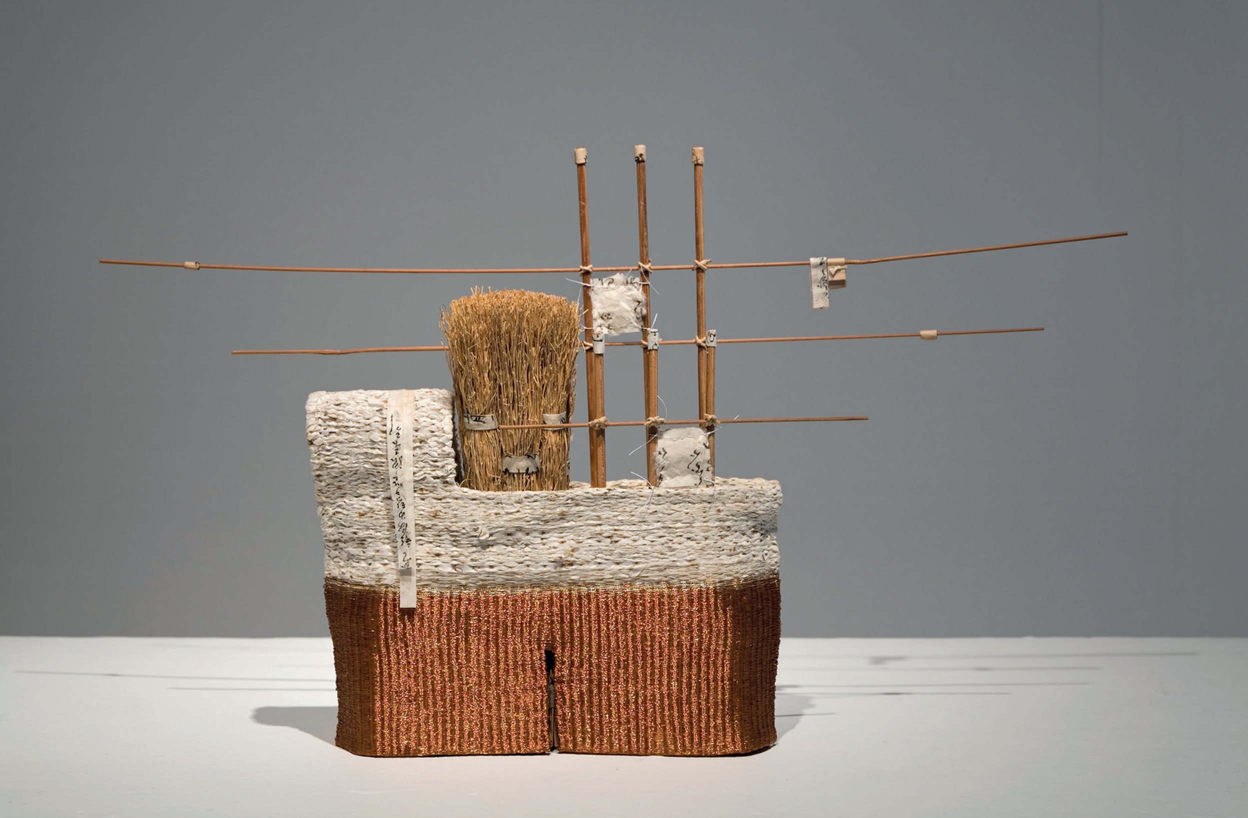
In addition to this article, I am writing about Brandon's work in "Re-Creating History and Memory: The Visual and Visceral Records," *Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Memory*, Kenya Davis-Hayes and Roger Chapman, ed., under review.

24 I proposed this definition in *The Garden as an Art* (State University of New York Press, 1993), Part III, 8-11.

25 Information about her life, materials, techniques, and her views of her art comes from an interview with the artist in June 8, 2014.

26 See Munroe 1994, 268 and plates 159, 160-1 and 160-2; Reiko Mochinaga Brandon, "Weaving Cultural Bridges," *Shuttle, Spindle & Dyepot*, XIX, 3, issue 75: summer 1988, 72-73; The Morikami Museum and the Boca Raton Museum of Art, "Reiko Mochinaga Brandon," in *Japanese-American Craft Invitational* (catalogue) (Delray Beach: The Morikami Museum, 1987); Marcia Morse, "Reiko Mochinaga Brandon: Bridging Two Cultures," *Fiberarts: The Magazine of Textiles*, Sept./Oct. 1987, 14: 4, 16-17. Brandon also authored books on textiles during her years as the Honolulu Academy of Arts textiles curator.

1. R. Brandon, Winter Guardian, 1987



2. R. Brandon, White Guardian, 1986

completely natural straw and twigs, high-tech industrial copper wire of different gauges, and "low-tech" handcrafted paper. The copper's strength and resistance, combined with the fine diameter of the wire and its natural pliancy, make it suitable as weft for Brandon's tapestry or weft-faced weaving – weaving that completely hides the linen warp threads and provides a solid base of support for the more delicate and fragile natural materials in the top register. The middle register continues the tapestry, but gradually substitutes the paper-fiber weft, until the paper weft has completely replaced the metal – giving it "the upper hand," we might say.

With the exception of the American wire, found at Sand Island, an industrial zone in Honolulu, the materials emanate from Japan's "traditional past." The paper comes from farmers' account books she was given that were found in an abandoned village – one of many such left to decay as industrializing cities drew villagers to better-paying factories. These accounts were hand-written in the traditional *sumi* ink (aka "India ink"), used both for everyday writing and for artistic painting and calligraphy on hand-made paper; Brandon then cuts or tears the paper and hangs pieces of it in the sculpture (some of this is singed with a candle or electric burner), or reworks it, tearing it into strips and then twisting it into fiber. In that case the farmers' original writing is lost to view, becoming a "hidden history." She then sometimes dyes the woven paper, using natural dyes, or writes on it herself with *sumi*, tea, coffee, natural indigo or persimmon.

The upper register foregoes the solidity of the tapestry weaving for more scattered, isolated, seemingly random arrangements of the twigs, straw, and small strips of paper, whose asymmetry and delicacy suggest vulnerability into the future even as the stolidity of the base suggests a solid grounding. Brandon describes this process as "I let the piece sing its own stories."

Inspiration

Brandon's Guardian series thus brings together a lifetime of experiences, integrating passions felt as a child during events whose outcomes were still uncertain, with the perspective, knowledge of outcomes, and even wisdom of an adult. What does this example suggest about inspiration? First, in this case it is clear there were a number of different sources of inspiration. In a sense, the Guardians serendipitously bring together many facets of Brandon's own biography: the industrial wire from her new American home, the weaving she learned as a young graduate student in fiber studies, the traces of traditional Japan still lingering during her childhood and encountered anew on her 1980 return, as well as her first-hand experience with fire-bombing that destroyed her home as well as an enormous city that reappears in the singing of the paper. If we are talking about inspiration in my second ("weak") sense – the germ of the idea, the conception – must we not say that most of her life provided the inspiration for these pieces?

And does this not suggest that our key metaphor for the "weak" kind of inspiration, the kernel or germ, is misleading? Complex as the plants that arise from such a seed are, they are, like human embryos, the result of only two

sources of characteristics. But are we not talking, in the case of Brandon's art, about something more like a river, which has multiple sources and along whose course many different kinds of substances may enter?

With the exception of her training in fiber arts, these are experiences familiar to hundreds of thousands, even millions, of Japanese of her generation – as well as to Guernicans, Londoners, Germans, Iraqis, and others. Although their ultimate "dislocation" wasn't always geographical as it was in her case, the internal experiences of loss of home and culture, of growing up with substitutions (many of which "work" just fine) and of not even recognizing what you are missing, of maturing and making a life, of changing identity, of suddenly reencountering the lost identity unexpectedly, are widespread. Indeed, with the exception of watching one's home being bombed, much of this material – the losses, the shocks, the dislocations, the reinventions of identity – were familiar to her parents' and grandparents' generations as well – since the Meiji Restoration initiated the fundamental modernization processes. (And even watching one's house burn as part of the destruction of one's city was familiar to tens of thousands of victims of the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1926.) What, then, accounts for the specificity of Brandon's work?

Materials, Form, Symbolic Power

Brandon took inspiration from physical materials. Consider the polyvalent discarded copper wire she ran across in an industrial district in Hawaii. It represents modernization, and industrial culture – and also, to her (she told me), America. This last symbolic identification may be specific to her, based on her finding it here and on the fact that she was looking for something that contrasted with the "traditional" and historic Japan she encountered on the trip that had prompted her new awareness of Japan and new sense of her own identity. I, by contrast, associate the copper wire as much with Japan in its modernization (Meiji period, 1868-1912; Taisho, 1912-1926; and early Showa, 1926-1989) as with America. Virtually all Japanese were absorbed during that extended time with questions about how to modernize, industrialize, Westernize – and some of this (a great deal, but by no means all) meant "Americanizing." So from a Japanese perspective such industrialization may itself suggest an earlier contrast.

Beyond these cultural connotations, the copper wire also gives support to the entire structure when tightly woven (how's that for a symbolic connotation regarding America and industrialization?!). Its flexibility permits the work to be shaped so that it both is free-standing and accommodates an empty interior. (How different such pieces would be with a solid wooden or stone base, for example!) At the same time this emptiness represents Japan's inner emptiness at that time, expressing Japan's moral, political and even religious situation after the war, when religious and political leadership – military, social, and imperial – had been discredited, social institutions dissolved or reinvented, and whole communities and a dozen cities, destroyed. The numbers of the missing alone were staggering. How to rebuild? Should we not say that it was Japan's situation at the time that was one of Brandon's deepest inspirations?

Of course, emptiness in Japan is by no means a negative concept. There is a positive value to be ascribed to it – in the Buddhist metaphysical sense, and aesthetically, where "empty" or "negative" space (to use our English terms) suggests the fullness of the Dao and the context of calm serenity so important to truth and to aesthetic and emotional satisfaction. In this sense, Japan's very ability to empty itself of what were after 1945 outmoded political institutions and abused cultural forms, became the foundation of the new society, permitting growth, rebuilding, reconnecting to core values, and reimagining new values. This symbolic wealth, the Buddhist and Daoist legacy, thus informs the sculptures, raising them to the level of symbolism.

Technique and Effects of the Body

Like traditional Japanese calligraphy (Jp. *shodo*), weaving on a floor loom (as opposed to a table loom) requires coordinating the whole body, torso and legs as well as arms, and one breathes with it. It typically involves one's whole weight and balance system, and establishes a rhythm of its own (whose nature depends on the width of the warp, the type of shuttle used, the weight of the weft thread, the complexity of the treading pattern and the length of the units repeated). Tapestry weaving is slower, more painstaking, usually due to the representational images and geometric patterns, which do not factor here, however. But the fact of using metal, whose memory is so strong, requiring but a single act to bend it permanently (until another force changes its angle), makes this process even more painstaking, something Brandon says she accomplished only with a lot of practice.

The Chain of Inspiration

The most important inspiration regarding Brandon's work is the inspiration it provides the viewer – at once immanent, very much of this world, and transcendent – referring us to ultimate realities, to values that transcend the immediate physical environment and social world to encompass the deepest past of the human spirit. If ever there was art that "transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night," to quote Jung's statement once more, it is Brandon's.

Keiko Tsuji

Keiko Tsuji is another Japanese artist who weaves art on topics "inspired by" war and mass destruction. In her case, these are the atomic bombings, the nuclear testing on Bikini Island and the "3/11" "triple disasters" that hit March 11, 2011 – the earthquake, tsunami, and the release of radiation due to the partial destruction of the nuclear power plant at Fukushima. ("Meanwhile, [Tsuji writes] this year [2012] is the 60th anniversary of the hydrogen-bomb test in Bikini. Bravo Test was said to be 1,000 times more destructive than the atomic bombing in Hiroshima. The H-bomb has made the entire Earth 'a victim of radiation exposure.'") In her 2012 catalogue of her work, she writes, "…I was completely unable to get down to work after March 11. As a disaster artist,

I became powerless and helpless… I was overwhelmed by the rush of the Japanese character for the word 'sen' folding from the media reporting the disaster: *hosyashen* (radiation exposure), *jikko senryo* (effective dose), *kukan hosyasen ryo* (radiation dose in the air), *teisenryo hibaku* (small dose exposure), *hosyasen* (radiation), *osensui* (contaminated water), *jyosen* (decontamination), *dojyo osen* (land contamination), *idenshi* (gene), *sensyokutai* (chromosome), *senryo* (dose), *kansen* (infection), etc. '*Sen*' is a homonym that also means 'a line' in Japanese. I draw '*sens'* or marks, on my fabrics, and for me, they are supposed to depict happiness…"[27] Her solution – which the text of her catalogue makes explicit – was to reconnect with the spirit world by means of woven silk work that connects her (body and soul) to the physical landscape and its spirits.

Thus we can say that not only the topic but the language of the post-disaster time inspired this work, language suddenly being used again (now in a non-war context) but also offering a powerful symbol, the line. In Japan, the art of the line, calligraphy, uses the same skills and materials (a pliant brush and *sumi* ink) for both writing and painting, that is, for denoting linguistic meaning, for aesthetic experience, and (because of the need to coordinate respiration, heart beat, and muscle movements through training over many years), for expression of the individuals body and spirit *at that very moment of drawing the line*. As a result, calligraphy is recognized as embodying (for the future, which will be the new viewer's present) the artist's body-mind (the term often used to translate the Japanese "*kokoro*"). In Tsuji's case, the line she draws over the landscape is of vermillion silk, woven to her body width (either her shoulders or her torso) (Plate 3 and 4).[28] Like calligraphy, it also incorporates (literally!) her body rhythms: "My textile works, which are woven out of my own existence … are woven according to my own biorhythms, sometimes very tightly and sometimes with loosely inserted crosswise threads, so they change according to even slight stimulation from the world around them." This makes it literal in-spiration, literally "breathing in" or taking in spirit. Then we must ask, don't Brandon's *Guardians* similarly include the breath, the inspiration, of the long-dead farmers who wrote the accounts? In Tsuji's case, these are the spirits of the land itself; Yasuo Kobayashi asks, "What kind of indication on Earth is a piece of work carrying, in a forbidden place where the primitiveness of ancient time still remains or in a holy place in which supernatural power still seems to control."[29]

Another source of inspiration for her is the natural landscape, which becomes her collaborator, her partner. She says, "[They] are fabrics that by themselves cannot represent completed expression."[30]

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27 *2014 Red like the spring water* (あかからあかへ。あるいわ火と水; *aka kara aka e. arui wa hito mizu*). All quotes are from this text unless otherwise noted. Japanese terms italicized by Mara Miller.

28 Kei Tsuji, *Drawing*: *Fieldwork Notes* (Tokyo: Soko Tokyo Gallery, 1992), 17.

29 Yasuo Kobayashi in Kei Tsuji, *Drawing*, 17.

30 Tsuji, *Drawing*, 10.

3. Tsuji Kei HI Red Silk at Water’s Edge use

4. Tsuji Kei Red Silk in Water HI USE

CONCLUSION

The concept of inspiration is as useful today as it ever was. In fact, we may need it more now than in ancient times, when it was used to "explain" the inexplicable and when Plato's confusion over the roles and importance of rules led to misleading divisions among the arts and a mistaken view of the artist's sanity – and a way to dismiss her contributions.

Close examination of work by contemporary artists shows that inspiration is far more complex than is acknowledged by common usage, ancient philosophers, or even psychoanalysts and contemporary philosophy. Far from being a dichotomous either/or phenomenon, inspiration is various. It occurs in many guises – as gods, dreams, ideas, visions, materials, methods, sites, landscapes. It reveals itself all at once, intermittently, or gradually. It may present either the whole idea as a *fait accompli*, which the artist "merely" makes manifest, or as pieces at a time – which the artist may or may not have to struggle to realize. It may torment an artist with a vision that she must figure out. It has many sources, from active collaboration with a site or materials, one's own body, the subject matter, the spirits of the past or of place.

Today, with the guidance of Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, we can understand it better than ever – especially when we take evidence into consideration and don't insist on making it fit one mold.

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