

ALCHEMICAL RUBEDO IN JILL MELLICK'S *THE RED BOOK HOURS*: ECOSOPHY OF THE SPIRIT

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Abstract

According to the biocultural partnership-dominator lens as expounded by Riane Eisler, this article studies the echoes and analogies between the *opus alchymicum* and the instruments of self-growth and transformation found in Jung's *The Red Book* and Jill Mellick's profound, insightful and exquisite *The Red Book Hours*. Eisler's method is significantly interrelational and systemic, it supersedes traditional binary oppositions and offers an interesting correlation with alchemy. Mellick's monumental *The Red Book Hours* is not only a profound scholarly study of Jung's own extraordinary *Red Book*, but also a multifaceted, dynamic and living work which sheds light on the process of Self-analysis as a breakthrough towards wholeness.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, archetypes, symbolism, dialogic critical methodology, alchemy, partnership, domination, biocultural, Riane Eisler.

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A SYSTEMIC, BIOCULTURAL, AND PARTNERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

According to the biocultural partnership-dominator lens as expounded by Riane Eisler, this article studies the echoes and analogies between the *opus alchymicum* and the instruments of self-growth and transformation found in Jung's *The Red Book* (2009) and Jill Mellick's profound, insightful and exquisite *The Red Book Hours* (2018). Riane Eisler's model is significantly interrelational and systemic; it

supersedes traditional binary oppositions and offers an interesting correlation with alchemy:

Rather than viewing societies through the lenses of familiar social categories such as religious versus secular, Eastern versus Western, rightist versus leftist, or capitalist versus socialist, which only describe a particular aspect of society, the Biocultural Partnership-Domination Lens uses two larger cultural configurations at opposite ends of a continuum: the *partnership system* and the *domination system*. This broader frame makes it possible to identify the conditions that support the expression of our human capacities for caring, creativity, and consciousness or, alternately, for insensitivity, cruelty, and destructiveness. It upends age-old assumptions about human nature and the supposed impossibility of improving the human condition, showing how we can bring about fundamental change. The new interdisciplinary perspective of the Biocultural Partnership-Domination Lens reveals how cultural beliefs and social institutions such as politics, economics, and education affect, and are in turn affected by, childhood and gender relations; highlights the impact of these early experiences and observations on how our brains develop; and shows how we can use our knowledge of human development to construct equitable and sustainable cultures that maximize human well-being.

Eisler & Fry, 2019, p. 1-2

In *The Red Book Hours*, Jill Mellick pursues with resolve, passion, and intense critical study a contemplation of Jung's *The Red Book*, and shows how, if not thwarted by culturally introjected dominator and aggressive models, the human being very naturally orients towards caring, creativity, and consciousness, as expressed through dreams, visions, and artistic creations. Mellick focuses on these psychological elements that support partnership, creatively analysing and discussing Jung's method, explaining his procedures, and underlining the importance he gave to location, tools, and materials. Mellick closely charts Jung's inner movements and outer realisations in the conception of his *opus* from different artistic, technical, and methodological points of view, which he chose as the foundation and milieu for his psychoanalytical research. She uses pictures, parts of Jung's paintings, images

from microscopic analyses of dyes and pigments, chemical graphs, and other elements to give shape and clarity to their meanings for Jung. Mellick also amplifies Jung's symbolic and mythic imagery, while working through archival and contemporary photographs, plans, and construction drawings for his 'abodes', which he designed to enhance and facilitate concentration, self-analysis and patients' therapy. She also presents Jung's working contexts: places, views, landscapes, houses - for example the Bollingen tower, his standing desk, his library, and much more:

The Red Book can only be appreciated if it is located within the larger contexts, inner and outer, that nurtured and midwifed its maker's creative processes - processes that evolved before and after it. Jung chose and created contexts and mediums that would give his creativity every opportunity to come into tangible form.

The Tower at Bollingen is at the heart of these [...].

Jung's creative energies were always interdependent with - even dependent on - his surroundings. He intentionally and actively designed environments in which to make visual works with which and in which to experience the creative process.

Mellick, 2018, p.101

Mellick's volume offers a profound insight into the shamanic experience of studying and delving into Jung's materials, through 'breathing' in tune with colours, landscapes, places and things: "Throughout his life, Jung devoted unusually high energy, resources, and time to securing and creating physical and architectural, visual and auditory environments that were harmonious with his inner needs and inner environment [...]" (p. 71).

Like biocultural and systemic partnership science, psychoanalytic symbolism and archetypal patterns are fundamental to deepening our understanding of Life and the Self, and can be key instruments in literary and artistic criticism and analysis to deepen our comprehension of the creative practices operating in the minds of artists worldwide, in their manifold expressions and different fields of action - writing,

music, dance, performance, paint, body art, and much more. The path trodden by the scholar, clinical psychologist, expressive arts therapist, poet, and artist Jill Mellick in studying and experimenting with Jung's tools and methods of work is actually a perfect channel to better understand how the critical endeavour embodies a profound ecology (or *ecosophy*) of the spirit, and is much more complex and far-reaching than when adopting a merely objective standpoint, using only the appropriate scientific terms, which define, limit and dissect, rather than the "creative word", which is open and multidimensional, "material and spiritual, sensual and intellectual, personal and impersonal, all at once. It has power and meaning" (Panikkar, 2007, p. 110) for it unravels whole new dimensions not only in the *artefact* read or studied, but also in ourselves. For Jung, the alchemical work is a perfect symbol - between art, imagination, magic and mysticism - and an analogous equivalent for the unconscious dynamics and ancestral mythologems present in our psyche, which is structured in layers that are archetypal, personal and cultural (see Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 474).

Plunging into the deepest recesses of our Soul and the Cosmos parallels a biocultural partnership relationship between Self and World, within a holistic or systemic world-view, akin to what Panikkar defines as "ecosophy":

A certain habitual ecological attitude must be overcome in order to go much deeper, seeking a new equilibrium between matter and spirit" (*Ecosofía. Para una espiritualidad de la tierra*, Madrid 1994). Beyond a simple ecology, ecosophy is a *wisdom-spirituality* of the earth. "The new equilibrium" is not so much between man and the earth, as between *matter and spirit*, between spatio-temporality and consciousness. *Ecosophy* is neither a mere 'science of the earth' (*ecology*) nor even 'wisdom about the earth', but rather a 'wisdom of the earth herself' that is made manifest to man when he knows how to listen to her with love.

Panikkar, 1994

This very *echosophical* wisdom connected to the ancient alchemical tradition and the even much more ancient feminine tradition as described by Pinkola Estés, are the *fil rouge* in Jung and Mellick's works.

ALCHEMY AND BIOCULTURAL PARTNERSHIP: THE CREATIVE MATRIX

In alchemical tradition, *Rubedo* is the successful transformative process of the *opus alchymicum* that leads from raw matter to perfection in all its forms (Elkins, 2000, p. 149), both in the human being and in the Cosmos (see Abraham, 1998). Jungian analyst and storyteller Pinkola Estés posits that the black, red, and white colours associated with alchemy might derive from menstrual and reproductive cycles of women, and that alchemy may have been a “later effort to create a vessel similar to the uterus and an entire set of symbols and actions that would give some proximity to the cycles of menses, gravida, delivery and nursing” (Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 476-477).

In *The Red Book Hours*, Mellick uses all her human, artistic, scholarly, psychoanalytical gifts, talents, and sympathetic feelings in order to follow, explain, and *illustrate* - also with her own paintings and challenging experiments with Jung's colours - all the subtleties, techniques, and materials Jung used to *generate The Red Book*. Mellick's professional work as psychologist, therapist, and visual artist is akin in many subtle and inspiring ways to that of Jung. She uses a rich variety of materials, from photography to pastel, acrylics, watercolour, poetry, and *kōan*, all very apt instruments for her wild hunt into Jung's own creativity and archetypal journey into the Self.

She also expounds in detail his method of work, and the different places where it happened, for Jung himself strongly believed that both elements were essential for his method:

[Jung] was highly sensitive and particular about the context in which he worked - usually creating that context himself. He experienced his own creative process as inseparable from his environment.

Environment, context, surroundings - physical and visual, intellectual and emotional - were central to Jung.

[...] Very early he had an overwhelming sense that he absolutely needed to live by a great body of water, with its rhythms and patterns.

Mellick, 2018, p. 71

Mellick's monumental *The Red Book Hours* is not only a profound scholarly study of Jung's own extraordinary *Red Book*, but also a multifaceted, dynamic and living creation/creature launched into the world, meant to illumine us and our psyche, shedding light on the continuous process of Self-analysis, and a breakthrough towards wholeness: "[Mellick's] book examines the environment, pigments, tools and choices Jung made when creating his art as a spiritual practice and window to self-discovery" (Dremann, 2019).

Mellick's *The Red Book Hours* is a leather-bound volume that beautifully counterparts, as a sort of double in a resplendent mirror of paper, words and colours, the facsimile edition and English-language translation of Jung's *The Red Book*, published in 2009. Mellick insightfully explores Jung's idea of art as an indispensable resource in our human quest for profound meaning. She patiently, imaginatively, and steadfastly traces her nine-year long study and research into the different media and techniques that, according to Jung, could best express the alchemical process of revealing hidden metaphors, symbols and archetypes surging up from the immeasurable depths of our unconscious. As Pereira argues, "The work on alchemy is indeed part of the various researches Jung led after 1930 that may be considered a continuation of themes emerging from the fantasies exposed in "the *Liber Novus*, of which they are often a transcription and a theoretical development" (Pereira, 2016, p. 173).

In her choice of the word *hours* for her title, rather than *years*, I believe Mellick decided to focus on the slow, meditative, initiatory process of engaging in a dialogue with Jung's Self/Soul and her own, in a totalising eternal and meditative present moment. It is an everlasting and spiralling movement, a non-linear quest, repeating seasonal cycles and Moon passages, not only across time, but also, timelessly, within

oneself: “This book documents my own search for these mediums, methods, and processes. My unlikely journey and its unlikelier discoveries have included serendipities, memories caught on the tide, pigments long stored in the dark, and hard science” (p. 17).

The book is an interesting mixture, blending hard science and serendipities, pigments and memories, which together form a scientific, poetic, and artistic meaning immensely higher and deeper than any of the single elements of Mellick's (and Jung's) exploration. This is one of the outstanding qualities of *The Red Book Hours*: it leads us across different topics and contexts, as if we were, on the one hand, travelling within a mythological fable and voyage of self-discovery and, on the other, engaging in a crucial psychological, technical, and scientific debate. In his insightful review of Mellick's book, D'Agostini states that:

The most significant part of [*The Red Book Hours*] relates to Jung's techniques and processing methods in the composition of his work. Here Mellick demonstrates her remarkable ability for technical analysis due to her personal background as an artist. Together with her activity in psychoanalysis, Mellick is an experimenting artist working with different materials for the composition of her paintings, using, for instance, acrylic, watercolour, and pastels. Her artistic work can now be seen and appreciated through her personal website (www.jillmellick.com). In the section titled “Art” Mellick displays watercolours, paintings, photographs and forms. The detailing of her sketches demonstrates her ability in constructing and discerning symbols and characteristics from real life. She is particularly interested in landscapes, portraits and geometrical forms. She mirrors Jung's legacy also in her professional background, which follows at least two main fields of inquiry and research: the psychological and the artistic, which often mix and interplay, giving her the right sensitivity and depth of feeling in her study of Jung's techniques, colours and shapes.

D'Agostini, 2019, p. 271

Mellick's approach is in tune with Riane Eisler's Biocultural Partnership-Domination lens, and reveals how, through a partnership, dialogic, and relational method (Riem, 2015), criticism can (and should) be a creative act in its own right, in which there is no 'object' of study, but an inter-relational biocultural growth and interaction among diverse subjects, which rejuvenates our perspectives on science, psychoanalysis, spirituality, art, and creativity in a continuum within the web of life (Capra, 1997) in which everything is interconnected.

TAKE WINGS: ALCHEMY AND "WATER WIND BREATH"

The symbolic and archetypal materials found in alchemy (Bonardel, 1993) are incarnated in all the tools and materials Jung utilised as a medium for his and his patients' initiation and self-discovery, which resound in an ample echo between the *ex-expression* of imagination, as an inner meditative practice, and psychoanalytic therapies: both are tightly interwoven and lucidly demonstrate the affinities between therapy, artistic practice, and the *opus alchymicum*. This union within the psyche and through 'art' and 'imagination' has its foundations in the depths of physical matter, and has the power to transpose the psyche into a higher and more perfected state of conscience, as happens in the imaginative practice Jung carries on and expounds in his *Red Book*. Like that of Jung, Mellick's method is a great example of holistic or systemic science (Capra & Luisi, 2016), for it recovers ancient and never-outmoded alchemical notions of the necessity of unity and wholeness within one-Self and with the Cosmos, and it indicates the path towards a less fragmentary and monothematic 'specialist' investigation towards a biocultural and ecocritical partnership approach to both life and science:

Methods are called forth, dictated, or necessitated by the nature of the material. [...]. The methods I have used for this research have roots in psychology, anthropology, ethnography, oral history, art history, art conservation science, graphic design studies, and technical art history, among other areas. I hope this research may contribute to several fields - including art history, psychology, technical art history, Jungian studies, creativity

studies, and art therapies - and that is both an original contribution and a stepping stone for future research.

Mellick, 2018, p. 19

In her spiritual quest for personal and collective meaning, Mellick sets out on a journey of exploration where she manages to carry on an essential and “intimate interplay between text and image” (p. 17). This includes all other possible elements and backgrounds, such as the places Jung constructed and the environments he chose, which, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s protective “Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison” (Coleridge, 1983, pp. 178-181), were meant as significant creative recesses for his and his patients’ psychological pursuit and his own work on the *Red Book*. These places were often connected to water, one of Jung’s noteworthy metaphors for the unconscious. As Mellick states and often repeats, in order to be trustworthy and coherent, her method had necessarily to follow a very similar path. It had perforce to be inter- or trans-disciplinary, holistic, or systemic, according to contemporary approaches of system biology, science, sociology, and biocultural partnership-dominator models which theorise the inter-connectedness of all living things, and the dynamics of emergence and self-organization as conceived by Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana (Maturana & Varela, 1980), and developed by Fritjof Capra (1982, 1997) and many others. In the same way, this methodological approach has always been indicated as the *Via Regia* (Fabricius, 1994) of soul-making in all ancient spiritual traditions worldwide, from alchemy to shamanism, from *Advaita Vedanta* to Taoism (Guénon, 1973). As Mellick states, these ancient paths were engraved in Jung’s childhood memory, when, sitting on his mother’s knee, he contemplated with transfixed imaginative eye the illustrations of Hindu Gods from John Amos Comenius’s encyclopaedia *Orbis Pictus*, first published in German and Latin in 1658. These relevant analogies and relations of topic and method are evident in many passages of Mellick’s book, such as the following, where she studies and analyses in detail Jung’s working approach and techniques, with Jung’s very same ‘exactitude’, ‘sophistication’ and ‘mastery’ - all the *essential* qualities to realize the *Magnum Opus* of the alchemical marriage of opposites:

To view his sophisticated array of tools and to understand the specific skills each required is to appreciate how fully Jung immersed himself in each

medium, such as water colors, wood, and stone: each demanded mastery of their qualities, gifts, and constraints, and each required the maker to immerse himself in a unique engagement. [...] Many of these tools still exist, and the variety underscores the exactitude that Jung demanded of himself in the mastery of a medium.

Mellick, 2018, p. 140

Jung travelled to the Pueblo village of Taos in 1925. Nearby tribes who speak Tewa have a word and concept that approximates Jung's (and Mellick's) expression of Self through 'art':

Tewa has no word for 'art', no word for 'creativity'. The closest approximation, *po-wa-ha*, translates as 'water wind breath'. So art is not an *object* in the worldview of these Tewa people. They experience *po-wa-ha* moving through them when they sing or drum or dance in sacred and social ceremonial dances; when they make ceremonial dress, embroider kilts, carve headdresses, stitch moccasins; when they make coiled pots and fire them at the same time they cook their chiles for dinner; when they paint a painting; when they build a kiva, their ceremonial chamber; when they bounce a young relative on a knee. There is no separation between art and daily life. The creative spirit that moves through the world is the same spirit that moves through what the West terms 'art'. The spirit of the breath itself is not witnessed but *experienced*. For Jung, too, his visual work was a verb, an activity - not a thing.

Mellick, 2018, p. 36

In-spiring and *ex-pressing* or *ex-piring* are the activities Jung carries out in order to discover his "own myth" (Jung, 1963, p. 174), through writing, at first, in order to translate his emotions in a "perilous protocol of experimentation" that led him often to plunge into "inner depths from which he knows he risks not returning physically intact" (Mellick, 2018, p. 64). He then reverted to "visual mediums to break through, record, express, explore, experience, reflect, contemplate, and theorize" (Mellick, 2018, p. 68), which is exactly what Mellick does in her *The Red Book Hours*: an

invitation for us to follow with our own experimentation and inner search, letting our imagination “take wings” (Mellick, 2018, p. 70). According to James Hillman, in *The Red Book* Jung writes about meeting a variety of beings and presences in his dreams and lucid visions, as if coming from beyond the boundaries of our personal psyche, and embodying the greater archetypal forces of the spiritual world. Jung’s task then “would be the uncovering of the figures, which seems to be what the *Red Book* does. [Jung] allows the figures to speak, to show themselves” (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, p. 2). These profound universal archetypes have entered Jung’s imagination, and are part of Mellick’s work: she passes them on to us, to be carried forward and inward, through our active imagination, or, in a sense, what Hillman calls “a descent into human ancestry”(Hillman, 2013, p. 79). *The Red Book* for Hillman “depicts Jung’s recovery of his soul” (Hillman, 2013, p. 79) plunging into the deep waters of our underworld or otherworld (see Mazis, 2014).

PASSING ON PASSION - RUBEDO - AN ECOSOPHY OF THE SPIRIT

Jung, Mellick tells us, “encouraged his patients to paint” because he could thus “learn more about the workings of each patient’s unconscious from multimedia, nonlinear expressions” (p. 415). Just as Jung learned to put himself into the landscapes he was painting so that “the figures would talk to [him] and [he] would answer them” (Jung, 1997, p. 929), Mellick leads us through the intricate meanders of Jung’s journey as a therapist and as a creative, imaginative, alchemical meditative being, so that he talks to us and we can answer him. This journey is Jung’s for the making, and also Mellick’s to pass on to us. Indeed, Mellick concludes her book with a paragraph entitled “passing on passion” as an invitation to persevere with our inner research, to outpour passion in our lives, art, and ancestral personal and archetypal dreaming. This is also the goal of her search for significant mythopoetic *intelligence*, opening up pathways rather than concluding, ending and arriving at an ultimate monolithic explanation:

Dreams, overanalyzed, explained, and subsumed in the service of clarity and application, dry up their wellspring of psychic nourishment. [...] So, too, a researcher into another’s creative process and experience should remain

acutely aware of treading softly [...]. If I have done my work well, my inquiry will leave a mystery richer for the exploration, and still as elusive.

Mellick, 2018, p. 23

By focussing on the interrelated threads analogically unified in a holistic systemic web - the art-science-shamanic-archetypal-therapy of both Jung and Mellick - my article intends to keep our inner psychic instruments well-nourished and vivified by the inner power of *viriditas*, as Hildegard von Bingen called it (in Fox, 1985). It is the vivifying power of humidity against the danger of barrenness; it is the germinating energy of fertility, which can always transform aridity, sterility, and wounds into their opposites. Indeed, to be humid, watery, moist, full of vital and fluid lymph, means to be wholly alive. The whole *body* expresses its vitality through humidity, the oozing of desire, tears of sadness, ecstasy, and roaring laughter; they are all full of vigour and manifest sentiments, passions, and emotions of the heart and soul.

My article *intends* to suggest how the path toward a partnership biocultural critical approach can open new varying, multi-coloured, fluid, fresh, and *green* horizons of reading and interpreting 'literature', rather than give categorical, limiting, 'scientific' interpretations and determining irrefutable results. My work too is meant as an invitation to expand, transform, and integrate the intimations and insights shared, and plunge more deeply into the 'mystery' of *Red Books* of all kinds, of Life and ourselves. It is also a solicitation and challenge to participate actively in a culture of peace and caring, paying attention to the ecology of ourselves, nature in all its forms and manifestations, and the planet, our beautiful *Pacha Mama*, the Earth Mother herself, and all Her creatures; to understand Her *ecosophy*, Her wisdom-spirituality, to listen to Her loving and powerful voice with love:

What matters in painting is pushing the mundane toward the instant of transcendence. The Effect is sublimation, or distillation: just as water heats up and then suddenly disappears, so paint gathers itself together and then suddenly becomes something else - an apparition hovering in the fictive space beyond the picture plane.

Elkins, 2000, in Mellick, 2018, p. 398

Alchemical *Rubedo*, biocultural partnership transformation, psychoanalysis, art, *po-wa-ha*, are one and the same - they push the mundane world towards the instant of transcendence, to the sublimation and distillation of our human and cosmic story, of our eternal quest to reach and *ex-press* the “Atmavictu” (Mellick, 2018, p. 425), the breath of life “not witnessed but experienced” (Mellick, 2018, p. 36) in a transformative and scintillating *ecosophy* of our Spirit.

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