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What is and what is not art psychology?

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Abstract

Similar to other scientific disciplines, art psychology, beginning at the end of the 19th century until the present day, can also be considered a science. The ancient concepts of *mimesis* and *catharsis*, for example, are extremely important and have been used in art psychology extensively. The emotions, thoughts, dreams and emotional fulfillment created by the artist are shared by the recipient of the artwork. Based on psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud was able to explain Leonardo and Dostoevsky through their works and personalities. In this study, the content of art psychology, psychology theories on which art psychology is based and psychological processes related to artist-art work-recipient were investigated. In this research, a descriptive research model was used and the related resources and approaches were aimed to be determined. In the study, based on the existing sources an attempt was made to answer the question of what the field of art psychology is and is not.

Keywords: Art psychology, psychology theories.

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1. Introduction

Art psychology is a discipline in art sciences; likewise art sociology or art philosophy. It is also an interdisciplinary branch at the junction of art and psychology sciences. In art psychology, artistic work or artist is at the centre of attention; work is verbalised on the basis of artist or artist is tried to be defined on the basis of artistic work. However, in both cases, no judgement is concluded on the aesthetic value of artistic work; the aesthetic value thereof would not change.

The scope of art psychology domain comprised of the fundamental trends and theories in both art and psychology. Accordingly, psychoanalytic approaches or Freud and his successors to artists and artistic works or their psychologic interpretations on art movements and theories are the bases. At this point, Sigmund Freud's work entitled 'About Art and Artists' (2001) is an important reference. Neriman Samurçay's book 'Psychoanalysis in Art' (2007) may also be considered among primary sources. Sitki M. Erinc's 'Art Psychology' (2004) may also be included among reference books.

Art theories are explained on four pillars. Projecting art theory based on social environment and external world covers such trends as ancient period, the Renaissance and realism. Notions of simile, metaphor, mimesis and catharsis are crucial for trends. Expressionist art theory focusing on artist contains movements such as expressionism, impressionism and surrealism. The art theory based on artistic work is included in the formalist theory and includes Semiotics, Dadaism, Cubism, etc., art movements. Emotional impression theory focused on art consumer/reader, on the other hand, takes part in literature as reception aesthetic.

According to Erinc (2004, p. 52), an artistic product should give pleasure according to feelings of its artist and recipient in terms of art psychology, and be stimulating for its recipient's self-awareness; it is considered an artistic work only if it may have an effect on the thoughts and feelings of its recipient with its intensity that turn into action.

According to Jung's theory, artist or artistic work should be elucidated by means of illusions and images with archetypes, subconscious, anima and animus concepts. Archetypes are certain themes in myths and fairy stories, which may also appear in people's dreams, daydreams and delusions; they may also have instinctive, vivid and emotional burdens. Subconscious means everything that unknown, that we do not know and that has no connection with the ego, which is the centre of conscious; it covers the secrets in our inner world. The concept of conscious is defined as a baby born from the womb of unconsciousness. Anima and animus are the personalisation of a man's subconscious female nature and a woman's subconscious male nature. Every man carries in him an eternal female image that does not belong to any particular woman. Individual reflects such type images to the loved one as subconscious features. Shadow archetype is part of personality at a lower level; All individual and spiritual elements that try to create a conflict in subconscious and forming an independent faction; On the other hand, dream is defined as a small and hidden door opening to a dark cosmic night and a spirit that existed prior to ego conscious and will always exist, and hidden away deep in the innermost part of soul (2001). Jung (2001, p. 328) says that the task of human is to heighten the material coming from the subconscious to the conscious so that human will shed light on the darkness of his existence. Furthermore, according to Jung, our subconscious sends us some images, symbols and references. Dominance of critical reasoning alters life; at the rate of heightening subconscious to conscious, and adding myths, we contribute to life (2001, p. 306).

Utilising Jung's theory, we may try to interpret basic elements, archetypes, mandalas, subconscious images, artist's dreams and daydreams in artistic works but this may not be true for every artist or artistic work. Such artistic works carrying surrealist, fantastic epic features, elements and images may be more suitable.

According to Freud, artist behaves like a child playing games; creating a dream world and taking it real—equipped with the enriched sentiment, eventually losing the reality. However, the unreality of the artistic world turns into a source of pleasure for viewers of many artistic works actually

unpleasant. Although the artist is not playing games like kids anymore, but his motive for playing games replaces and starts fantasising. Emotions not fulfilled are expressed through daydreams. Every daydream is an attempt for the fulfillment of a certain desire and alteration of the reality sparing such fulfillment (2001, pp. 105–106). A strong actual experience reminds artist another experience of childhood; while such particular experience builds up the desire materialising in artistic creation, that creation involves both the experience recalled and the elements pertaining to the old experience (2001, p. 102). People's daydreams may embarrass them but daydreams of artists are before our eyes, pleasuring and comforting us. Freud describes the pleasure presented to us by an artist as seduction prize or fore pleasure in order for ensuring bringing greater pleasures from the sources hidden at innermost parts of our souls (2001, p. 115). Meantime, artistic work eliminates stresses in our inner world, creating pleasure.

According to Freud, Leonardo da Vinci was taken away from his mother at the age of 5–6 and raised by his father and stepmother; during his early ages, he left his family, starting to work at the atelier of a painter. According to Freud, the fact of lacking the father figure at early ages and the birth mother after 6 years old, but having a good stepmother was deflected at Leonardo's works. Sublimating his sexual daydreams, he turned them to a constant scientific and research passion (2001, p. 25). Leonardo was always a calm and peaceful person with easy and affectionate attitude; he used to set loose the birds he bought at the marketplace; he was a vegetarian. He was someone watching prisoners on the way to the capital punishment, drawing facial expressions of soldiers at war or working on cadavers purposefully. This may be explained by his dual personality as an artist and a researcher. His perfectionism and strong cognitional passion caused him not finishing some of his works (2001, p. 24). He turned his passion to cognitional and investigation passion, and worked steadfastly and in depth.

Starting with Freud, psychological defense mechanisms also used in elaborating art and artistic works. Projection is a narration of one's ideas and designs, desires and emotions to the external world. A person or object in the external world is associated with such attributes not present in that person or object. Daydreams are vivid visions during a wide-awake state where ideas and desires created by an individual are intermingled with realities. Frustration is the prevention of satisfying instinctive desires by subconscious forces or due to unfavorable external conditions. Injustices and unjust sufferings may also lead to frustration. Accordingly, the individual may become aggressive. Rationalisation is attribution of such ideas and attitudes unapproved by superego to cause a logically coherent and ethically suitable. Regression is retreat or recourse. Primitive and childish behaviours and attitudes unique to the cycles left behind in the mental development process. Compulsive conditions, such as inner and external constraints, conflicts, etc., cause regression. Sublimation is turning the energy of sexual instinct to high-value activities acceptable by society (Freud, 2001, pp. 336–358).

Prof. Dr. Neriman Samurcay is an esteemed personality in the field of art psychology in Turkey. She has interviewed with artists based on the psychoanalytic theory, applied tests and construed artistic works and painters based on observations, interviews and tests both in her lectures and books. According to Samurcay, a psychoanalytic approach to an artist's work reveals mostly suppressed, pushed back impulsive conflicts. By establishing a relation between the artist's personality and his works' contents, it is possible to understand why certain themes are crucial (Samurcay, 2008, pp. xii–xiii). Regardless of meaning and scope, there is 'experience' in the relation of art and psychoanalysis whatever is observed or revealed. We may come across sometimes sublimated and sometimes intensified part of the experience; we may find relevant individual investigated as aggressive, dull or spent. Psychoanalysis and art solidarity let us perceive the world much better than conventional methodology (Samurcay, 2008, p. xiv). In order to base the relation between art and psychoanalysis on a scientific foundation, Samurcay applies to artist such tests as Minnesota Multiphase Personality Inventory, Rorschach Test, Thematic Apperception Test, Koch Tree Test and goes through artist's photographs of childhood, family and school years.

Samurcay has made analyses regarding many painters, such as Orhan Peker, Kayhan Keskinok, Devrim Erbil, Utku Varlik, etc. The relation between an artistic work and its artist's inner pursuits is not incidental. Every actions and products of human-being starting the day of birth carry traces of his/her life adventure. For instance, she tells that Orhan Peker is neurotic, searching strong mother image in his relations, using his defense mechanisms against his feelings of anxiety and desolation (Samurcay, 2008, pp. 10–12). Orhan Peker says 'As an artist, I take my theme from life; I decode the theme. I painted the objects I observed in my life, the people made me thought, and unrests and pains. In my opinion, Expressionism values personal statements. Expressionist wishes to tell the following; Despite being part of humanity, I am solitary, I am unique. I have seen and observed all these; and now I am offering them to you so that I may establish a communication between you and I' (Samurcay, 2008, p. 20).

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