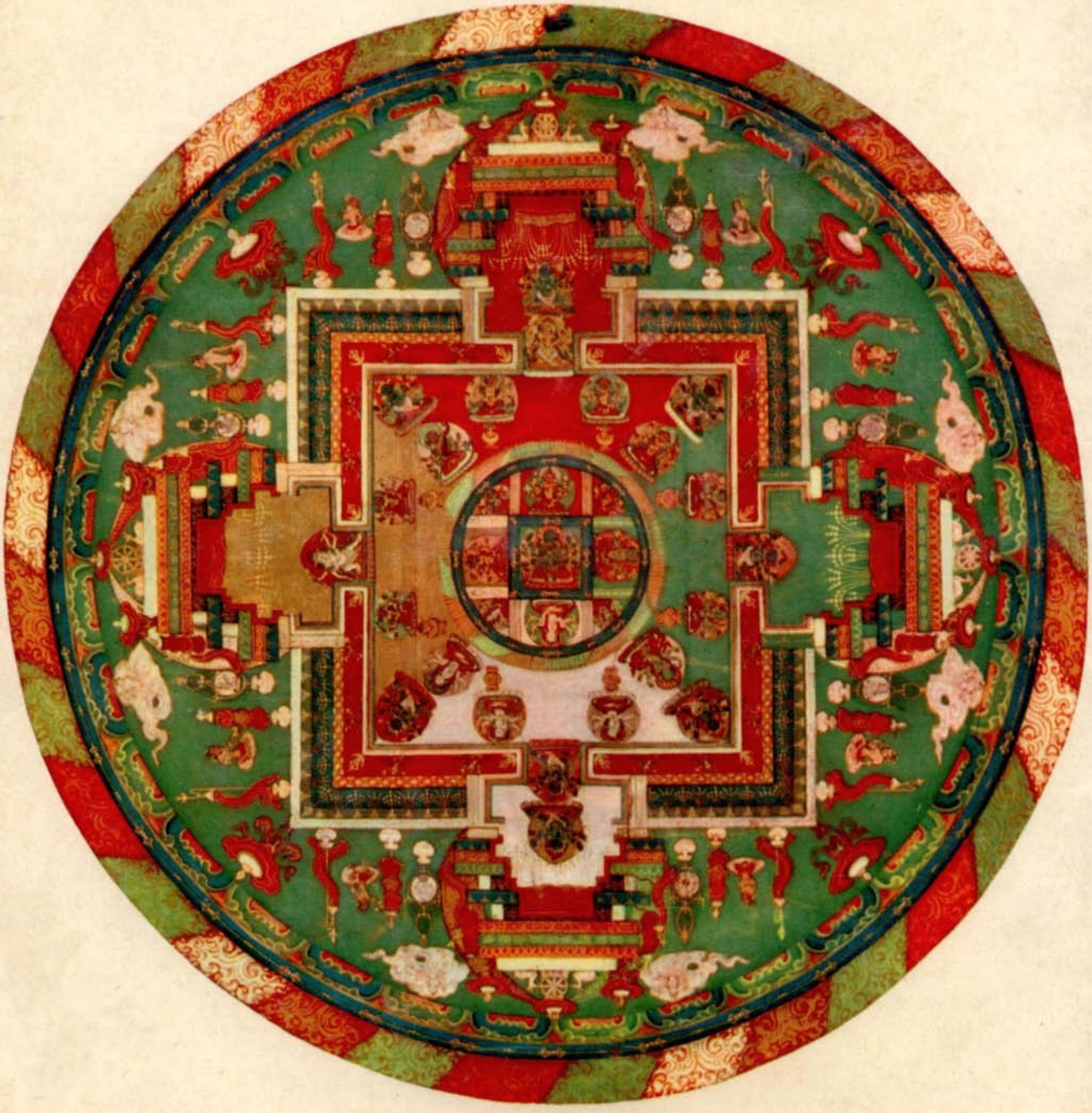
Man and his Symbols

conceived and edited by

Carl G. Jung



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4 Symbolism in the visual arts

Aniela Jaffé

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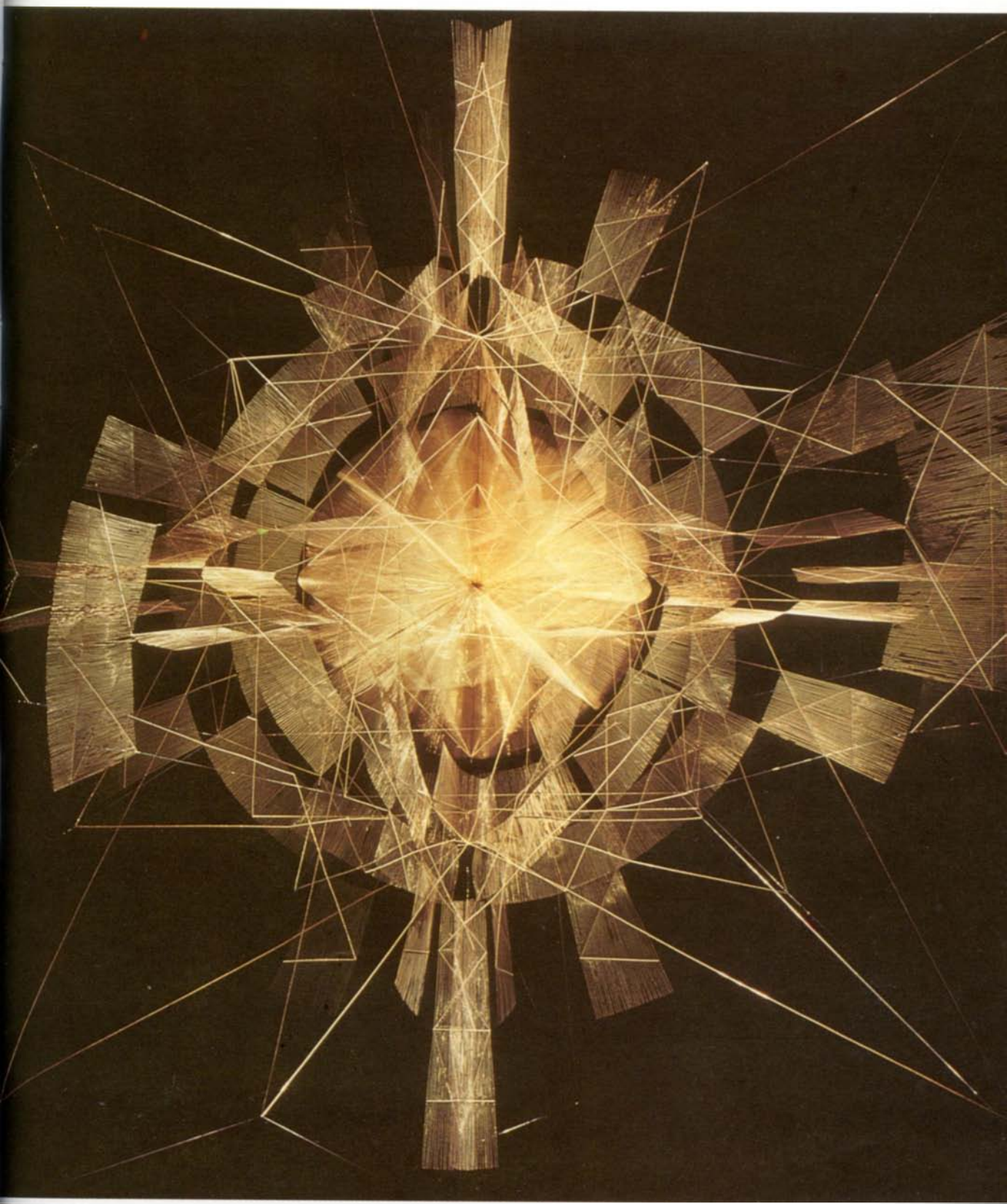


Sacred symbols—the stone and the animal

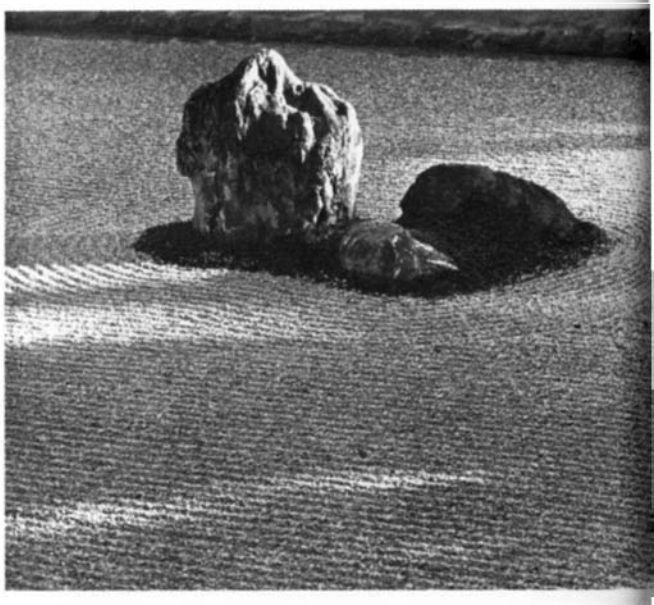
The history of symbolism shows that everything can assume symbolic significance: natural objects (like stones, plants, animals, men, mountains and valleys, sun and moon, wind, water, and fire), or man-made things (like houses, boats, or cars), or even abstract forms (like numbers, or the triangle, the square, and the circle). In fact, the whole cosmos is a potential symbol.

Man, with his symbol-making propensity, unconsciously transforms objects or forms into symbols (thereby endowing them with great psychological importance) and expresses them in both his religion and his visual art. The intertwined history of religion and art, reaching back to prehistoric times, is the record that our ancestors have left of the symbols that were meaningful and moving to them. Even today, as modern painting and sculpture show, the interplay of religion and art is still alive.

For the first part of my discussion of symbolism in the visual arts, I intend to examine some of the specific motifs that have been universally sacred or mysterious to man. Then, for the remainder of the chapter, I wish to discuss the phenomenon of 20th-century art, not in terms of its use of symbols, but in terms of its significance as a *symbol itself*—a symbolic expression of the psychological condition of the modern world.

In the following pages, I have chosen three recurring motifs with which to illustrate the presence and nature of symbolism in the art of many different periods. These are the symbols of the stone, the animal, and the circle—each of which has had enduring psychological significance from the earliest expressions of human consciousness to the most sophisticated forms of 20th-century art.

We know that even unhewn stones had a highly symbolic meaning for ancient and primitive societies. Rough, natural stones were often believed to be the dwelling places of spirits or gods, and were used in primitive cultures as



tombstones, boundary stones, or objects of religious veneration. Their use may be regarded as a primeval form of sculpture—a first attempt to invest the stone with more expressive power than chance and nature could give it.

The Old Testament story of Jacob's dream is a typical example of how, thousands of years ago, man felt that a living god or a divine spirit was embodied in the stone and how the stone became a symbol:

And Jacob . . . went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of the place, and put them for his pillows and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el.

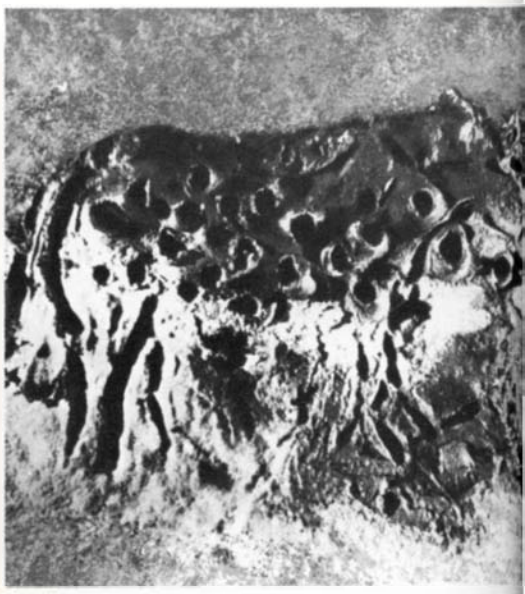
For Jacob, the stone was an integral part of the revelation. It was the mediator between himself and God.

In many primitive stone-sanctuaries, the deity is represented not by a single stone but by a great many unhewn stones, arranged in distinct patterns. (The geometrical stone alignments in Brittany and the stone circle at Stonehenge are famous examples.) Arrangements of rough natural stones also play a considerable part in the highly civilized rock gardens of Zen Buddhism. Their arrangement is not geometrical but seems to have come about by pure chance. In fact, however, it is the expression of a most refined spirituality.

Very early in history, men began trying to express what they felt to be the soul or spirit of a rock by working it into a recognizable form. In many cases, the form was a more or less definite approximation to the human figure—for instance, the ancient menhirs with their crude outlines of faces, or the herms that developed out of boundary stones in ancient Greece, or the

Above left, the stone alignments at Carnac in Brittany, dating from *c.* 2000 B.C.—crude stones set upright in rows that are thought to have been used in sacred rituals and religious processions. Left, rough stones resting on raked sand in a Zen Buddhist rock garden (in the Ryoanji temple, Japan). Though apparently haphazard, the stones' arrangement in fact expresses a highly refined spirituality.

Right, a prehistoric *menhir*—a rock that has been slightly carved into a female form (probably a mother goddess). Far right, a sculpture by Max Ernst (born 1891) has also hardly altered the natural shape of the stone.



many primitive stone idols with human features. The animation of the stone must be explained as the projection of a more or less distinct content of the unconscious into the stone.

The primitive tendency to give merely a hint of a human figure, and to retain much of the stone's natural form, can also be seen in modern sculpture. Many examples show the artists' concern with the "self-expression" of the stone; to use the language of myth, the stone is allowed to "speak for itself." This can be seen, for instance, in the work of the Swiss sculptor Hans Aeschbacher, the American sculptor James Rosati, and the German-born artist Max Ernst. In a letter from Maloja in 1935, Ernst wrote: "Alberto [the Swiss artist Giacometti] and I are afflicted with sculpturitis. We work on granite boulders, large and small, from the moraine of the Forno glacier. Wonderfully polished by time, frost, and weather, they are in themselves fantastically beautiful. No human hand can do that. So why not leave the spadework to the elements, and confine ourselves to scratching on them the runes of our own mystery?"

What Ernst meant by "mystery" is not explained. But later in this chapter I shall try to show that the "mysteries" of the modern artist are not very different from those of the old masters who knew the "spirit of the stone."

The emphasis on this "spirit" in much sculpture is one indication of the shifting, indefinable borderline between religion and art. Sometimes one cannot be separated from the other. The same ambivalence can also be seen in another symbolic motif, as it appears in age-old works of art: the symbol of the animal.

Animal pictures go back to the last Ice Age (between 60,000 and 10,000 B.C.). They were discovered on the walls of caves in France and Spain at the end of the last century, but it was not until early in the present century that archaeologists began to realize their extreme importance and to inquire into their meaning. These inquiries revealed an infinitely remote prehistoric culture whose existence had never even been suspected.

Even today, a strange music seems to haunt the caves that contain the rock engravings and paintings. According to the German art historian Herbert Kühn, inhabitants of the areas in Africa, Spain, France, and Scandinavia where such paintings are found could not be induced to go near the caves. A kind of religious awe, or perhaps a fear of spirits hovering among the rocks and the paintings, held them back. Passing nomads still lay their votive offerings before the old rock paintings in North Africa. In the 15th century, Pope Calixtus II prohibited religious ceremonies in the "cave with the horse-pictures." Which cave the pope meant is not known, but there can be no doubt that it was a cave of the Ice Age containing animal pictures. All this goes to prove that the caves and rocks

Far left, animal paintings on cave walls at Lascaux. The paintings were not simply decorative; they had a magical function. Left, a drawing of a bison covered with arrow and spear marks: The cave dwellers believed that by ritually "killing" the image, they would be more likely to kill the animal.

Even today the destruction of an effigy or statue is a symbolic killing of the person depicted. Right, a statue of Stalin destroyed by Hungarian rebels in 1956; far right, rebels hang a bust of the former Stalinist Hungarian premier Matyas Rakosi.

with the animal paintings have always been instinctively felt to be what they originally were—religious places. The *numen* of the place has outlived the centuries.

In a number of caves the modern visitor must travel through low, dark, and damp passages till he reaches the point where the great painted "chambers" suddenly open out. This arduous approach may express the desire of the primitive men to safeguard from common sight all that was contained and went on in the caves, and to protect their mystery. The sudden and unexpected sight of the paintings in the chambers, coming after the difficult and awe-inspiring approach, must have made an overwhelming impression on primitive man.

The paleolithic cave paintings consist almost entirely of figures of animals, whose movements and postures have been observed in nature and rendered with great artistic skill. There are, however, many details that show that the figures were intended to be something more than naturalistic reproductions. Kühn writes: "The strange thing is that a good many primitive paintings have been used as targets. At Montespan there is an engraving of a horse that is being driven into a trap; it is pitted with the marks of missiles. A clay model of a bear in the same cave has 42 holes."

These pictures suggest a hunting-magic like that still practiced today by hunting tribes in Africa. The painted animal has the function of a "double"; by its symbolic slaughter, the hunters attempt to anticipate and ensure the death of the real animal. This is a form of sympathetic magic, which is based on the "reality" of a double represented in a picture: What happens to the picture will happen to the original. The underlying psychological fact is a strong identification between a living being and its image, which is considered to be the being's soul. (This is one reason why a great many primitive people today will shrink from being photographed.)

Other cave pictures must have served magic fertility rites. They show animals at the moment of mating; an example can be seen in the figures of a male and female bison in the Tuc d'Audubert cave in France. Thus the realistic picture of the animals was enriched by overtones of magic and took on a symbolic significance. It became the image of the living essence of the animal.

The most interesting figures in the cave paintings are those of semihuman beings in animal disguise, which are sometimes to be found besides the animals. In the Trois Frères cave in France, a man wrapped in an animal hide is playing a primitive flute as if he meant to put a spell on the animals. In the same cave, there is a dancing human being, with antlers, a horse's head, and bear's paws. This figure, dominating a medley of several hundred animals, is unquestionably the "Lord of the Animals."

The customs and usages of some primitive African tribes today can throw some light on the meaning of these mysterious and doubtless symbolic figures. In initiations, secret societies, and even the institution of monarchy in these tribes, animals and animal disguises often play an important part. The king and chief are animals too—generally lions or leopards. Vestiges of this custom may be discerned in the title of the last emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie (Lion of Judah), or the honorific name of Dr. Hastings Banda (The Lion of Malawi).

The further back we go in time, or the more primitive and close to nature the society is, the more literally such titles must be taken. A primitive chief is not only disguised as the animal; when he appears at initiation rites in full animal disguise, he *is* the animal. Still more, he is an animal spirit, a terrifying demon who performs circumcision. At such moments he incorporates or represents the ancestor of the tribe and the clan, and therefore the primal god himself. He represents, and is, the "totem" animal. Thus we probably should not go far wrong in seeing in the figure of the dancing animal-man in the Trois Frères cave a kind of chief who has been transformed by his disguise into an animal demon.

In the course of time, the complete animal disguise was superseded in many places by animal and demon masks. Primitive men lavished all their artistic skill on these masks, and many of them are still unsurpassed in the power and intensity of their expression. They are often the objects of the same veneration as the god or demon himself. Animal masks play a part in the folk arts of many modern countries, like Switzerland, or in the magnificently expressive masks of the ancient Japanese *No* drama, which is still performed in modern Japan. The symbolic function of the mask is the same as that of the original animal disguise. Individual human expression is submerged, but in its place the wearer assumes the dignity and the beauty (and also the horrifying expression) of an animal demon. In psychological terms, the mask transforms its wearer into an archetypal image.

Dancing, which was originally nothing more than a completion of the animal disguise by appropriate movements and gestures, was probably supplementary to the initiation or other rites. It was, so to speak, performed by demons in honor of a demon. In the soft clay of the Tuc d'Audubert cave, Herbert Kühn found footprints that led around animal figures. They show that dancing was part of even the Ice Age rites. "Only heel prints can be seen," Kühn writes. "The dancers had moved like bisons. They had danced a bison dance for the fertility and increase of the animals and for their slaughter."

In his introductory chapter, Dr. Jung has pointed out the close relation, or even identifi-

Far left, a prehistoric painting from Trois Frères cave includes (lower right corner) a human figure, perhaps a shaman, with horns and hoofs. As examples of "animal" dances: left, a Burmese buffalo dance in which masked dancers are possessed by the buffalo spirit; right, a Bolivian devil dance in which the dancers wear demonic animal masks; far right, an old southwest German folk dance in which the dancers are disguised as witches and as animal-like "wild men."

cation, between the native and his totem animal (or "bush-soul"). There are special ceremonies for the establishment of this relationship, especially the initiation rites for boys. The boy enters into possession of his "animal soul," and at the same time sacrifices his own "animal being" by circumcision. This dual process admits him to the totem clan and establishes his relationship to his totem animal. Above all, he becomes a man, and (in a still wider sense) a human being.

East Coast Africans described the uncircumcised as "animals." They had neither received an animal soul nor sacrificed their "animality." In other words, since neither the human nor the animal aspect of an uncircumcised boy's soul had become conscious, his animal aspect was regarded as dominant.

The animal motif is usually symbolic of man's primitive and instinctual nature. Even civilized men must realize the violence of their instinctual drives and their powerlessness in face of the autonomous emotions erupting from the unconscious. This is still more the case with primitive men, whose consciousness is not highly developed and who are still less well equipped to weather the emotional storm. In the first chapter of this book, when Dr. Jung is discussing the ways in which man developed the power of reflection, he takes an example of an African who fell into a rage and killed his beloved little son. When the man recovered himself, he was overwhelmed with grief and remorse for what he had done. In this case a negative impulse broke loose and did its deadly work regardless of the conscious will. The animal demon is a highly expressive symbol for such an impulse. The vividness and concreteness of the image enables man to establish a relationship with it as a representative of the overwhelming power in himself. He fears it and seeks to propitiate it by sacrifice and ritual.

A large number of myths are concerned with a primal animal, which must be sacrificed in the cause of fertility or even creation. One example of this is the sacrifice of a bull by the Persian sun-god Mithras, from which sprang the earth with all wealth and fruitfulness. In the Christian legend of St. George slaying the dragon, the primeval rite of sacrificial slaughter again appears.

In the religions and religious art of practically every race, animal attributes are ascribed to the supreme gods, or the gods are represented as animals. The ancient Babylonians translated their gods into the heavens in the shape of the Ram, the Bull, the Crab, the Lion, the Scorpion, the Fish, and so on—the signs of the Zodiac. The Egyptians represented the goddess Hathor as cow-headed, the god Amon as ram-headed, and Thoth as ibis-headed or in the shape of a baboon. Ganesha, the Hindu god of good fortune, has a human body but the head

of an elephant, Vishnu is a boar, Hanuman is an ape-god, etc. (The Hindus, incidentally, do not assign the first place in the hierarchy of being to man: The elephant and lion stand higher.)

Greek mythology is full of animal symbolism. Zeus, the father of the gods, often approaches a girl whom he desires in the shape of a swan, a bull, or an eagle. In Germanic mythology, the cat is sacred to the goddess Freya, while the boar, the raven, and the horse are sacred to Wotan.

Even in Christianity, animal symbolism plays a surprisingly great part. Three of the Evangelists have animal emblems: St. Luke has the ox, St. Mark the lion, and St. John the eagle. Only one, St. Matthew, is represented as a man or as an angel. Christ himself symbolically appears as the Lamb of God or the Fish, but he is also the serpent exalted on the cross, the lion, and in rarer cases the unicorn. These animal attributes of Christ indicate that even the Son of God (the supreme personification of man) can no more dispense with his animal nature than with his higher, spiritual nature. The subhuman as well as the superhuman is felt to belong to the realm of the divine; the relationship of these two aspects of man is beautifully symbolized in the Christmas picture of the birth of Christ, in a stable among animals.

The boundless profusion of animal symbolism in the religion and art of all times does not

Left, a mask used in the ancient *No* drama of Japan, in which the players often portray gods, spirits, or demons. Above right, masked performers in Japanese dance theater. Below right, an actor in Japan's Kabuki drama, dressed as a medieval hero, with mask-like make-up.

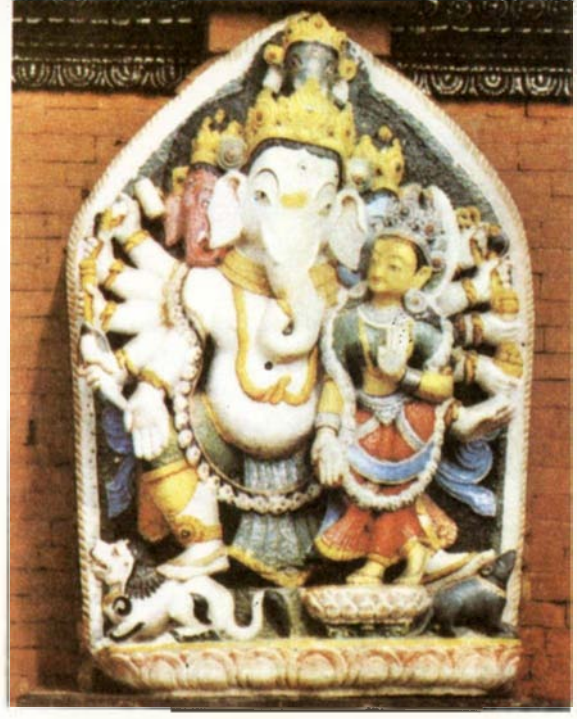
merely emphasize the importance of the symbol; it shows how vital it is for men to integrate into their lives the symbol's psychic content—instinct. In itself, an animal is neither good nor evil; it is a piece of nature. It cannot desire anything that is not in its nature. To put this another way, it obeys its instincts. These instincts often seem mysterious to us, but they have their parallel in human life: The foundation of human nature is instinct.

But in man, the "animal being" (which lives in him as his instinctual psyche) may become dangerous if it is not recognized and integrated in life. Man is the only creature with the power to control instinct by his own will, but he is also able to suppress, distort, and wound it—and an animal, to speak metaphorically, is never so wild and dangerous as when it is wounded. Suppressed instincts can gain control of a man; they can even destroy him.

The familiar dream in which the dreamer is pursued by an animal nearly always indicates that an instinct has been split off from consciousness and ought to be (or is trying to be) readmitted and integrated into life. The more dangerous the behavior of the animal in the dream, the more unconscious is the primitive and instinctual soul of the dreamer, and the more imperative is its integration into his life if some irreparable evil is to be forestalled.

Suppressed and wounded instincts are the dangers threatening civilized man; uninhibited drives are the dangers threatening primitive man. In both cases the "animal" is alienated from its true nature; and for both, the acceptance of the animal soul is the condition for wholeness and a fully lived life. Primitive man must tame the animal in himself and make it his helpful companion: civilized man must heal the animal in himself and make it his friend.

Other contributors to this book have discussed the importance of the stone and animal motifs in terms of dream and myth; I have used them here only as general examples of the appearance of such living symbols throughout the history of art (and especially religious art). Let us now examine in the same way a most powerful and universal symbol: the circle.



Examples of animal symbols of divinities from three religions: Top of page, the Hindu god Ganesha (a painted sculpture from the Royal Palace of Nepal), god of prudence and wisdom; above, the Greek god Zeus in the form of a swan (with Leda); right, on opposite sides of a medieval coin, the crucified Christ shown as a man and as a serpent.

The symbol of the circle

Dr. M.-L. von Franz has explained the circle (or sphere) as a symbol of the Self. It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature. Whether the symbol of the circle appears in primitive sun worship or modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the mandalas drawn by Tibetan monks, in the ground plans of cities, or in the spherical concepts of early astronomers, it always points to the single most vital aspect of life—its ultimate wholeness.

An Indian creation myth relates that the god Brahma, standing on a huge, thousand-petaled lotus, turned his eyes to the four points of the compass. This fourfold survey from the circle of the lotus was a kind of preliminary orientation, an indispensable taking of bearings, before he began his work of creation.

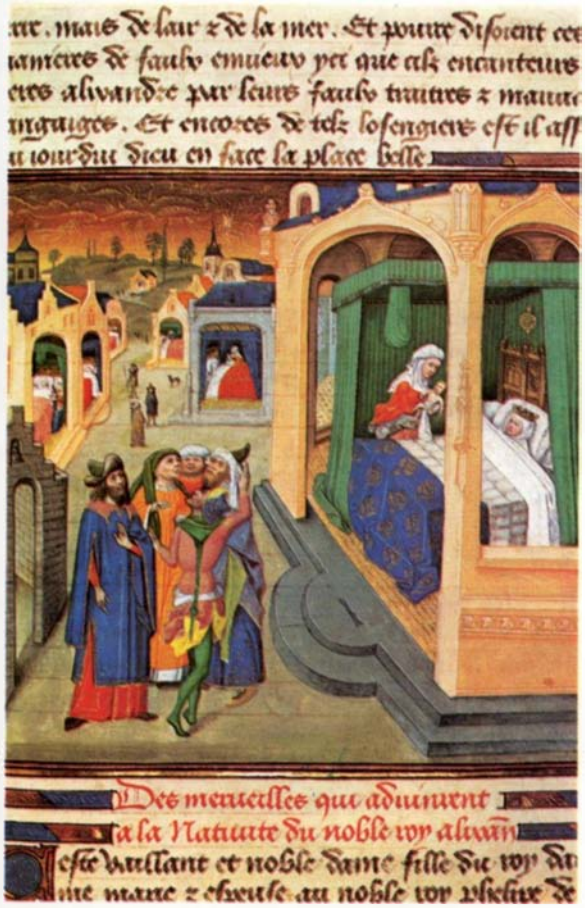
A similar story is told of Buddha. At the moment of his birth, a lotus flower rose from the earth and he stepped into it to gaze into the 10 directions of space. (The lotus in this case was eight-rayed; and Buddha also gazed upward and downward, making 10 directions.) This symbolic gesture of survey was the most concise method of showing that from the moment of his birth, the Buddha was a unique personality, predestined to receive illumination. His personality and his further existence were given the imprint of wholeness.

The spatial orientation performed by Brahma and Buddha may be regarded as symbolic of the human need for psychic orientation. The four functions of consciousness described by Dr. Jung in his chapter, p. 61—thought, feeling, intuition, and sensation—equip man to deal with the impressions of the world he receives from within and without. It is by means of these functions that he comprehends and assimilates his experience; it is by means of them that he can respond. Brahma's four-fold survey of the universe symbolizes the necessary integration of these four functions that man must achieve. (In art, the circle is often eight-rayed. This expresses a reciprocal overlapping of the four functions of consciousness, so that four further intermediate functions come about—for instance, thought colored by feeling or intuition, or feeling tending toward sensation.)

In the visual art of India and the Far East, the four- or eight-rayed circle is the usual pattern of the religious images that serve as instruments of meditation. In Tibetan Lamaism especially, richly figured mandalas play an important part. As a rule, these mandalas represent the cosmos in its relation to divine powers.

But a great many of the eastern meditation figures are purely geometrical in design; these are called *yantras*. Aside from the circle, a very common yantra motif is formed by two interpenetrating triangles, one point-upward, the other point-downward. Traditionally, this shape symbolizes the union of Shiva and Shakti, the male and female divinities, a subject that also appears in sculpture in countless variations. In terms of psychological symbolism, it expresses the union of opposites—the union of the personal, temporal world of the ego with the non-personal, timeless world of the non-ego. Ultimately, this union is the fulfillment and goal of all religions: It is the union of the soul with God. The two interpenetrating triangles have a symbolic meaning similar to that of the more

Right, a *yantra* (a form of mandala), composed of nine linked triangles. The mandala, symbolizing wholeness, is often connected with exceptional beings of myth or legend. Far right, a Tibetan painting of the birth of Buddha; in the lower left corner, Buddha takes his first steps on a cross formed of circular blossoms. Above right, the birth of Alexander the Great (a 16th-century manuscript illustration) heralded by comets—in circular or mandala form.



common circular mandala. They represent the wholeness of the psyche or Self, of which consciousness is just as much a part as the unconscious.

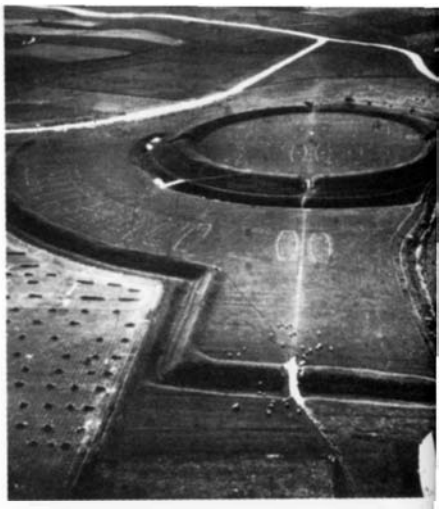
In both the triangle yantras and the sculptural representations of the union of Shiva and Shakti, the emphasis lies on a tension between the opposites. Hence the marked erotic and emotional character of many of them. This dynamic quality implies a process—the creation, or coming into being, of wholeness—while the four- or eight-rayed circle represents wholeness as such, as an existing entity.

The abstract circle also figures in Zen painting. Speaking of a picture entitled *The Circle*, by the famous Zen priest Sangai, another Zen master writes: "In the Zen sect, the circle represents enlightenment. It symbolizes human perfection."

Abstract mandalas also appear in European Christian art. Some of the most splendid examples are the rose windows of the cathedrals. These are representations of the Self of man transposed onto the cosmic plane. (A cosmic mandala in the shape of a shining white rose was revealed to Dante in a vision.) We may regard as mandalas the haloes of Christ and the Christian saints in religious paintings. In many cases, the halo of Christ is alone divided into four, a significant allusion to his sufferings as the Son of Man and his death on the Cross, and at the same time a symbol of his differentiated wholeness. On the walls of early Romanesque churches, abstract circular figures can sometimes be seen; they may go back to pagan originals.

In non-Christian art, such circles are called "sun wheels." They appear in rock engravings that date back to the neolithic epoch before the wheel was invented. As Jung has pointed out, the term "sun wheel" denotes only the external aspect of the figure. What really mattered at all times was the experience of an archetypal,

Left, an example of the mandala in religious architecture: the Angkor Wat Buddhist temple in Cambodia, a square building with entrances at the four corners. Right, the ruins of a fortified camp in Denmark (*c.* A.D. 1000), which was laid out in a circle—as is the fortress town (center right) of Palmanova, Italy (built in 1593), with its star-shaped fortifications. Far right, the streets that meet at L'Étoile, Paris, to form a mandala.



inner image, which Stone Age man rendered in his art as faithfully as he depicted bulls, gazelles, or wild horses.

Many pictorial mandalas are to be found in Christian art: for example, the rather rare picture of the Virgin in the center of a circular tree, which is the God-symbol of the burning bush. The most widely current mandalas in Christian art are those of Christ surrounded by the four Evangelists. These go back to the ancient Egyptian representations of the god Horus and his four sons.

In architecture the mandala also plays an important part—but one that often passes unnoticed. It forms the ground plan of both secular and sacred buildings in nearly all civilizations; it enters into classical, medieval, and even modern town planning. A classical example appears in Plutarch's account of the foundation of Rome. According to Plutarch, Romulus sent for builders from Etruria who instructed him by sacred usages and written rules about all the ceremonies to be observed—in the same way "as in the mysteries." First they dug a round pit where the Comitium, or Court of Assembly, now stands, and into this pit they threw symbolic offerings of the fruits of the earth. Then each man took a small piece of earth of the land from which he came, and these were all thrown into the pit together. The pit was given the name of *mundus* (which also meant the cosmos). Around it Romulus drew the boundary of the city in a circle with a plow drawn by a bull and a cow. Wherever a gate was planned, the plowshare was taken out and the plow carried over.

The city founded in this solemn ceremony was circular in shape. Yet the old and famous description of Rome is *urbs quadrata*, the square city. According to one theory that attempts to reconcile this contradiction, the word *quadrata* must be understood to mean "quadripartite"; that is, the circular city was divided into four parts by two main arteries running from north to south and west to east. The point of intersection coincided with the *mundus* mentioned by Plutarch.

According to another theory, the contradiction can be understood only as a symbol, namely as a visual representation of the mathematically insoluble problem of the squaring of the circle, which had greatly preoccupied the Greeks and was to play so great a part in alchemy. Strangely enough, before describing the circle ceremony of the foundation of the city by Romulus, Plutarch also speaks of Rome as *Roma quadrata*, a square city. For him, Rome was both a circle and a square.

In each theory a true mandala is involved, and that links up with Plutarch's statement that the foundation of the city was taught by the Etruscans "as in the mysteries," as a secret rite. It was more than a mere outward form. By its mandala ground plan, the city, with its inhabitants, is exalted above the purely secular realm. This is further emphasized by the fact that the city has a center, the *mundus*, which established the city's relationship to the "other" realm, the abode of the ancestral spirits. (The *mundus* was covered by a great stone, called the "soul stone." On certain days the stone was removed, and then, it was said, the spirits of the dead rose from the shaft.)

A number of medieval cities were founded on the ground plan of a mandala and were

surrounded by an approximately circular wall. In such a city, as in Rome, two main arteries divided it into "quarters" and led to the four gates. The church or cathedral stood at the point of intersection of these arteries. The inspiration of the medieval city with its quarters was the Heavenly Jerusalem (in the Book of Revelation), which had a square ground plan and walls with three times four gates. But Jerusalem had no temple at its center, for God's immediate presence was the center of it. (The mandala ground plan for a city is by no means outmoded. A modern example is the city of Washington, D.C.)

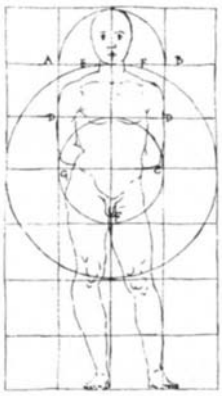
Whether in classical or in primitive foundations, the mandala ground plan was never dictated by considerations of aesthetics or economics. It was a transformation of the city into an ordered cosmos, a sacred place bound by its center to the other world. And this transformation accorded with the vital feelings and needs of religious man.

Every building, sacred or secular, that has a mandala ground plan is the projection of an archetypal image from within the human unconscious onto the outer world. The city, the fortress, and the temple become symbols of psychic wholeness, and in this way exercise a specific influence on the human being who enters or lives in the place. (It need hardly be emphasized that even in architecture the projection of the psychic content was a purely unconscious process. "Such things cannot be thought up," Dr. Jung has written, "but must grow again from the forgotten depths if they are to express the deepest insights of consciousness and the loftiest intuitions of the spirit, thus amalgamating the uniqueness of present-day consciousness with the age-old past of humanity.")

The central symbol of Christian art is not the mandala, but the cross or crucifix. Up to Carolingian times, the equilateral or Greek cross was the usual form, and therefore the mandala was indirectly implied. But in the course of time the

Medieval religious architecture was usually based on the shape of the cross. Left, a 13th-century church (in Ethiopia) cut from the rock.

Renaissance religious art shows a reorientation to the earth and the body: Right, a plan for a circular church or basilica based on the body's proportions, drawn by the 15th-century Italian artist and architect Francesco di Giorgio.



center moved upward until the cross took on the Latin form, with the stake and the crossbeam, that is customary today. This development is important because it corresponds to the inward development of Christianity up to the high Middle Ages. In simple terms, it symbolized the tendency to remove the center of man and his faith from the earth and to "elevate" it into the spiritual sphere. This tendency sprang from the desire to put into action Christ's saying: "My kingdom is not of this world." Earthly life, the world, and the body were therefore forces that had to be overcome. Medieval man's hopes were thus directed to the beyond, for it was only from paradise that the promise of fulfillment beckoned.

This endeavor reached its climax in the Middle Ages and in medieval mysticism. The hopes of the beyond found expression not only in the raising of the center of the cross; it can also be seen in the increasing height of the Gothic cathedrals, which seem to set the laws of gravity at defiance. Their cruciform ground plan is that of the elongated Latin cross (though the baptisteries, with the font in the center, have a true mandala ground plan).

With the dawning of the Renaissance, a revolutionary change began to occur in man's conception of the world. The "upward" movement (which reached its climax in the late Middle Ages) went into reverse; man turned back to the earth. He rediscovered the beauties of nature and the body, made the first circumnavigation of the globe, and proved the world to be a sphere. The laws of mechanics and causality became the foundations of science. The world of religious feeling, of the irrational, and of mysticism, which had played so great a part in medieval times, was more and more submerged by the triumphs of logical thought.

Similarly, art became more realistic and sensuous. It broke away from the religious subjects of the Middle Ages and embraced the whole visible world. It was overwhelmed by the manifoldness of the earth, by its splendor and horror, and became what Gothic art had been before it: a true symbol of the spirit of the age. Thus it can hardly be regarded as accidental that

a change also came over ecclesiastical building. In contrast to the soaring Gothic cathedrals, there were more circular ground plans. The circle replaced the Latin cross.

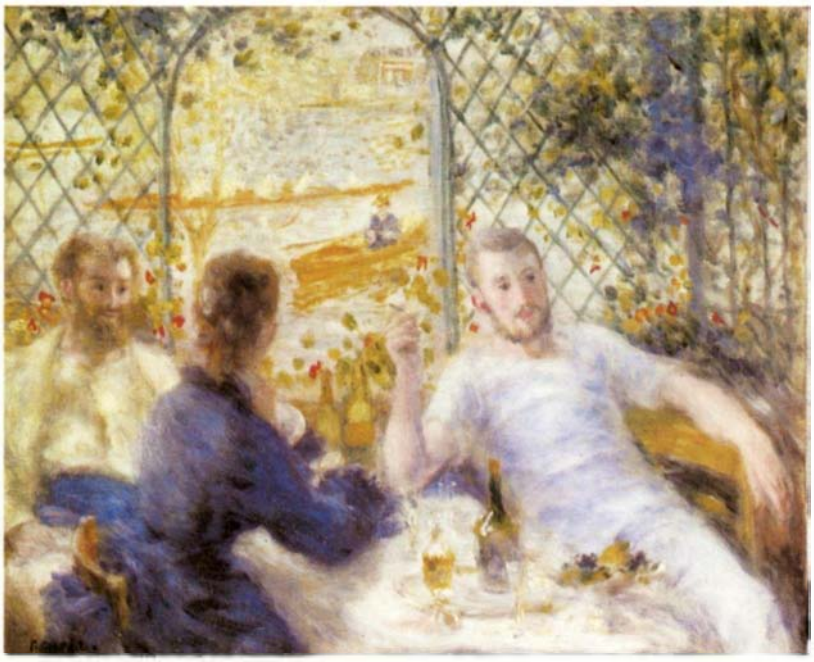
This change in form, however—and this is the important point for the history of symbolism—must be attributed to aesthetic, and not to religious, causes. That is the only possible explanation for the fact that the center of these round churches (the truly "holy" place) is empty, and that the altar stands in a recess in a wall away from the center. For that reason the plan cannot be described as a true mandala. An important exception is St. Peter's in Rome, which was built to the plans of Bramante and Michelangelo. Here the altar stands in the center. One is tempted, however, to attribute this exception to the genius of the architects, for great genius is always both of and beyond its time.

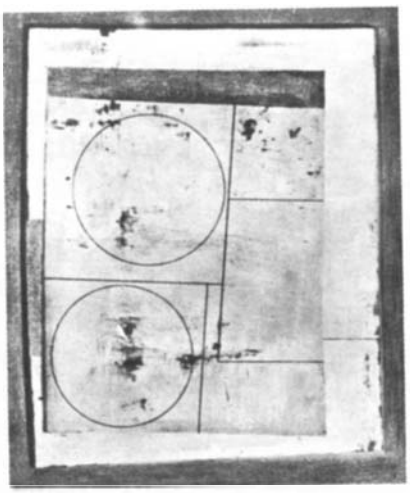
In spite of the far-reaching changes in art, philosophy, and science brought about by the Renaissance, the central symbol of Christianity remained unchanged. Christ was still represented on the Latin cross, as he is today. That meant that the center of religious man remained anchored on a higher, more spiritual plane than that of earthly man, who had turned back to nature. Thus a rift arose between man's traditional Christianity and his rational or intellectual mind. Since that time, these two sides of modern man have never been brought together. In the course of the centuries, with man's growing insight into nature and its laws, this division has gradually grown wider; and it still splits the psyche of the western Christian in the 20th century.

Of course, the brief historical summary given here has been over-simplified. Moreover, it omits the secret religious movements within Christianity that took account, in their beliefs, of what was usually ignored by most Christians: the question of evil, the chthonic (or earthly) spirit. Such movements were always in a minority and seldom had any very visible influence, but in their way they fulfilled the important role of a contrapuntal accompaniment to Christian spirituality.

The Renaissance interest in outer reality produced the Copernican sun-centered universe (left) and turned artists away from "imaginative" art to nature: Below left, Leonardo's study of the human heart.

Renaissance art—with its sensuous concern with light, nature, and the body (far left, a Tintoretto, 16th century)—set a pattern that lasted until the Impressionists. Below, a painting by Renoir (1841-1919).





Far left, the symbolic alchemical concept of the squared circle—symbol of wholeness and of the union of opposites (note the male and female figures). Left, a modern squared circle by the British artist Ben Nicholson (born 1894): It is a strictly geometrical, empty form possessing aesthetic harmony and beauty but without symbolic meaning.

Right, a "sun wheel" in a painting by the modern Japanese artist Sofu Teshigahara (born 1900) follows the tendency of many modern painters, when using "circular" shapes, to make them asymmetrical.

Among the many sects and movements that arose about A.D. 1000, the alchemists played a very important part. They exalted the mysteries of matter and set them alongside those of the "heavenly" spirit of Christianity. What they sought was a wholeness of man encompassing mind and body, and they invented a thousand names and symbols for it. One of their central symbols was the *quadratura circuli* (the squaring of the circle), which is no more than the true mandala.

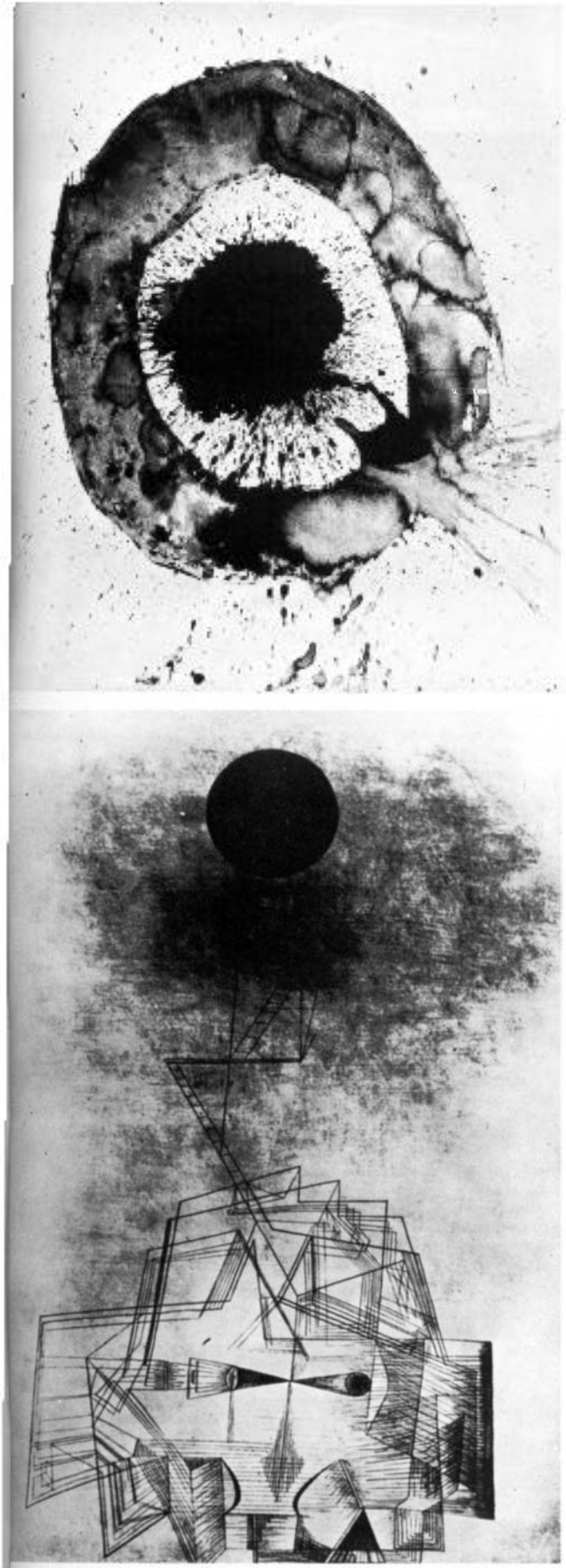
The alchemists not only recorded their work in their writings; they created a wealth of pictures of their dreams and visions—symbolic pictures that are still as profound as they are baffling. They were inspired by the dark side of nature—evil, the dream, the spirit of earth. The mode of expression was always fabulous, dreamlike, and unreal, in both word and picture. The great 15th-century Flemish painter Hieronymus Bosch may be regarded as the most important representative of this kind of imaginative art.

But at the same time, more typical Renaissance painters (working in the full light of day, so to speak) were producing the most splendid works of sensuous art. Their fascination with earth and nature went so deep that it practically determined the development of visual art for the next five centuries. The last great representatives of sensuous art, the art of the passing moment, of light and air, were the 19th-century impressionists.

We may here discriminate between two radically different modes of artistic representation. Many attempts have been made to define their characteristics. Recently Herbert Kühn (whose work on the cave-paintings I have already mentioned) has tried to draw a distinction between what he calls the "imaginative" and the "sensory" style. The "sensory" style generally depicts a direct reproduction of nature or of the picture-subject. The "imaginative," on the other hand, presents a fantasy or experience of the artist in an "unrealistic," even dreamlike, and sometimes "abstract" manner. Kühn's two conceptions seem so simple and so clear that I am glad to make use of them.

The first beginnings of imaginative art go back very far in history. In the Mediterranean basin, its efflorescence dates from the third millennium B.C. It has only recently been realized that these ancient works of art are not the results of incompetence or ignorance; they are modes of expression of a perfectly definite religious and spiritual emotion. And they have a special appeal today, for, during the last half-century, art has been passing once more through a phase that can be described by the term "imaginative."

Today the geometrical, or "abstract," symbol of the circle has again come to play a considerable role in painting. But with few exceptions the traditional mode of representation has undergone a characteristic transformation that corresponds to the dilemma of modern man's ex-



istence. The circle is no longer a single meaningful figure that embraces a whole world and dominates the picture. Sometimes the artist has taken it out of its dominant position, replacing it by a loosely organized group of circles. Sometimes the plane of the circle is asymmetrical.

An example of the asymmetrical circular plane may be seen in the famous sun disks of the French painter Robert Delaunay. A painting by the modern English painter Ceri Richards, now in Dr. Jung's collection, contains an entirely asymmetrical circular plane, while far to the left there appears a very much smaller and empty circle.

In the French painter Henri Matisse's *Still Life with Vase of Nasturtiums*, the focus of vision is a green sphere on a slanting black beam, which seems to gather into itself the manifold circles of the nasturtium leaves. The sphere overlaps a rectangular figure, the top left-hand corner of which is folded over. Given the artistic perfection of the painting it is easy to forget that in the past these two abstract figures (the circle and the square) would have been united, and would have expressed a world of thoughts and feelings. But anyone who does remember, and raises the question of meaning, will find food for thought: The two figures that from the beginning of time have formed a whole are in this painting torn apart or incoherently related. Yet both are there and are touching each other.

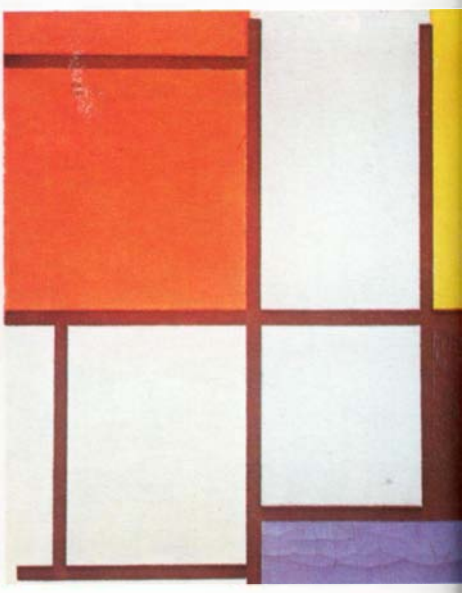
In a picture painted by the Russian-born artist Wassily Kandinsky there is a loose assembly of colored balls or circles that seem to be drifting like soap bubbles. They, too, are tenuously connected with a background of one large rectangle with two small, almost square rectangles contained in it. In another picture, which he called *A Few Circles*, a dark cloud (or is it a

Left, *Limits of Understanding* by Paul Klee (1879-1940) – one 20th-century painting in which the symbol of the circle retains a dominant position.

swooping bird?) again bears a loosely arranged group of bright balls or circles.

Circles often appear in unexpected connections in the mysterious compositions of the British artist Paul Nash. In the primeval solitude of his landscape *Event on the Downs*, a ball lies in the right foreground. Though it is apparently a tennis ball, the design on its surface forms the *Tai-gi-tu*, the Chinese symbol of eternity; thus it opens up a new dimension in the loneliness of the landscape. Something similar happens in Nash's *Landscape from a Dream*. Balls are rolling out of sight in an infinitely wide mirrored landscape, with a huge sun visible on the horizon. Another ball lies in the foreground, in front of the roughly square mirror.

In his drawing *Limits of Understanding*, the Swiss artist Paul Klee places the simple figure of a sphere or a circle above a complex struc-



Circles appear broken or loosely scattered in *The Sun and the Moon*, top, by Robert Delaunay (1885-1941); in *A Few Circles*, left, by Kandinsky (1866-1944), and in *Landscape from a Dream*, right, by Paul Nash (1889-1946). Below, *Composition* by Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) is dominated by squares.

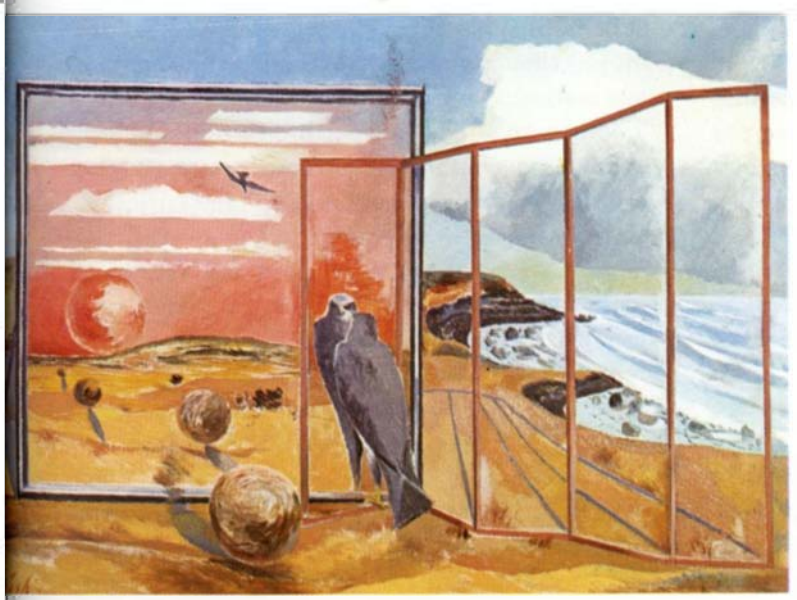
ture of ladders and lines. Dr. Jung has pointed out that a true symbol appears only when there is a need to express what thought cannot think or what is only divined or felt; that is the purpose of Klee's simple figure at the "limits of understanding."

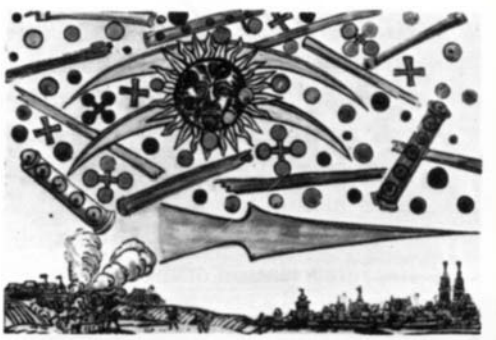
It is important to note that the square, or groups of rectangles and squares, or rectangles and rhomboids, have appeared in modern art just as often as the circle. The master of harmonious (indeed, "musical") compositions with squares is the Dutch-born artist Piet Mondrian. As a rule there is no actual center in any of his pictures, yet they form an ordered whole in their own strict, almost ascetic fashion. Still more common are paintings by other artists with irregular quaternary compositions, or numerous rectangles combined in more or less loose groups.

The circle is a symbol of the psyche (even Plato described the psyche as a sphere). The square (and often the rectangle) is a symbol of earthbound matter, of the body and reality. In most modern art, the connection between these two primary forms is either nonexistent, or loose and casual. Their separation is another symbolic expression of the psychic state of 20th-century man: His soul has lost its roots and he is threatened by dissociation. Even in the world situation of today (as Dr. Jung pointed out in his opening chapter), this split has become evident: The western and eastern halves of the earth are separated by an Iron Curtain.

But the frequency with which the square and the circle appear must not be overlooked. There seems to be an uninterrupted psychic urge to bring into consciousness the basic factors of life that they symbolize. Also, in certain abstract pictures of our time (which merely represent a colored structure or a kind of "primal matter"), these forms occasionally appear as if they were germs of new growth.

The symbol of the circle has played a curious part in a very different phenomenon of the life of our day, and occasionally still does so. In the last years of the Second World War, there arose the "visionary rumor" of round flying bodies that became known as "flying saucers" or UFOs (unidentified flying objects). Jung has explained the UFOs as a projection of a psychic content (of wholeness) that has at all times been symbolized by the circle. In other words, this "visionary rumor," as can also be seen in many dreams of our time, is an attempt by the unconscious collective psyche to heal the split in our apocalyptic age by means of the symbol of the circle.





Above, an illustration from a 16th-century German broadsheet of some strange circular objects seen in the sky -- similar to the "flying saucers" that have been seen in recent years. Jung has suggested that such visions are projections of the archetype of wholeness.

Modern painting as a symbol

The terms "modern art" and "modern painting" are used in this chapter as the layman uses them. What I will be dealing with, to use Kühn's term, is modern *imaginative* painting. Pictures of this kind can be "abstract" (or rather "non-figurative") but they need not always be so. There will be no attempt to distinguish among such various forms as fauvism, cubism, expressionism, futurism, suprematism, constructivism, orphism, and so on. Any specific allusion to one or the other of these groups will be quite exceptional.

And I am not concerned with an aesthetic differentiation of modern paintings; nor, above all, with artistic evaluations. Modern imaginative painting is here taken simply as a phenomenon of our time. That is the only way in which the question of its symbolic content can be justified and answered. In this brief chapter it is possible to mention only a few artists, and to select a few of their works more or less at random. I must content myself with discussing modern painting in terms of a small number of its representatives.

My starting point is the psychological fact that the artist has at all times been the instrument and spokesman of the spirit of his age. His work can be only partly understood in terms of his personal psychology. Consciously or unconsciously, the artist gives form to the nature and values of his time, which in their turn form him.

The modern artist himself often recognizes the interrelation of the work of art and its time. Thus the French critic and painter Jean Bazaine writes in his *Notes on Contemporary Painting*: "Nobody paints as he likes. All a painter can do is to will with all his might the painting his age is capable of." The German artist Franz Marc, who died in the First World War, said: "The great artists do not seek their forms in the mist of the past, but take the deepest soundings they can of the genuine, profoundest center of gravity of their age." And, as far back as 1911, Kandinsky wrote in his famous essay "Concerning the Spiritual in Art": "Every epoch is given its own measure of artistic freedom, and even the most creative genius may not leap over the boundary of that freedom."

For the last 50 years, "modern art" has been a general bone of contention, and the discussion has lost none of its heat. The "yeas" are as passionate as the "nays"; yet the reiterated prophecy that "modern" art is finished has never come true. The new way of expression has been triumphant to an unimagined degree. If it is threatened at all, it will be because it has degenerated into mannerism and modishness. (In the Soviet Union, where non-figurative art has often been officially discouraged and produced only in private, figurative art is threatened by a similar degeneration.)

The general public, in Europe at any rate, is still in the heat of the battle. The violence of the discussion shows that feeling runs high in both camps. Even those who are hostile to modern art cannot avoid being impressed by the works they reject; they are irritated or repelled, but (as the violence of their feelings shows) they are moved. As a rule, the negative fascination is no less strong than the positive. The stream of visitors to exhibitions of modern art, wherever and whenever they take place, testifies to something more than curiosity. Curiosity would be satisfied sooner. And the fantastic prices that are paid for works of modern art are a measure of the status conferred upon them by society.

Fascination arises when the unconscious has been moved. The effect produced by works of modern art cannot be explained entirely by their visible form. To the eye trained in "classic" or "sensory" art, they are new and alien. Nothing in works of non-figurative art reminds the spectator of his own world – no objects in

their own everyday surroundings, no human being or animal that speaks a familiar language. There is no welcome, no visible accord in the cosmos created by the artist. And yet, without any question, there is a human bond. It may be even more intense than in works of sensory art, which make a direct appeal to feeling and empathy.

It is the aim of the modern artist to give expression to his inner vision of man, to the spiritual background of life and the world. The modern work of art has abandoned not only the realm of the concrete, "natural," sensuous world, but also that of the individual. It has become highly collective and therefore (even in the abbreviation of the pictorial hieroglyph) touches not only the few but the many. What remains individual is the manner of representation, the style and quality of the modern work of art. It is often difficult for the layman to recognize whether the artist's intentions are genuine and his expressions spontaneous, neither imitated nor aimed at effect. In many cases he must accustom himself to new kinds of line and color. He must learn them, as he would learn a foreign language, before he can judge their expressiveness and quality.

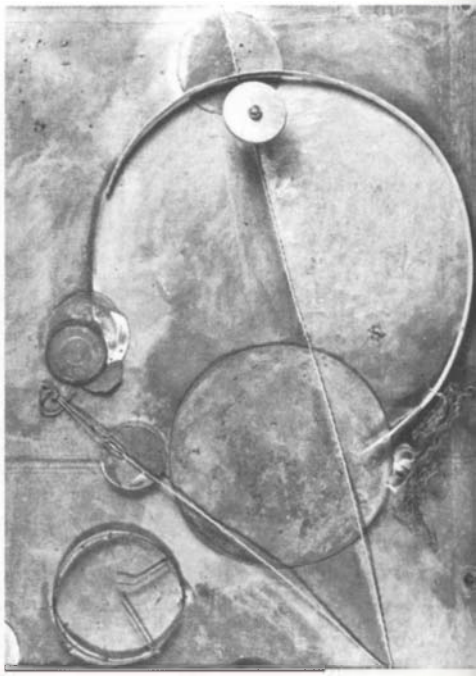
The pioneers of modern art have apparently understood how much they were asking of the public. Never have artists published so many "manifestoes" and explanations of their aims as in the 20th century. It is, however, not only to others that they are striving to explain and justify what they are doing; it is also to themselves. For the most part, these manifestoes are artistic confessions of faith—poetic and often confused or self-contradictory attempts to give clarity to the strange outcome of today's artistic activities.

What really matters, of course, is (and always has been) the direct encounter with the work of art. Yet, for the psychologist who is concerned with the symbolic content of modern art, the study of these writings is most instructive. For that reason the artists, wherever possible, will be allowed in the following discussion to speak for themselves.

The beginnings of modern art appeared in the early 1900s. One of the most impressive personalities of that initiatory phase was Kandinsky, whose influence is still clearly traceable in the paintings of the second half of the century. Many of his ideas have proved prophetic. In his essay "Concerning Form," he writes: "The art of today embodies the spiritual matured to the point of revelation. The forms of this embodiment may be arranged between two poles: (1) great abstraction; (2) great realism. These two poles open two paths, which both lead to *one* goal in the end. These two elements have always been present in art; the first was expressed in the second. Today it looks as if they were about to carry on separate existences. Art seems to have put an end to the pleasant completion of the abstract by the concrete, and vice versa."

Suprematist Composition. White on White 1918.
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Sensory (or representational) art *versus* imaginative (or "unrealistic") art: Right, a painting by the 19th-century British artist William Frith, part of a sequence depicting a gambler's downfall. This is one extreme of representational art: It has declined into mannerism and sentiment. Left, an extreme of imaginative (and, here, "abstract") art by Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935).



Left and above, two compositions by Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). His kind of imaginative art uses (and transforms) ordinary *things*—in this case, old tickets, paper, metal, etc. Below left, pieces of wood similarly used by Hans Arp (1887-1966). Below, in a sculpture by Picasso (1881-1973), ordinary objects—leaves—are part of the subject rather than the material.