

How Archetypal Images in a Dan Deacon Music Video are a Reflection of Deacon's Values

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Abstract. The video for Dan Deacon's song "Woof Woof" demonstrates the dangers of grandiosity and how to battle grandiosity through relationships. Based on research — including Carl Jung's works *Man and His Symbols*, *Psychology and Alchemy*, and *Aspects of the Masculine/Aspects of the Feminine*; neo-Jungian Robert Moore's *Facing the Dragon*; and an interview with the creator of the music video, Ben O'Brien — the essay uses archetypal images to show how the video demonstrates the dangers of grandiosity and how to battle grandiosity through relationships. The paper, which is part of a larger forthcoming work, argues that specific images in the video reflect Deacon's values unconsciously.

1. Introduction

After falling in love with the music video for "Woof Woof" by Baltimore artist Dan Deacon — a video produced by the video collective Showbeast — I decided to write an analysis paper for Dr. Chris Brooks' ENG700 class. The video uses images that effectively tackle the Jungian concepts of grandiosity demonstrated in Neo-Jungian Robert Moore's book, *Facing the Dragon*. I interviewed Ben O'Brien — the writer, co-director, co-producer, and co-editor of "Woof Woof" — in late October 2013 for background on the video. Employing Carl Jung's collective unconscious, one can see how O'Brien's unconscious could have conjured these images from patterns that Jung would call primordial.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

Carl Jung, one of the most important fathers to modern psychology, argues that we inherit patterns — "primordial images" or "reactivated archetypes" that aren't necessarily ideas (Jung, 84) — from primitive sources that he calls the collective unconscious. This is different from cyptomnesia, in which an unconscious recollection of a thought surfaces that has once been read somewhere (Jung, 83), "...at its deepest levels the unconscious possesses collective contents in a relatively active state," Jung writes (Jung, 84). These patterns make up the tapestry he calls the "collective unconscious" — an interesting concept to consider, especially when it comes to the use of images in modern-day media.

"Woof Woof" chronicles the lives of Snow Beast, Kasey Tang, and Mark Sleebes — characters in the childlike and absurd world of Showbeast reminiscent of Sesame Street — as they become trapped by an evil kitty named Dead Bird (played by Deacon) that takes over their house. The video culminates into an epic battle between Snow Beast and Dead Bird, in which both of them grow to epic proportions — so large that they're finally standing on the earth — and Snow Beast takes on the traits of his companions, which by this point also include the Showbeast characters Star Beast and Westby. While the music video relies heavily on *deus ex machina* to communicate this story in 11 minutes, two unconscious themes are apparent. The first communicates the dangers of grandiosity. The second is the solution to grandiosity: in this case, the importance of relationships in one's life.

The music video begins with the main character, who is later referred to as Snow Beast, eating Poison'd Oats cereal. Two housemates sit around a dining table with him — one, a girl named Kasey Tang and the other, a dog named Mark Sleebes. Kasey points out that Mark's birthday is coming up in three weeks and asks what he'd like. Mark reminisces about his old band, Hair Fire. As they talk, Snow Beast's attention is drawn to an offering for "Heightman's Incredible Grow Powder" on the back of his box of Poison'd Oats. In a vision that ensues, it's apparent he wants to gain notoriety by becoming the tallest guy in the First Annual Tall Guy competition. No image portrays grandiosity clearer than in the beginning when Snow Beast dreams of notoriety from the "Grow Powder." Grandiosity, as defined by Moore, is a "godlike" claim "grounded in psychological systems beyond the awareness of the ego" (Moore, 10). Moore elaborates by writing, "Grandiosity means you have larger fantasies and wishes for yourself than your real life experience can support" (Moore, 69).

According to Robert Moore, grandiosity can be in one of the four archetypes: the king and queen, the warrior, the magician, or the lover. The inflated archetype in this scenario appears to be the king and queen archetype. The king and queen, defined by Moore, sit “on their thrones” to “provide the archetypal center of the psyche, the axis mundi that enables the world to be ordered against the forces of chaos” (Moore, 111). He goes on to talk about how narcissists are generally inflated in this type. Because Snow Beast says he wants people to pay attention to him, it’s easy to see the inflation. Snow Beast craves attention and only meets Dead Bird after, as O’Brien also affirmed, he feels jealous of the attention Mark gets from Kasey.

By the end of the music video, the grandiose energies are clearly out of control, with Dead Bird eluding dogs, which arrive to save the day, with lasers and the crew with bees. As Lord Mailman arrives with the “Grow Powder,” Dead Bird runs into him. Though Snow Beast goes for the “Grow Powder,” it falls in Dead Bird’s hands. He shakes it on himself and begins to grow even bigger. To combat him, all the friends jump into Snow Beast at his beckoning, and he grows, taking each of their features as they’re absorbed (e.g., he grows a snout when Mark enters and then is seen wearing a skirt when Kasey dives in.) The two grow past skyscrapers until they face off on the earth. They take a swing at each other, and the song (and video) ends as the punch connects. This final statement appears to be a claim that the only way to fight this out-of-control grandiosity is with relationships. This is in synch with what many Neo-Jungians would say. For Moore, one can begin to overcome grandiosity when he or she engages in real relationships. “Without authentic and grounded relationships, you can easily get a little bit crazy, because you have no one to challenge your inflation,” he says (Moore, 133). This aligns nicely with O’Brien’s initial thought process, in that he enjoys “the idea of everybody working together,” he says. “As they jump into him, he takes on their attributes like Voltron growing up.”

It’s important to assess the values of the creators to demonstrate that the symbols are not completely arbitrary, and these values are most reflected in an interview with Pitchfork Media, Inc. Deacon elaborates on a shift in his values that shaped both “Bromst” and the album that followed it, “America.” In it, he says that “Bromst” is the first of his albums in which he began “to give a fuck.” In the interview, Deacon chronicles how his mother passed away on Dec. 21, “so all of a sudden, December 21 entered my life. I fell in love with the end of the world. All our problems would be solved, because there would be no more problems.” He explains how this was his approach to prior albums like “Spiderman of the Rings.” “It’s pretty much a party record,” he says. At shows, people came “fucked up, like, on ecstasy” and “it made me feel like shit,” says Deacon, because he was “enabling this culture I wanted nothing to do with.” He goes on to say that the album “Bromst” (and the album after it, “America”) shifted its focus: Waiting for the end of the world is “not the answer. That’s like throwing out your dishes because they’re dirty. Even if your dishes are filthy as fuck, you clean them. I guess the theme of the record is to wash your dishes.”

3. Conclusions

By analyzing “Woof Woof” using Jungian archetypes as a model for understanding, one can interpret the music video as a narration reflecting the dangers of grandiosity and the importance of relationships to combat such inflation. These values reflect in Deacon’s life based on his live performances and interviews with magazines. Initially, O’Brien said that the collective wanted Dan in it, and they also wanted a battle between Dan and O’Brien. This was the origin of the narrative for “Woof Woof.” Even though the narrative did not consciously intend to convey a message about grandiosity, one can still conclude that the images work in such a manner because of Carl Jung’s notion of the “collective unconscious.” This means that the images employed in the video, whether chosen deliberately or not, can effectively act as symbols because the symbolism has a universal meaning that is unconsciously known by all humanity. Accepting Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, one can safely assume that these values were communicated unconsciously through the use of its images.

4. Acknowledgements

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5. References

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