

Emotional Healing and the Rothko Chapel
A Progression Towards Depicting the Underlying Nature of Reality

By
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Introduction

Mark Rothko is an artist who has been characterized as an abstract expressionist. He was born in a Jewish family in 1903, Latvia and passed away in 1970, New York. Rothko passed several phases in his artistic development and expressed himself in different forms. The culmination of his artwork, for which he is still acknowledged today, came into being during the late 50's-60's. This period is characterized by the classical abstract artwork and the Chapel in Houston which will be the focus of this thesis. The rest of the periods will be addressed as well since they were the creative foundation on which Rothko built. They contained the same intention within and are important to address in order to understand Rothko's final periods.

In the last two periods, Rothko found his way of communicating his main intention, which will be addressed throughout the thesis. As mentioned before, the focus will be on the last two periods, with the main spotlight on the Chapel. This is because people have intense emotional experiences when interaction with the paintings of both periods. The spotlight will be on the Chapel because there Rothko managed to achieve his final aim. The Chapel is a space designed in a specific way to evoke a meditative state. Rothko created the paintings in the chapel, and assisted designing the space. The space and the paintings evoke deep spiritual experiences within several individuals who visit it: many break down and cry, some have intense emotional experiences, and others do not feel anything. Due to these intense experiences, the focus of my thesis will be on understanding the effects of Rothko's chapel and exploring the possibility of it bringing emotional healing.

What healing refers to in this case is a psychological state in which one becomes aware of its own psychological and emotional layers through which one becomes more acceptant of life, less fearful, more fulfilled. Health in this case refers to a state of oneness in which there is no division between the self and the persona. These concepts were addressed by Jung in his "*Collected Works*". The first concept refers to what one is a whole, meanwhile the second concept refers to the image by which one presents oneself. What is meant by healing and health will be elaborated on in

greater detail throughout the thesis, but the main research question which will be answered is whether Rothko's chapel has the ability to bring emotional healing.

To be able to answer this question, it is necessary to interpret Rothko's artwork and look into the experiences of the people who visited the chapel in order to see what effects the space produces within individuals. The focus of the thesis will be on the Chapel and the structure will be as follows: First, Rothko's biography will be presented together with the progression of his artwork. Then the intention in his artwork will be addressed and the theories described in Nietzsche's "*Birth of tragedy*" and Jung's "*Collected Works*" will be presented. These will serve as a basis to understand the effects of Rothko's Chapel. The interpretation of Rothko's artwork done by his son Christopher will be presented, and the experiences which random individuals have had in the Chapel will be portrayed, with a focus on the experience of Christopher. These will serve as an example of the effect Rothko's Chapel has on individuals. In the last chapter, the theories of Jung and Nietzsche together with Christopher's interpretation and Rothko's intention will be linked together in order to see the effect of Rothko's artwork, and answer the main research question, on whether the Chapel has the capacity to bring emotional healing.

Chapter One: The life of Mark Rothko and the Progression of his Artwork

The main source used in this first chapter will be Mark Rothko's biography written by Annie Cohen-Solal. The name of the work is *Mark Rothko: Towards the Light in The Chapel*, written in 2015. Cohen-Solal is a French sociologist, academic and writer who was born in 1948. Her most famous work is a biography of Jean-Paul Sartre, which has been translated into six languages. She worked at a number of well acknowledged universities all around the world and has studied Rothko's life in great detail (Wikipedia, 2017). Since Cohen-Solal has experience with writing biographies, and is well acknowledged for them, she seemed to be a suitable and reliable source from which to retrieve the information on the life of Rothko. Besides, she has a vast amount of knowledge on the artist's life which she depicts in an objective manner.

This chapter will be divided into two main parts. The first will describe the early life of Rothko and the beginning of his career as an artist, and the second will address the progression of his artwork, with a focus on the two last periods. As each period will be described, certain events which occurred during the time will be pointed out together with a description of the artwork. Even though the focus will be placed on the last two periods, which were the culmination of Rothko's artwork (where he achieved his final goal) it is important to also address the periods which came before. The previous periods contributed to the development of Rothko's painting style, and most importantly, contain the same intention within.

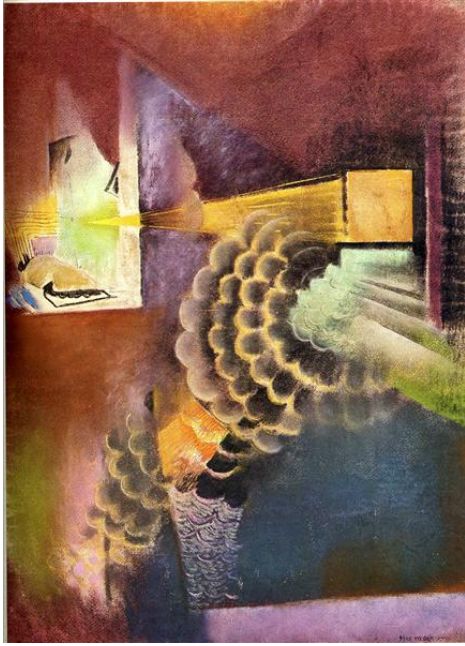
Rothko's Early Life and beginning of his Career as an Artist

In the first chapter Cohen-Solal addresses the early life of Markus Yakovlevich Rothkowitz who was born in 1903 Dvinsk, Russia (now Dugavils, Latvia), and died in 1970 in New York, at the age of 67. He was a Russian Jew who immigrated to the US in his youth and became a painter who is still recognized today. During the period of his birth in Russia, the Jews were facing many anti-Semitic policies and persecutions. Due to this, Rothko's childhood was wrapped in fear. His father Yakov Rothkowitz was a pharmacist who brought up Rothko with a secular and political perspective on the world. This contributed to Rothko's interest in politics and philosophy. Cohen-Solal does not say much about his mother.

Even though Yakov was a secular non-religious man during the time of Rothko's birth, he went back to Jewish Orthodoxy some years after. Due to his father's return to Judaism, Rothko was sent to a traditional Jewish elementary school, even though the rest of his siblings, who were born earlier, were all studying at a public school. It might be that Rothko derived part of his spiritual inclinations from Judaism which show later on in his artistic expression. Due to the political situation in Russia at the time, Yakov immigrated with two of his sons to the US since he did not want them to be sent to the military. Rothko, his mother, and sister remained in Russia for a while longer. They arrived to the US in 1913 and rejoined with the rest of the family.

A few months after, Rothko's father passed away from cancer. The family fell into an economic struggle since Yakov provided for the family. In order to survive, Rothko's sister worked as a cash register, and Rothko, at the age of 10, was selling newspapers to the employees of his uncle's warehouse. The death of his father also led Rothko to sever his ties with religion. After mourning for a year, Rothko decided to never visit a synagogue again. During the same period, Rothko began his education. Cohen-Solal describes this period in the second chapter of her book. He started going to school in 1913 and completed secondary school with honors at Lincoln High in Portland during the year 1921, at the age of 18. Rothko got a scholarship at Yale University but did not receive an extension for the next year. Since his scholarship was not renewed, and he did not have enough money to pay the tuition fee, he had to leave the university. According to Cohen-Solal, Rothko found Yale to be elitist and racist. He never returned there until 46 years later when he was awarded an honorary degree.

The beginning of Rothko's career as an artist is described in the third chapter of Cohen-Solal's book. In 1923 Rothko found work in New York. According to Chonen-Solal, this was the beginning of his life as an artist. There he enrolled in Parsons the New School for Design where he was taught by Max Weber, a Jewish-American painter. Under his tutelage, Rothko began to view art as a form of emotional and religious expression. In 1930 Rothko began to give classes in painting and sculpture at the Brooklyn Jewish Center (an education center for Jewish Americans) where he continued teaching until 1952. Some years after, in the early 1930's, Rothko met a group of young artists surrounding the modern painter Milton Avery. According to Cohen-Solal, it was Avery who gave Rothko the idea that the life of a professional artist was a possibility. Avery also influenced Rothko with his use of form and color, which was the epicenter of his artistic development. Two years later, Rothko met Edith Sachar, a jewelry designer who became his wife.



Max Weber (1916): *Slide Lecture at the Metropolitan Museum* [Pastel on paper].
Unknown location



Milton Avery (1940): *Gaspé Pink Sky* [Oil on canvas]. Collection of Mr and Mrs Samuel Lindenbaum, New York.

The Development of Rothko's Style

This part of the chapter will address the work of Cohen-Solal to describe the events occurring in Rothko's life during the periods of his artistic evolution. Accompanying Cohen-Solal's work will be another article written in 2016 by Rina Arya. The name of the article is "*Reflections on the Spiritual in Rothko*". Arya has a doctorate degree

and works at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Wolverhampton in the UK. She specializes in several different areas including the relationship between visual art and religion. In her article she describes Rothko's development of style and gives a name to each stylistic period, but her main focus is on the Spiritual effects of Rothko's art, with an emphasis on the Chapel. Throughout this chapter, the names of the periods will be identified in the same way as Arya named them. The description of the periods also be partially taken from Arya.

It is important to point out that Rothko's development of style was a progression. It took him several years to move from one form of painting to another. As mentioned before each artistic phase will be addressed, but the focus will be placed on the last two periods. This is because Rothko had the same intention when creating his artwork since the beginning of his career but managed to fully achieve his aim in the last two periods, culminating with the Chapel. To have a proper overview of his artwork and to understand the goal he was trying to reach, it is important to also address the earlier periods since they contributed to the final outcome.

Earliest periods

Arya addresses the first artistic period of Rothko's life in the first chapter of her article. Rothko's first phase was characterized by depicting religious scenes such as the crucifixion of Jesus. This phase was influenced by Rothko's Jewish heritage, but the main idea which he was trying to convey was not religious itself, but rather symbolic. Rothko was not a religious man, but was deeply interested in spirituality. The main difference between the two is that spirituality does not contain religious dogma. Spirituality, in comparison to religion is much freer when it comes to the way in which one lives their life. It speaks about the same topic as religion such as human suffering, its ways to end it, and the higher power which in religion is named as God, meanwhile spirituality addresses it as a higher consciousness or the universe. The spiritual conception of God differs from the religious one in the sense that God is not personified, but is rather conceived as unity.

During this period, Rothko was making oil paintings on canvas. According to Arya, the depiction of crucifixion was a symbolic expression of suffering, sacrifice and death. She explains that Rothko's religious paintings functioned as a site of displacement, repression, or substitution for his Jewishness. As mentioned before, Rothko was a secular Jew, interested in the Jewish culture and heritage, but not in religion itself. As Arya explains in the first chapter of her article, Judaism informed Rothko's art without defining it. He used religious imagery as a symbolic form of expressing an idea, meanwhile the message he was trying to send across was not connected to religious dogma.

Around the same time, Rothko began to depict urban scenes and daily life. Christopher, the son of Rothko, points out at a lecture he gave at the Saint Luis Art Museum in 2015, that his father began to not only depict daily life as it is, but included something much deeper, which according to him is the underlying energy of those spaces. The theme of the underlying persisted throughout Rothko's artistic development, and reached its culmination with the chapel in a much deeper sense. During the first couple of periods Rothko's style was varying between symbolism and abstraction, but the main idea which Rothko was trying to convey remained the same.



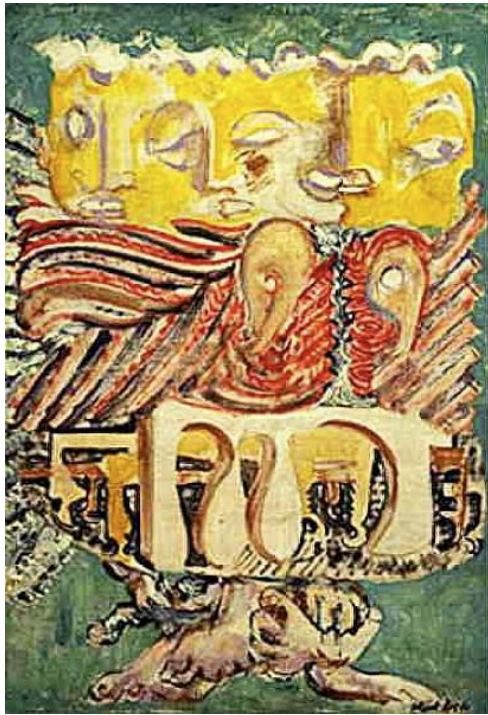
Mark Rothko (1937). *Untitled (Subway)*. [Oil on canvas]. Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.

The mythological Period and the Move to Abstraction

Cohen-Solal addresses this period of Rothko's life in the fourth chapter of her book, and names it as "*The Metamorphosis of Marcus Rothkowitz*". In 1937 Rothko separated from his wife. They reconciled, but the relationship remained tense. In 1938, Rothko became citizen of the U.S. He was stimulated by fear of being deported back to Europe, due to the rise of the Nazi movements. In 1939, the Second World War began, and in 1940, Markus Yakovlevich Rothkowitz changed his name to Mark Rothko due to his concern of the anti-Semitic movements in Europe and America. As he changed his name, his artistic metamorphosis began as well.

According to Cohen-Solal, Rothko was facing many life struggles during this period. The disintegration of the group of people with whom he was painting occurred, he was upset with the mediocracy of the New York art circles, had trouble in his marriage, and on top of it all, the Second World War had begun. In this phase, Rothko stopped painting and began to write a book which he never finished. The texts which he wrote were unknown to the world until his son Christopher discovered them in 2004. He collected the texts in a book named "*The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*", published in 2006. Christopher explains that the main focus of his father's life was to convey ideas. After twenty years he decided to put the brush down and use a different form of expressing his them (C. Rothko, 2014).

According to Christopher, his father was not only an artist, but an intellectual as well. Rothko had read a variety of important Western thinkers such as Nietzsche, Freud, or Plato, which influenced him greatly in his philosophical thinking and artistic expression. After this period, in which Rothko was invested in conveying his inner world through writing, he picked up his brush again and began to make a new form of art inspired by mythology. Rothko undertook the mission of linking his paintings to ancient myths and contemporary ideas. According to Christopher, he saw myths as timeless symbols which represented eternal ideas in different shapes throughout history (C. Rothko, 2014).



Mark Rothko (1942): *The Omen of the Eagle*. [Oil on canvas]. Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.

In the sixth chapter, Cohen-Solal addresses the surrealist period in which Rothko depicted the collective and individual unconscious through symbols. This period took place for more or less three years, starting in 1944. There is no need to go into more detail about this period, but it is important to acknowledge it since this topic will come up again in the interpretation of his artwork. After this period Rothko moved to full abstraction, starting with the multiform period which is addressed in the seventh chapter of Cohen-Solal's book. In this period, Rothko left form behind and began to depict energy. This was an important step towards the two main periods in which Rothko managed to achieve his final aim.



Mark Rothko (1944-1945): *Untitled*. [Oil on canvas]. Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.



Mark Rothko (1948). *Multiform*. [Oil on canvas]. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

The Sublime Abstract Period

Cohen-Solal addresses this period of Rothko's life in the eighth and ninth chapter of her book. Rothko's abstract sublime form of expression came into being around

the year 1954. During this year Rothko turned fifty. He became a recognized artist, and a responsible father, but he was torn inside between embracing the luxurious life of a well-known artist and remaining his old self. During this period Rothko met Katherine Kuh who was an art historian, curator, critic, and dealer from Chicago (Wikipedia, 2018). According to Cohen-Solal, she was one of the rare scholars with whom Rothko was friendly. Soon after their meeting, Rothko and Katherine became close friends. With her help, Rothko had his first major exhibition in Chicago.

In her article, Arya gives a description of Rothko's sublime artwork. The classical works, as addressed by Cohen-Solal, are composed by colorful rectangles placed within one another. The frames of the rectangles are blurry and shaped with dimmed lines, creating the effect of transition. The colors of the rectangles and their exact position within the frame would vary through time, but the intention of the artwork remained the same. The paintings were of a big scale, always placed at a specific position (Arya, 2016, p. 324). According to Cohen-Solal, Rothko was very precise when it came to the way his paintings were exhibited since he did not want them to be appreciated for their esthetics, but rather for the message they convey.

At his first major exhibition in Chicago, Rothko took on the job of being a curator. According to Cohen-Solal, he wanted to establish the proper conditions in which the message of his paintings would be conveyed to the viewers. He wanted to place the paintings in such a way that they would create an interactive experience between the painting and the spectator. In 1954, Rothko sent Kuh a letter in which he specified all the details on how the paintings should be exhibited: "the large pictures must be first encountered at close quarters, so that the first experience is to be within the picture. This may well give the key to the observer of the ideal relationship between himself and the rest of the pictures" (Cohen-Solal, 2015, p. 143-144). As one can see from this example, Rothko was very precise with his work, he would not only create the paintings, but also the conditions in which the viewers would interact with them.



Mark Rothko (1953). Rust and Blue. [Oil on canvas]. Museum of Contemporary Art, NY, US.

During this period, Rothko's depression began to develop, and so did the pallet of his paintings. Regardless of the poor emotional state, Rothko became even more widely recognized as an artist. He was included in many prestigious museums and shows all over the world. The museums which included his paintings during this period were the Guggenheim museum in 1954, the Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris in 1955 and the New American Painting and Sculpture in 1956. During this period, Rothko travelled around Europe and got recognition in all major cities, but he still experienced many difficulties in his personal life.



Mark Rothko (1956): *Orange and Yellow*. [Oil on canvas]. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, US.

In the tenth chapter of her book, Cohen-Solal describes the years of Rothko's life before he was commissioned to create the Chapel. In 1958, Rothko was commissioned to create a series of panels for a newly built luxury restaurant on Park Avenue, named "The Four Seasons". Rothko accepted the order and was presented with a new challenge. It was the first time that he was required to not only design a series of paintings, but to also produce them for a large, specific interior. Over the course of three months, Rothko completed forty paintings in dark red and brown colors which were addressed as the "Seagram Murals". After some time, Rothko and his wife visited the nearly-completed Four Seasons restaurant. Rothko was highly upset by the atmosphere of the restaurant. He considered it to be pretentious and inappropriate for the display of his works. He believed that the paintings would lose their meaning and become mere decoration. Due to this, Rothko refused to continue working on the project, and returned the money to the commissioners.



Mark Rothko (1959): *Untitled (Seagram Mural)*. [Oil on canvas]. Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.



Mark Rothko (1959). *Seagram Murals*. [Oil on canvas]. Temporary exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

After the incident with *The Four Seasons*, Rothko began to experiment ceaselessly. Each painting was a new adventure. He studied carefully how the intensity, texture, and overall area of certain colors interacted. During the time, Duncan Philips, an art collector and critic who played an important role in introducing America to modern art, displayed his collection in Washington. The exhibition included a room dedicated to Rothko's artwork. Rothko arranged the

setting of the room in great detail. There was one painting on each wall, which was slightly gray and lit dimly. The seating in the room was arranged as well.

Rothko designed the space in such a way to induce a meditative contemplative state. Rothko's artwork was addressed as a "type of chapel" for the first time by Philips (Cohen-Solal, 2015, p. 173). The year 1961 marked the climax in Rothko's life. He was incredibly recognized as an artist and received the opportunity to have an exhibition at the MoMA for the first time. According to Cohen-Solal, Rothko would be extremely nervous and would even get sick the days before an opening. Once he would be congratulated and felt accepted, he would begin to glow again (Cohen-Solal, 2015, p. 176).

Rothko's Chapel



Figure 1: *Exterior*. The Rothko Chapel, Huston, Texas, USA

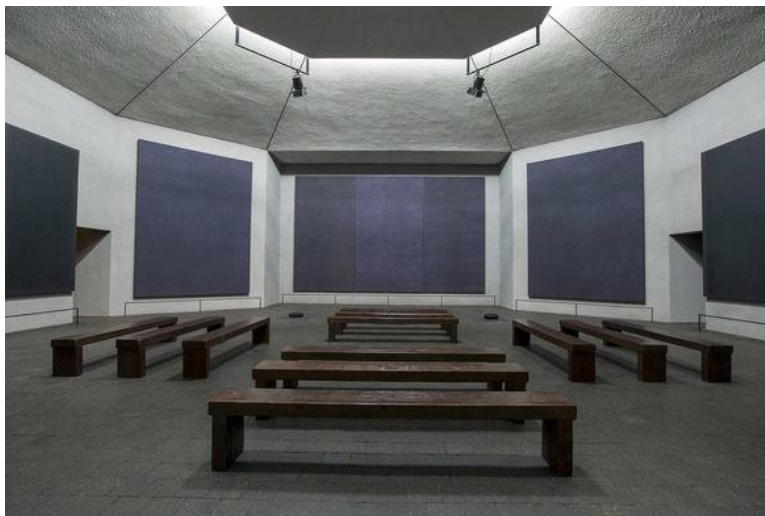


Figure 2: *Interior*. The Rothko Chapel, Huston, Texas, USA.

The 12th chapter of Cohen-Solal's book is devoted to the last period of Rothko's life in which he achieved his final goal. In 1956, Rothko was commissioned by John and Dominique de Menil to paint a series of panels for a chapel in Houston. The couple was interested in art. John was a businessman and Dominique was an art collector. Both of them were devoted to donating money for good causes so they decided to create a Chapel and address Rothko as its designer. In about two years, the artist produced twenty panels, fourteen of which were eventually hung in the chapel. It was believed that his paintings would function as a contemplative and meditative sanctuary. The space of the Chapel was also designed in a way to induce a meditative state. It was set within a simple, minimalist, octagonal plan designed by architect Philip Johnson, who was later on replaced by Howard Barnstone. The replacement took place due to a dispute between Johnson and Rothko. Rothko was very specific when it came to the way the space should be designed. Since the two disagreed on the architectural plan and could not find a common ground, Johnson was dismissed.

The Chapel was designed in such a way to evoke a meditative, contemplative, spiritual experience. After experimenting for a long time, Rothko found the technique to convey his message. He adopted the triptych format, which was traditionally used for religious work. These paintings were similar to the works done in the abstract sublime period but deviated from them in two aspects. In her article, Arya explains the difference between the abstract sublime artworks and the one's positioned in the Chapel: 'first the formal architectural relationship between rectangle and frame as present in the earlier classics give way to a single surface. Second, there is a development in the fracture of the surface, as we move from opposition, to oneness and relative uniformity'. Besides these two aspects, the color pallet of the paintings in the Chapel became even darker, giving rise to deep blues composed by several layers of color which from a distance generate a sense of depth (Arya, 2016, p. 327).

As mentioned before, the chapel was set in an octagonal plan. From outside, the Chapel looks simple. In front of it there is a minimalist sculpture named the Broken Obelisk designed by Barnett Newman between the years 1963-1967. The

sculpture is composed of two parts. The first is a rectangular kind of shape with a pointed end, and the second is a pyramid on top of which the rectangular pointed end maintains itself in balance. The first visible thing which one can see when entering the Chapel is the Triptych. It is placed in the apse of the Chapel as the central art piece. The panels are placed on the diagonal walls, and two additional triptychs are situated on the side walls together with another panel at the entrance hall. The room is lit by one single window which is located on the sealing of the Chapel. There are benches on which one can sit. They are positioned in the center, facing four different directions, so that one can contemplate all of the paintings (Leach, 2014, p. 87).

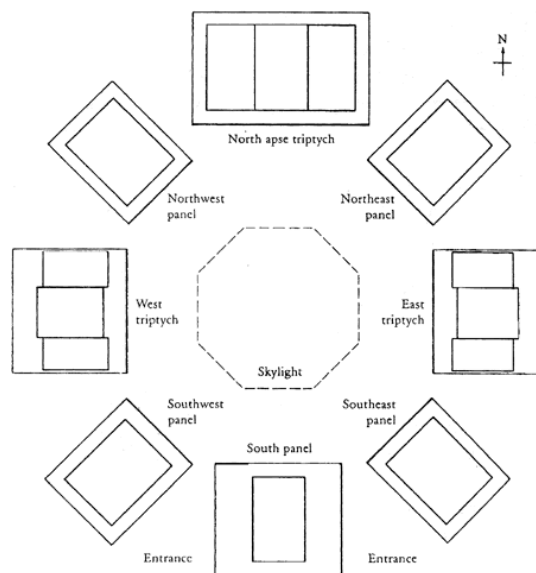


Figure 3: *Floorplan*. The Rothko Chapel, Huston, Texas, USA.

As mentioned before, the Chapel was designed in such a way to evoke a meditative state. The whole architecture and the paintings contribute to the creation of this effect, but the Chapel was not only designed to be a space for contemplation, but also to be a space in which people can gather regardless of their background or belief systems. The events organized in the Chapel contribute to raising individual and collective awareness. There are workshops on topics such as meditation and introspection, but there are also lectures on topics as human rights or world problems (Rothkochapel.org)



Figure 4: *Events*. The Rothko Chapel, Huston, Texas, USA.

Also in the 12th chapter of her book, Cohen-Solal addresses the period of Rothko's life which came after finishing the work at the Huston Chapel. The first project after the Chapel was the exhibition of his Seagram Murals at the Tate Museum in London. Slightly after, at the age of 65, Rothko was diagnosed with a "dissecting aneurysm of the aorta". He was released from the hospital but was recommended to have a healthy diet and severely limit his consumption of alcohol and tobacco. Two years later, Rothko got diagnosed with heart disease and was becoming progressively more depressed and dependent. He was battling alcohol and drug abuse at which he was not succeeding. On January first 1969, Rothko decided to distantiate himself from his family and move into his own studio due to the rising tension between him and his wife.

During the same year, Rothko received an honorary doctorate from Yale University and his shows were at the most prestigious museums of the time. He still attended two of his exhibitions in the MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969, but on February 25th 1970 at nine in the morning, Rothko's assistant found him dead in his studio. An autopsy was performed, and it was declared that Rothko committed suicide. His work continued after his death with the official opening of the Rothko Room in the Tate gallery in 1970 and the inauguration of the Rothko Chapel in 1971.

As mentioned throughout this chapter, Rothko's artwork contained the same intention since the beginning of his career but was expressed in different forms depending on the period. His work was constantly evolving, and reached its peak with the Chapel. Rothko's artistic intention will be addressed in the next chapter to understand his artwork in greater detail. In the following sections, two theories of Jung and Nietzsche will be presented together with the interpretation of his artwork done by his son Christopher. This will be done to gain more knowledge on the effect of his art, and answer the main thesis question which is whether Rothko's artwork has the capacity to bring emotional healing.

Chapter Two: Rothko's Intention in his Artwork

This chapter will address the intention with which Rothko created his artwork. The focus will be mainly on Rothko's chapel, but it is important to address the rest of the periods as well since they did not only contribute to the creation of his final masterpiece, but also contain the same intention within. Two main sources will be used in this chapter. A lecture given by Rothko's son Christopher in 2014 at the Saint Luis Art Museum on the topic of Rothko's artwork, and an Article of Franz W-Kaiser named "*The Divine in Art*" which also devotes its full attention to Rothko's artwork. Christopher explains that since the beginning of Rothko's painting career, he was aiming to depict the underlying energy of existence. Through the change of style, Rothko got closer to his final goal, which is fully achieved with the Chapel. During his urban period, Rothko was painting everyday life, but his depiction was completely out of the ordinary. He was aiming to depict the underlying energy of the spaces which he painted.



Mark Rothko (1940). *Urban Fantasy* [Oil on canvas]. Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.

During the mythological period, Rothko's intention remained the same, but he entered a level deeper: from everyday life to the unconscious, but his aim to depict the underlying energy of existence remained the same. The main elements of the unconscious which are common to all human experience are archetypes, which can also be seen as gods. As Rothko painted myths, he came closer to depicting that which is common to all human experience on a more universal level. Since form was becoming less visible, more individuals could relate to the paintings. Even though in the urban period, he was depicting the same thing, not all people could (for example) relate to the subway, but all people could to relate to the emotion present in the spaces he depicted. That is because the emotions which Rothko portrayed are universal. As Rothko's form was fading, the universalism of his paintings was raising (C. Rothko, 2014).

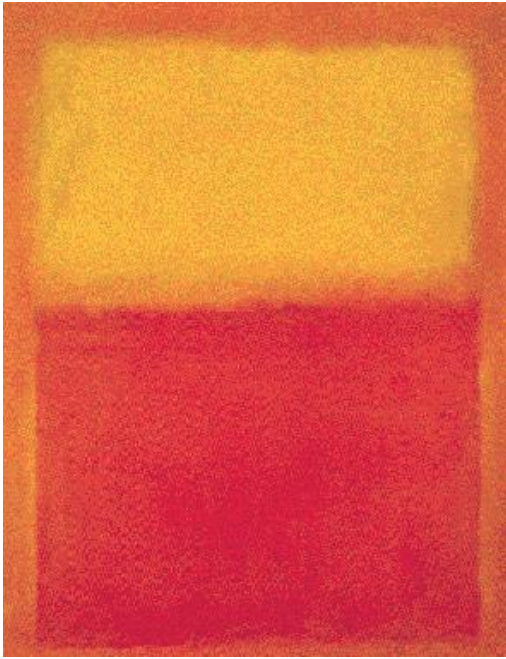


Mark Rothko (1944). *Hierarchical Birds* [Oil on canvas]. Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.

In the next period, Rothko moved to full abstraction. He began to paint specific emotions which are common to all human beings. In this cycle, Rothko left formative painting behind, and began to depict energy. The main elements of these paintings are different colored rectangles which fade into one another. Rothko explains that his intention in these art pieces was to depict basic human emotions. This period got Rothko even closer to his final aim. In an interview with Seldon Rodman during the year 1956, Rothko explained:

“I am not interested in relationships of color or form or anything else [...] I am interested only in expressing basic human emotions – tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on – and the fact that lots of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I communicate with those basic emotions [...] The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience that I had when I painted them. And if you say you are moved by their color relationships, then you miss the point” (van Os, 2012, p. 69).

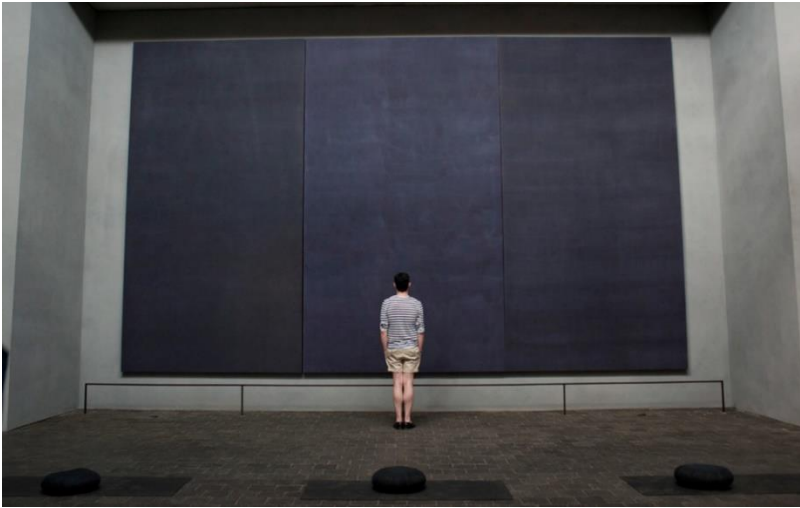
As Rothko explains, his paintings are not about color, but rather about the underlying emotions which accompany all human existence. His aim was to send across a spiritual message of unity which will be addressed further on.



Mark Rothko (1956). *Orange and Yellow* [Oil on canvas]. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York, US.

Rothko's intention to depict the underlying energy of existence was present throughout each phase. In the urban period, he achieved depicting basic human emotions through everyday life. In the mythological period, Rothko depicted the underlying energy of existence by painting elements of the collective unconscious. In the abstract sublime period, Rothko took a step forward and began to depict basic human emotions without form, this way enhancing the universality of his paintings. Finally, in the Chapel, Rothko was not depicting basic human emotions, but managed to depict the underlying energy of existence as a whole, without focusing on a specific emotion. In the Chapel, Rothko managed to depict the whole common field of human consciousness with all of its emotional layers (C. Rothko, 2014).

Cohen-Solal, in the 9th chapter of her book addresses a very important aspect of Rothko's artwork which is the interaction between the painting and viewer. Rothko would take on the job of being a curator in order to create the right conditions in which the viewers could see the paintings and become immersed in them. Christopher explains that Rothko was aiming for an experience within the individual rather than in the painting. The painting would serve as a stimulation for the inner self-reflective state produced within the spectator.



Mark Rothko (1971). *Not Somber* [Oil on canvas]. Huston Chapel, Texas, US.

Rothko would create his paintings in such a way that they would create an experience for the viewer. As mentioned above, his paintings were not about esthetics, but about the feeling which they would produce within the spectator. For this reason, Rothko was very specific about the way his paintings were exhibited. His focus was on the interaction between the painting and the viewer. Kaiser explains that “Rothko wanted to communicate through his art – immediately, directly and without support from language. He derived his certainty that this was possible from ancient cultures which, as conveyed by Nietzsche, had no separation between art and the public” (Kaiser, n.d, p. 181).

Rothko had a deep interest in Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* written in 1872. He even stated that he became a painter because he wanted to “raise painting to the level of poignancy of music and poetry” (Kaiser, n.d, p. 179). Knowing this gives us more clues on what he was trying to achieve in his art. As mentioned above, Rothko wanted to convey certain philosophical messages without the need of words. He wanted to depict the common basis of existence and have individuals experience it (C. Rothko, 2014).

In “*The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*”, Nietzsche explains the mechanisms of two main Greek gods which also exist within every individual: the Dionysian and the Apollonian. In the book, Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of accepting both of these aspects within ourselves and explains that the acceptance of this apparent duality is what creates the effect of unity. It seems that Rothko was trying to awaken individuals from the slumber of their suppressed aspects and lift them up into a full

conscious experience of what they are as a whole. Kaiser explains that ‘the impact of his painting on people who experienced a kind of divine revelation before them seems to confirm that he was successful in this’ (Kaiser, n.d, p. 179). Rothko wanted to depict the underlying energy of existence, and create a sense of unity within those who would interact with his paintings.

Apparently Rothko did not want to communicate on an elevated cultural level, but instead ‘aimed at the deepest layers of the human condition’ (Kaiser, n.d, p. 176). Through this approach Rothko managed to get his message across to a greater public regardless of their status. ‘Rothko was averse to any rational or intellectual approach to his art’ (Kaiser, n.d, p. 176). He decided to use a kind of language which can be understood by everybody: our emotions. Regardless of the education and way of living, emotionality is part of the common human experience. By depicting that which is common to humanity, Rothko managed to reach the broadest audience possible. Those individuals who were susceptible to his artwork would not only receive his message, but experience it.

It is important to point out that there is a lack of comment done by Rothko on his own art. He wrote a couple of works during a period when he stopped painting, but these were not published until after his death. Rothko’s writings did not entail reflections on his own art, but rather addressed his philosophical viewpoints that are also present in his art pieces. As Keiser points out: ‘His silence was also interpreted as a deliberate rejection of the written word, as if this were part of his abstract art’ (Kaiser, n.d, p. 177).

It seems that the silence was what made Rothko’s statement even stronger. I would even argue that he might have believed that language could be very limiting when it comes to expressing unity. From my viewpoint, language seems to be built in a dualistic framework which automatically separates one from the state of unity. Language gives one a description of that which is, and that which is, is not the same as its description. Nietzsche also points to this idea on page 8 of his *Birth of Tragedy*. He explains that feeling conveys itself as thought in a very small part, ‘but there always remains an indissoluble residue’. It is only the dissoluble part of feeling which can be expressed through words since it is linked to concepts. It seems to be,

that Rothko decided to paint rather than speak, in order to convey his message through the interaction between the painting and viewer

It is difficult to state with full certainty what Rothko's intention was, but it is important to point out that he was trying to depict that which is underlying and universal to all human beings. Rothko was not concerned with the formal properties of his paintings, but rather with a religious experience (Kaiser, n.d, p. 181). The main element of his artwork is the interaction between the painting and the viewer which can evoke a deep spiritual experience of unity. To explain how Rothko achieved this, the philosophical theories of Nietzsche and Jung will be addressed. These will be linked together with the interpretation of his artwork done by his son, Christopher Rothko, which will be used to provide an analysis of the spiritual effect of Rothko's Chapel.

Chapter Three: The Philosophical and Psychological Background of Rothko's Artwork: Nietzsche's "Birth of Tragedy" and Jung's "Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious".

This chapter will address two main texts which will be used to interpret Rothko's artwork. The first is "Nietzsche's *Birth of tragedy*" written in 1872, and the second is Jung's "*Archetypes and the Collective unconscious*" written in 1969. The main concepts which these two authors introduce will be explained and used further on to interpret Rothko's artwork. They will also serve as a basis to answer the main question of my thesis, which is whether Rothko's artwork has the capacity to bring emotional healing. Both of these theories are quite similar and have influenced Rothko to a great extent. It is also important to point out that Jung's theory was created in line with Nietzsche's, but developed in greater detail (C. Rothko, 2014).

Health and Healing

Before proceeding to the introduction of the two authors and their main concepts, it is important to give out the concrete definition of what healing is. Both, Jung and Nietzsche speak of health in quite similar terms. Nietzsche addresses health

throughout the book as a state of abundance, plenitude, and creativity. He explains that health occurs when the natural energy of life flows through us. He states that when one is healthy, the dreamlike world of semblance ceases to be, and full awareness arises (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 119). For Nietzsche health is a state of acceptance in which all opposing aspects come together into one. He describes this state of unity, which he addresses as the great health in the following way: ‘‘a child playing in the sand on the beach, wantonly and haphazardly creating individual shapes and forms and then destroying them, taking equal pleasure in both parts of the process’’ (Nietzsche, 1999, p. XXIV). For Nietzsche, health and the process of healing has to do with the unification of all opposing aspects which come into being through the acceptance of creative and destructive phases of life.

Jung makes a very similar point to Nietzsche’s. He explains that health is neither one thing nor the other, but rather the unknown third thing, which is part of the first and second things (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 157). What he tries to explain here is that health does not consist of darkness nor light, but of another third thing which he addresses throughout the book as unity. The unification of the two opposing aspects brings out a different state in which judgements decrease, and a state of acceptance arises. Throughout the book Jung explains that to be healthy, one must accept and become aware of those aspects which have been suppressed. It is only in this way that one can become truly free and healthy. If this does not occur, the un-acknowledged aspects drive one’s life without the person even noticing, this way creating a sense of separation from the world.

Both of these authors point to the idea, that to achieve the great health, it is necessary to integrate those archetypes which are linked to the aspects of oneself that have been neglected. For Nietzsche, those are mainly the traits held by the Dionysian archetype, meanwhile Jung develops a more detailed theory with several archetypes that reside in the collective unconscious. Both of them point to the idea that the aspects which one neglects are those which are considered to be negative. Nietzsche labels those characteristics as Dionysian, meanwhile Jung points to several different archetypes. Jung and Nietzsche agree on the idea that health arises as one becomes aware of his/her own neglected aspects. The practice of integration and acceptance of one’s

neglected characteristics is what is addressed as the healing process. Once one integrates these, one becomes healthy and unified.

Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy

Mark Rothko was greatly influenced by Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. It is not fully certain when he had read the piece, but curator and art historian Franz W. Kaiser points that this might have happened during the times when Rothko was still a student at Yale University: "The fact that painting for Rothko was a form of philosophy begs a closer scrutiny of his interest in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*. In an undated sketch for a lecture on his book he wrote that he had often come back to it. He may have first read it in the early 20's while studying at Yale, when he was not yet involved in painting" (Keiser, n.d. p. 178). Nietzsche's philosophy did not only influence Rothko's philosophical thinking but also the intention with which he produced his paintings

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born on the 15th of October, 1844 in Germany, and died on the 25th of August 1900, in Germany, at the age of 55. He began his career as a philologist and became the youngest who ever held a Chair of Classical Philology at the University of Basel in 1869, at the age of 24. He resigned ten years later due to health problems which plagued him for most of his life. After he stopped working at the University of Basel, Nietzsche became a philosopher. His work has influenced Western philosophy to a great extent, but he only became acknowledged for what he wrote after his death. It seemed to be that his philosophy was ahead of time. At the age of 44, Nietzsche suffered a collapse, and shortly after came a complete loss of his mental faculties. He remained in the care of his mother until her death. After the death of Nietzsche's mother, his sister took care of him until the day he passed (Wikipedia, 2018).

Nietzsche wrote a great amount of works. One of his first books was the "*Birth of Tragedy*" written in 1872. In this book Nietzsche brings forth two main concepts, which are the Dionysian Apollonian. Before going into explaining these concepts, it is important to point out that Nietzsche was greatly influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher born on the 22nd of February 1788 who passed away on the 21st of September 1860 (Wikipedia, 2018). Many concepts which Nietzsche uses in his *Birth of Tragedy* are derived from Schopenhauer. The main idea on which Nietzsche bases

his work is the concept of the Will introduced by Schopenhauer in his book, ‘‘*The World as Will and Representation*’’, written in 1819. The concept of the Will was introduced for the first time by Schopenhauer in the West, but it was already a well-known concept in the East.

Schopenhauer, through his mother (who was an intellectual) had access to a broad range of literature, including books on Eastern esotericism. This can partially explain from where he derived his metaphysical conception. Another concept which Schopenhauer uses is that of the genius, which will be used when explaining Rothko’s position as an artist. It is important to introduce the notions on which Nietzsche bases his theory in order to fully understand his philosophical conception. The concepts of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer will be introduced and used further on to describe the effects of Rothko’s artwork

The Will

The Will is the main concept introduced by Schopenhauer. It refers to the essence of oneself and the universe. Throughout his book, Schopenhauer explains that if one looks deeply enough into oneself, one will discover not only one’s own essence, but also the essence of the universe. This is because one is part of the universe, as everything else is. The basic energies which flow through the universe, also flow through oneself. As one enters into contact with the nature of the universe, one also connects with its ultimate inner being. When the connection to the Will is established, one can experience a pure state of unity (Schopenhauer, 1958).

In the Chapter XLIX, named The Road to Salvation, Schopenhauer explains that ‘‘there is only one inborn error, and that is the notion that we exist in order to be happy. (...) We are nothing more than the will-to-live, and the successive satisfaction of all our willing is what we think through the concept of happiness’’ (Schopenhauer, 1958, p. 634). What Schopenhauer points to is that the meaning of life is to experience it in its fullness, with all of its aspects, not only those which may appear as happy and good at first sight. He explains that to experience all parts of life is to experience the Will itself.

The Genius

Another concept used by Schopenhauer in his *World as Will and Representation* is the *genius*. The genius is that individual who is able to convey the Will through his art. Schopenhauer explains that abstract art is the kind of art which has the ability to directly express the Will. He addresses music as the art which can bring one directly to the Will since it is the most abstract of all arts. Schopenhauer explains that painting, on the other hand is an art of semblance because it does not take one directly to the Will, but rather to a representation of one of its aspects. It is important to point out that the music during Schopenhauer's period was classical. Classical music does contain text, but rather expresses a constantly changing combination of several emotions like a story, this way conveying a much deeper image than what appears to be on the surface. Classical music is similar to modern abstract painting since it has the ability to convey the same message, but this form of creative expression did not exist during the times of Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche's Theory of the Dionysian and Apollonian

Nietzsche bases his aesthetic philosophy on the pillars of Schopenhauer's theory, and links it to the two Greek gods of Tragedy: Dionysius and Apollo. Nietzsche explains that these two gods were the source of Art in ancient Greece. At the beginning only Apollo existed. He was the god of light, purity and order. The Greek only identified with Apollo. All which was not light, pure, and orderly would be exteriorized and denied. After some time, Dionysius was introduced to the Greek culture. He was the god of disorder, chaos, intoxication, and even madness. The introduction of Dionysius made the Greek more acceptant of the darker aspects of human existence (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 28-29).

Nietzsche explains that Apollo is the god of semblance and order which creates limitations and categorizations. On the other hand Dionysius is the god of dream and intoxication which breaks all boundaries. He describes the Dionysian archetype as one which brings together all things that might seem contrary to each other, and illustrates the effects of the Dionysian and Apollonian through the example of the rich aristocrat

and the poor man. Nietzsche explains that the rich aristocrat and the poor man are brought together through Dionysian intoxication meanwhile these two would be drawn further apart in the presence of Apollo, due to its strict order and hierarchy. (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 120). Throughout the text Nietzsche points to the idea that the loss of boundaries and sense of unity are what bring Dionysius closer to the truth, but explains that neither the Dionysian nor the Apollonian archetypes are the truth itself. It is the unification of these archetypes which brings the truth. They are the two major archetypes which may seem as black and white, but they are part of one and the same Will.

Nietzsche, at the beginning of his book describes the healing effect of dreams: “Yet even while this dream-reality is most alive, we nevertheless retain a pervasive sense that it is semblance; only when this ceases to be the case do the pathological effects set in whereby dream no longer enlivens and the healing natural energy of its states ceases” (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 119). What Nietzsche is stating here is that during the time we are in tune with the dream-reality, the Dionysian state of unity, we are being healed by the feeling of oneness. Once we disassociate from the state of unity, consequentially creating a duality, the healing effects stop.

Nietzsche explains that the union of the Dionysian and Apollonian brings a great health. Apollo was already acknowledged by society when Dionysius was introduced. As the Dionysian aspects of life were accepted and synthesized with the Apollonian, the primal unity of life was reconciled. During the Hellenistic period, Apollo and Dionysius coexisted in Greek Tragedy. Tragedy had its healing effect on the population because it would reconcile the opposing aspects of life. Through it, individuals could look at the unfortunate aspects of their life and find acceptance by seeing those through a different lens.

The Will introduced by Schopenhauer is for Nietzsche the sense of unity which arises as the Apollonian and Dionysian are unified. Schopenhauer explains that to experience the Will is to experience all aspects of life. Nietzsche makes the same point through the Dionysian and Apollonian principles. He explains that the unification of this apparent duality is what brings unity, and connects one directly to the Will. To put it in simple terms, it is the acceptance of all aspects of life which creates the sense of unity, connects one to the Will and brings a great health.

Nietzsche explains that the Will reveals itself directly through Dionysian art. He states that Dionysian music “has the power of musical sound to shake us to the core and the quite incomparable world of harmony” (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 122). The Dionysian artist is the genius who is able to convey the wholeness of the Will and send across the message of unity. Those who interact with a Dionysian art piece can pick up those aspects with which they resonate, or can even experience the Will as a whole.

Nietzsche explains that “The Dionysian artist presents the essence of everything that appears in a way that is immediately intelligible, for he has command over the chaos of the Will before it has assumed individual shape, and from it he can bring a new world into being at each creative moment” (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 122).

The Dionysian artist is able to convey a much deeper message through the chaotic spirit of Dionysius in comparison to the Apollonian concepts and labels. Because of this, the Dionysian spirit is expressed with greater accuracy through intuitive means rather than through language, which is formed by concepts and labels. Nietzsche explains that language is highly limiting when it comes to expressing unity. According to him, the Will can be perceived through feeling and not through words. He explains that the two main forms of expression which do not go through language are gesture and musical tone. The main symbol of the Will is harmony, and it is because of this that music and other forms of expression which are not formed by concepts are the best form of expressing it (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 135)

Schopenhauer describes music as the Will itself meanwhile Nietzsche explains that music is a symbol of the Will: “through Dionysian oneness, the essence of nature is being expressed, and so the will, too, demands to be expressed symbolically” (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 138). Nietzsche explains that music has the ability to dissolve the phenomenal world into its original unity. As one is in this state, the veil of appearances disappears and the truth remains (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 136). Even through Nietzsche’s and Schopenhauer’s link between music and the Will differs slightly, their main conception, which is that abstract art has the ability to convey the Will, remains the same.

Jung’s Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

Carl Gustav Jung was born on the 26th of July 1875 in Switzerland, and died on the 6th of June 1961 also in Switzerland, at the age of 85. Jung was not only a doctor and

psychologist but also one of the most important philosophers and psycho-analyticians of the 20th century. He was a student of Sigmund Freud, but took his philosophy of the human psyche a step further. He wrote a series of important works and developed a number of psychological theories. The psychological and aesthetic theories which will be discussed here were addressed by Jung in different volumes of his '*Collected Works*'.

Rothko was acquainted with Jungian psychology, and applied its principles to his artwork (C. Rothko, 2014). Because of this, three main Jungian concepts will be addressed in this chapter together with his aesthetic theory. These will serve as a basis (together with Nietzsche's conceptions) to interpret Rothko's artwork. The first concept is that of the individual unconscious, the second is that of the collective unconscious, and the third is his conception of God. Besides the introduction of these concepts, Jung's aesthetic theory will also be addressed, which is based on his psychological theory.

The Individual unconscious

The theory of the individual unconscious is adopted by Jung from his teacher Freud. He addresses this theory in volume 9 of his '*Collected Works*' named '*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*', written in 1969. Jung explains that the individual conscious and unconscious levels are both part of one's identity. The conscious identity is formed by those thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and memories of which one is aware, meanwhile the unconscious identity is composed by those thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and memories of which one is not aware. The reason for which these become unconscious is because of one's ego. The ego is the essence of one's conscious identity. Those aspects of life with which the conscious identity/ego does not want to identify with are pushed into the unconscious, and those which are accepted and embraced remain in the conscious levels of one's identity. As Jung explains: 'in our subconscious lives the unacknowledged living water, the spirit which does not fit into the mold of our persona' (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 24).

Jung explains that these unconscious aspects lie beneath the persona, which is the mask human beings carry in order to be accepted in society. Individuals carry a mask due to societal norms which are imposed on them. These are composed of standardized ideas on how one should behave (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 288-289). These norms,

consequentially bring out the development of a mask which fits those conventions. Jung also states that facing one's unconscious is difficult. It tests one's courage when meeting with the unpleasant aspects of oneself. Because of this, most people avoid facing their unconscious and rather project their shadow (which is composed of suppressed aspects) out to their environment. Jung points to the importance of acknowledging and facing one's shadow: 'If we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious. The shadow is a living part of the personality and therefore wants to live in some form' (Jung, 1969, vol. 9. 1, p. 20).

The Collective Unconscious

The individual conscious and unconscious levels are the foundation of Jung's theory, but he introduces a new concept which is that of the collective unconscious. He explains that meanwhile the individual unconscious constitutes itself from personal suppressed memories, the collective unconscious does not come from personal experience, but is rather something universal, inherent in everybody. Jung describes it as: '*a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is in every one of us*' (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 4). The main elements of the collective unconscious are archetypes. These can be described as entities which contain those suppressed elements that are common to all human experiences.

As mentioned above, the collective unconscious is a part of the individual psyche, but it can be distinguished from it by the fact that it does not contain personal experience. Meanwhile the personal unconscious is made up of those contents which have once been conscious and then repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been conscious. They are as the basis of human experience, and owe their existence to heredity. Jung explains that the main elements which constitute the collective unconscious are archetypes. These represent certain motifs present in our society and give stance to how we see the world. The traits out of which the archetypes are formed of, are also part of ourselves. Those individuals who carry these traits maintain the archetypes alive in the collective unconscious through themselves (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 42).

Jung states that archetypes are as gods, and explains through the words of Euhemeros that 'the gods were nothing but reflections of human character' (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1,

p. 60). In the same way that the gods are reflections of human character, the archetypes are also a reflection of human traits. There are several kinds of Archetypes, just as there are many gods. The two archetypes to which Jung devotes most of his attention are the anima and animus. He describes these in greater detail throughout the chapter of the ‘*Anima and Animus*’ in his ‘*Researches on the Phenomenology of the Self*’, written in 1969 which is part of volume 9 of his ‘*Collected Works*’. These two archetypes will be addressed to explain in greater detail what the archetypes are, and to show the way our collective and individual unconscious works with more precision.

The anima refers to the feminine traits and the animus to the masculine traits. As individuals we all possess both of these traits regardless of our sex, but depending on it we have a tendency repress the traits with which we do not associate. For women it is usually the masculine traits which are being repressed, meanwhile for the males, there is a tendency to repress the feminine traits. This is not always the case, it can also be that women repress certain feminine traits and men some of their masculine traits depending on the way they have been raised and the way in which they formed their identity (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.2).

In the chapter of ‘*The Anima and Animus*’ Jung explains that it is of great importance to become aware of those traits with which one do not wish to associate. They are also part of one’s identity. If a person associates with being strong and independent which according to Jung are masculine traits, one may have a tendency to not be acceptant of the moments in which one is weak and in need of support from the outside world, this way repressing its anima, which is the feminine archetype. On the other hand, if one is very sensitive and in tune with one’s feeling, which according to Jung are feminine traits, one might not be able to stay strong in the moments life situations require one to do so, this way repressing the animus, which is the masculine archetype (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.2).

These examples illustrate how the individual and collective unconscious are interconnected. Jung explains that ‘*Archetypes are complexes of experience that come upon us like fate, and their effects are felt in our most personal life. The anima no longer crosses our path as goddess, but, it may be as an intimately personal misadventure, or perhaps our best venture*’ (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 30). As Jung explains here, the archetypes are composed by traits which exist within us as well. As

mentioned before, it is ourselves who maintain the archetypes alive by associating with certain traits and suppressing others.

Because of this, it is crucial to become aware of the traits which one suppresses. The more one discards certain aspects, the more they drive one's life unconsciously. They do not only influence the individual in a negative way, but also the people surrounding that person. As one is not aware of those negative ideas about oneself, one projects those outwards, onto the people surrounding them (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 20). To become aware of the archetypes and one's suppressed qualities (which exist within oneself and within the archetypal figure) does not only influence the relationship one has with oneself, and the outside world, but also the way in which one experiences life. As one becomes aware of their suppressed qualities, these cease to be perceived as something negative, but become beneficial for the person.

To become aware of one's suppressed opposite is to become whole, and to become whole is to experience the unity of life without judgements and limitations. Jung describes this state as the state of the God within since it is the state of pure awareness. This happens once one integrates its suppressed aspects and becomes whole. As this occurs, one becomes a conscious creator of its own reality (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 357). The process of becoming aware of one's suppressed aspects is the process of healing. Jung explains that the archetypes do not cease to exist even when one is aware of them, but that once awareness arises, the archetypes, which can be seen as unconscious traits or patterns on an individual and collective level, do not have the power to unconsciously drive one's life (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 280).

Jung's Aesthetic Theory

Jung's aesthetic theory deeply relates to his psychology. In a volume 6 of his '*Collected Works*', named '*Psychological Types*', he explains that aesthetics is deeply related to psychology since it does not deal with the aesthetic essence, but rather with the question of aesthetic attitudes, which according to him is a matter of psychology (Jung, 1971, p. 407). What Jung means here is that aesthetics do not question what beauty is in itself, but rather discusses that which forms the appreciation of those things that are regarded as beautiful, which is a matter of perception, structured by one's psychology. Due to this conception, Jung addresses aesthetics through his psychological theory.

Throughout volume 15 of his ‘*Collected Works*’, named ‘*The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*’, Jung explains his aesthetic theory in greater detail. He bases it on his main concepts of the conscious and unconscious levels of the Self. Jung addresses art as an access point from which unconscious information can be made conscious. He explains that art operates beyond the control of the ego. As mentioned before, the ego is a part of the conscious identity which preserves itself by pushing away all of those things with which it does not want to identify with. When one is creating artwork and connects with the creative flow, one is able to transcend conscious boundaries and become more aware of one self. Jung explains that when an artist is in a creative process, the mind is empty, while thoughts and images from the unconscious flow into awareness (Jung, 1966, p. 281).

Artwork is one of the links which can enable one to bring unconscious information to consciousness. Both of these synthesize and an individual becomes whole. Jung explains that the synthesize of conscious and unconscious information is essential to the process of individuation. As the unconscious aspects of one self are integrated, the person becomes more whole and complex, distinguishable from the rest. But he also points out a very important aspect, which is that the individual who has gone through an individuation process does not become separate from society. What occurs is the contrary. As the individual accepts the suppressed aspects a stronger connection with humanity arises due to the experience of self-acceptance and the compassion which arises from it. As Jung explains it: “Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to oneself” (Jung, 1966, p. 266).

Jung makes two main distinctions in his aesthetic theory. The first one is between a sign and a symbol, and the latter between archetypal and personalistic artwork. The distinction between a sign and a symbol is that a sign is known, meanwhile the symbol is real but unknown. He explains that symbols reside just below the threshold of consciousness. They have no fixed content, but must be intuitively comprehended (Jung, 1966, p. 76). The second distinction between archetypal and personalist artwork is that personalistic artwork only reproduces known entities which may relate to the human condition, but do not give out a new viewpoint, meanwhile archetypal artwork can radically transform individuals and society by bringing new knowledge from the unconscious into awareness. Consequentially the new knowledge modifies the behavior

of those individuals and the way in which they interact with themselves and the outside world (Jung, 1966, p. 89).

Jung explains that archetypal art, enhances the process of gaining new knowledge when seeing or reading the finished work. As mentioned before, both the viewer and the artist enter into a process of flow in which the conscious and unconscious levels begin to merge into one another. Jung explains that during the uncontrolled creative process symbols appear which serve as indicators of certain unconscious content (Jung, 1966, p. 89). He also makes an interesting remark about the artist, which is that he is subordinate to the creative process which produces an unintended art piece, as if the artist enters the creative flow which encompasses a consciousness bigger than himself (Jung, 1966, p. 72-75).

Jung explains that archetypal artwork has the ability to transform individuals, but also to transform society. For him, the creative process brings symbolic forms from the unconscious into reality, this way making individuals more aware. As Jung explains, artwork ‘’ is constantly at work educating the spirit of our age, making it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life’’ (Jung, 1966, p. 82-83). It is important to point out that as the awareness of an individual increases, one becomes a co-creator of existence as unconscious processes do not drive the life of that person anymore. As this occurs, the person becomes one with themselves, or as Jung addresses it, the person meets the God within. (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.1, p. 357)

Synthesis of Nietzsche’s and Jung’s Theory

Even though Nietzsche and Jung use different terminology, they introduce the same issue and propose the same solution. Both of them explain that the main aspect of the healing process is to accept and acknowledge those aspects of ourselves which have been suppressed and rejected. Both of them describe this process through archetypes. As one integrates those archetypes which are unconscious, one sheds a light on them, and consequentially becomes freer when it comes to living life and making decisions. This brings about a great psychological health that induces one with a state of peace, presence and acceptance. Nietzsche and Jung explain that the integration of the rejected aspects does not only affect the individual, their state of awareness, and life experience, but also the world around them. In modern terms of *positive psychology* this state is also addressed as flow. It is a state of being fully immersed in what one is doing, which

is accompanied by full awareness, and a loss of reflective self-consciousness (Wikipedia, 2018)

Nietzsche and Jung place the artist and the artwork in a central place. They serve as the link through which unconscious information can be made conscious. Both make a distinction between the artist who connects to the creative source and brings new information, and the artist who only reproduces information which is already known. Nietzsche addresses the artist who brings about a sense of unification as the “genius”, meanwhile Jung addresses the type of artwork as “archetypal”. Both of them explain that the artist connects to a higher form of consciousness. Jung addresses this state as the God within, meanwhile Nietzsche takes Schopenhauer’s term of the Will. As the artist connects to the creative flow and expresses it in the artwork, those who see the artwork are given the opportunity to have the same experience of unification as the artist had when he created it.

The theoretical basis for the interpretation of Rothko’s artwork has been laid out in this chapter. The upcoming chapter will address several experiences which people have had in the Chapel together with Christopher’s interpretation of his father’s artwork. The last chapter will tie Christopher’s interpretation together with the theoretical framework presented in this chapter. These two conceptions will serve as a basis to give an answer to the main research question which is whether Rothko’s artwork has the capacity to heal.

Chapter Four: Experiences in the Chapel and the Interpretation of Rothko’s Artwork

Experiences

This part of the chapter will focus on the experiences which individuals have had when visiting the Chapel. The central light will be on the experience of Rothko’s son named Christopher, who was born in 1963 and has studied his father’s work in great detail. To have a broad representation, some experiences and viewpoints of random individuals will be presented. Then the perspective of Suna Umari, a woman who has worked in the Chapel for about 30 years will be portrayed, continuing with the experience and viewpoint of Dominique de Menil, one of the commissioners of the Chapel. Finally, the

experience of Christopher Rothko will be illustrated in greater detail followed by the interpretation of his father's artwork.

John Seed, a writer and curator wrote a blog entry named "At the Rothko Chapel: Art, Meditation, and Reverence" (Huffingtonpost, 2012). The entry gives stance to several experiences of individuals who visited the Rothko Chapel, including his own. Seed shows a great deal of skepticism when it comes to the chapel being a space that can bring out a spiritual experience. In his post, he shows prejudice against the church and religion. He equates the meditative spiritual effects of the Chapel with religious practice: "then again, maybe meditation and prayer are closer than one might expect (...) for many of us, art galleries and museums are as close to the church as we will get".

John's perspective is understandable, spirituality revolves around the unified experience of life, which is the central theme of all religions, but the Rothko Chapel goes far beyond religious dogma. It expresses oneness which is a central theme in all religions. In those, there are all kinds of rules on how to live life in accordance to the unity which is addressed in different ways depending on the religion. The Rothko Chapel, on the other hand, opens a space in which one can connect to the unity which religion addresses as well, without tying it to a dogma and experiencing it as it is. Rina Arya, who wrote a piece named "*The Spiritual in Rothko*", addresses Rothko's abstract work as being "designed to transport the viewer beyond the mundane, not to a transcendent reality but rather to an awareness of the reality of bare existence" (Arya, 2016, p. 332). What this means is that the unity which Rothko was aiming to depict is not something which goes beyond this reality, but is rather an inherent part of it.

Seed explains that Rothko's artwork has been addressed as a doorway to the spiritual, but that "there is a growing trend to see modern art — especially abstract art — as a spiritual gateway." Regardless of the skepticism and prejudice, the author decides to give the Chapel a try. He does not write directly about his own experience, but he does address the experience and ideas of Dominique de Menil, one of the commissioners of the Chapel, and the experience of a random visitor Jessica who wrote in the guest book.

The author quotes a statement of Dominique de Menil from 1977 in which she offers her viewpoint on the art piece: "The Rothko Chapel is oriented towards the sacred, and yet it imposes no traditional environment. It offers a place where a common orientation

could be found — an orientation towards God, named or unnamed, an orientation towards the highest aspirations of Man and the most intimate calls of the conscience”¹. This quote explains in greater detail why the Chapel is not just a religious space, but rather as Dominique addresses it, a space which is oriented towards the highest conscious aspirations, in which all religions are welcome. Seed also brings out the experience of a visitor named Jessica, who wrote down her experience in the guestbook of the Chapel in 1988: “these paintings are the colors I see when I close my eyes at night, I feel grief, a grave sense of loss... then exhilaration and calm”.

A blog entry titled “*Meditation and Modern Art Meet in the Rothko Chapel*”² describes the interpretation and experience of Suna Umari, a woman who has been working at the Chapel for 30 years. The author of the entry, spoke to Suna Umari who explained, that the people who came to the Chapel seemed to feel at home: “People feel it's their place. They come, and they have a problem, and they cry in this space. If you look at the comment books, they make comments to each other as though this was their personal little diary” (Npr, 2011).

The author provides Suna’s interpretation and experience of the Chapel. She states that looking at the paintings is like looking beyond the material world into the depth of the universe. From far away, the paintings seem only one color, but when one looks close, one can see there are different shades of the same color spread over the canvas, this way creating a sense of depth, as if one was looking into the infinite. Suna also tells the story of the couple who visits the chapel every six months. Suna explains that the first time she saw the couple they must have had a fight since the woman continued to ignore the man when he sat next to her. But Suna explains that, “they whispered to each other, and pretty soon they made up.” When the couple came out, the man wrote a love declaration in the comment book, and the woman wrote a love declaration back. This example shows how Rothko’s Chapel brings people together through the sense of oneness in which there is no separation between individuals.

The author gives out a quote of Christopher Rothko regarding his spiritual experience in the Chapel: “*You walk into this chapel and you know that it has been sanctified by the prayers of the people. There is something you feel in the chapel that tells you it is a*

¹ The author does not provide a reference to this quote.

² The author of the blog entry is unknown.

holy space''³. Christopher did not visit the Chapel until the age of 33, but once he entered, he experienced a deep encounter with himself. This chapter will devote a larger part on the experience of Cristopher Rothko who describes it himself at the lecture he gave during the year 2014, at the Saint Luis Art Museum. The lecture is posted on YouTube and titled as '*Mark Rothko and the Inner World*'.

Cristopher begins his lecture by pointing out that those who do not like the Chapel speak of it as an empty and cold space. He does not discard these opinions and states that the viewers are correct and accurate when describing their experience, but that the reason they have such an experience is because there is something missing. What is missing is not something in the chapel, but rather the person itself. Cristopher explains nothing comes from the paintings on their own. It only occurs when there is an interaction between the painting and the viewer. He then proceeds to describing his personal experience which was similar to the experience of those people who felt nothing. He spent two hours alone in the Chapel before opening time. Everything was silent and he felt isolated, like a tiny spec in the universe. He felt a compulsion to leave but resisted it.

After a while, he figured that he was not uncomfortable with the paintings or the space, but with himself. He felt that he was standing in a space filled with dark mirrors, all reflecting back on himself. As he turned inward and looked at himself he learned about what he saw. He does not go into the aspects of himself about which he had learned, but describes the experience as deeply rewarding, but nerving. Cristopher then draws a parallel of this experience with one that he had at the Tate Gallery in London at a Louise Bourgeois exposition during the year 2000 with the artwork 'I do, I undo, and I redo'. There were towers with a spiral staircase and four mirrors on top. Once he climbed the staircase, he could look at the different perspectives of the hall, but when he stood at the center of the mirror, he could only see four different perspectives of himself. Cristopher explains that this art piece was more playful than the chapel and less overwhelming, but sending the same message: to look within for the answers to the questions one has about life and reality.

Cristopher Rothko explains that the Chapel made plainly clear what is present in all Rothko's: "they yield only what you put in." The paintings speak to one's inner world

³ The author does not provide a reference for this quote

when one is open to their suggestion. If one is not open, then the experience is empty, plane, and even discomfoting. Cristopher concludes by stating that “to understand a Rothko is to understand what the painting helps us see in ourselves.”

Christopher’s interpretation of Rothko’s Artwork

This chapter will entirely be based on Cristopher’s lecture on the interpretation of Rothko’s artwork mentioned above. The curator of the museum, Simon Kelly presents Cristopher Rothko. Christopher was born in 1963, as the second born child of Mark and Mary Alice Rothko, seven years before his father’s death.

Cristopher received a bachelor degree in Literature at Yale University and studied his father’s work for 25 years. He got his doctorate in psychology at the University of Michigan and has worked as a clinical psychologist since then. Cristopher has a broad range of interests and is also a music critic, he wrote pieces on his father’s art, and is the editor of his father’s philosophical writings: “*The Artist’s reality: Philosophy of Art*”. Cristopher helped prepare more than 2000 Rothko exhibitions and has a great amount of knowledge on his father’s art. Even though Rothko was in Cristopher’s life only until the age of 7, Christopher seems to know him well. The interpretation of his father’s artwork seems to be very precise and in tune with what Rothko said about his own art. It is important to point out that Cristopher’s profession is dedicated to analyze the psyche of individuals which also contributes to the accuracy of his interpretation.

Cristopher Rothko explains that the work of his father, since the beginning was not about drawing attention to a specific character, but rather to depict the human condition which refers to the emotional factor that is common to the human experience. The difference between the earlier figurative works and the later sublime works is not as much in the content, but rather in the form of depicting it. As Cristopher explains, his father liberated himself from the figure of the myth to be able to take a step further in depicting the truth of existence through abstraction. During his sublime period, Rothko was depicting basic human emotions meanwhile in the chapel, he achieved to depict the whole field of consciousness.

Christopher explains that his father’s paintings are as gateways through which one can enter one’s internal space, “they express the inexpressible and invite us to look within”. This comes into play especially with the sublime period when Rothko

perfects his work and creates a much more direct experience for the viewers through its abstraction. In the sublime period Rothko begins to paint on a much larger scale with the intention to confront the viewer directly with the painting. Christopher points out two main elements in the new form of painting. These are nebulosity and action. The nebulosity creates a dreamlike state in which nothing is tangible meanwhile the action consists of change. The movement and dynamic of color represents the kinetic energy of emotions which are constantly shifting and transforming. Christopher points out that Rothko does not say what he shows in his paintings: one must make sense of it through one's own psychological processes.

Christopher explains that in the Chapel, Rothko takes his technique even a step further. In the Chapel, Rothko does not depict basic human emotions anymore, but rather the whole field of consciousness. Here, color is still an important aspect, but it becomes darker, formed by several layers of color. The layering represents different emotional sheets out of which one's emotional self is formed. According to Christopher, this technique gives the access to one's whole field of emotions. The space during the sublime period, and in the Chapel was designed in a way to evoke meditative experiences through which one can delve within. It is important to point out, that the space design was taken even a step further in the Chapel since it is not just a part of an exhibition in a museum, but rather a whole architectural piece dedicated to induce a meditative state.

Christopher explains that Rothko's intention was to depict those emotions which form the basis of human existence but are experienced differently by each individual. According to Christopher, his father's paintings work as a doorway through the collective human condition into the specific and personal experience. Rothko referred to his paintings as dramas since they had to do with interaction and feeling. Without those two aspects, the viewer will not experience the painting, but will only see a distant piece of art. Christopher explains that the interaction between the painting and the viewer stirs the inner world of an individual.

It is because of this, that many individuals, when confronted with Rothko's later work cry. Christopher explains that this occurs due to the tragic content. It is not that the paintings are sad themselves. Tears do not necessarily represent sadness. They show that something in the inner world of the individuals has been moved. As Christopher

explains, tears come from a place before thought, which mainly indicates meaning, and not necessarily sadness. As people delve into the painting, they pick out that with which they relate to. Christopher points out to an important aspect of Rothko's paintings, which is that not all people have these intense experiences when confronted with his father's art. Some people do not feel anything. But as Christopher explains, this is only a confirmation that Rothko communicates on a deeper level. The people who do not experience anything when confronted with Rothko's work are those who are not prepared to look within. They do not want to have their emotions stirred up.

According to Christopher, Rothko did not want his viewers to see the painting as the other, but rather as something directly linked to the self. Rothko was creating the artwork in such a way that it would directly speak to the viewer about their own inner world. As mentioned before, Rothko depicted the tragedy of human emotion. To illustrate what is meant by tragedy, Christopher gives the example of feeling pleasure and pain or smiling and crying at the same time. Both of these aspects are the basic underlying feelings of human existence, which are not either positive or negative, they simply are. Christopher explains that the tragedy of human existence is universal. The paintings depict this universal human experience and evoke something personal in the viewer.

Christopher Rothko explains that his father was probably influenced by Jung. In his early period, Rothko painted the mythological/dreamlike world beneath emotion, meanwhile in his later work he was able to directly express those feelings or states of consciousness without figure. This way Rothko enabled himself to communicate in a more direct form. In his lecture, Christopher stated that Rothko's paintings "touch us because they know exactly where we live". Through their universality, they enable us to delve within ourselves and feel what is present in the moment.

Christopher explains that Rothko found his universal language in color. The classical works are composed by several different colors fading into each other, meanwhile the paintings in the chapel are composed by colors of a similar tone. These are layered over each other as a symbol of one's emotional complexity. Christopher points to another main difference between the art in the chapel and the previous sublime work. Both styles are designed in such a way to make one look within and see oneself, but in the (previous) sublime work, the paintings indicate where to look meanwhile in the chapel

there is no indication. This is because in the previous work Rothko depicted specific human emotions meanwhile in the paintings of the Chapel, Rothko depicted the whole field of consciousness. The paintings in the Chapel work as a mirror. When one interacts with them, one can see all of those aspects of which one is aware, together with those aspects of which one is unaware. Cristopher stated that the chapel was the culmination of Rothko's art exactly because of this. In the series of the Chapel there is no more guidance towards where to look. The paintings are just as a mirror that can take us to the depths of ourselves.

Cristopher explains that the paintings in the Chapel strip away more layers, and the content becomes more specific since the viewer has to put in more of its own emotional input. As mentioned before, the paintings of the chapel serves as a mirror to see oneself. There are individuals who see the Chapel as cold, but Cristopher affirms that this happens because they forget to bring themselves. The space is designed in a calm and quiet way so that those who enter are able to go within with even more ease.

In both of these two abstract periods, the paintings and space is created in such a way that it enables one to look within. One might wonder how was Rothko's later work able to depict something universal and through it evoke an individual experience. One also might wonder whether there is any specific content in the paintings or the viewer is just making it up. Cristopher gives an answer to these questions. He explains that the truth lies in the interaction between the painting and its viewer. Rothko's intention was to depict those basic emotions which are universal to all humanity. These basic emotions result in many alterations, hybrids or modifications depending on the viewer, but nevertheless it is the same basic emotion that one is experiencing. Cristopher explains that Rothko's paintings contain volumes of information, and that meaning comes when an individual interacts with the painting through its own volumes of information.

Chapter Five: Rothko's Chapel and its Capacity to Heal

This last chapter will address the main question of my thesis which is whether Rothko's artwork has the capacity to heal. To be able to answer this question, the main ideas conveyed throughout Nietzsche's *"Birth of Tragedy"* and Jung's *"Collected Works"* will be addressed once again, together with Rothko's intention and Christopher's interpretation of his father's artwork which he transmitted during his lecture at the Saint

Luis Art Museum in 2014. The main ideas which have been addressed several times before will not be referenced again since these can be found in the previous chapters, meanwhile the direct quotations and new ideas will be provided with a source. Then the concepts of Nietzsche and Jung will be linked together with Christopher's interpretation and Rothko's intention to answer the main question of my thesis which is whether Rothko's Chapel has the capacity to heal.

First of all it is important to remember some of the concepts already introduced in the previous chapters, beginning with the central theme of my thesis which is emotional healing. Healing in this case refers to a psychological process. Both Jung and Nietzsche address this process as the unification of those aspects which are perceived as opposite. Nietzsche addresses these two opposing aspects as the Dionysian and Apollonian, meanwhile Jung gives a more detailed philosophical description. Jung's philosophical thought can also be broken down into two main archetypes that can be named as the Dionysian and Apollonian, even though he does not address them as such. The Apollonian can be seen as those aspects of oneself which one accepts, embraces, and considers as correct, meanwhile the Dionysian can be seen as those parts of oneself which one rejects, and considered to be wrong. Both of the authors explain that health arises when the aspects which one accepts are unified with those which one rejects. Jung's explains that if one considers oneself to be strong, one must also accept the moments in which one is weak. If this does not occur, one is unable to psychologically cope with certain situations. Both Nietzsche and Jung explain that as one embraces the neglected aspects of oneself, one does not become both dark and light, but rather another third thing, which can be addressed as the acceptance of that which is without judgement. Both authors agree that as this comes into being, one becomes healthy and whole.

Both authors address the same third thing which can be referred to as unity. Jung explains that as unification takes place, the God within arises. Nietzsche addresses this same idea as the Will. To understand this in greater detail, it is important to remember the main concepts which are introduced by Nietzsche and Jung. Nietzsche explains that reality is composed by two main archetypes, the Dionysian and the Apollonian. The Apollonian is that which appears as light, orderly and good, meanwhile the Dionysian is that which is perceived as dark, chaotic, and bad. Both of these archetypes exist within every aspect of reality. He explains that in Greek society, and also during

modern times, there is a tendency to discard the Dionysian, but that in Ancient Greece, tragedy brought these two together. Due to this, Nietzsche devotes more attention to the Dionysian since the message he tries to convey is that this archetype also serves its purpose and can be good on the individual and collective level. The Dionysian, may appear as dark and chaotic, but it also has its positive aspects. Nietzsche explains that the Dionysian has the capacity to break boundaries and bring people together through its intoxication and chaos, meanwhile the Apollonian, even though it may appear as light and orderly, brings people further apart due to its categorizations and judgements. Nietzsche makes a very important point which is that neither of these two archetypes are the truth itself, but that the unification of these two is what connects one to the truth. He addresses the truth as the Will and explains that a great health arises when one allows the Will to fully flow within oneself. The Will is that energy which is universal and part of everything. It is unity in itself.

Jung addresses the same issue, through a similar manner, but explains it in greater detail. Jung divides the human psyche into two main areas which are the conscious and the unconscious. The conscious levels are those elements of which one is aware, meanwhile the unconscious levels consist of those aspects of which one is unaware. He explains that the unconscious is divided into two parts. One is the collective unconscious and the other is the individual unconscious, but both of them are connected to each other. The collective unconscious consists of archetypes, which are collective repressed ideas of the world and oneself, meanwhile the individual unconscious consists of individual repressed memories and emotions. That which one suppresses on the individual level is also suppressed on the collective level and manifested through archetypes. The archetypes can be seen as entities which consist of certain traits or patterns that have been pushed away. An example of these can be the masculine and feminine archetype. The masculine archetype consists of those traits and patterns which are expected to be there for men, meanwhile the feminine archetype consists of those patterns which are supposed to be there for women. Throughout his '*Collected Works*', Jung emphasizes the importance of integrating those aspects with which one does not wish to identify with, and explains that as one integrates their masculine and feminine traits, together with all other opposing aspects, (since there are several archetypes), one is able to open up and experience the sense of unity, which he addresses as the God within.

Both Jung and Nietzsche point out that to experience a sense of unity is to experience the great health. They both explain that this process does not only occur on an individual level, but also on a collective level. As one become more aware of their personal suppressed aspects, one becomes less judgmental of others, and more willing to make the right decisions for oneself. As this occurs, society transforms as well, since the behavior of each individual influences it. Also, as one person behaves in a positive way, it is very likely that the person who is in contact with that (positive) person, begins to shift their form of behavior, this way influencing humanity on a collective level through the individual level. Jung explains that as one becomes more aware of one's own suppressed aspects, one also stops projecting those to the environment, which results in a healthier and happier relationship with oneself and with the world.

Both authors also address the artist. Nietzsche and Jung explain that there are two types of artists. The first is one that merely reproduces the elements of which he is conscious, meanwhile the second brings out something much deeper and unknown. The artist of interest for both authors and myself is the artist who has the ability to bring out something new and deep. Nietzsche addresses this type of artist as the genius, meanwhile Jung addresses the type of artwork as archetypal. The authors again describe the same process through different words. Nietzsche explains that the genius is that artist who is able to connect to the Will and bring out new information from the formless world. He points out that abstraction is the form of art which is able to convey the Will. Jung on the other hand, explains that archetypal artwork brings out information from the collective unconscious into consciousness. He explains that the artist who is able to bring out a new message has to be connected to the collective unconscious, and allow for those aspects which reside in it to flow outwards. Since the collective unconscious is eternal and resides within everybody, those who see the art are able to have the same experience as the artist had when he was in the creative process.

To understand the effect of Rothko's artwork and see whether it has the capacity to emotionally heal individuals, it is important to also bring in Rothko's intention together with the interpretation of his son Christopher. In chapter two of my thesis, a statement of Rothko has been pointed out in which he explains that the intention of his artwork was always to depict basic human emotions and bring out that which is common to all human experience. This is something that is visible throughout all of his artistic

periods. As Christopher points out in his lecture, Rothko's artistic expression was not about aesthetics, but about finding the way to convey a deeper message of unity. Christopher describes and interprets Rothko's artistic periods to illustrate this. In his first artistic period, Rothko was depicting the underlying common energy of existence through everyday life. He was depicting places such as the subway or everyday streets, but the way in which he painted those was out of the ordinary. Through his use of form and color one can perceive the emotion of those spaces. Then, in his mythological period, Rothko began to depict the underlying and unchanging energy of existence through myths. It is possible that during this time Rothko encountered Nietzsche's *'Birth of Tragedy'* and found a new way of expressing himself through his philosophy. Later on in his surrealist phase, Rothko began to depict elements from the collective and individual unconscious, again conveying that which is common to all human experience. This period served as the transition phase between his earlier works which still contained form, and the fully abstract works which came later.

The first phase in his abstract artwork was the multiform. In this period Rothko was still figuring out how to convey his message through abstraction. He stopped depicting form and began to depict the energy of emotions. According to Christopher, Rothko did not reach his full potential yet, but after this period, he found his form of expression. The abstract sublime works which came after this phase are nowadays addressed as his classic works. In this phase, Rothko found his way of depicting the underlying energy of existence but was still focusing on depicting specific human emotions. As time passed, he got an opportunity which according to Christopher was his dream: to create a chapel designed for contemplation. The paintings which he created for the Chapel took his message even a step further. These paintings did not only convey the underlying energy of specific emotions, but depicted consciousness as a whole. His son Christopher explains that the space and the paintings hold the potential to bring out the repressed aspects of oneself, but whether that occurs depends on the viewer. If one opens up to the space and interacts with the paintings, these can bring out intense spiritual experiences which produce a sense of unity or oneness, but if the person does not open up, the space may seem empty. Christopher explains that this only proves the potential of his father's artwork since the space only gives out what the viewer gives in. Due to this reason, Rothko was incredibly specific on how the artworks should be

exhibited since the meaning of his paintings lies in the interaction between the art piece and the viewer.

As mentioned above, Rothko achieved to depict the whole field of consciousness, which can also be addressed as unity. If one links Rothko's artistic process with the theories of Nietzsche and Jung, one can observe many common points. Taking into account the artist's statements and the effects of his paintings, Rothko can be seen as the genius who creates archetypal art. Rothko, (in an interview with Seldon Rodman described in chapter two), explained that he creates his artwork while having an intense spiritual experience. He stated that the people who break down and cry when they engage with his artwork are having the same spiritual experience as he had when he painted it. Through the terms of Nietzsche, Rothko can be seen as the genius who is able to convey the Will through his art, meanwhile in Jungian terms, he can be seen as the archetypal artist who brings out elements from the collective unconscious, this way enhancing his own awareness and the awareness of those who engage with his artwork. As he experiences a sense of unity while painting, he conveys the same feeling to the viewers. That is because unity is a common aspect of all human existence. Rothko's paintings have the ability to open the door to the collective unconscious which is pre-existent and inherent in everybody. The main elements of the collective unconscious are archetypes (such as the Dionysian and Apollonian). As Rothko depicts unity, he opens the door to full consciousness in which one faces those aspects that have been suppressed. These reside on the collective and individual level. As the suppressed aspects are lifted up, one has the capacity to unite them with those parts which have already been embraced in the past, this way becoming whole and healthy.

As Rothko depicted unity, the potential of his artwork to heal became even greater since he was not only depicting specific human emotions such as judgement, guilt, or joy which all have their opposite, but depicted the whole field of consciousness through which a person can heal any aspect that needs to be reconciled. For each individual the interaction with Rothko's artwork is different since the aspects that need healing differ depending on the person, but the aspect of bringing up that which has been neglected, rejected, and addressed as something negative remains the same in every individual who decides to open up and engage with the paintings. Rothko's artwork, specifically the Chapel has a great potential to heal. As Rothko conveys the Will through his art, he brings out the same feeling of oneness within the viewer. As the suppressed aspects are

lifted up, one can experience the unity of existence which Nietzsche addresses as the Will and Jung as the God within. It is important to point out that these terms are not religious, but rather spiritual or philosophical. Here, the term God Refers to full consciousness and the ability to create and steer life in the direction that one wants to. As one lifts up the suppressed aspects of one self, one becomes fully conscious, and able to create its own reality without limitations.

If one is willing to open up in the Rothko Chapel, one has the opportunity to lift up the suppressed aspects of oneself, this way becoming healed and whole. If one does not open up, the healing does not take place. The Chapel holds the potential, but the incentive has to come from the individual. It is also important to point out that healing is a process which takes time, but the more healed one is, the more one becomes a conscious creator of one's reality. Jung explains this in the following terms: "the self, on the other hand, is a God image, or at least cannot be distinguished from one. The Christians were aware of this, that is why Clement of Alexandria said, that he who knows himself, knows God" (Jung, 1969, vol. 9.2, p. 22). What Jung is trying to say here is that we contain unity within ourselves. The more we lift up the suppressed aspects of ourselves, the more whole and God-like we become.

A final aspect which is important to address is something which both Rothko and Nietzsche touch upon. As mentioned in chapter two, Rothko did not want to communicate through written word. He wanted to express his ideas without the use of language. The reason for this can be found in Nietzsche's *'Birth of Tragedy'*. Nietzsche explains that language can be very limiting when it comes to conveying the Will, and that the Will can be understood with more precision through other intuitive means rather than through language. This is because language is shaped by concepts and labels, meanwhile the feeling of oneness goes far beyond these. Due to this, Nietzsche, as a concluding thought in his *'Birth of Tragedy'*, states that unity can only be understood by those who have experienced it (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 138), meanwhile Rothko in an interview described in chapter two, explains that his artwork can only be understood by those who can relate to it. Rothko's intention throughout his artistic development was to depict the deepest layers of existence and transmit the experience of unity. As it has been shown throughout these chapters, Rothko succeeded in his mission and then, as the tragic artist he was, committed suicide.

Conclusion

Throughout these chapters, Rothko's life and the progression of his artwork has been addressed in order to illustrate how the artist achieved his final aim of depicting unity. His form of expression passed through many phases, but the intention remained the same: to depict the underlying energy of existence. Rothko began his artistic career by depicting basic human emotions, and ended it by depicting the wholeness of reality. The theories of Nietzsche and Jung have served as a basis to interpret Rothko's artwork since he was deeply influenced by them. Also, the interpretation of his artwork done by his son Christopher, who has studied his father's artwork in great detail, has been provided. To enhance the credibility of these theories and illustrate the effects of the Chapel, some examples of people who visited the space have been described.

This information has been provided to answer the main question, which is whether Rothko's Chapel has the ability to bring emotional healing. Both Jung and Nietzsche describe healing as a sense of unification of those aspects which have already been accepted with those that have been neglected. Both of them explain that the acceptance of one's suppressed aspects brings a great psychological health. Christopher, who is also a psychologist describes his experience at the Chapel in line with Nietzsche's and Jung's theories. He explained that as he opened up to the paintings of the Chapel, many facets of himself that he was unaware of rose into awareness. He stated that the experience of facing his suppressed aspects was difficult, but deeply rewarding.

Jung's and Nietzsche's theories together with the experiences and interpretation of Christopher show that Rothko's Chapel has a great capacity to heal individuals. But as Christopher points out, the healing only takes place if the viewer opens up to it. When describing his experience, he explains that at the beginning he did not feel anything except a sense of emptiness, but he also points out that as he opened up to the space, many things arose. For Christopher, this was proof for the deep message that the artwork of his father contains. In his abstract sublime artwork, Rothko depicted basic human emotions, but he took this idea even a step further in the Chapel, where he depicted the wholeness of existence. As the viewer interacts with the paintings of the Chapel, the aspects which are suppressed rise up, and reward one with a sense of oneness and unification. The Chapel holds a great potential to heal, but whether this occurs depends on the viewer. If one opens up and interacts with the paintings, one will

most probably experience the healing process of unification, but if one does not open up, then one will may not experience anything at all, except a discomfoting feeling of emptiness. As Christopher Rothko points out in his lecture, the paintings only give out what the spectator puts in.

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Figure 2: *Interior* (n.d). Rothko Chapel. Huston, Texas, USA. Retrieved from: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/rothko-chapel>

Figure 3: *Floorplan* (n.d.). Rothko Chapel. Huston, Texas, USA. Retrieved from: http://vidal.genevieve.pagesperso-orange.fr/rothko/eng/cnt_12.htm

Figure 4: *Events* (n.d). Rothko chapel. Huston, Texas, USA. Retrieved from: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/artist-chapels>