

Animate/Inanimate: The Reanimated Ghosts of Anima/Animus

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Life. Death. Rebirth. Animation. Reanimation.

Sacred sites are always wrapped up in the fundamental mysteries of life and death, with promises of rebirth or a new eternal life equally marked with gravestones and epitaphs of what and who had been. And yet, underpinning this is a yearning for a transcendental experience – for an ethereal, haunting or otherworldly occurrence that gives affirmation of the supernatural.

Set on the imposing grounds of Winchester Cathedral, *Anima/Animus* – the new multimedia performance piece from Wilson-Eflerova – attempts to invoke this unearthly experience by re-enacting the past through the medium of film, a medium that has only available to us in the relative present. Combining performance, video and the sculptural form, the piece reprises history through mythology, and makes human that which was once fable.

On entering the area, the sense of space is overwhelming: ceilings so high they are almost out of sight, and stones that mark the names and histories of Winchester's most illustrious residents of times gone by. One commemorates two sisters who lay side-by-side, reading, "As close as their hearts could be in death as they were in life."

Situated behind a black onyx sarcophagus, a screen imitating one of the cathedral's arched windows displays a woman in dowdy brown 13th century dress. She stares intensely at the viewer, threatening to raise a blindfold to her face. Her anguish is apparent, as though she is being forced to raise the blind by an unknown force and end the gaze she desperately wants to keep. Then, before the blindfold cuts the concentrated stare, a flash of light highlights a solitary stream running from her eye. She is crying, but it is too late to console her. Blindfolded, she fades from sight – as we presumably fade from hers – and disappears.

A woman in white replaces her, looking wistful, powerful, happy. She invites us to pray, worship and be empowered. She welcomes you to the screen. She becomes a moving stained glass window, pouring in a mystical, natural light and is, in fact, made purely from the light projected onto this surface. She looks to us with love and one returns her affection purely by gazing upon her. She revels in the exchanged glance.

What has just been witnessed is Helena Eflerova's performance of the mythical figures Ecclesia and Synagoga – in Latin meaning 'church' and 'synagogue' respectively. Originally, these two figures were used to illustrate the medieval Christian belief that Jesus – as the Jewish messiah – made Judaism as a religion unnecessary and that all Jews should have converted. Synagoga is portrayed as a defeated woman, often blindfolded and with a broken lance, while Ecclesia is heroic, almost angelic and often regal in her portrayals.

Wilson-Eflerova reimagine these mystical characters as women who were once alive – and allow them to live again. The tortured, agonising Synagoga and the majestic presence of Ecclesia come from one woman – Eflerova – just as Judaism and Christianity came from one religion. This is the crux of the Jungian principle of the *anima*: that these empowered female

psyches have the potential to emerge and be embodied in all of us, while the figures also channel the highest level of *animus* – becoming mediators of a kind of spiritual profundity. They are a connection point between both our suffering and our higher mystical selves.

The forms of the sculptures in Winchester Cathedral that inspired the performance of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* may or may not have been formed from the bodies of real women, but Wilson-Eflerova make the two idols seem as though they could have once been living. *Synagoga* takes on the struggles and persecution of a beaten and defeated woman, perhaps one who has been oppressed and forsaken by the patriarchy of the church. *Ecclesia* focuses this patriarchal energy and embodies the mother, the healer and the goddess.

The screen becomes the supernatural veil between life and death itself – the object that prevents us from completing a heavenly transcendental experience. *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* are both present and absent, living and long dead. We feel a connection, but the connection is limited, distanced, detached. We cannot step through the screen and rescue *Synagoga* from her inevitable plight, nor provide her with aid, just as *Ecclesia*'s being cannot be made flesh by our touch. They remain, as ever, ghosts that fade, revive and repeat their actions for eternity, inevitably diminished to the blackness from which they came after each citation of their action.

Though *Anima/Animus* directly references Jung, the title of the work also hints at performance's mystical ability to *animate*: that performance has a numinous quality that re-enacts and re-animates that which was once living. The original sculptures were given life by a mason's hands, perhaps even by the posing of a muse. Turned into stone, the sculpture's performance becomes stuck in a recursive loop throughout the centuries, performing the same gesture over and over. The loop is then broken by Wilson-Eflerova, re-imagined and re-constructed as performance to camera and put in another loop that we can witness in the present. This relationship, from life to stone to life once more, is strengthened and completes a cyclical ritual within the cathedral's sacred surroundings.

The question between what is animate and what is inanimate within the cathedral is raised. The surrounding sculptures become complicit in this act of living death – all performing their own presence and yet marking their absence simultaneously. The great structure of the building itself becomes a monument to that which has now disappeared, a landmark to those who have passed through and are enclosed within.

Anima/Animus hovers between these boundaries of liveness and mediated, spiritual and logical, life and death, and reality and myth. And, with its setting in 'sanctified' space, takes on a whole new powerful dimension that shows how contemporary art can not only comment on religion and its historiography, but enrich it with re-interpretation and re-enactment, affirming both a sense of the impermanence of life and invoking the phenomenological feeling of transcendence.