

Ruth White's Research for Art Blog

Research for my work during the Artist Teacher M A and currently for the MRes in Art and Design (Sep 2009 – Sep 2012)

Sigmund Freud – Psychological Projection

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“Projecting our problems onto other people”

Psychological projection is the phenomenon whereby one projects one's own thoughts, motivations, desires, feelings, and so on onto someone else (usually another person, but psychological projection onto animals, parents, children, neighbors, other drivers, political figures, racial groups, states and countries, also occurs).

According to the theories of Sigmund Freud, psychological projection is a psychological defense mechanism whereby one “projects” one's own undesirable thoughts, motivations, desires, feelings, and so on onto someone else (usually another person, but psychological projection onto animals and inanimate objects also occurs). The principle of projection is well-established in psychology.

An illustration would be an individual who feels dislike for another person, but whose unconscious mind does not allow them to become aware of this negative emotion. Instead of admitting to themselves that they feel dislike for someone, they project their dislike onto him, so that the individual's conscious thought is not “I don't like Bob,” but “Bob doesn't seem to like me or I do not like that certain behavior that Bob does.”

It is “the operation of expelling feelings or wishes the individual finds wholly unacceptable – too shameful, too obscene, too dangerous – by attributing them to another”.

Projection concerns externalizing the issues that we need to deal with ourselves. Usually we project onto others issues and problems that we need to address within ourselves, or are unable to manage properly. Projection is irresponsible behavior as we dump our problem onto somebody else. We justify these projections by blaming someone or something outside for the emotions we do not want to feel. We project our disappointments and problems onto other people, it is somehow their fault, we become a blamer. Ultimately it is the person who projects that loses, as they never really sort out their own problems.

You've seen parents raging at their children demanding they meet requirements the parent has failed to achieve themselves. This is projection. The parent trains the child to do all the negative behaviors the parent has repressed for a lifetime. If the parent has a problem with addiction they will rage at the child until the child becomes addicted too. They see their own behavior mirrored back in the child and then rage against their own projection trying to get the child to change what they are not yet willing change and face in themselves. We try to change everything outside us when we are not willing to go inside and do the work we need to do to change ourselves. You see this with so called progressives. They try to change everything in the world rather than do their own inner work.

If a parent has repressed feelings that they have a lazy nature, they will see a hint of laziness in their child and begin to rage against this. A child will do anything it is told not to do, because it is a way of getting the parents attention, even though it may be negative behavior. Over time this negative attention feels like love to the child. They get reversed wired and begin to do passive aggressive behavior to get the attention of the parent, even though it is painful for both. To the child this negative behavior begins to feel like love.

Strong expectations concerning other people is also a form of projection. We projecting our own

wishes, desires and aversions onto them and then become disappointed when they will not, do not, or cannot live up to them.

Classic racism is an example of psychological projection; “It’s all their fault that I feel they way that I do,” says the racist. I am a victim of another persons thoughts or actions.

Also, jealousy and resentment of others good fortune is a form of projection, “Aren’t they lucky, it never happens to us (me).”

There are techniques to overcome this:

1. Recognition of this trait in ones own character is the first step.
2. Finding out what issues we project is the next.
3. Then taking responsibility and bring the projection back in.
4. Facing the issues penetrates them and finishes them off.’

Karl R. Wolfe Ph.D <http://www.truesilence.com/psychological-projection.htm>
(<http://www.truesilence.com/psychological-projection.htm>) accessed 21.04.10

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