

Grasping and Ambiguity

Psyche, Quantum Mechanics, Alchemy and the Brain

Presentation at IGAP seminar

London, March 28-29th 2015

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■ Friday evening:

- * Basics of the Hemisphere Hypothesis (Iain McGilchrist)
- * Ambiguity and grasping in Quantum Mechanics (Hans van den Hooff)

■ Saturday morning: lecture

- * Coniunction of Opposites (Iain McGilchrist)
- * Paradoxes, Opposites in Alchemy (Hans van den Hooff)

■ Saturday afternoon:

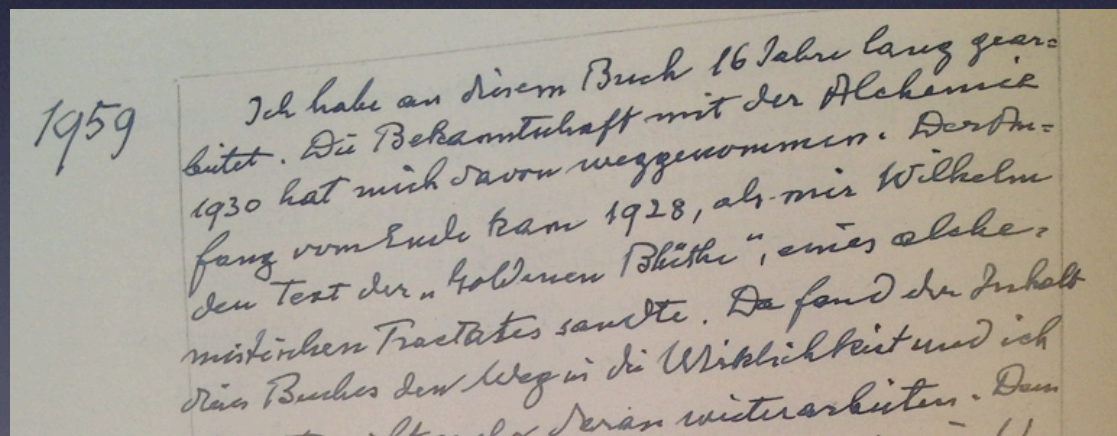
- * Panel discussion, question and answer session (Participants, Iain, Hans)



Jung's central hypothesis about Alchemy is that its texts and images are projections from the collective unconscious

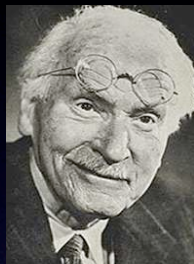
- Alchemy is not only proto chemistry but also proto psychology
- Participation Mystique unspoiled by Cartesian Enlightenment
- The imagery represents a catalogue of the structure and dynamics of the collective unconscious
- Jung suddenly stopped his work on The Red book when he learned about Alchemy

Fragment of last page of the Red Book
(C.G. Jung, Norton)





The factors in Alchemy which come together in the coniunctio form a dualism



■ **Mysterium Coniunctiones**

“The factors which come together in the coniunctio are conceived as opposites, either confronting each other in enmity or attracting one another in love ...”

humidum siccum

praetiosum vile

frigidum calidum

bonum malum

superiora inferiora

manifestum occultam

spiritus/ anima corpus

oriens occidens

terra coelum

vivum mortuum

aqua ignis

masculus foemina

agens patiens

sol luna



The main motifs in alchemy correspond to the main hemisphere polarities

Hemisphere Polarity	
Left	Right
unequivocal	paradoxical
isolated	interconnected
disembodied	embodied
static	dynamic

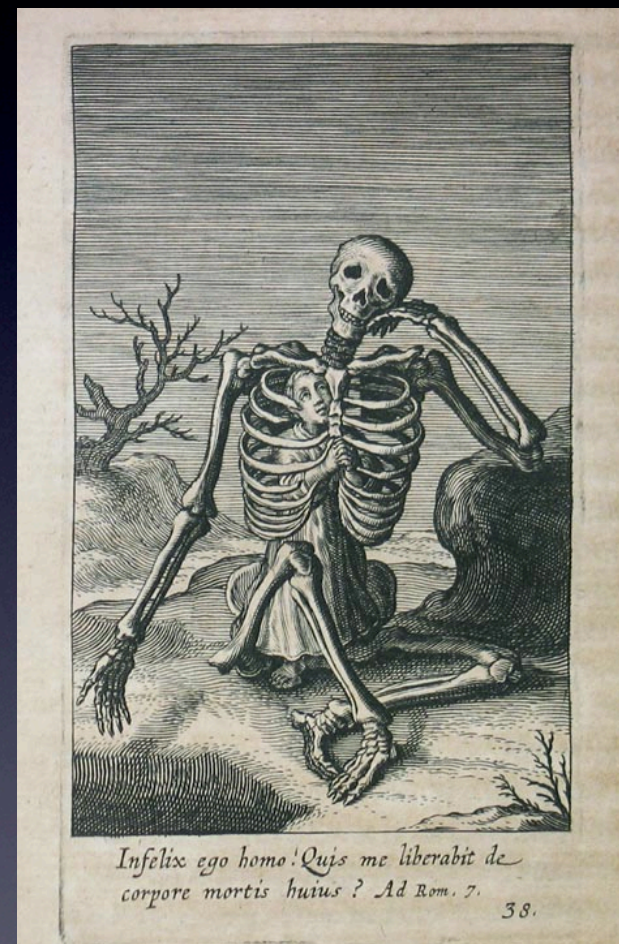


Abraham Eleazer, Uraltes chymisches Werk, Leipzig 1760



The main motifs in alchemy correspond to the main hemisphere polarities (cont'd)

Hemisphere Polarity	
<i>Left</i>	<i>Right</i>
unequivocal	paradoxical
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Pia Desiseria, Hugo, Herman. (Antwerp: Vulguit Boëtius a Bolswert, Typis Henrici Aertssenii, 1624).



To what extent is the paradoxical in Alchemy be understood as manifestations of Right Hemisphere material?



“I am the true green and Golden Lion without cares,
In me all the secrets of the Philosophers are hidden.”

Hemisphere Polarity	
Left	Right
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Hermetic Art

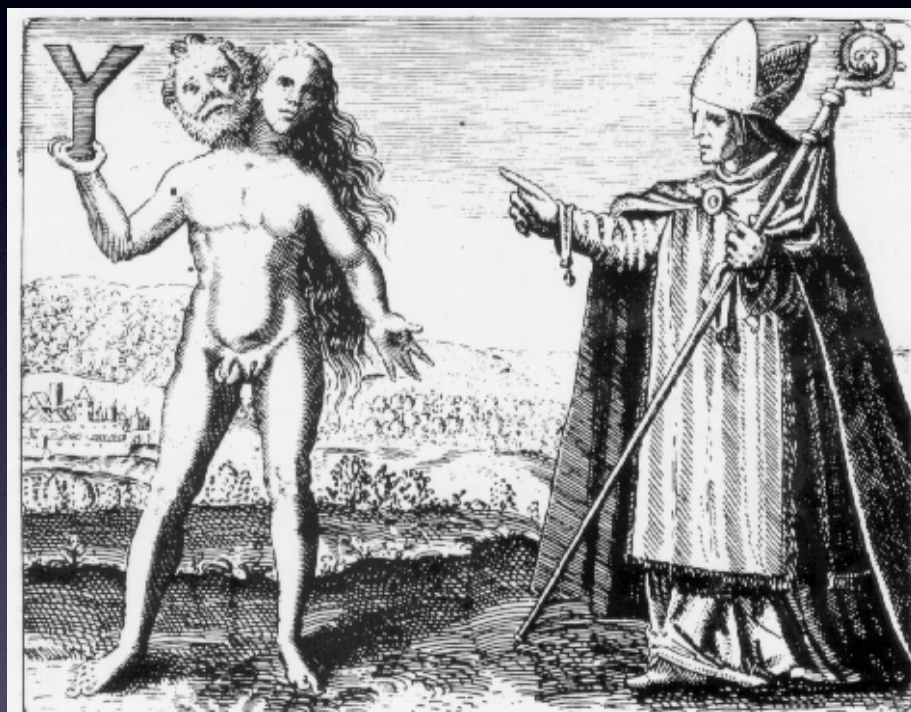
Prima Materia

Lapis



Paradox is important motif in Alchemy corresponding to right hemisphere functionality; e.g. the Rebis (two-thing)

paradoxical



Michael Maier, *Symbola Aureae Mensae* (1617)



The Rebis in the *Rosarium Philosophorum*



Hermes: the holder of opposites, the beginning and end

Hermetic Art

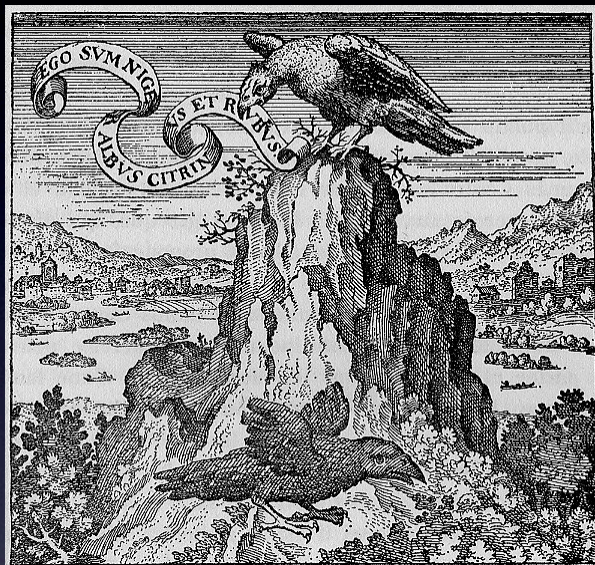


Resurrection of the United Eternal Body,
Rosarium Philisophorum, 1550

- Hermes as prima materia as well as the Lapis; holder of opposites; the beginning and end
- Hermes -Senex who is like Hermes trimegistus, Hermes the saviour, Hermes as archetype of the unconscious,
- Hermes as bringer of dreams, messenger God, metaphor for the transcendent function.
- Mercurius is the Cosmic Child, the Filius Macrocosmi (which is also the Philosopher's Stone and the inner man);



The right hemisphere functionality corresponds in several ways with motif of the *prima materia*



Prima Materia (Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* 1618, plate 43)

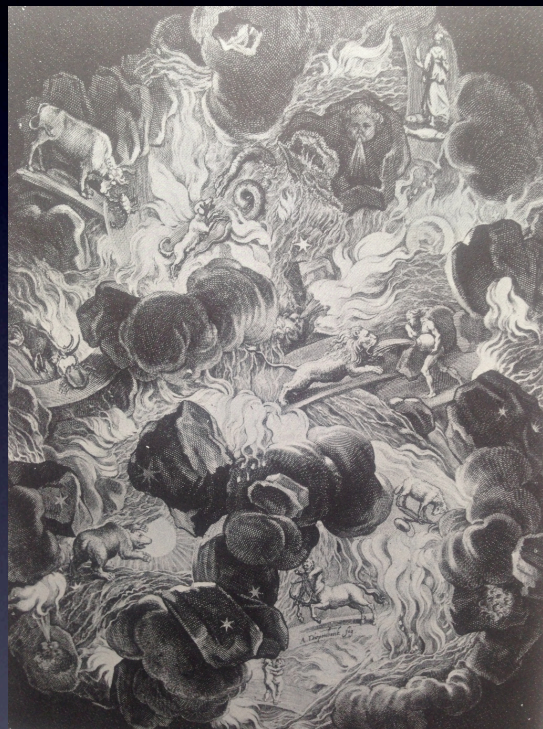
Prima Materia

- Prima Materia is the *increatedum*, the chaos prior to the operation of the world-creating logos
- The matter lies before the eyes of all; everybody sees it, touches it, loves it, but knows it not. It is glorious and vile, precious and of small account, and is found everywhere... But, to be brief, our Matter has as many names as there are things in this world; that is why the foolish know it not. Waite, trans *The hermetic Museum* 1:13
- The prima materia is undifferentiated, without definite boundaries, limits or form. This corresponds to a certain experience of the unconscious that exposes the ego to the infinite, the $\alpha\pi\epsilon\iota\rho\upsilon\nu$ (the undetermined), it may invoke the terror of dissolution or the awe of eternity. It provides a glimpse of the $\pi\lambda\acute{\eta}\rho\omega\mu\alpha$ (the all, the totality of divine powers)



prima materia cont'd

Prima Materia



■ Examinandus says:

I make known to you, ye sons of the doctrine, that the beginning of all creatures is a certain primary everlasting and infinite nature which cooks and rules everything, and whose active and passive [aspects] are known and recognized only by those on whom the knowledge of the sacred art has been bestowed

Art. aurif. I, p66. Eximindus is a corruption of Anaximenes or Anaximander

the *Prima Materia* as Chaos (Marolles, *Tableaux du temple des muses*. 1655. London, British Museum. Reprinted in Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*)



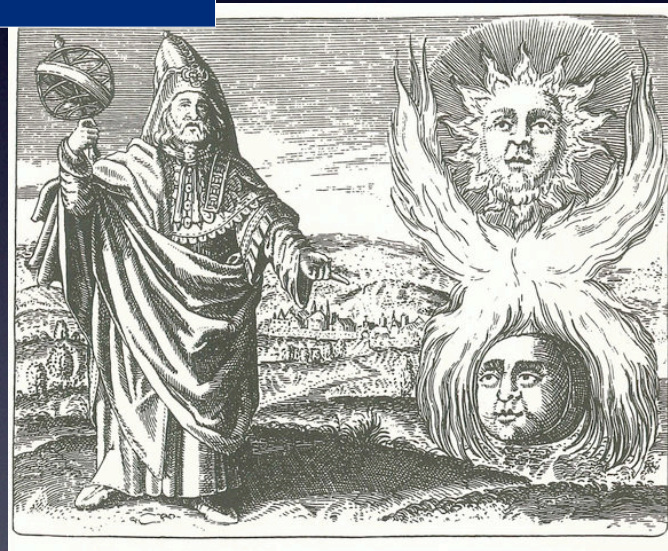
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Unus Mundus

Separatio

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Coniunctio

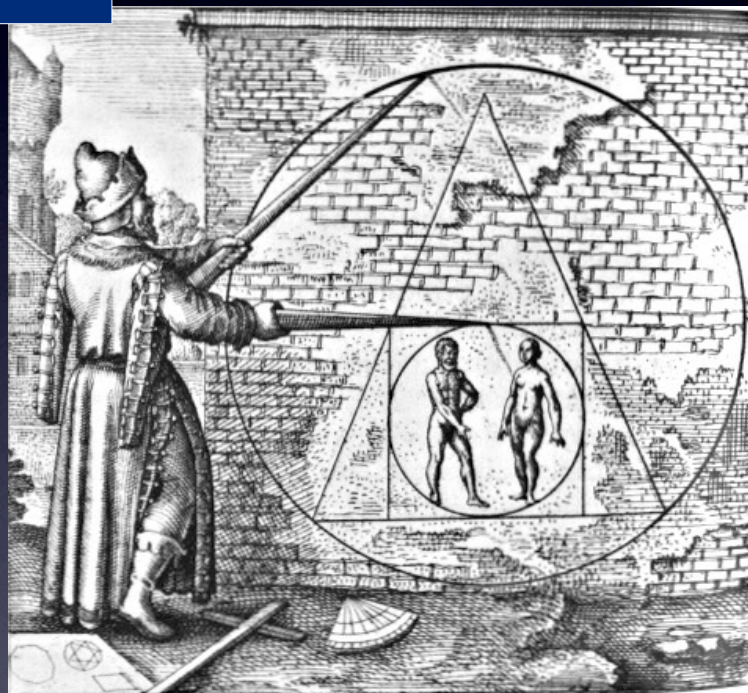


Hermes Trismegistus and the creative fire which brings polarities together (D. Stolcius von Stolcenberg, Viridarium chymicum, Frankfurt, 1624).



Measurement, numbering, weighing and quantitative consciousness in general belong to the operation of Separatio

Separatio



the Alchemist as Geometer; (Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* 1618)



Separatio as a first step towards the formation of Self



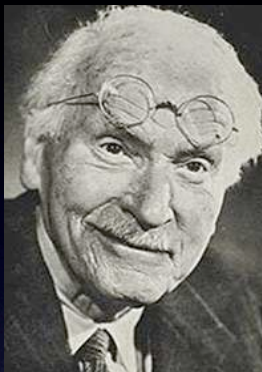
Separatio

ζ

the Awakening of the Sleeping King as a judgement of Paris (Thomas Aquinas [pseud.],
"de Alchemia", Code Vossianus, Univ Leiden



Individuation: a process of differentiation in Analytical Psychology



Separatio

■ **Individuation**

In general, it is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. Individuation is therefore a process of differentiation having for its goal the development of the individual personality

cw 6 §757



The factors in Alchemy which come together in the coniunctio form a dualism in love or enmity (cont'd)

Separatio

Coniunctio

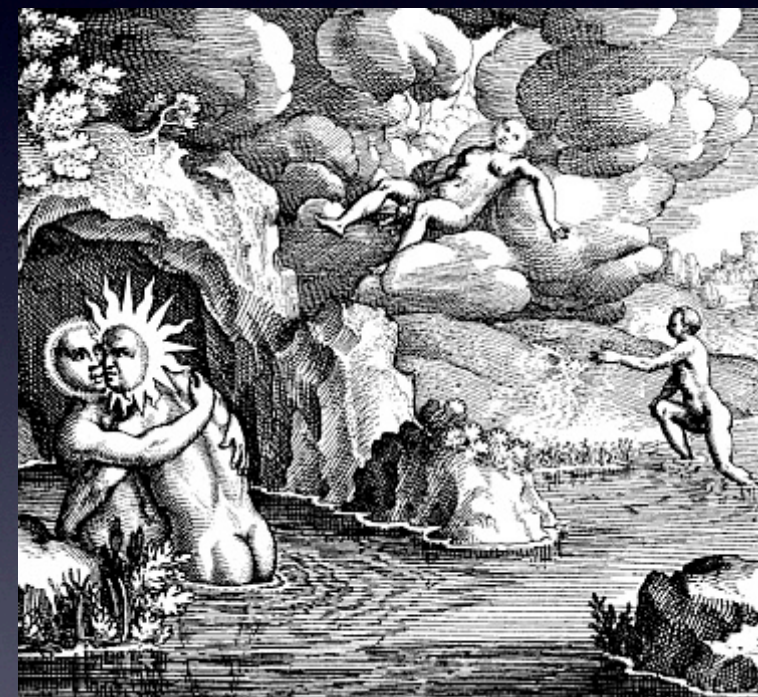


Lions in Enmity (Book of Lamspring , North Germany 16th century)



The factors in Alchemy which come together in the coniunctio form a dualism in love or enmity

Coniunctio



The Sun and the Moon fighting, riding a Lion and a Griffin, the symbols chosen by the Marxbrüder and the Freyfechter. – From a Renaissance Rosicrucian Compendium on Alchemy



Clinically it is important to distinguish between the lesser and the greater coniunctio

■ the lesser coniunctio

- * the lesser coniunctio is a union of substances that are not yet thoroughly separated
- * it occurs whenever the ego identifies with contents emerging from the unconscious
- * it is always followed by the Mortificatio and further Separatio

■ the greater coniunctio

- * is the goal of the opus
- * the supreme accomplishment

■ the experience of the coniunctio is almost always a mixture of the lesser and greater aspects (Circulatio)

Coniunctio



Oedipal dynamics are one example of the lesser coniunctio

Lesser Coniunctio



The dragon kills the woman and she kills it (Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* 1618)



Abraham Eleazer, *Donum Dei*, Erfurt 1735



The perfect coniunctio is the gold and the elixer, the goal of alchemy

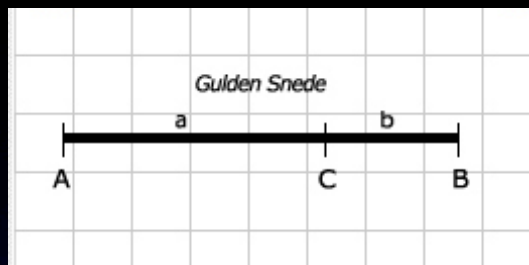
Coniunctio



Solutio Perfecta, Dounum Dei, 17th Century



Separatio as a first step can spark specific meaning

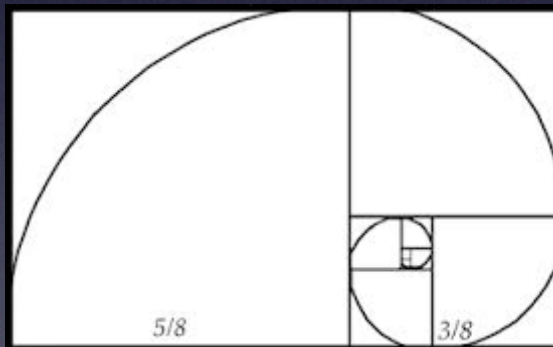
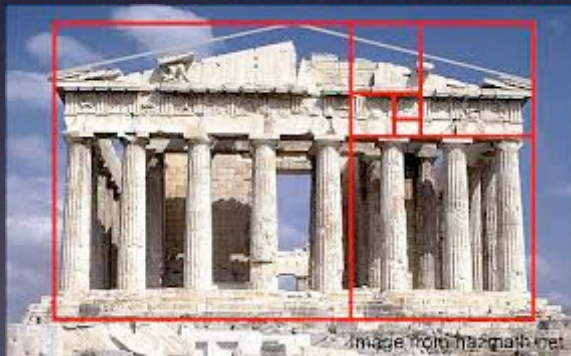


$$a:b=(a+b):a$$

Separatio

Golden Section

the Golden Section is a very interesting separatio symbol: it expresses the idea that there is a particular way to separate the opposites that will create a third thing (the proportion or mean between them) of value

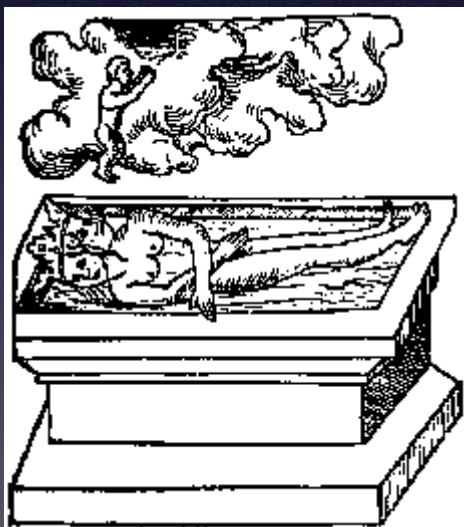




The main motifs in alchemy correspond to the main hemisphere polarities

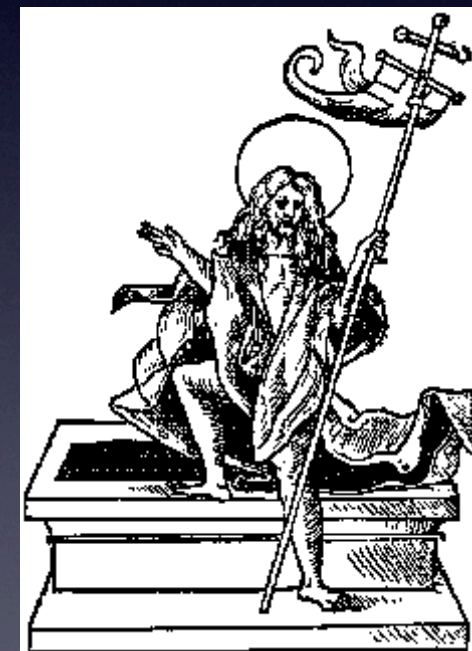
Unio Mentalis

Putrefactio



Unus Mundus

Incarnatio



Hemisphere Polarity	
<i>Left</i>	<i>Right</i>
unequivocal	paradoxical
isolated	interconnected
disembodied	embodied
static	dynamic



The factors in Alchemy which come together in the coniunctio form a dualism in love or enmity

Unio Mentalis



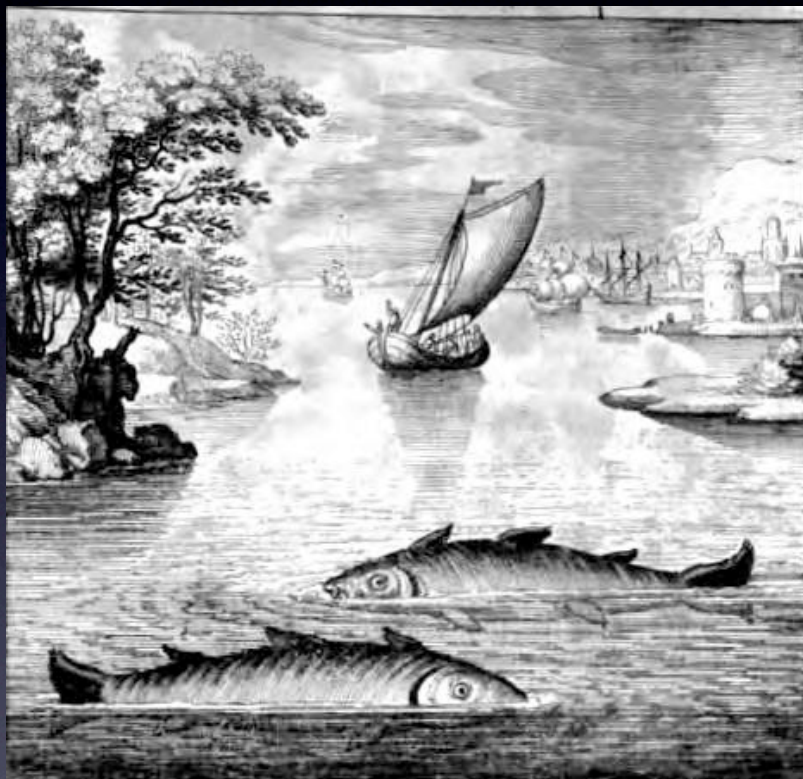
Stag and Unicorn in the clearing (Book of Lamspring , North Germany 16th century)

Unus Mundus

Embodied



The factors in Alchemy which come together in the coniunctio form a dualism in love or enmity (cont'd)



Two Fishes in the Sea (Book of Lamspring , North Germany 16th century)

Embodied

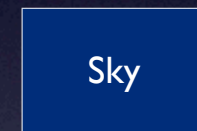
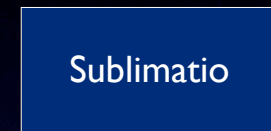
The Sages will tell you
That two fishes are in our sea
Without any flesh or bones.
Let them be cooked in their own water;
Then they also will become a vast sea,
The vastness of which no man can describe.
Moreover, the Sages say
That the two fishes are only one, not two;
They are two, and nevertheless they are one,
Body, Spirit, and Soul.
Now, I tell you most truly,
Cook these three together,
That there may be a very large sea.
Cook the sulphur well with the sulphur,
And hold your tongue about it:
Conceal your knowledge to your own advantage,
And you shall be free from poverty.
Only let your discovery remain a close secret.



The main motifs in alchemy correspond to the main hemisphere polarities



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Hermes Trismegistus with Eagle and the Toad (D. Stolcius von Stolzenberg, Viridarium chymicum, Frankfurt, 1624).

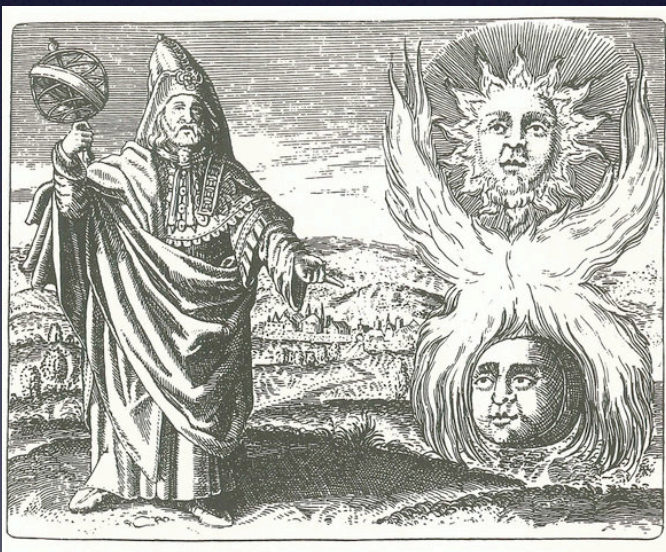


Hemisphere functionality can be linked to to the collective unconscious via Alchemy

Hemisphere Functionality



Ambiguity vs. Grasping



Paradoxes

Opposites

Alchemy

Collective Unconscious Dynamics

Hermes Trismegistus and the creative fire which brings polarities together (D. Stolcius von Stolcenberg, Viridarium chymicum, Frankfurt, 1624).