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Neurosis and Creativity

Franz Alexander, Ph.D. 

This is Franz Alexander's last written publication. He died on March 8, 1964. The Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis is deeply appreciative and feels honored that Dr. Sandor Rado spoke of his long friendship with Dr. Alexander and read his Karen Horney Lecture.—Ed.

Mister chairman, ladies and gentlemen: Before reading to you Franz Alexander's paper, I should like to say a few words about Franz Alexander. We were friends, close friends, for over fifty years. This fact may explain the personal tone of what I am going to say.

When I first met Franz we were both students at the medical school of the University of Budapest. This was before World War I. He was then working on problems of the metabolism of the brain. Upon returning from war service, we found ourselves co-residents at the University's psychiatric hospital. Soon, under the influence of a small group of friends, of whom I was one, he decided to seek psychoanalytic training at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, which had just been founded. It was, as you probably know, the first institution offering training in psychoanalysis, and Franz was the first student ever to graduate from it. He remained its most distinguished alumnus.

We met again in the fall of 1922 when I went to Berlin to attend an international psychoanalytic convention. At that convention, Franz received an award from Professor Freud for a paper he had written as a student. After the convention, Freud remarked to me privately, "*You will see—this man will do a good deal for psychoanalysis,*" and we can say today that he certainly did.

Franz was a tireless investigator and an easy and prolific writer. He published articles and books one after the other. In his first book he used Freud's structural theory to shed light on the case histories of his patients, and Freud's abstract ideas came to life. His next book applied the insights of psychoanalysis to problems of forensic psychiatry. His fame grew and brought him an increasing number of students from the United States.

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In the spring of 1930, Franz and I came to Washington, D.C. to attend the first International Congress on Mental Hygiene. After the convention, Franz went for a year to the University of Chicago as a professor of psychoanalysis, and in 1931 moved to Boston to work with the Judge Baker Foundation. In the fall of 1932 he returned to Chicago and founded the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute which he directed for twenty-five years. Under his leadership, this institute played a dominant part in elaborating the conceptual framework of psychosomatic medicine. After he retired from the Chicago Institute he continued his psychosomatic studies at the research division of the Mount Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. During all these years, he never tired of applying psychoanalytic thought to a large variety of cultural problems in such fields as sociology, history, etc.

Before I read his paper, possibly the last one he ever wrote, I should like to offer a comment on his introductory statement concerning his scientific relationship to Karen Horney. To do so, however, I have to begin with Franz' relationship to me. Our long friendship was never disturbed by any serious conflict. In scientific matters we agreed, in general, on just about everything—with one exception: the methodological principles of psychoanalytic medicine.

Our differences reflected the differences of our past. As a son of a professor of philosophy at the University of Budapest, Franz grew up transferring his admiration from one celebrated authority to the next. I came to medicine as a disillusioned student of the social sciences which at that time had no fruitful investigative method and could do no better than collect authoritarian opinions. After the entrancement of our years of apprenticeship had faded away we had to separate what in Freud's work were the true fundamentals and what were only authoritarian opinions—at variance with scientific evidence. Franz was inclined to carve out a larger sector of "fundamentals" than I. Thus he leaned toward authority and I toward evidence.

Franz published many original ideas, contributions and observations, reconfirming at the same time traditional concepts. This need to attempt balance colored all his writings, criticisms and decisions. He thus managed to uphold Freud as the supreme authority.

Franz and I could avoid discussing this topic because we were never in a situation where one could have been made responsible for the writings or doings of the other. But in Chicago, Franz, as director of the Institute, was anxious to

terminate Karen Horney's educational influence, and, with it, the threat of a conflict with Freud's orthodox followers.

Franz' paper is entitled "Neurosis and Creativity."

I consider your invitation to deliver the Karen Horney Lecture a distinction and a challenge. You probably know that a year after Dr. Horney joined me to become Associate Director of the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis, our collaboration ceased. This was not due to our differences concerning psychoanalytic theory. In fact, I always welcomed differences of opinion as a prerequisite for scientific advancements. Horney and I parted because of a more crucial issue. Both Horney and I believed that psychoanalytic theory and practice required revision and clarification of many obscure, never fully-tested assumptions. However, I felt at that time (the early 30's) just as I feel today, that these revisions do not require discarding the basic concepts of Freud, and particularly that the observational foundations of psychoanalysis represent a solid body of knowledge on which further advancements could safely rest. Horney opposed this evolutionary orientation and tried to rebuild the whole theory. Hers was a

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revolutionary approach which implied the repudiation of many of Freud's fundamental conceptions.

I do not want to elaborate further on the radical differences in our orientation. It suffices to state that they were extensive enough to preclude a fruitful collaboration. Horney went to New York and pursued her own course, founded her own school and published in subsequent years a number of books which had a definite influence on psychoanalytic thought and practice although, in my opinion, they did not replace successfully the Freudian foundations of our discipline. Many of Horney's contributions, however, appear to me of definite value, and I feel it a distinction to honor her memory with this presentation.

Among these valuable contributions there is in her book, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, a brief discussion of the relationship of creativity and neurosis. This is, indeed, a belabored chapter of psychoanalytic thought. Many psychoanalytic authors—including Freud—suspected some kind of relationship between neurosis and artistic productivity, both in regard to the psychological nature of the creative and the neurotic processes, and also in regard to the motivational powers behind neurotic symptom formation and artistic creation. This suspicion led to a general hesitation to touch the artist with the psychoanalytic scalpel lest not only his neurotic fibers but with them the closely related artistic fibers be cut. Freud himself shared this awe before the complexities of the creative process. Many artists had the same reservation toward being analyzed.

I shall not attempt at this occasion to evaluate in detail the extensive and controversial literature on this subject, but shall try to show that much of the prevailing confusion stems from using global terms, such as neurotic conflict, and from setting an Aristotelian antithesis between normal versus healthy mentation, and also from a tendency to draw sharp structural lines between the actually more fluid transitions between conscious, preconscious and unconscious processes. Many of the writings on this subject use preponderantly deductive reasoning, but most authors refer to self-observations of artists and scientists about the psychological conditions favorable to their creativity and about their motivations. The same classical examples are quoted again and again by different authors, such as Kekule's discovery of the carbon ring, Poincaré's unparalleled description of his mathematical discovery concerning Fuchsian series, Hadamard's observations on mathematical creativity, Mozart's, Picasso's and still other artists' self-revelations.⁸ Yet, important facets of this introspective material are neglected when their theoretical implications are drawn. Kubie, for example, thoroughly exploits it to demonstrate convincingly the significance of preconscious processes in creating novel unknown combinations between psychic elements, which is less common during conscious mentation, but neglects the struggle and anguish, the birth pains which are a constituent part of the creative act and which strongly indicate an underlying conflict.

Without attempting to discuss in detail the many pioneering efforts, such as those of Freud, Sachs, Rank, Reik, Kris, Kubie and the more recent systematic empirical studies by psychologists, I shall try to reconcile the diversified observations scattered over the literature and conflicting views derived from them, and arrive at a theory of creativity free from these contradictions.

I may well start with Horney's approach. She asks some of the relevant questions about neurosis and creativity and takes her departure from the above-described confusion about the relation of neurosis to creativity. She asks: Is neurosis an indispensable condition of creativity? If analyzed, would the artist lose with his neurosis also his

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creative ability or drive? Granted that many artists and scientists, among them the greatest ones, had conspicuous neurotic traits or outright symptoms, does this coincidence justify the conclusion that neurosis is an inherent part of creativity? Horney's answer is tentative, but she does not believe that neurosis is indispensable for artistic creation. This, indeed, appears plausible because there are many successful artists and scientists who are not more neurotic than other average people. Are they exceptions? But even if they are, the mere fact that great artistic productivity may exist with and without neurosis contradicts the assumption that neurosis is a *sine qua non* factor in artistic production. If there are non-neurotic artists, scientists, creative businessmen and statesmen at all, neurosis at best could be considered as a contributing factor operative in *some* creative people, and not a basic constituent of creativity. On crude inspection, it appears then that neurosis may be related and is sometimes a contributing factor but not indispensable for creativity.

Most authors on this subject refer to the similarity between creative psychological processes and dreaming. In fact, it has been reliably noted that creative accomplishments occurred during sleep and dreaming. The far-reaching similarity between dreams and neurotic and psychotic symptoms has also been repeatedly described, the first time explicitly by Moreau de Tour in his famous treatise, *Du Hachisch et de l'aliénation mentale*. Moreau anticipated Freud's differentiation between primary and secondary psychological processes. The primary processes are the most primitive ones in which the fantasy runs its own course dictated solely by wish-fulfillment and

uninfluenced by the impact of the external reality. These free, unencumbered types of psychological processes, governed only by subjective needs and trends within the person, are characteristic for psychoses. Psychosis is continuous dreaming in the waking state. According to Moreau: "It appears then that two modes of existence—two kinds of life—are given to man. The first one results from our communication with the external world—with the universe ... The second one is but the reflection of the self and is fed from its own distinct internal sources... The dream is a kind of in-between land where the external life ends and the internal life begins ... Delirium and dreams are not merely analogous but *absolutely identical**." ¹⁷ The "primary process" of Freud refers essentially to the same phenomenon which Moreau described as the completely subjective modality of psychological processes.

Bleuler re-emphasized this kinship between dreams and symptoms; Freud, Abraham and other early psychoanalytic writers spelled it out in psychodynamic terms. The difference between the primary and secondary processes has been postulated by Moreau, but the laws of the primary processes were established much later by Freud and his followers and served for the understanding of the meaning of dreams and neurotic symptoms, slips of the tongue, myths and primitive rites. These two premises together—that the dream is made of the same stuff as neurosis and that dreaming is one form of a creative act—led to the syllogism that creativity consists of the same psychological process which produces neurosis and dreams. This syllogism goes even one step farther. Dreams are attempts at internal conflict solution; neurosis also is an attempt, although unsuccessful, at conflict solution; hence creativity is an attempt to resolve neurotic conflicts.

At this point a question forces itself upon us, a question which unfortunately has never been explicitly asked by most

* Translated from the French by the author.

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authors: Is it the nature of the solution of a conflict that differentiates neurosis, dreams and creativity from each other, or is it the nature of the conflict itself which is different in these three processes? Kubie in a recent publication contrasts creativity and neurosis on both counts. ¹³ Following Kris's lead, he maintains that the creative process is the product of preconscious mentation, whereas in neurosis unconscious processes prevail. According to Kubie, neurosis not only is not a source of creativity, but a disturbing influence which interferes and distorts the creative preconscious processes. Kubie erroneously equates neurosis with unconscious processes. Horney, who questioned a simple relation between neurosis and productivity, came to a less radical conclusion. She admits that neurotic conflicts may interfere with artistic creation, but considers it most probable that the artists's struggle to resolve internal conflicts supplies the incentive to artistic creation. She believed that dreams, creative production and neurosis may stem from the same motivational forces and are different forms of reducing internal distress. Horney emphasized what most authors explicitly or implicitly assume, that motivation itself is not sufficient to explain creativity. What distinguishes the creative artist, scientist and other great innovators is their mastery of communication in one or another medium, be it the line, the color, the marble, the spoken word, the stage, or reasoning in mathematical symbols. (Kris calls this faculty "representational skill.") Kubie tries to define this gift more concretely as the greater ability of the creative person to make use of preconscious psychological processes. Before him, Kris spoke of the creative artist's greater "capacity of gaining easy access to id material without being overwhelmed by it..." ¹⁰ This capacity Kris defines as the ego's ability to control the regressive primary processes and use them creatively. All this would indicate that it is not the nature of the motivation—whether it is a neurotic conflict or some non-neurotic urge for self-expression—that accounts for creativity, but both a highly developed faculty for creating new worthwhile combinations of perceptions and ideas, and a highly developed faculty of communication and representation. "Representational skill" is the faculty of successfully communicating this reintegrated material to others.

This line of reasoning is but a further elaboration of Freud's original view, that the neurotic lacks the ability for sublimation. He always defined sublimation as something of social value. Both neurotics and creative persons struggle for self-expression and conflict solution, but the creative person can do this in a socially acceptable way. By his superior mastery of the media of communication he can share with others what he wants to express in an acceptable, effective and pleasing way, which we call esthetic appeal. According to the testimony of Poincaré, Hadamard, James Henry and Ernst Mach, even great scientific discoveries have this formal esthetic quality, to which scientists refer with the adjectives "beauty," "elegance" and "simplicity."

The significance of sharing with others was further developed by Sachs in his writing on "Shared Daydreams," which in my opinion comes nearest to a satisfactory theory of creativity. ²² Sachs sees in the formal attributes of the work that which gives it its artistic value. Freud demonstrated that not the content but the form in which it is presented is what gives a joke its witty effect. The same content, if said without certain formal requirements, loses its laughter-producing effect. Freud, in this most original contribution, describes these essential formal attributes of wit: brevity, condensation, contrast and, in some instances, the sound effect of words, and still many other techniques employed in jokes. The content,

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according to Freud, is as a rule an aggressive ego-alien attack on the victim of the joke, the wish to laugh at someone's expense. It is malicious pleasure. What makes this ordinarily unacceptable pleasure acceptable is the enjoyment of the formal excellence of the presentation. The pleasure derived from these formal values (saving energy no longer needed for repression) covers up the hidden enjoyment derived from malicious pleasure. Sachs extended this principle to artistic forms of communication. The content of the tragedy, for example, is most commonly the oedipal crime, which is made acceptable because of the formal excellence of the product. This formal excellence in literary products consists in the fact that the content is communicated successfully to the audience, and that a formal esthetic pleasure is offered which is distinct from the content. Moreover, the fact that the repressed ego-alien content is shared by the author and his public relieves guilt which otherwise keeps the ego-alien content repressed.

From this perspective, Kubie's contention that unconscious conflict, which for him is identical with neurosis, does not contribute to but only interferes with creative expression appears untenable. This does not detract, however, from his convincing demonstration of the significance of preconscious processes in creativity.

The question, whether neurotic conflicts can contribute to creativity, appears as a pseudo-question due to semantic imprecision. There are no *neurotic conflicts*, only *neurotic solutions* of universal human conflicts. The Oedipus conflict is not neurotic; it is a universal stage in human development derived from the social structure of which the family is the cell. The adjective "neurotic" implies that this universal conflict was not resolved without disrupting the internal harmony of the personality. Neurosis is a maladaptive, unsuccessful attempt at internal equilibration. That the Oedipus conflict can be the source of a product of literature is amply demonstrated by such masterpieces as *Hamlet* or *The brothers Karamazov*. It is derived from unconscious, that is to say, repressed material, which in these great writers finds its way into consciousness. The whole controversy, whether or not the sources of creativity are unconscious or preconscious, loses its meaning. Not the structural localization of a conflict, but the way of its expression and resolution is what determines the value of a creative act.

The history of sciences teaches us that questions asking for the ultimate nature of a phenomenon are not the most fruitful ones and belong to a very advanced phase of knowledge in a discipline. The ultimate nature of light is still debated, while the natural laws of optics are firmly established. The same is true for gravitation and, nearer to our field, for the ultimate nature of life. The first step is to answer operational questions relating to the observable conditions under which phenomena take place and change. Nowhere is this operational principle more appropriate than in our field. We are still debating the ultimate nature of libido, ego impulses and hostility, while we have a great deal of solid knowledge about certain verifiable principles of emotional and thought processes.

It appears, then, that it is more promising to ask about the conditions under which creative processes occur, rather than to start at the end and try to define the ultimate nature of creativity. First of all, we must agree about the phenomenon we want to investigate. We refer to a mental process which brings about something new which did not exist before. Most definitions I know emphasize the novelty and the originality of the product. Obviously, however, we are not concerned with every new and

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original combination of ideas, colors, forms and tones. Psychotic ideas, worthless new gadgets, an original jumble of colors or musical tones are not what we have in mind. To originality and novelty a third most elusive yet essential attribute must be added: some kind of value, be it esthetic, technical or scientific.

We want now to establish what type of mental activity and conditions in general are conducive to bringing about such worthwhile and novel products. As a first step, the most promising approach consists in the autobiographical or episodic accounts of creative persons. As psychoanalysts, we can only deplore but not fully explain why so few valuable observations are available from psychoanalytic treatments. My own few observations made during treatment are restricted to those in which the creative process has been disturbed as a result of neurotic conflicts. These do not give direct information about the conditions favorable for creativity. Self-observations by creative individuals have been repeatedly reported, quoted and discussed, and I do not intend to enumerate them. Perhaps the most informative is Poincaré's²⁰ account which clearly demonstrates that the creative process does not result from conscious efforts, but occurs spontaneously when the mind is not focussed on a problem but wanders free, free associating during a sleepless night or in hypnagogic states, sometimes in dreams. This statement, however, would be most incomplete without adding that the creative inspirational idea, be it a mathematical solution as in the case of Poincaré, a chemical theory as Kekule's carbon ring, a new musical idiom as those of Mozart, occurs regularly after the originator had been consciously struggling with a solution for a considerable time. It appears as if, after consistent conscious efforts, a period of relaxation on the conscious level follows and hence non-verbal mentation takes over and finds the solution. This non-conscious activity is not repressed and has free access to consciousness. This freely available yet not conscious activity is precisely one which Freud called "preconscious process." We assume that the same motivation and effort which kept the unsuccessful conscious processes going is still active after the conscious effort ceased. There is no change in motivation. The creative mind while asleep still continues to be preoccupied with the same problem which motivated it in the waking state during its conscious, focussed efforts. What has changed is only that conscious, focussed thinking, which is always verbal in nature, gives way to a freer kind of mental activity. In writing on this subject most authors intuitively use the expression "free." Kubie, for example, uses this adjective repeatedly and consistently in describing creative mentation. The question arises, free from what?

In trying to define this freedom, Kubie speaks of freedom from the pressure of both conscious and unconscious pressures. "The contribution of preconscious processes to creativity depends upon their freedom in gathering, assembling, comparing and reshuffling of ideas."¹³ "Preconscious processes are assailed from both sides. From one side they are nagged and prodded into rigid and distorted symbols by unconscious drives which are oriented away from reality and which consist of rigid compromise formations, lacking in fluid inventiveness. From the other side they are driven by literal conscious purpose, checked and corrected by conscious retrospective critique. The uniqueness of creativity, its capacity to find and put together something new, depends on the extent to which preconscious functions can operate freely between these two ubiquitous concurrent and oppressive prison wardens."¹⁴

Kubie emphasizes freedom from conscious and unconscious pressures. It is, however, not an *absolute* but a *relative* freedom. It is not freedom from

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effort and, I may add, from conflict. A mathematician who for days or weeks makes conscious efforts to solve a problem which has captured his interest, obviously is not free from his urge to solve the problem when he suddenly finds the solution while asleep or at a

moment of distraction. He finds the solution when he relaxes his conscious efforts temporarily. We must assume that the effort continues on the preconscious level even if he is not aware of it. How can we then define this freedom from conscious effort? First of all, the creative person becomes free from *verbal* thinking. Conscious thinking operates with verbal symbols. Verbal symbols are the results of previous generalizations. Words refer to things which have been previously recognized as having something in common. They are fixed. Words are results of previous discoveries of similarities and differences between things. In using words we commit ourselves to certain fixed generalizations and distinctions created in the past. On the pre-verbal level a new connection can be discovered which is not yet codified by words. Using words, we commit ourselves to the results of previous discoveries or similarities. They are most useful in utilizing results of past thought processes. In order to create a new connection or distinction between things which are not included in accepted verbal symbols, it is necessary to free oneself from these well-established previous connections. This requires a kind of withdrawal from what is already known and well-established. This withdrawal is only possible, however, if one is free from the pressure of immediate necessities, of the necessity to act. Emergency situations which require us to act at once according to what we learned in the past are not conducive to playful creative experimentation leading to new creative discoveries. Freedom from emergency—both external and internal emergencies—is the most essential feature of that freedom which most authors include in their formulations about creativity. Kris quotes Freud's statement that "When our psychic apparatus does not actually act in search of some urgently needed gratification, we let this apparatus work for pleasure gain. We attempt to gain pleasure from its very activity."¹⁰ This notion became known under the term used by Karl Buhler: "functional pleasure." Waelder and I elaborated on its significance for understanding play activity.^{2, 24} As we shall see, this type of pleasurable play-like activity is free from urgency and immediacy but not free from the urge for mastery.

Let us turn now to the freedom from the pressure of unconscious processes, which Kubie identifies with neurotic processes. When Dostoevski depicts the oedipal strivings of the four brothers Karamazov, it can hardly be assumed that he freed himself from his own oedipal strivings. What he did was to distance himself—at least temporarily in the moments of creation—from his own previous solutions of this conflict. These previous solutions may well be considered neurotic. Rado in one of his writings aptly called neurotic solution of conflicts "emergency measures."²¹ Under the pressure of conflict-laden impulses the neurotic makes an attempt—albeit, an unsuccessful attempt—to reduce anxiety and guilt produced by ego-alien impulses. The neurotic symptom is indeed an attempted, but unsuccessful, solution of this internal conflict, unsuccessful because it creates new conflicts. Repression and disguise is perhaps the most common and universal of these emergency measures. The great writers obviously have a freer communication with their unconscious impulses and can tolerate them more than the average person. They do not completely withdraw from their pressure by massive repression and can admit them to become the content of preconscious mentation. What permits them this

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temporary withdrawal, what makes it possible for them to deal with repressed content from which the ordinary person escapes by repression and disguise, is the most crucial question about creativity.

Humor is one example of this type of distancing oneself from an overwhelming emotional pressure. It signifies a lesser involvement in oneself. The ego is capable of assuming a superior and understanding attitude toward itself. It is noteworthy that in their study of gifted creative individuals J. Getzels and Ph. W. Jackson found the capacity of humor as one of the most ubiquitous characteristics.⁷ Humor signifies the capacity for such a distancing of oneself from emotional involvement which ordinarily would occasion overwhelming fear and dejection. Humor means a relaxation of serious and desperate participation in emotionally distressful anxiety-producing conflict. But humor is not the only variety of anxiety-reducing devices. We already mentioned that Sachs, in particular, spelled out other psychological techniques which allow otherwise repressed and unbearable unconscious processes to enter into preconscious and conscious mentation. Sharing with others what is difficult to bear alone is perhaps one of the most important methods of reducing anxiety derived from guilty feelings. This requires the gift of communication in the different media of communication which has been recognized by students of creativity as a primary prerequisite. And finally, the shifting of emphasis from content to form is a universal prerequisite of successful sharing with others. The significance of this shift from content to form is well established in jokes, but also that artistic or esthetic appeal consists in an emphasis on the formal attributes of the communication. The simplest example is rhyme and rhythm. Both the artist and his audience in a sense are bribed by the appeal of the novel formal aspects of communication. This allows repressed unconscious and ego-alien content to appear in consciousness. A carcass hanging before a butcher shop, ordinarily repulsive, becomes appealing and esthetically effective because of the formal appeal of the representation. And the crime of patricide can be communicated in the great drama without arousing revulsion, mainly because of the formal merits of the presentation. I expressed this view in saying: "The content of literature, as of wit, expresses repressed or thwarted desires. The artistic effect is created by the form, which permits covert indulgence of emotions which would be conflictful if brought into the open. Everyone has the feeling that another's complaint at desertion by a lover is ordinarily an imposition and rouses contempt rather than compassion. Without the formal excellence the content of most love poetry would appear weak and sentimental ... When form is weak, art loses its appeal. When its content appears in all its nakedness, drama becomes melodrama and comedy an unsavory burlesque, painting becomes mere photography or pornography, the dance an imitation of sexual license, and wit a brutal derision or an undisguised sexual attack."¹

The workshop in which these novel and appealing formal representations are produced is obviously the "preconscious system." This preconscious creative act in the arts, just as in the sciences, requires the capacity of freeing oneself from an immediate compelling external or internal pressure and shifting the emphasis from content to playful experimentation with the formal elements of communication: words, lines and color. Kubie goes overboard when he postulates complete freedom from conscious or unconscious pressures. It is only a relative freedom, a kind of moratorium, a freedom from emergency.

Schachtel defines this freedom in the field of perception as an openness toward the external world. According to him,

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the creative individual has a greater freedom to arrange his perceptions in an original way than the uncreative one who remains a slave to his autocentric needs. In other words, the creative individual is more open-minded, obviously because he has a greater capacity to free himself of his subjective immediate needs for satisfaction.²³

Freud compared this freedom with the freedom characteristic for daydreaming and childhood play. In a previous publication I elaborated the significance of freedom from immediate necessities for the understanding of play and creativity.² The playing child or animal does not exercise his faculties for an ultimate purpose; playing is an aim in itself. (This explains the relatedness of play and erotic phenomena). In personality development erotic play for the sole sake of pleasurable exercise of faculties is the first phase, and the utilization of the functions perfected during erotic play is the second. While playing in a non-utilitarian fashion the child discovers new uses for his organs and exercises them until mastery is achieved and the different functions become integrated in a utilitarian fashion for independent existence.

It was pointed out that the playful exercise of functions alone is a source of pleasure. This pleasure is derived from the feeling of gaining mastery over these functions. The pleasure derived from mastery also was recognized by different psychoanalytic authors, first by Freud in his well-known example of an infant playing with a wooden reel with a piece of string around it. The infant expressed pleasure at discovering how to master the separation trauma from mother by throwing away and pulling the wooden reel back at his discretion.⁶ Kardiner equated ego instincts with the drive for mastery.⁹ Waelder further elaborated the pleasure of mastery and considers it as an integral part of play activities.²⁴ Also, Kris makes brief reference to the mastery component in play.¹⁰

In recognizing the paramount significance in play of the striving to master different functions of the body and the mind, it must be emphasized that this playful learning through exercise is an aim in itself and is not subordinated to the serious exigencies of survival. Freedom from emergency is what makes play play and distinguishes it from adaptive behavior which serves survival. I formulated this by stating that "In playful experimentation with his own faculties, and without any consideration for utilitarian goals, man instead of 'adjusting' himself to the world is able to shape it according to his own needs and desires. In building his own world he furthers his survival and discovers the means for survival by creative acts while playfully exercising his abilities for their own sake."³

This free form of activity for its own sake accompanied by functional pleasure—the pleasure of mastery—is what is common in play and creativity. Yet play and creativity are not identical. Play, like dreams, is directed mainly towards self-gratification; in creativity, communication of that which has been discovered in playful activities becomes a basic ingredient. In a previous publication I stated that "The creative nature of playing lies in greater freedom of choice in contrast to adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is closely determined by the adaptive goal: by the problem which the organism has to solve. As a rule there is only one or at most a few correct solutions.

"In play, on the other hand, the freedom of choice is practically unlimited, which lends to it an experimental connotation. By contrast, utilitarian behavior is pedestrian. The goal is circumscribed and the procedure by which one may reach it is restricted by the goal itself as well as by the practical exigencies of a given situation.

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"Adaptation has a conserving and leveling function. It favors uniformity which is determined by the adaptive task that prescribes a certain solution. There is little choice. In play, however, and in his more complex creative activities when man is relieved from immediate tasks of adaptation, he reveals his individuality, building a world according to his own fantasy.

"Play is one of the important sources (though not the only one) of man's culture-building faculty by which he changes the world according to his own image."⁴

There is no doubt that not only the mastery of the environment can be achieved by free playful experimentation, but also the mastery of internal conflicts. To Freud's famous example of the infant's play with a wooden reel, Erikson added convincing demonstrations of how in play the child learns to resolve internal conflicts.⁵ Here is where Kubie's theory falls short. Indeed, the same unconscious conflicts which find in neurosis inadequate emergency solutions are the sources of literary and artistic creativity.

In evaluating the participation of unconscious, preconscious and conscious processes in the creative act, certain well-established dynamic principles of thought processes should be remembered. One of the early but still clearest formulations of the motive powers behind thinking is that of Claparede, who influenced Piaget as a starting point in his later fruitful investigations. Claparede considered thinking (consciousness) a biological function in the service of the total organism. Only when an arising biological need meets with difficulty in being satisfied do we become conscious of the need and can find the means of its gratification. Unsatisfied needs are the source of both awareness and thinking. Voluntarist psychologists of all ages came to similar conclusions; Claparede formulated this basic tenet more clearly than his predecessors. He stated: "I have attempted to show that intelligence intervenes when instinctive or acquired automatism is not capable of solving the problem which confronts behavior..."¹⁸ A need becomes conscious when it cannot be satisfied by automatic performance. "... consciousness intervenes when action is obstructed ..." ¹⁹

As long as old solutions operate smoothly, there is no impetus for finding a new solution. Accordingly, conflict or frustration is the source of all thought processes, creative and uncreative alike. In every learning when a successful solution is found it is repeated until it becomes automatic and no longer requires conscious or preconscious efforts at solution. It is immaterial whether the problem to be solved is the satisfaction of a basic need or the mastery of our bodily equipment, or the problem-solving passion of a scientist. The playing child tries to climb a tree again and again for nothing else than to accomplish the task of tree-climbing. It is a goal in itself not immediately subordinated to survival goals. Karl Buhler's term "functional pleasure," that is to say, pleasure derived from the mere non-utilitarian exercise of native or acquired powers, is most appropriate and refers directly to the essence of this phenomenon. The most important part of this phenomenon, namely, *playful experimentation until a solution is found*, is the core of the creative process. It consists in a

successful effort to find a new adequate solution. What is adequate obviously differs according to the task. If the latter consists of climbing a tree, proper muscular co-ordination, proper strategy (the use of hooks, ropes, spurs, etc.) supply the adequate solution. Adequateness in scientific discoveries has been defined by philosophers of science, most impressively by Ernst Mach, as economy and simplicity, lack of redundancy, that is to say, a formula which explains a phenomenon by a minimum number of

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independent empirically-founded statements.^{15, 16} Adequate is the formula which is in concordance with all observations, which is not redundant and has no internal contradictions. Poincaré defines the adequate solution with terms such as “beautiful” and “harmonious.” “Now, what are the mathematic entities to which we attribute this character of beauty and elegance, and which are capable of developing in us a sort of esthetic emotion? They are those whose elements are harmoniously disposed so that the mind without effort can embrace their totality while realizing the details. This harmony is at once a satisfaction of our esthetic needs and an aid to the mind, sustaining and guiding.”²⁰

The motive power behind the mental activities which spur on this type of experimentation in thought is frustration, or we may say conflict. In using the word conflict, I do not restrict myself to internal conflict, that is to say, contradictory strivings, feelings and values, but include also what Hartmann designated with the unfortunate expression, “conflict-free area.” He refers to the adaptive functions of the ego. Every adaptive task represents a *conflict with reality* which opposes our needs. Both external and internal conflicts create tension states which the organism tries to resolve by finding new solutions when the old effortless automatic solutions of the past do not work. Frustration is the source of all creative acts, that is, of all efforts to find new solutions no matter whether for practical purposes, self-expression, communication or satisfaction of the urge to understand the world around us, or simply to do something better, express something more effectively than it was possible before. The source of the creative act is a tension state created by conflict—the inability to resolve this tension state and continued efforts and struggle to find the adequate solution. Kubie overlooks this struggle and speaks of the creative act in terms of structural theory, neglecting an essential part of this process: the birth pains of creation, the struggle and anguish which creative persons describe as an essential part of their work. The creative product is the result of a continued, in fact, heroic struggle inherent in creation. The creative product is not born simply from a free play of preconscious mentation. It is preceded by a preliminary phase, the incubation period of mental struggle.

Many authors suspected that pre-verbal preconscious, or what is synonymous, non-focussed mentation may often succeed where conscious efforts have failed. Kubie convincingly describes the nature of preconscious processes and its relation to the creative processes, but overlooks the dynamic determinants of the creative act: frustration and conflict. This oversight leads him to the unconvincing conclusion that unconscious processes are not sources of creativity, but are merely disturbants of the creative act.

In summary, the ultimate motive power behind creativity is the urge of mastery of tension-creating situations, be it conflict with external reality, internal conflict or the struggle for greater mastery of the faculties of the body and the mind. The primary condition under which this urge for mastery leads to new creative solutions is freedom from emergency, that is to say, freedom from the necessity of finding an *immediate* solution. This freedom from urgency allows free experimentation on the preconscious level. Neurosis stems from the same internal conflicts, but is an unsuccessful attempt at tension reduction because of an internal emergency situation which compels the neurotic to find immediate relief from conflict. The faculty to withdraw from emergency and give way to playful experimentation is a basic attribute of the creative person. In addition to freedom from emergency, is a representational skill for finding and the other prerequisite of the creative act

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communicating to others new combinations of ideas, forms, colors and sounds. Particularly in literature where the motive power behind creativity consists of internal conflict, successful communication with others—sharing—is a paramount anxiety-and guilt-reducing factor. It appears in the formal attributes and not in the content of the creative product. This factor in scientific discoveries appears in the elegance and economy of the formulation. Internal conflict may find in the same person at different times either neurotic or valuable creative solutions. Hence, the wide coincidence of neurosis and creativity in the same person.

Dreaming, neurotic symptoms, play and creative processes all have certain elements in common. They are all motivated by internal tension caused by internal conflict or conflict with external reality. Play and creativity both are distinguished by the freedom from emergency, from the need to resolve a tension immediately. This freedom allows playful experimentation on the preconscious level. Dreams and neurotic symptoms, however, have meaning only to the dreamer and the neurotic. Only in creativity is communication with others a paramount component which lends it its social value. Creativity is essentially a higher derivative of play. Representational skill is its basic prerequisite.

We may now turn to the often-raised question: What is the function of the creative person in our highly organized mass civilization which obviously favors conformism and routine. In a recent conference on creativity, a gifted and original businessman stated: “I do not need creative and original persons on my staff. They are too expensive. They disrupt planned procedures and the organization. I do not need their original ideas. I am the creative one, the staff is there to implement my ideas.” Contemporary social commentators have repeatedly stressed that the qualities most cherished by large corporations are whether the applicant for the job is a good mixer and gets along well with others, rather than knowledge, special gifts and originality. The security-seeking conformist, the man in the gray flannel suit, became a stereotype, characteristic of our era. Even in psychoanalysis—which professes to foster self-realization—we speak more and more of successful adaptation to the world and forget that there is a special form of adaptation which characterizes man in distinction to other living organisms, the gift of changing, that is to say, adapting the world to our needs and dreams. The creative persons are the

successful dreamers who are primarily responsible for the great social changes. Fundamental, new scientific discoveries are the foremost factors in social change. Obviously we are living today in an era of rapid change which requires constant re-adaptations to new conditions. These explosive advancements in technology are cumulative results of three centuries of creative thought of the great natural scientists of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, who were not concerned with the possible practical applications of their basic discoveries. Those indeed were the great creative periods of history. Technological practical application of their discoveries is the distinctive mark of our present day. The task to adjust ourselves to this new world is indeed an almost full-time job which contemporary western man has to accomplish. Freedom from immediate necessities, allowing temporary withdrawal into playful experimentation on the preconscious level which we have recognized as the essential prerequisite of creativity, is not readily possible in these hectic days of rapid change. The prize is on rapid, conscious, steady readaptation, pinpointed to the ever-changing adaptive tasks, and not on original creative accomplishments which would only compound our dilemma by

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creating new problems of readaptation. Nowhere is this trend more conspicuous than in the field of education. The trend is not to stimulate detached curiosity, but to prepare the student for his practical needs to become a useful member of a highly structuralized social machinery. Moreover, mass education aims at the average person. The exceptional student who asks embarrassing questions, who is squeezed into a curriculum devised for the average, even for the below average, is a source of discomfiture. We are more interested in the defective than in the exceptional child. All this amounts to the deplorable fact that our present cultural climate in general and our educational philosophy in particular are not conducive to foster creativity.

And yet, even in our conformist mass civilization there is room for the creative person. The number of artists, scientists, inventors, professionals, political leaders is small; their social significance, however, is great. Even totalitarian states recognize their strategic social function and treat them as a privileged group. Our prejudice against eggheads, based on our anti-intellectual bias, shows up most unfavorably in this perspective. Representative of our anti-intellectual bias is a controversy about "eggheads" between a congressman and an educator, reprinted in the *Los Angeles Times* (November, 1963). The congressman said, "About eggheads ... I know two out of M.I.T. in New Hampshire. They can't play a ball game. They don't know how to make love. They are not like any other people..." The educator cautiously replied, "It takes all kinds to make a world." Then he added, "Albert Einstein might not be considered a completely well-rounded man perhaps, yet think of the importance of one man's imagination for the rest of the world."

It is difficult to predict when the pendulum of history will swing again in the other direction, and the emphasis on individuality and originality will come again into its own right. As soon as the world emergency situation relaxes, the freedom from immediate necessities will grow. Pinpointed immediate efforts directed towards increasing national security will no longer occupy to the same degree the best intellects and there will be more place and more admiration for the impractical but highly creative playful experimentators of the mind.

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