

(1964). Chapter V: Esthetics and Psychology of the Artist. *Am. Imago*, 21:98-112.



(1964). *American Imago*, 21:98-112

Chapter V: Esthetics and Psychology of the Artist

The possibility of a psychological understanding is always easier in poetry than in any other field of art. We would, therefore, keep this constantly in mind with our esthetic considerations and only occasionally touch upon other kinds of art.

If we propose two fundamental esthetic questions, namely, what kind of enjoyment a work of the art of poetry affords, and in what way it accomplishes this, the first deliberation shows contradictions, which can scarcely be solved so long as the consideration remains limited to the processes of consciousness. For to the first question, we must answer that the content of poems is in great part suited to arouse in us painful affects: calamity and sorrow, the suffering and downfall of noble men are, for tragedy, the only themes, for the epic, the romance, the novel, the most frequent ones; also, where cheerfulness should be awakened, that is only possible when misunderstandings or accidents bring the persons for a while into difficult and unpleasant situations. But we find the acme of pleasure from art, where a work almost takes our breath away, and causes the hair to stand on end from fear, so as finally to call forth tears of deepest suffering and sympathy. All these are feelings from which we flee in life and strangely enough seek in art. The effects of these affects are plainly of quite a different character when they proceed from a work of art than otherwise, although they are received by consciousness as the same; hence, this esthetic alteration of the affective effect, from painful to pleasurable, is a problem in which we may expect assistance from knowledge of the unconscious mental life.

This changed relationship in our affects can in no way be explained by the mere fact that the observer or auditor

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 98 -

knows that not reality but only make-believe stands before him. In this way, we may understand why facts which would affect us painfully if they were true, happening in this make-believe world, make us cheerful, as was mentioned for comedy and related forms; in the most essential cases however, we are dealing with something quite different. The normal effects of these facts on our feelings are not altered by this failure of reality; rather, they excite exactly the same affects, fear, terror, horror, sympathy, etc., and are thus, at least at the moment of their activity, received entirely in earnest and placed on a par with the real ones. It is the affects themselves, which are differentiated from those aroused by reality, not in the cause of their origin, nor in the form of their expression, but rather by the sign of pleasure, inverted to its opposite, which is inappropriate to the content.

With this explanation comes the answer to the second question. The chief means by which the poetic art achieves its effect is the peculiar condition into which the listener is transposed. As by suggestion, he is compelled to experience things which are related to him of another, that is, to transpose them into subjective reality, in doing which, however, he never completely loses knowledge of the correct relation of things. The degree of deception which may be attained is different in every kind of art and conforms to the suggestive means which are employed. These means are, in part, determined from within by the material, in part, are technical aids, which have developed in time to typical forms and represent the inheritance from earlier generations which lie ready for the creating artist. On the other hand, those arrangements, in which the illusion may be attained by direct imitation of reality, like those in use on the modern stage, do not belong here, because they have nothing to do with the essence of poetic art. With the two others, we will deal later.

We dwell next on the peculiar middle position, in which everyone is transposed, on whom a work of poetic art exercises the full and correct effect. He will feel the truth of this work, know its falsehood, without this continual alternation, which ought to arouse the most painful indecision, troubling him in the least. When we draw the comparison with other phantasy products, especially with the dream,

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 99 -

which is often placed parallel to poetry, we find that in the latter the deception is complete. Aside from an exceptional case with special basis (the feeling of dream within a dream), the dreamer believes, even to the end, in the reality of the processes. That the insane patient puts his delusional structures in place of reality is well known. But when we keep in mind the immediate precursors of poetry, the myths, we find the same phenomenon. Man of the myth-forming ages, which are still by no means entirely past on our earth, believes in his pictures of phantasy, and may occasionally regard them as objects of the external world. That poetic art is no longer able to do the same completely for us indicates a lowering of its function, to which its lessened hold within our social status corresponds; that it is plainly effective makes it the last and strongest comforter of humanity, which finds the entrance to the old buried sources of pleasure becoming ever more difficult.

The phantasy formation, to which the poetic work in this, as in many other respects, stands nearest, is the so-called daydream, to which practically all people occasionally yield; especially before and during puberty does it assume a large place and keen significance in the inner life. The day-dreamer can gain from these phantasies a considerable amount of pleasure without believing in the real existence of the dreamed situations. Other characteristic marks separate these products sharply from the work of art: the day-dream is without form or rule, it knows no aid, which, as we have seen, the work of art uses to attain its suggestive effect, and can easily get along without this, since it is not calculated for effect on others, but is purely egocentric. Therefore, we may find again in the day-dream the inversion of the affective effect, which seems so puzzling to us in the work of art, but of course not in the same amount. Mostly, situations which are

pleasant to the dreamer, fulfilling his conscious wishes, form the content of the day-dream; especially, such things as the gratification of ambition by immense success, as marshal of the army, statesman or artist, then the attainment of the object of his love, the satisfaction of his vengeance for the injury done him by one more powerful than himself, does the day-dreamer paint in all their fullness. Among these appear also, though less

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 100 -

often, situations which in reality would have been highly painful; these, however, the day-dreamer carries out and repeats with the same pleasure. The most frequent type is the phantasy of his own death and also of other suffering and misfortune: poverty, sickness, imprisonment and disgrace are often represented; not less often, also, the idea of the perpetration of infamous crime and its discovery.

We will not be surprised to find that the average man, as day-dreamer, finds the same enjoyment in the production of such phantasies as the hearer of a poem in its reception. Both functions are in essential aspects identical, in so far as the reception of a phantasy consists only in the fact that it is experienced. The presupposition for the possibility of this circumstance is, of course, that there be present in those receiving it the same tendencies, for the gratification of which the phantasy was created. The first requisite for a work of art that is destined to exert influence beyond the limitations of time and space, is therefore its universal human foundation. Now, among similar fundamental instinctive tendencies of humanity, the day-dream can scarcely lack such a basis entirely; the distinction lies in the fact that the common human traits, by which a sympathetic feeling for another is possible, appear in the phantasy of the artist without his interference and his guidance. In the case of the day-dreamer they are hidden by his most personal pressures in life. Thus, we see, to give an example, in the day-dream of the ambitious person, a man whose immense success would extort no interest from us, since the dream is satisfied with the fact and disdains every internal introduction of motive, by which the case would be included in the universal psychic material. In "Macbeth," we see also an ambitious person and his success, but the premises are followed even to the roots of each ambition, so that everyone who has fostered ambitious wishes must, irresistibly transported, feel the whole horror of the night of murder.

Herein we perceive a hint toward the understanding of the suggestive power of the work of art, but the problem of the inversion of the affective effect, we have not yet approached any nearer. To that problem, we can only find the solution, when we accept the help of the affect theory of psychoanalysis.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 101 -

This teaches that a very great amount of affect may remain unconscious, indeed, in certain cases must remain unconscious, without the pleasant or unpleasant effect of these affects, which necessarily belong to consciousness, being lost. The pleasure and discomfort existing in consciousness is then attached to other affects, namely, to those belonging to the same ideas; many a time this union succeeds so completely that nothing striking remains; very often, however, the pleasure or discomfort is inadequate for the affect—complex from which it seems to arise, or, as in our case, it is opposed. The pathological examples of immensely strong expressions of joy or grief on apparently insignificant occasions are well known. The foundation of the thing is, of course, more complicated than it has thus far been represented. Without further explanation, it is not correct to say that the pleasure set free by the unconscious affects is annexed to favorite representatives. This would contradict the strong determination in mental affairs and produce the erroneous presupposition that an affect, excluded from consciousness, would renounce its success. Rather, those ideas and affects which are capable of being conscious, which now work with no strong gain of pleasure and discomfort, are nothing else than the servants and substitute formations of the original, but now repressed, affects. Between these two, a close associative connection must be demonstrable and the path prepared by this association, the pleasure shifts and the fund of energy belonging to it also.

If this theory is correct, then its application to our problem must be possible, and would have to run something like this: The work of art arouses, besides the conscious affects, also unconscious ones, of much greater intensity and often of opposite pleasure form. The ideas by the help of which this happens must be so chosen that they possess, besides the connections present before the testing consciousness, also sufficient associations with the typical unconscious constellations of affect. In order to be chosen for this complicated task, the work of art must be so constituted that it will perform in its origin for the mental life of the artist, what it performs at its reproduction for the hearer, namely, the discharge and gratification by phantasy of the unconscious wishes common to both.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 102 -

It must be remembered here, what was said in the first chapter concerning resistance and censor, and the necessity of disguises (distortion) connected with these. The undisguised presentation of the unconscious would call forth the whole defense of the social, moral and esthetic personality, thus arouse, not pleasure but anxiety, disgust and horror. Poetry, therefore, makes the most extensive use of all those masks and means of representation—transposition of motive, inversion to the opposite, weakening of the connection, splitting of a figure into several, duplication of processes, condensation of material and especially of symbolism. Thus, there arises from the repressed wish-phantasies which, being typical, must necessarily remain limited to a few (and the oftener repeated, so much the more uniform) the endless, never to be exhausted variety of the work of art. This variety is assured by the individual variation and also by the varying intensity of the repression which with the change of cultural epochs, directs its strongest resistance now against one, now against some other bit of the unconscious.

The conflict between repression and unconscious finds in the work of art, as in a compromise formation, a temporary accommodation. The unconscious succeeds in breaking through without the necessity for a direct attack upon the barriers of the censor, which are rather

circumvented in clever manner. To be sure, the conflict is not removed from the world by this circumvention, that is shown by the frequent inverted signs of pleasure, with which the phantasies appear before consciousness. Even in the disguise, a painful characteristic adheres to the longed-for situations which marks them as ghosts, rising from the haunts of the unconscious.

Especially in tragedy is this regularly the case, and in it, further, the purification of the soul of the hearer is most completely attained. That most works of poetic art awaken sorrowful affects in our consciousness is thus no contradiction to their pleasure-giving function, as we might think at first, but a confirmation of it; for, on the one hand, the unpleasant affects in consciousness are employed and placed in the service of the artistic form; on the other hand, the forbidden pleasure, nourished from unconscious sources, is enjoyed under the mask of the foreign affect without offending

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 103 -

the censor.⁴⁹

The capability to create pleasure from painful affects and the emphasis of poetry on the ideas belonging to these affects, which is rendered possible in this way must, however, have still a second root, for the day-dream, which is unable to place the unconscious in the service of the artistic tension, utilizes it likewise, even though less often than the work of art. As a matter of fact, a primary gain of pleasure may be derived from these phantasies of suffering. We know already that there belongs to the infantile instinctive tendencies which may not be quite eliminated in the sexual activity of the adult, also the sexual pleasure of inflicting and enduring pain (sadism-masochism). In the day-dream, where the gratification of these infantile tendencies is connected neither with physical pain nor with evil social results, they also find after complete repression their foster home and from there, wander over into the work of art where they are received and utilized for its secondary tendencies.

It is also an important factor that the esthetic enjoyment occurs entirely aside from the acting and achieving ego situated in reality. Thereby it is made possible for the hearer to identify himself with any feeling or with any figure without hesitation and to always give up this incorporation again without trouble. In this sense, the command "l'art pour l'art" has its full justification, since the work of art with a purpose, by which the author and his public constitute themselves, à priori, in favor of certain opinions and figures, so that for their opponents there remains only refusal, may not bring all sides of the mental life into play. In such cases, a remnant of the relation to reality remains missing which clips the wings of the phantasy. Only he who loses himself completely in a work of art can feel its deepest affect and for this end, complete turning away from present aims is necessary.

There still remains for us, the consideration of the means of the esthetic effect, which we have divided above into internal and individual on one side, and external and technical,

⁴⁹ "I have often said and will never retract it: the representation kills that which is represented, first in the representor himself, who brings under his feet in this way what had hitherto made him act, then furthermore for those who enjoy it."—Friedrich Hebbel.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 104 -

on the other. To the first category belongs, preeminently, the basic principle of economy in the distribution of affect. In order to call forth a stronger impression with the work of art than would be possible in an actual occurrence or in a daydream, a structure is necessary which does not allow the affect to flatten out immediately, and uselessly, but raises it slowly and regularly from one stage to the next, until the highest degree is attained, and the affect is then abreacted as quickly as possible. The "internal form of art," which compels the artist to choose a different kind of treatment for each material, is nothing else than the unconscious insight into how the maximum amount of affect, which may be produced by the object, would be attained by the proper alternation between progress and retardation. According to this insight, the artist will then treat the material as tragedy, epic, novel or ballad, and further, adapt the means to the variety exactly according to the aim. The economy of affect is just that mark of genius, by the aid of which the latter produces the strongest effects, while against its rules the most beautiful declamation and the most brilliant acting produce no deep impression.

Besides the economy of affect, there stands, in second place, the economy of thought, in favor of which, in the work of art, everything which happens must be given a motive, according to strict rules and without gaps, while real life, with its gay and tumultuous instincts, leaves in our hands, only here and there, the tattered shreds of a motive. In the poem, the thread of action can never break unaided, the course of events within the work is completely visible and according to the principle of sufficient reason for understanding without addition, that is, our laws of thought must not assert themselves painfully against the outer world, but find a world before them, which is harmoniously constructed according to their rules. The result of this is that the connections of the work of art are understood without effort, without the trains of thought and the facts crossing each other; the economy of thought is the cause of the phenomenon that, for the reception of the work of art, immensely less expenditure of energy is necessary than for the reception of a bit of the outer world of same extent; the result of this saving of strength is a gain in pleasure. By the assistance which the

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 105 -

economy of thought still further affords, for example, by means of the introduction of a consequent parallelism or the arrangement, side by side, of sharp contrasts in motives, processes and figures, this gain of pleasure can be increased.

It may now be seen that at this point the narrower esthetic problems begin which can in great part be brought nearer to solution by the

application of these fundamental principles to definite groups and families. Into these problems we may not go and, therefore, turn to the external means of art; these consist, since speech is the medium of poetry, in clang effects which we can divide into two groups: rhythm and rhyme.

Rhyme has existed in various forms as alliteration, initial rhyme, internal rhyme, etc., until it has become fixed for our circle of culture as end rhyme. The foundations of the pleasurable effect are common to all; the repetition of the same syllable causes a saving of attention and this just at the time when the rhyming word is both times essential for the sense, and no mere expletive; the exertion of force, for which one must be prepared and which suddenly becomes superfluous, is transformed into pleasure by the repeated recognition of the same thing. On the other hand, the play with words, whereby the real importance is apportioned to the sound and on which the associative connection is built, is a source of childish pleasure which is thus reawakened by the rhyme for the domain of art.

Rhythm was already known and used in primitive stages of culture as a means of facilitating labor; this function it has retained and it serves where the overcoming of real resistances remains outside of consideration, besides our case, for example, also in the dance and children's play for direct gaining of pleasure or increase of pleasure. Still it is to be added that the most important forms of sexual activity, especially the "pleasure sucking" of the child, then further of the sexual act itself are rhythmical for physiological reasons. By the introduction of rhythm during a definite action, the same is thus rendered similar to the sexual processes, sexualized. Hence the pleasure in rhythm has probably, outside of the motive of economy of work, also an equally important sexual root.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 106 -

What is said here of art is founded on the investigation which Freud has instituted in the problem of wit. Wit, too, serves the unpunished gratification of unconscious tendencies. In order to win favor with the listener for its content, wit, too, can utilize the childish pleasure in rhyme, which is occasionally carried to the extreme of apparent nonsense of words. All those kinds of aids, such as in poetry, the artistic form demanded by economy of affect and of thought, then rhyme and rhythm, serve as forepleasure. That is, they afford the hearer a premium of easily attained pleasure and thus entice from him his first interest. By means of a chain of such pleasure premiums, a psychic tension is produced and gradually strengthened. This causes the listener to perform the exertions which the reception of the work demand of his power of imagination, to overcome his resistances until the endpleasure in which the discharge of the affects and the relief of the tension is attained. To the superficial observer, the whole sum of pleasure which a work of art awakens seems to be created by means which serve to call forth forepleasure; but in reality, they form only the façade, behind which the real pleasure arising from the unconscious is hidden.

The mechanism of "forepleasure" is not limited to these two cases. We have already made its acquaintance in following the course of development of sexuality; there we saw the previously independent partial instincts afford the forepleasure which spurs on to the attainment of end-pleasure (in sexual act). In addition, a similar situation may be shown in still other fields.

The relationship with sexuality is not limited merely to external affairs; it is a common saying that the question "whether Hans will get his Gretel" is the chief theme of poetry, which is ever declaimed anew in countless variants, without the poet and public ever getting tired. That not only the material but also the creative force in art is preponderantly sexual has been expressed more than once in intuitive knowledge. Psychoanalysis must limit this view by substituting for the plainly sexual, the instinctive forces of the unconscious. If, in the unconscious also, the by far greatest significance falls on sexuality, still, it does not entirely fill out the same; on the other side, it should never be left out of

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 107 -

consideration that the sexual springs, which psychoanalysis recognizes, must have a quite particular characteristic, namely, that of the unconscious. The conscious desire is not long satisfied with phantasy, it destroys the make-believe and strives toward gratification in reality; upon the appearance of the latter, both the pleasure in creating of the artist, and the esthetic enjoyment of the audience, are removed and brought to naught. The unconscious desire does not distinguish between phantasy and reality, it estimates the events not according to whether they are objective facts or only subjective ideas, and to this peculiarity, it owes its ability to form the psychological basis for the structure of art. Especially is this true of the Œdipus complex, from the sublimated instinctive force of which the masterpieces of all times and peoples have been created; the traces of this fact are afforded by the more or less disguised representations of the Œdipus situation, which the analyst can always trace back again to the primitive type. Now, as in Œdipus himself, the deed is carried out in all grossness; now again, inverted, the forbidden desire is consciously striven for, but expiated by the fact that the relationship turns out to be false (family romance); most frequently, the situation is weakened so that instead of the mother the stepmother, the wife of the ruler or another figure, who betrays herself as the mother image only in the finer details, enters and the figure of the hostile father undergoes a similar distortion.

If we extend our observation to the art of painting, we easily find certain related traits. As a root of the inclination for painting may be assumed, for example, the sublimation of the looking instinct (Schaulust), especially strongly developed in the instinctive life of the individual. The pleasure from looking (Schaulust), in its most primitive form in the child, is joined to the first objects of pleasure, among which, the sexual, in the broader sense of psychoanalysis, assumes first place. It is known that the representation of men especially of the naked human body, long passed as the only task of the painter and sculptor. The landscape, enlivened by no figure, first appeared, only in more recent times, after a further increase of repression had sharpened the demands of the censor for a diversion from the original goal. Still it holds

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy,

distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 108 -

even to-day that the human body is the real and noblest subject which no painter may entirely neglect. The original fundamental interest which is repressed by civilized man may still be plainly recognized in the sublimated form.

The place of the economy of thought is taken in the art of painting by the economy of vision. The ideal is to show the spectator every phenomenon, free from confusing accidental peculiarities, in the form which is essential and most characteristic for the artistic effect, as it presents itself to the soul of the artist, thereby sparing the observer the trouble of separating that which is important for the impression from that nonessential.

Still plainer than in the general foundations of the artistic creation is the connection with the unconscious in the production of the individual work. The fact that the conception of a work of art and the condition of mental elevation connected with it do not proceed from consciousness has been testified to by all, without exception, who were in a position to have experience on this point. The inspiration is a sudden comprehension of figures and connections, which were either entirely unknown to the artist himself until this moment or wavered before his mind in hazy indefinite form and now arranged themselves before him at a stroke, in vivid clearness. The mysterious part of this process has led to the assumption that the artist owed it to a heavenly inspiration which he cannot have created from his consciousness. Psychology has now for a long time been unable to dispense with an un- or sub-conscious in explanation, without, however, hitherto occupying itself with the nature of this force distant from consciousness, and submitting to itself the question whether the products of inspiration may not be determined by this force; so that one might learn from the investigation of their mutual characteristics something concerning the mental acts taking place beyond consciousness.

The question, whence the artist gets the psychic material previously unknown to him, is not hard for psychoanalysis to answer. It is otherwise, of course, with the problem of the cause, by which the transition from conscious to unconscious is put into the work and the mechanism by which this transition is brought about. The fact that we are dealing with a

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 109 -

flight from reality and with a regression to infantile sources of pleasure is the only fixed one. How the mode of utilization of this method differs from that which the neurotic prefers, for which exactly the same formula holds, is still little investigated. The question is just so much the more interesting, because the traits of both types very often mix, since the same man can be artist and neurotic at the same time, thus caring for a part of his regressively gained pleasure by the medium of artistic inspiration and another part by means of neurotic symptoms. According to what fundamental principles the choice is made, whether, perhaps, the union of certain instincts with certain others is needed in order to become adapted for the one or the other method, on all these points later investigation must enlighten us.

A fundamental distinction was already outlined in the first chapter. The neurosis makes it impossible for the associates of the patient to attribute a meaning to it. The symptoms produce the impression of arbitrariness and nonsense and are, furthermore, certainly not suited to be felt by the relatives of the patient as pleasant or to bind strangers to him. The malady troubles and hinders the social relations of the neurotic. With the artist, the condition is essentially different. Instead, the talent for art renders difficult the adaptation to the surroundings; the examples of this, that artists as husbands and fathers, friends or citizens do not come up to the mark, need not be gone into in detail. It belongs to the fate of the artist that, right at the point, where he should act immediately through his personality, he mostly remains without results or is not understood; still, he knows how to give a form to his works which finds, not only understanding, but calls forth deep pleasurable effects. Thus, by the fact that he withdraws himself to his infantile attitude, the neurotic loses his social connection, even though against his will, while the artist knows how to win back that which, for the same reasons, he must give up, in a new way, which is only possible for him. He sues for love and admiration, not in the ordinary manner, but in a more complicated and more spiritual manner, he captures the others in the indirect way by the depths of his own personality. For the rest, enough exists in common to form the psychological foundation for

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 110 -

the often observed similarity between the artists on the one side, and the nervous and mental invalids, on the other, genius and insanity.

The tendency to sudden changes of mood, the immoderation in love and hate and the incapacity for steady following of practical ends, may be explained by the strengthened influence of the unconscious on the conscious and voluntary conduct of life. The constantly renewed upward pressure of primitive mental forces, which, if they succeeded in getting control, would burst asunder and desecrate all the bonds imposed by culture, create a deep, lasting feeling of guilt, which transposes itself by "rationalization" by moral over-refinement; the latter occasionally changes again, with the consequent overstepping of ethical barriers. In general, un-compensated mental opposites are better endured in consciousness than by the average man, in whom likewise an assimilation with the unconscious mental life is seen, which does not stir up against each other the opposing pairs, but allows them to exist side by side.

To both types is common the high irritability or sensitiveness to irritation; that is, they often react to very slight external stimuli with apparently an immeasurable and incomprehensible amount of affect. The cause of this characteristic lies in the fact that the possibility of a reaction from unconscious sources of affect is easily given as a result of an accidental disturbance of the association chains leading thither.

The relation of the artist to the outer world is peculiar throughout, because the latter comes into consideration for him, not so much as playground for his passions, as instigation for his creative phantasy. For this, a very small amount of external experience suffices. Very often, the manner of work of the genius has caused wonder, that he should show in his works the closest knowledge of the human soul, in all its fulness and depth, before he could extend his observations beyond the smallest circle. The explanation lies in the fact that the human

soul is infinitely greater than the circle which presents itself to consciousness. In the unconscious, lies buried the whole past of our race; it resembles a navel-string which binds the individual to the race. The greater the valuable part of the unconscious is, just so many more possibilities

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 111 -

exist for the genius, divesting himself of his conscious ego, to change into strange personalities. If Shakespeare saw, even to the bottom of the souls of wise men and fools, saints and criminals, he was not only unconscious of all this—which applies perhaps to everyone—but he possessed also, the other gift which we lack, of making his unconscious visible, while he allowed it to create apparently independent figures from his phantasy. These figures are all merely the poet's own unconscious, which he has put out, "projected," in order to free himself from it.

The artist can experience more in very small events than the average man in the gayest adventures, because they are only the occasion for him to become acquainted with his inner kingdom. His irritability is only the reverse side of the phenomenon and must appear, so far as he does not utilize this overflow for his work but chooses the everyday way of allowing his affects to discharge in reality.

Finally, if we attempt to gain from the previous considerations a standpoint for the recognition of the importance of art in cultural development, then, we come to the conclusion that the artists belong to the leaders of humanity in the struggle for the taming and ennobling of the instincts hostile to culture. When one of the customary forms of expression becomes obsolete, that is, remains below the cultural level and stands in the way of ascent with its all too treacherous figure, then it is the individuals gifted with artistic creative force who make it possible for their fellow men to free themselves from the injurious instinct, without being compelled to renounce the pleasure, at the same time casting the old instinct in a new, unobjectionable, nobler form and putting this in the place of the old. Inversely, if the repression becomes superfluous in one place in its previous intensity, then the artists first feel the lessening of the pressure which bore heaviest on their spirits and utilizing the newly won freedom for art before it has yet come to pass in life, point out the way to their contemporaries.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 112 -

Article Citation

(1964). Chapter V: Esthetics and Psychology of the Artist. *Amer. Imago*, 21:98-112

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the subscriber to PEP Web and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form whatsoever.