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## What Grounds Creativity?

Richard D. Chessick, M.D., Ph.D. 

“Developmental or ordinary creativity” is distinguished from “genius creativity.” The former offers pleasure or distraction. The latter sometimes offers this, but tarrying before the product of genius also brings a new understanding of one’s culture, one’s self, and even an experience of transcendence. The concepts of Heidegger and of Gadamer are applied to this distinction. All serious artists are seen as manifesting one or more of three aspects: (1) driven by creative genius from the biological furnace of the individual, (2) temporary regressions and exhaustion of ego function, and (3) an anxiety-driven process resting on a constitutional ability to shift levels of ego activities and compromise formations. Falling in love is discussed as another example of creative imagination based on the need to solve psychological discomfort either due to developmental or pathological problems. Creativity in psychoanalytic work is an important factor that needs to be explored in addition to the fact that every country seems to create the approach to psychoanalysis that it needs. Emotional illness is demonstrated as hindering and constricting creativity, not enhancing it as is the popular idea. Some seriously psychopathological artists are able to wall off the pathology and sublimate their conflicts into the production of art, but creativity requires a relatively intact ego; when the ego deteriorates, so does the creative product. An important spring to genius creativity is the nonrecognition of the extremely talented child, which leads to solitary activity and an immersion in ideas and fantasies that, if the person has the requisite talent, is manifested in the expression of truth and beauty through art.

In this article I hope to discuss what it is that grounds creativity, an activity that has persisted consistently over the centuries in the human species. I will make a distinction that is not often made, one between developmental or ordinary creativity and genius creativity. Developmental creativity can occur at any age. It almost always appears in children from the moment they pick up a crayon and start drawing pictures. There is usually a prepubertal quiescence of this and then commonly a big surge of it in adolescence. Many adolescents write poems and stories, paint pictures, and so on, but for most people, after adolescence developmental creativity disappears. This is probably because we are immersed in a culture that admires money making

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above all things and there is little reward for ordinary or developmental creativity. Sometimes, charmingly, developmental creativity can reappear after retirement or even in old age, as for example in the artwork of “Grandma Moses.”

Developmental creativity produces pleasant art that often is enjoyable but lacks the creativity of genius no matter how diligently the ordinary individual attempts to exercise his or her talents. As an interesting example, Nietzsche, who was without doubt a philosophical genius, only had developmental or ordinary creativity when it came to composing his piano pieces. In the Wagner household these were given polite attention, but there was never any doubt about who was the musical genius. So developmental creativity is a nice thing, and it brings pleasure to the creator as well as the audience, but it lacks an essential element.

Genius creativity, on the other hand, is something rare and extraordinary. I will not go into a discussion of who among creators is a genius and who is not because this has been done at great length in the three current books of one of my favorite literary critics, Harold Bloom. Bloom’s three books ought to be required reading for any psychoanalyst. They are *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994), *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998), and *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (2002). The geniuses and their work discussed by Bloom carry with them the additional factor that tarrying before their art, in the sense that Gadamer (1982) wrote about, brings one to a new understanding of one’s self, one’s culture, and, if you are willing to go along with Heidegger as I am, a transcendent experience of the sense of Being.

I will try to explain this transcendent experience. In previous publications (Chessick, 1992a, 1995) I discussed Heidegger’s concepts and his psychopathology at some length, and here I will only offer a few remarks for those who are not familiar with his seminal work. Briefly, if “Being” is not simply an empty word, then it can be thought of as a stance toward things that govern all of our relationships on earth but itself remains unnoticed. We tend to see the world as objects to be manipulated and studied, a stance that has led to a darkening of our world, the Holocaust, endless wars and striving for power over others, and so on. Heidegger (1953) suggested a different stance toward Being, one of experiencing it as an “event” in a clearing provided by humans in what Guignon (2001) has called an “event ontology.” This involves a more open acceptance of things as they are, a letting appear what will appear, a kind of phenomenological stance toward the world (Chessick 2002a).

This approach is very helpful in tarrying in front of an artwork and allowing what it expresses to be absorbed by us, a happening or “event” taking place in the clearing that has provided for it by tarrying in front of it. We have

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all had the experience of coming suddenly before a great work of art, say, for example, Renoir's "The Boating Party", and being forcibly struck by a shining forth of Being, an event that transforms the world for us in an almost shocking way. It is not easy to put this into words, which is why Heidegger's writings are so difficult to follow, and he had to invent a number of new words. Heidegger's example is that of a Greek temple that organizes and gives structure to the world of the people who live in its shadow. I remember spending a whole week gazing at the great cathedral in Cologne, watching as it changed appearance over the course of the light of the day, and sensing how it too, in medieval times, structured and gave meaning to the world of the people who lived in its shadow. And there are many such examples; Harold Bloom (1998) wrote an entire book on our encounter with Shakespeare's plays as catalyzing our sense of being human. Before Shakespeare, he argues, there was only characterization, a kind of placing each person in a group slot; after Shakespeare there were characters—men and women capable of change with highly individual personalities. Similarly, the ancient Greeks received their sense of who they were from the poems of Homer. So for Heidegger, Shakespeare, Homer, and other genius creators are "world-defining" creators.

I am using the phrase "genius creativity" rather loosely here because it is so difficult to define. Bloom (2002) struggles with it: "Since we do not know how else to account for Shakespeare (or Dante, Cervantes, Goethe, Walt Whitman), what can we do better than return to the study of the ancient idea of genius? Talent cannot originate, genius must" (p. ix). He continues, "Genius, by necessity, invokes the transcendental and the extraordinary, because it is fully conscious of them" (p. 12). This coincides with my (1999) concept of genius creativity providing "ciphers" toward grasping the transcendental. I like the observation of the Victorian historian Froude also, who said that genius is a spring in which there is always more behind than flows from it. Bloom (2002) goes on to offer 100 examples of genius and he warns us that "the study of mediocrity, whatever its origins, breeds mediocrity" (p. ix). So much for "politically correct" reading lists, part of what Bloom (2002) considers the "long suicide" of our academic institutions since 1967.

Developmental or ordinary creativity, on the other hand, is a fairly widespread ego function (Brenner, 2004), and the results of such creativity vary depending on the inborn skills and talents of the creator. No amount of tarrying in front of ordinary creative products will produce anything but a mild sense of pleasure, such as one gets upon looking at the illustrations of Norman Rockwell or the numerous pictures drawn by one's grandchildren which are posted all over one's kitchen wall. With the exception of Freud, most of the creative writings in the psychoanalytic field, including my own, have been in the category of ordinary creativity and have yielded perhaps some knowledge and insight and pleasure in the mode of presentation—if the writer

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has any skill—but do not yield any sense of transcendence or Being or new ways of looking at the world.

The works of creative genius shake us to our very psychic foundations. For example, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* proclaims the title and subtitle of Nietzsche's last masterpiece. This title, as Kaufmann points out in his edition of the *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (Nietzsche, 1968), is chosen from the words Pilate spoke of Jesus, "Behold the man!" (John 19:15). The philosophical genius Nietzsche is trying to present a new and different image of humanity: not a saint or a holy man any more than a traditional sage, but a modern version of man. Nietzsche struggled throughout his life and works with the importance of man overcoming himself to develop a creative and dynamic personality—a personality that can look at the absurdity of human life and feel laughter and exaltation in spite of that absurdity. He recognized the chaos of the passions, and asked us to harness this chaos, but not to lose it or regard it as an enemy to be sternly repressed: "I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*).

Nietzsche asked, what is this modern man? How is he to chart a course in the troubled waters of our present dark age? Will our youngsters respond to the "prudent" parent—or will they respond to the parent who keeps alive the flame of chaos and creativity in him or herself, who does not become inundated by it, but whose flame enables a person to create and to laugh at our patently absurd situation? Can our children respond to us as adolescents if their infantile nuclear core has been damaged by the mother-child symbiosis? If we cannot give birth to the "dancing star" any more because our life lacks quality and principle, does it matter how "prudent" we are? These questions form the central problems of our troubled U.S.A.; they remain often unrecognized and, tragically, unsettled.

The descent into Hell in "Canto I" of the genius Ezra Pound (1948) represents not only a return to the past, but a descent into that poet's own psyche in a search for the source of his creative powers:

Came we then to the bounds of deepest water,  
To the Kimmerian lands and peopled cities  
Covered with close-webbed mist, unpierced ever  
With glitter of sun rays  
Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven  
Swartest night stretched over wretched men there.

A great deal of work has been done in attempting to get at the deep structures underneath the phenomenology of human experience. Cultural phenomena are intrinsic to the creation of language and behind these, argued Lévi-Straus (Kurzweil, 1980), are archetypal human structures. Lévi-Straus

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analyzed myths in order to find these structures in a way similar to psychoanalytic studies of the unconscious through the use of free association. Carrying this further, for Foucault (see Chessick, 1992a) history is not the continuity of the subject, but consists of structural discontinuity in epistemological breaks. Each epoch corresponds to the dominant structure. All structuralists extrapolate from

rules/relations of grammar/speech to explore social phenomena in terms of linguistic oppositions and transformations. This assumes the centrality of language to culture and culture to language. Structuralism is a systematic attempt to uncover deep universal mental structures as they manifest themselves in kinship and larger social structures; in philosophy, literature, mathematics; and in unconscious psychological patterns that motivate human behavior. Furthermore, Piaget's structuralism maintained that structure and genesis are interdependent; there is no structure apart from creative construction and so underlying structure changes as the child's development proceeds. This attributes a crucial role to developmental creativity.

On the other hand, the very experience at which an artwork of genius aims is to shake us out of our current worldview, out of our contemporary structures. The resistance to a certain number of contemporary artworks has occurred because they are successful in challenging that view and those structures with which we are comfortable and which seem self-evident to us. In this sense the artist is the herald of the future, as Foucault (1973) suggested, and the more accurate a herald of the future the artist is, the more likely it is that he or she will be described as "mad" at the time of the creative activity.

## Preliminary Remarks about the Creative Process

I will now proceed to discuss developmental or ordinary creativity in general and the springs of the creative process in all humans. Later I will discuss the special aspects of the creative work of genius that shines forth Being in all its aspects of truth and beauty.

Our psychoanalytic understanding of the sense of reality in terms of cathexis of ego boundaries also throws some light on the creative process in general and on what has been called poetic intuition. Maritain (1955) characterized poetic knowledge as the grasping of objective reality of the outer and inner world, a knowledge through "affective union." Maritain asked whether Freud's theory can account for spiritual activities directed toward works of art. Can any mechanistic concept of the psyche do justice to aesthetic activity? Freud recognized the tremendous power of the drives and their channeling within our current civilization into rampant greed, unmitigated lust, and aggression. These enormous forces thrust to the side our well-intentioned efforts in an overcrowded and underfinanced educational system to actualize

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the potential of children in any domain, whether it be science, art, or the simple reading and writing skills. The basic socioeconomic structure that Fukuyama (1989) viewed as vital to what he called the "end of history" is so materialistic and so embedded in what Marx called "commodity fetishism" that it engenders a dog-eat-dog mentality that overwhelms everything else as we rush mindlessly on to obtain "new and improved" commercial products, or more potent forms of mind-boggling drugs, depending on our social class. Possession of such commodities becomes an end in itself, regardless of their value or destructiveness.

Artistic activity, along with much other human potential, is simply swept away by the overwhelming impact of a media-based civilization that is carrying most of the countries of the world with it in what Heidegger called a "technological frenzy." In this frenzy, technological improvement becomes an end in itself, without regard to the problems it creates; even the problems that the technology was originally developed to solve are forgotten. Thus we incur the incredible threats of acid rain, nuclear plant melt-downs, radioactive contamination, the breaking up of the ozone layer, the warming of the climate, and massive environmental destruction, all at an accelerating pace with no end in sight.

In direct contrast to this trend Kohut (1994) wrote,

Perhaps you know me well enough by now to realize that I see the major issue of life not in the terms of the outcome of the struggle for dominance, but in the terms of the outcome of the struggle to maintain active creativeness. Creativeness, however, depends in the last analysis on the ability to be in touch with the playful child deep in the personality, and thus on the ability to maintain the freshness of the child's encounter with the world. All mature creativity ... depends on our capacity to encourage the growth of that inner freedom. (p. 234)

Kohut contended that mystical propensities are present in all people, both consciously and unconsciously. If one can accept this, one can examine dispassionately "the fact that nonrational systems, such as religion, may serve (and have indeed been serving) culture-building, humanitarian ends, while strict rationality may be in the service (and indeed has sometimes been in the service) of culture-destructive, anti-humanitarian ends" (Kohut 1994, p. 316). Kohut would have been quite tolerant of the work of Walter Benjamin (1994). Benjamin's mysticism and metaphysical or transcendental thought served for him as a selfobject or glue that enabled him to hold together in the face of a terrible reality. So Kohut (p. 329) emphasized the importance of separating the lines of development of object love and of narcissism. This is because there are instances of very creative people with good self-cohesion who are stunted in object love, and yet others who have developed the capacity for object love but whose self is always in danger of disintegration. It is interesting

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to speculate where Kohut would have placed Walter Benjamin on these lines of development.

Poetic knowledge comes about by means of introspective focus on our emotional processes. When Rebay (1945) writes "we already feel indebted to him who was able to rise above human nature, to probe with passion, confidence, and courage the mysterious waves of the soul," we may easily suspect that the author is referring to Freud, and may be surprised to discover that he is talking about the artist Kandinsky.

## Creative Intuition

Kris (1952) divided artistic creation into two processes, which are inspiration, a feeling of being driven by an outside agent, and elaboration, a purposeful organization and intent to solve a problem. In inspiration the id communicates to the ego and in elaboration the id is submitted to others in a disguised, symbolized, condensed form. Kris said these stages are characterized by “shifts” in psychic levels, shifts in degree of ego control, and shifts in cathexis of the ego boundaries and of the external world. Such shifts also occur in the observer and are pleasurable; especially control of the ego over these shifts seems to be pleasurable. This is a sort of mastery by repetition at a distance, a controlled and temporary ego regression during inspirational creation. There is a certain amount of narcissistic regression and change in ego boundaries permitting larger parts of the id to come through.

Kris pointed out a resemblance of the creative process to schizophrenia, except that in creation by nonschizophrenics there is only a temporary and controlled regression of the ego. The libido is withdrawn from the ego to a sufficient extent to permit bits of the id to come through, albeit in a symbolized, condensed, distorted, and fragmented form. This concept of regression of the ego or temporary withdrawal of ego boundary cathexis explains such phenomena as Hindu depersonalization or ecstatic states, certain delusions and hallucinations, loss of the feeling of free will, and the sensation that creative instinct or intuition “comes to me” or “bubbles up from the abyss,” as described by A. E. Houseman (Kris, 1952, p. 301).

The question of why, in some individuals, this shift in ego cathexis is possible, making them more able to perform creative work, and also why they have a drive to do this sort of thing, is a very difficult and complicated one. My answer for ordinary creativity, gleaned from intensive study of a number of artists, seems to revolve around the individual personality and life history of the creator. In some creative patients studied there is more closeness to schizophrenia during the artistic process as described by Kris. Others seem

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driven by anxiety or narcissistic pressures to cause these shifts in ego cathexis as an attempt at mastery.

In still others there is a constitutional genius factor that has not been clearly defined. Such individuals seem to be driven by some almost physiological urge as in the case of Mozart or other creative giants. Almost all artists can be classified in one of these three groups; either driven by creative genius from the biological furnace of the individual, or by a near schizophrenia causing temporary regressions and exhaustions of ego functions, or a less pathological and more anxiety-driven process that is predicated on a constitutional ability to shift levels of ego activities and compromise formations in the production of art. Of course, these factors may overlap.

The fact that creative inspiration appears as an active agent coming from somewhere else to the artist leads directly to a discussion of passivity and the creative process. What is the relationship of creativity to passivity? Kris described the artist as projecting impulses that arise out of the id onto an external agent. This is a function of the self-regulated ego regression, resulting in projection followed by a passive reception of the impulses. Ferenczi (1950), in his contribution to the psychology of system constructions, gave a similar theory and explained the elaboration element—described by Kris as purposeful organization and intent to solve a problem—as follows: a projection of irrational internal id strivings into the external world and then an attempt to rationalize the external order of the world, leaving no room for irrationality and inexplicable things; thus an attempt at order and control of the id strivings.

There seem to be pregenital elements in artistic creativity, especially revolving around passive gratifications through the sense perceptory apparatus. Thus the ego of the audience is permitted to regress and certain passive pregenital gratifications are permitted under controlled conditions. In fact, in one sense the activity of the creator can be seen as a sort of self-feeding exercise where the creator projects impulses from the id, elaborates and orders them, and then enjoys his or her own work, incorporating through the sense receptors the material that he or she has projected. One artist told me, “I try to keep in mind while I create that I wish to make a product I can look at, take in, and enjoy. This is true art.”

Sarason (1990) maintained that cultural attitudes and educational practices engender in most people the feeling that artistic activity is alien to their capabilities, and this feeling becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. He suggested the real title of his book should be “*How Our Society Ignores, Blunts, Extinguishes, and Devalues a Universal Feature of Human Capability, with Untoward Effects for People and Society*” (p. x). At the same time, a certain caution is built into his argument because he does not think that an enlarged role for the arts in our schools, although a well-intentioned idea, would result in any significant change. He finds the reason for this in what he considered to

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be our current “worldview” about human nature: one that is neglectful of human potentialities other than scientific calculations. In this sense Sarason's work shows an affinity with Heidegger's (1977) complaints. Heidegger presented well-known descriptions of “the age of technology,” which he labeled as today's predominant worldview, and declared that such a worldview neglects and conceals more than it reveals of what he referred to as Being. Heidegger was content to wait and to gather small clues to other possible manifestations of Being in the hope that somehow, someday, our worldview would change, that the gods would return, and Being disclose itself to us in another fashion. One of the remarkable aspects of Sarason's book is that, although diametrically opposed to Heidegger's philosophy of art, it gives art the same crucial importance as a challenge to our current worldview.

This world view, said Sarason (1990), contains the axiom that artistic activity is the special talent of a few people, an axiom that he tells us again and again is false. He defined “artistic activity” as “... an individual's choice and use of a particular medium to give ordered external expression to internal imagery, feelings, and ideas that are unique in some way for that individual” (p. 1). He made little distinction between “artistic activity” and “art.” Other authors, he said, would view art as a gift bestowed upon a handful of talented

individuals which, as Kohut (1978) might put it, are able to use artistic activity as a sustaining selfobject and to communicate to others in a very special way. For Sarason, everyone has the ability to do this; it is just a matter of the proper teaching in order to bring out the artistic potential of each individual.

Heidegger (1977) pointed out that we are living in an anthropocentric time that establishes the world as objects over against the viewing subject. We (Zimmerman, 1990) are in the society of the spectacle, a key feature of our technological culture. The aura of the work of art is lost in crowded museums and in books crammed with reproductions, and certainly it is lost when a great painting hangs in the lobby of a multinational corporation headquarters. The capacity of the artwork to organize the world and allow the earth to manifest itself is ignored in a mass culture that is fascinated with entities and with the price of various artworks on the auction market. For Heidegger, only art offers the way out of the technological desert of our time; he meditated on Nietzsche's and Hölderlin's views about the world-altering power of the work of art.

While Heidegger was meditating, the Nazis were overrunning Europe and the Holocaust was in full operation; his fellow professors were dismissed from the university because of their Jewish origins and one of his best friends, Karl Jaspers, a philosopher and psychiatrist, was forbidden to teach and relegated to seclusion because his wife was Jewish. Not a word from Heidegger about this, either while it was happening, or for the rest of his life. To emphasize the saving power of art is an attractive, even beautiful thesis, but it runs

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the danger of turning a blind eye to the realities of extensive human misery and suffering and to the senseless roller coaster of human history.

## Creativity in love and Psychoanalysis

I have discussed creativity in love and in psychoanalysis at length in previous publications (Chessick, 1992b, 2002b) and will only briefly review them here. The creative aspect of falling in love requires that there has to be a problem situation that calls for creative imagination, such as a loss that must be ameliorated or a depletion of middle age that is becoming unbearable. The "leap" then, is one of the imagination where the illusion is created that the beloved object will be able to perform all these roles, and passionately, so there will be a sudden release of dammed up narcissistic and sexual tensions that have accumulated sometimes for many years. This creative leap triggers the idealization and obsession with the beloved, and explains the exaltation and ecstasy when the love is reciprocated.

Kohut (1978) pointed out, "People whose self is in need of sustenance, whether because of the energetic drain and anxiety during a creative spell or for other reasons, will tend to establish narcissistic relationships to archaic selfobjects—whether in the form of one of the varieties of a mirror transference or through a merger with an idealized imago" (p. 813n). He convincingly demonstrated that in periods of intensive creativity a similar archaic selfobject transference occurs to those seen in the psychoanalytic situation, a "transference of creativity" (p. 814). It follows from this that creativity enhances the tendency to idealization needed for falling in love, and falling in love enables the actualization of one's potential for creativity since it lends strength to a self that would otherwise be enfeebled by the creative process.

This is not so mysterious, and can be depicted in metapsychological terms. Furthermore, the length of the passion can be understood as a function of the capacity of the lover to maintain the illusion in his or her creative imagination for an indefinite length of time, and of the degree of their proximity and time spent together. For some of us we have a greater capacity to regress in the service of the ego than others, to maintain illusions and idealizations longer, and to engage in a play space in our fantasy lives. Freud already pointed out that with each sexual act the degree of idealization of the loved one diminishes—perhaps he was speaking from his own experience. But of course familiarity makes it harder and harder to maintain idealization, whereas partings and obstacles fan the flames of illusion by keeping the reality of the beloved in a shadow and making it easier to project our wishes and fantasies onto him or her. That is why passionate love is often thought of as incompatible with marriage, and often fades after the familiarity of marriage into either an enduring

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affection or a parting of ways. In Freud's terms, the passionate or "lyrical" phase of love is replaced by a calmer, more rational, more durable "epic" phase.

Similarly, in the state of heightened creative imagination and expanded play space during passionate love there is an enhanced potential to create in other areas of one's life (Gediman, 1975). New values, projects, dreams, and even artistic compositions may abound. The increased cohesiveness of the self as a function of the mirroring from the beloved can also lead to better ego functioning, greater achievement, joy in life, and an enhanced sense of being alive.

Spence (1982) emphasized the creative aspect of the psychoanalyst's work. He believed that the reason interpretations work is due to their poetic value; because they help the patient see by the right words, they offer a coherent account, they remove a responsibility, and there is no evidence against them. So an undocumented assertion can acquire a life of its own and in that sense all interpretations are "inexact," but, insisted Spence, some are more creative than others. He argued that in all of them we exchange narrative for historical truth. Each analyst "hears" material in his or her own way, making interpretation an aesthetic experience as well as useful for results.

Every country creates the psychoanalysis that it needs (Kurzweil, 1989). Each psychoanalysis, or psychoanalytic listening channel as I (Chessick, 1996, 2000) have called it, operates with indigenous philosophical assumptions, intellectual controversies, journals and societies, and fashions of the culture in which it arises. A total muddle of theories results from this in international psychoanalysis, and in

the spirit of Nietzsche, I (Chesick, 1997) have called for a genealogical study of the various forms of psychoanalysis that have become established in different countries over the world.

There is no overarching explanatory metanarrative that all agree upon in the field of psychoanalysis today. There are only geographically localized narratives (or ideologies, or myths). The creation, employment, and development of these variegated localized narratives all over the world is a matter for genealogical investigation. Emphasis on the creative input of the psychoanalyst, which tends to be downplayed in the traditional literature, is becoming increasingly realized to be quite important as we go into the 21st century.

## Emotional Illness And Creativity

In trying to understand the relationship between emotional illness and creativity, I suggested in my recent book (Chesick, 1999) to use both the phenomenologic and psychoanalytic investigative methods, which taken together demonstrate that there are no fixed rigid pathologic intrapsychic structural organizations

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and no such conditions as specific mental “diseases” (putting aside mental aberrations caused by specific organic conditions such as brain tumors, etc.). The psychic state of patients in reasonably good physical health who manifest pathological psychiatric symptoms engages in a dynamic fluctuation and interplay as the ego moves back and forth regressively and progressively in its attempts to deal with unconscious conflicts, the superego, and external reality under the various conditions, vicissitudes, and developmental stages of life. A study of artists and their artworks is enormously rewarding by providing an understanding in a dramatic form from gifted individuals of this fluctuation, one in which all of us engage throughout our lives.

It is a common misconception that in order to be creative an individual has to suffer from an emotional illness. Recent studies, including my own, have indicated that this ubiquitous belief is untrue. Psychoanalytic observation of a large number of creative individuals has repeatedly demonstrated that the amelioration of their neurotic difficulties releases and enhances their creative capacities. The successful interpretation and working through of a psychoneurotic conflict results in a movement of ego capacities to a more conflict-free zone of functioning and one can see in many case histories how patients' psychopathology often actually ruins the products of their creative efforts. The removal of this psychopathology liberates their creative capacities and enables the patients at the same time to develop a more successful and fulfilling existence.

The psychopathology of the artist, while on the one hand rendering the artist alienated and uncomfortable with the prevailing mythology of the civilization and filling him or her with the motive to express either this mythology or a new mythology in some artistic form, at the same time mars the product due to either the intrusion of the artist's delusions and/or obsessional preoccupations into the creative endeavor or to the constriction of that endeavor by the artist's impaired ego functioning and fragmented sense of self. Although Ernest Jones is reputed to have said neurotics are the torchbearers of civilization, psychopathology can steer artistic endeavors into a dead end.

The capacity for sublimation seems to be a critical issue for understanding the relationship between emotional illness and creativity. If an artist can wall off his or her psychopathology and somehow sublimate or transform his or her emotional conflicts and personal passions into creative work, these conflicts and passions can serve as a motor and drive the work forward, along with the selfobject function of the artwork or of the creative process itself. A selfobject function, as Kohut (1977) conceived of it, enhances one's sense of self, and firms up one's psychic integration. When coupled with genius, what emerges is a profound work of art that speaks directly to the audience, is capable of many interpretations because it is multiply determined, and withstands subsequent generations of critics and variegated critical approaches.

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When this capacity for sublimation is not present, the emotional illness of the artist encloses his or her talent in a sort of straightjacket, restricting the creativity and, in the worst cases, disrupting it with obsessions and delusions, and even self-mutilation or self-destruction.

From a psychoanalytic point of view it is usually not difficult to recognize that such disruption has taken place. A careful study of the complete artworks of the artist usually reveals areas of constriction due to emotional difficulties. Within the areas that are not constricted, however, the artist may produce reputable work. For example, the poetry of Emily Dickinson, a reclusive, self-effacing woman who wrote many of her poems on little scraps of waste paper, still has a lasting and universal appeal. So emotional illness per se does not necessarily prevent the production of good art; it may simply constrict or disrupt it even to the point where, as in the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, the whole work becomes a botched failure with spots of beauty in it.

Creativity requires a relatively intact ego; when the ego deteriorates, artistic production deteriorates. Inherent genius along with the capacity for sublimation through artistic creativity is required for the production of great artworks that are not flawed. The driving force to creativity may be thought of as the universal human need to resolve intrapsychic conflicts and reduce anxiety (which is the driving force of all solutions, neurotic or healthy), or the universal human need to provide one's self with enhancing selfobjects as a “glue” to ensure cohesion of the self, or both. The artwork itself may form such a selfobject, or the mirroring appreciation of the audience may perform this function. But in the genius creation of a great artwork there is something more we experience, the shining forth of truth, beauty, and Being in new and unique modes of expression. As Rilke (1984) put it, the “Archaic Torso of Apollo” tells us,

... for here there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life. (p. 61)

The traditional psychoanalytic view, as described above, suggests that there are two processes in artistic creation; inspiration, the feeling of being driven by a “muse” or outside agent, and elaboration, the purposeful organization and intent to solve a problem. The artist tries to endow with secondary public meaning what was meaningful originally only to him or herself, an important task that the artist's psychopathology will impede. The much quoted phrase about temporary ego regression or regression in the service of the ego is alleged to describe what happens during inspirational creation, allowing the id to communicate more directly with the ego. This may or may not be an accurate conception of the creative process, but even Plato in the dialogue *Ion* called it a kind of productive insanity.

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## Genius Creativity

The great artist is able to perceive relations and images that most of us do not or cannot perceive. Genius creativity is an innate capacity, a rare characteristic of certain endowed individuals, involving both the tendency and the ability to perhaps playfully take apart and put together again, to break established patterns of relationships and replace them with new ones.

The experience of great art is neither subjective nor objective but rather a dialectical interchange between the object of art and the subjective viewer, or the musical performance and the audience. What transpires is a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1982) that changes both the work of art and the viewer, a procedure similar to the experience of psychoanalysis, in which there also is a creative fusion of horizons changing both the patient and the analyst (Chessick 1996, 2000). So there is no such thing as a “correct” interpretation of a work of art, nor is there a completely free subjectivity in it. The viewer or listener completes the work of art by his or her interpretation, but at the same time the work of art completes the viewer by helping to realize or actualize his or her potential.

Recent psychoanalytic thinking suggests that great creativity is not a reaction to childhood depression or narcissistic injury, but rather is due to the injury of nonrecognition of special talents and of the problems involved in adaptation to unusual endowments. Niederland (1976) wrote, “Creativity is a solitary activity. It is usually accompanied by a withdrawal from complex emotional involvements with the external world and the latter's replacement—in the mind—by ideas, projects, fantasies, and personal, artistic, cultural, or religious strivings” (pp. 193-194). This is similar to Bush's (1969) depiction of a self-insulating sanctuary that the artist lives in at least for periods of time. Niederland (1976) called this “a walled-off garden away not only from the turbulence and strife of the outer world but also from irksome emotional problems and involvement with people. It is under such circumstances that, in the gifted person, the world of repressed visual, auditory, and kinesthetic memories emerges, which the artist transmutes into the creative act” (pp. 193-195).

Contemporary psychoanalysts concentrate on the capacity of the artist to wall off or transcend psychopathology. So, great art can even be produced by wicked individuals like Caravaggio or Wagner, or very disturbed individuals like Van Gogh or Virginia Woolf, because they can isolate off their psychopathology. When this fails the creative process disintegrates and ego functioning deteriorates. Inner conflicts may increase the pressure to focus within, to enhance the power to symbolize, and to achieve liberation of expression. I believe the pressure to create also comes from the necessity of all primates to communicate, deeply built into our species along with the need for mirroring, one of the earliest selfobject experiences.

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The great creative artist needs to cross three censor stations in order to transmit the meaning inherent in his or her work of art from the deep unconscious to the audience. These are the artist's own defenses or controls, the cultural barrier that the audience has (e.g., in every century the audience has complained about the cacophony of “new” music), and the psychological defenses and controls of the audience. Because these defenses change from time to time and the psychological needs of the audience change from one historical period to the other and from one culture to another, every period and culture is characterized by specific needs and patterns of defenses. This requires the creative artist to continually search for new means to keep communicating with that fluctuating cultural and intrapsychic state of the audience while continuing to create art. Thus Hegel was wrong when he claimed that historically the creation of art was over and inevitably superseded by religion. A lot of great art has been produced since Hegel's era, but of course the creative products are vastly different just as our outlook on life has been vastly changed by the horrible events of the 20th century.

Neurotics and great creative artists differ not only in their basic psychopathology but in the way they succeed in coping with it. Freud said the artist, like the neurotic, withdraws from an unsatisfactory reality into the world of imagination but, unlike the neurotic, he or she knows how to find a way back from it and once more to get a firm foothold in reality. For example, the neurotic Mahler believed that what moves us in a work of art is precisely its mysterious and unfathomable elements. Feeling incapable of explaining his musical intention in words, he was nevertheless aware of expressing in his music powerful truths. He believed his music expressed his whole self and changed continuously as his self developed, and it went much further. Mahler felt that creative artists are the people least able to answer the question of what is creative activity, and he insisted he could not even explain his compositions to himself let alone obtain an explanation for others.

## Truth, Beauty, and Being in Art

Emotional illness, unless it can be effectively dissociated or walled off, complicates and obscures the truth that attempts to communicate itself through a work of art. First, it interferes with and constricts the creative process of the artist in many ways, sometimes even tragically causing the artist to destroy his or her own work entirely. Second, because of the defective aspects of the artwork that emotional illness engenders, it discourages us from tarrying before the work and interferes with our focus and capacity to directly experience the aesthetic phenomena expressed to us through the artist.

One way to approach this problem is to discuss the whole concept of truth,

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beauty, and Being as they are displayed in art. For example, in my study I have labeled Ezra Pound's *Cantos* as a "metaphysical failure," a failure on his part to produce consistent poetry that reveals truths that cannot be attained by ordinary scientific methods. The paradigm of this kind of manifestation of truth, beauty, and Being in artistic creations is to be found in the works of great playwrights like Shakespeare or Shaw, great novelists like Proust or Tolstoy, great composers like Bach or Wagner, and great artists like Rembrandt or Goya. Truth, beauty, and Being can be expressed in art even though the various concepts of them are inherently ambiguous and the grasp of them is often fleeting and ineffable. Furthermore, the experiencing of art as a manifestation of these transcendent phenomena depends on one's sociocultural horizon so, as has become increasingly evident in this postmodern era, we are always dealing with limited rather than absolute, essential, and eternal truths and absolute beauty, as aspects of Being.

One of the biggest problems that faces us when we talk about "art" is the contemporary issue of what constitutes art, a philosophical problem. Some philosophers claim that artworks are whatever artists make and there is no standard about how a work of art should look, nor does it have to have any political or social message. I agree with the opposing view to this, one maintaining that art embodies values that are phenomenologically given to us by that unique vehicle of aesthetic communication; otherwise art would be pointless ... and it is not. Artistic and creative endeavors are found in all cultures and all eras, evidence for the universal need of humans even in primitive caves or in concentration camps to try to make contact with the stars. Art shows us, for any culture, what we respond to and what we are. There is nothing new about the idea that creative work is similar in its construction and function to the dream. What is interesting and important is the unanswered question of why it is that certain creative works have universal appeal whereas most creative works are soon forgotten if they are ever recognized at all.

Melanie Klein's early theory of artistic creativity was that the creator wishes to rediscover the mother of his or her early days who has been lost. For example, Robert Louis Stevenson's mother is best described, I think, as a flake, a person who was both there and not there. Bell (1992) described her as "often vapid, absent even when she was present" (p. 22). Klein reported on the tremendous anxiety of children over the child's sadistic desire to destroy the mother and rob the body of its contents. In her view, since the loss of the love object mother is the basic infantile danger situation, the urge to create arises from the impulse to restore and repair the injured object after a fantasied destructive attack.

But I believe that psychohistorical analysis of genius creative works based on the author's individual conflict situation is insufficient. For example, Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," the theme of two characters, one of

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whom is a personification of the id and the other a personification of the ego and intellect, is a universal theme in literature. The example of the same universal theme to which I refer the most in my work with patients is from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, a work of his old age and greatest maturity. This play, which was produced some time early in the 17th century, is the shortest play Shakespeare wrote and gives the freest possible reign to his imagination. Caliban, the offspring of a mating of the devil and a witch, has a physique that Shakespeare purposely keeps impossible to visualize. He is a slave of Prospero, who represents the ego and intellect, and he feels a peculiar hatred for this master who has dispossessed him. Prospero has found him impossible to educate and must simply repress him literally underground. Remember Shakespeare's depiction of Caliban as being eager to rape and destroy the innocent Miranda and everybody else.

Any analysis of creative products always must consider the principle of multi-determination; there are levels of conflict from the most archaic, involving the poisoned breast and the profound longing for the nurturant mother with the accompanying rage and hatred at the disappointment in the mother's preoedipal failures, up the preoedipal and finally the oedipal ladder to the classical Freudian themes involving incest and castration. One of the problems with psychohistory is that it often centers on those themes which are of most interest to the particular psychohistorian. We should never forget that characters like Mr. Hyde or Caliban are cold-blooded killers and/or rapists, and therefore at some level they are manifestations of the deepest and most archaic human sadistic themes (Chessick, 2000), perhaps going all the way back to the doubling of Cain and Abel.

We see in Stevenson's Jekyll-Hyde story how the evil side of humans' dual nature eventually triumphs and begins to assert itself constantly; in despair about this, Dr. Jekyll kills himself. It would be easy to read this story as a prophetic description of the 20th century, in which the evil side of human nature certainly triumphed and led to the mass suicidal psychosis known as war in which millions and millions of people senselessly and uselessly lost their lives. As of this writing the 21st century has opened by continuing the senseless slaughter.

I believe that *all* artwork is founded on the seething cauldron of the unconscious and in some fashion or other expresses the unconscious of the individual, even though it may at another level either express or defend against childhood traumata. Extremely traumatized individuals, if they have creative ability, may use artwork in the service of either expressing or denying or working through the trauma in some form or other, but I think this is a very limited description of the function of art. It is much better to progress by trying to understand the multiple functions that artistic works can serve. Why, for example, is the contemporary art of Kalho or Bacon considered great art and viewed by many people in museums whereas the art of some unfortunate

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schizophrenic patient is not? Is there not truth in art as Hegel thought, that is expressed through the artist and his or her artistic creation? Why not look at art in this way, the way of philosophers, rather than simply characterizing art as a function of the artist's ego attempting to work something through, whether it be trauma or unconscious conflicts or both?

I agree with Giovacchini (1968) that although there is a phenomenological similarity between the psychic structure and behavior of creative persons and that of disturbed noncreative or psychotic patients, these similarities are not so deep and there are important fundamental differences. The fragmented self of the psychotic may obtain through the artistic product a selfobject that can contribute to repairing self-fragmentation, but the production of art in the psychotic does not successfully achieve that function. So psychotic individuals may compulsively create art over and over again, some of it quite interesting art and a lot of it boring and repetitious, but it does not result in an improvement of the cohesion of their self; rather it is a kind of obsessive attempt at self-repair that always fails. There is no truth in schizophrenic art. This emptiness in their productions regardless of the artistic talent displayed could be a function of organic factors in schizophrenia; nobody knows.

The public's reaction to psychotic art is one of indifference and boredom whereas the reaction to really innovative art by a great artist is at times quite a bit more dramatic (witness the riots that broke out at the premier performance of Stravinsky's magnificent *Rite of Spring*). The reason for this is that great art conveys the truth about ourselves, a dazzling experience of beauty, and an event of Being that challenges our worldview. The individual artist may not even be aware that he or she is communicating these things. When they are communicated, the public strongly responds, sometimes with ecstatic aesthetic pleasure, sometimes with rage, sometimes with avoidance and denial, and sometimes with horror and anxiety.

I (Chessick, 1999) challenged as being insufficient the traditional psychoanalytic description of creativity that viewed it as fundamentally involving regression in the service of the ego. As early as 1967 Weisman pointed out that repressed id content can re-enter the ego for inspirational creative purposes *without* ego regression. Alteration from personal enactment to creative enactment can be ascribed to the dissociative function of ego; the capacity for dissociation is a predominant feature of ego functioning in the creative process. So the artist has a creative self and a more conventional self. The dissociative function liberates the artist from his or her customary mode of operation and permits emerging drive-derived cathexis to new treatment by the ego and the superego.

As an example of how all these things are woven together, my (Chessick, 1999) book on these matters is like the Russian doll within a doll within a doll. There are five dolls in it that can be read (either simultaneously or at separate levels) as: (a) an up-to-date psychoanalytic study of the creative process

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itself, and how it is interfered with, not enhanced as is often believed, by mental illness. This level also includes a look at creativity in the psychoanalyst's work; (b) two detailed psychoanalytic case presentations, one of "that difficult individual" Ezra Pound and the other of "Barry" a composite patient I created out of my clinical experience with neurotics who attempted to create, and found their creativity inhibited by neurosis and released by psychoanalysis. Also presented are some minor case studies; (c) by presenting you *directly* with the creative work of Pound and then the "creative work" that I produced allegedly of "Barry," I offer the reader the phenomenologic experience directly of their agony and failure and how their mental illness wrecked their creativity. This approach follows Sartre's "existential psychoanalysis" and requires understanding of the patient's culture, e.g., as in his *Family Idiot*, so I have included studies of our civilization, educational system, etc.; (d) a philosophical study of what created artworks represent on a metaphysical level; for example, the differences between a psychotic's creative philosophical system and one that needs to be taken seriously by scholars. I stressed the importance and tried to establish the value of aesthetic education and support of the arts; and (e) a literary creation of mine, rather like a novel, containing a lot of summing up of my opinions and life experiences, and created by me also into the fictional character "Barry." The high point of this level is a complete three-act play (Chapter 16) presented as a creation of Barry and similarly my created Barry's "notebooks and diaries". Conversely these levels can be interpreted endlessly from various orientations "all the way down."

Every phenomenological study of human being and especially of human creativity shows the weakness of the DSM-IV and its limitations in understanding psychopathology. It is indeed difficult to hold onto one's optimism about the future of humans, about the potential of *dasein*, as Heidegger called it, in this new dark age. But there is much more to human consciousness, the human self, and the human search for transcendence than can be found either in neurobiology or in the self formed by interpersonal experiences or, for that matter, even in the Freudian hydrodynamic model of the psyche. The postmodernists and the intersubjectivists will not have the last word. Ask Harold Bloom (1994)!

From half-measures weaned  
And in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful  
Resolutely let us live.  
—Goethe

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