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On the Artist and the Creative Process

M. O. Strahl, M.D.

Norma Jabin presented the first paper, titled "Thoughts on Creativity." A great artist's work reflects truths of his or her time and culture and thereby is an aesthetic experience that makes the work accepted as great by all who view it. Many great artists are ahead of the times and foresee cultural evolution and

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intuitively capture universal and timeless truths in their works. In becoming a painter, Jabin learned that creativity is the art of making form out of chaos, of combining elements in such a way that "something new" is formed. It is experienced as "giving birth" to new life where none had existed-and most artists experience sudden ecstasy, a "eureka" sensation, when the phase of creative synthesis is completed. This glorious feeling is sometimes also frightening; it can arouse a fear of exposure, a fear that the work is not good enough to be acceptable. The more original and significant it is, the more the artist is open to scrutiny. A true artist must be brave enough to express his or her inner self. In contrast, repression is detrimental because it can cause the artist to censor valid emotionally laden ideas and intuition, and block insights.

In concluding her paper Jabin outlined the stages the artist goes through in the process of creating: The first phase is that of *immersion*, the second is the *gestation* and *incubation* phase, then a phase of *integration* takes place, all from the unconscious. A sudden *illumination* phase occurs when the artist's conscious insight into what is created is revealed, accompanied by feelings of exaltation.

Margaret Owen Tsaltas presented a paper called "Artists I Have Known and Psychoanalysis." Very little has been written about the development of young, living artists, their peculiar requirements for growth, and the special clinical needs their growth patterns require. The purpose of the paper was to describe the development of artists the author had known, along with a proposal for further study of the early life development of artists and their processes of making art.

The creative artist must have access to the right brain in order to evolve creative ideas, as well as to the left brain in order to store and retrieve personal memories and organize perceptions into gestalten. The artist also needs to be able to slip back and forth easily from one mode of thinking to the other. Much of the anxiety artists may experience derives from discomfort or temporary inability to make this transition without interference from irrelevant or tangential concerns.

Most of the authors's sources of information are the four artists she analyzed successfully, another one she afforded long-term supportive therapy, and several she had seen at the clinic in short-term psychotherapy. Another source of information came from family members, in one case a five generation line of creative people in various art forms. From the above sources, the author took account of the many ways artists differ from other people, for example: They create what they do because they enjoy using their ability and feel motivated; they require protracted training and a mentor; the artist's parents usually collaborate in the prolonged training period so the artist's separation-individuation period may be delayed or never resolved; when adult, they transfer their dependency to a spouse, a friend, or even rivals; the artist requires easy transitions between right brain-left brain thought processes repeatedly when at work; artists rarely retire, and most are creative throughout old age.

In America, self-worth is usually equated with money, regardless of lip service given to the arts. Yet, about 80% of artists support themselves by their art, work alone, live below the poverty line, and are dependent on family or friends. Few artists gain fame and wealth in their profession, and most poor artists are considered

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by other people to pursue art as a form of play. The artists are humiliated and hurt when people scorn them as lazy for not getting a "real job." This attitude lowers the artists' self-esteem and confidence in their creative work.

In conclusion, the author's firm opinion is that psychoanalysts could do artists a favor by contracting with select graduate schools with Fine Art Ph.D. programs to apply a mutually agreed upon plan to elucidate retrospectively the childhood experiences of artists and prospectively describe the conflictual experiences of emerging, mature, and finally senescent artists in a long-term study. Such a study would contribute to our understanding of some of the most valuable people in our society and perhaps allay forever some of the prejudices that hurt these creative people.

In his paper, "Creative Brainstorms: A Story of Madness and Genius," Dr. Russell Monroe clarifies the distinction between these conditions. A mad genius is one who has lost touch with reality, therefore whatever he creates reflects distorted truths and is usually unacceptable to others. In contrast, a rational genius creates a new and unusual view of reality that becomes accepted by others. Monroe has studied the lives of five geniuses in the arts who were in contact with reality most of the time but have been episodically "mad." The episodes were intense but brief, with precipitous onset and remission. Between the attacks these geniuses had self-awareness of an imminent episode and insight as to how the episodes might distort or contribute to their creativity. They have written descriptions of events

that preceded, accompanied, and followed the episodic disorder. Their self-described “prodromal symptoms” resemble seizure activity observed in patients experiencing “storms of neuronal discharges” occurring in the brain. Following the episodes they have often described having a creative inspiration that triggers a “eureka” and ecstasy reaction to their new “brainstorm.”

The five creative artists Monroe studied are Mary Lamb, Virginia Woolf, August Strindberg, Vincent Van Gogh, and Edvard Munch. As part of their genius, these subjects were all willing to reveal candidly in their writings their innermost thoughts and feelings and showed surprising sensitivity to psychodynamic insights into the influence early childhood experiences had on their subsequent lives.

The present report focuses on Van Gogh. A number of diagnoses were considered for Van Gogh's illness, the most popular of which was epilepsy. There was no record of epilepsy on Van Gogh's St. Remy Asylum chart, but his sudden explosive behavior was considered evidence of “epilepsy without seizures.” The evidence shows, however, that Vincent drank absinthe, which contains a euphoriant, terpen thujone, and when deprived of absinthe, he probably drank turpentine and inhaled camphor to get euphoric. When suffering an episode of desperation, he might well have self-destructively abused these compounds. But his final anguish leading to suicide by gunshot differed from his previous impulsive suicidal attempts. In this fatal instance he had procured a gun two days before he shot himself; it was a carefully considered act.

In late adolescence, Van Gogh showing idiosyncratic behavior following a failed (illusory) love affair. During the next decade he was markedly ambivalent

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toward his parents and was only saved from self-destruction by his younger brother, Theo, who supported him for the rest of his life, mainly in fervent belief of his artistic genius.

Vincent's insatiable dependency needs were soon threatened by Theo's marriage and the subsequent birth of his nephew and namesake. He became depressed and sought treatment from Dr. Gachet, a homeopathic physician and art collector. Pressures on Vincent soon mounted: Theo's wife Johanna was ill and unable to nurse the infant who was also ill. In his letters to Theo and Jo, he projected his own primitive fear that the infant would not recover if his mother's breasts dry up. Vincent's healthy attitude toward Dr. Gachet changed to blatant transference neurosis.

Other evidence that the “loss of mother's breast” was crucial to Vincent's suicide is given by Lubin, a biographer who surmised that Vincent felt unloved by his mother following the loss in childbirth of her first son, also named Vincent, born a year to the day before Vincent the artist. Actually, his mother had been *the* sympathetic parent and, in fact, encouraged his artistic efforts early in his life. Yet, it must have had a deeply traumatogenic effect on the boy to walk daily past the graveyard next to home and see his name and birth date (minus one year) on baby Vincent's tombstone.

Monroe feels strongly that careful study of our genius artists' psychopathology is a neglected part of our usual psychohistories but is essential if we are to understand the inner world of these important people.

The paper presented by Melvin Shaw is titled, “The Eureka Process: A Structure for the Creative Experience in Science and Engineering.” This detailed paper focuses on the thoughts and feelings of scientists when in the throes of scientific creative development of inventions. Little has been written on this subject, so the author set up a formal heuristic procedural study to ascertain the scientist's experience of modeling natural phenomena. The author used this procedure for gathering data from himself and 11 other scientists to discover the nature of this problem as it exists in human experience. Studying the data, the author then designed “The Research Model” using McNally's scheme showing that the creative processes occur along sequential phases: (1) immersion, (2) incubation, (3) illumination, (4) explication, and (5) creative synthesis.

The immersion phase involves experiential input from internal and external sources. It is the learning phase involving components of data taking for development of skills and technique. The incubation phase involves the unconscious development of skills and technique, and involves the unconscious development of the creative process. Both right and left brain components become important and a parallel functioning process occurs here. Little is known about it, but it probably controls the major aspects of how we function. It appears to us in various ways such as dreams, sexual arousal, and uncontrollable urges that are acted out without any apparent logical base. Lastly, within the unconscious, there lies the often unexplainable—the root of *intuition*—the force that drives us toward new knowledge. Illumination is the moment, or phase, when pieces of the puzzle fall into place. It is the “Eureka!” experience felt by the scientist when he

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exclaims, “Aha! Now I have insight into the problem; the whole thing has come together!” It is the “peak” experience. Explication is the phase of self-explanation as the illumination becomes detailed: meanings unfold and are elaborated upon, and when patterns and individual meanings, clusters, relationships, and key themes are explored and refined. The creative synthesis is the phase when the full nature of the achievement is revealed and captured by the scientist.

The five phases of the creative process are not each separate; they flow into each other (like the colors in a rainbow) until the creative work is synthesized. Here the creator is near the end point of the attempt to transform experiential details via a cognitive process into a piece of work that involves a strictly human transformation. Yet it is never possible to achieve a complete representation of the experience via cognitive means. We are limited by our uniqueness, finite senses, and finite ability to create. The synthesis of our experience results in a theory of nature, a work of useful technology invented by the scientist or a unique work of art created by the artist.

After creative synthesis occurs, personal validation results simply if the creator likes it. Collective validation occurs if the scientist's creative synthesis is held for scrutiny by his or her peers and they accept it. Thereupon it gets fed back into the knowledge base and is

filtered through the collective consciousness. All this is fundamental to the technique by which natural science and engineering advances.

For this investigation the author chose 14 competent scientist/engineer co-researchers whom he requested to assist him, knowing that with these men he could interact with ease. He conducted his interviews in his own home where the setting was warm, congenial, pleasant, and open. Honest exchanges occurred in all the interview he conducted. The interviews lasted no more than 90 minutes each, and the records were taped and transcribed. Shaw was surprised to find that after five or six interviews he had obtained most of the data he needed.

The *implications* of his findings are as follows: (1) There is a unified process associated with the experience of creative behavior of all types. (2) Illumination occurs when *meaning* is given to events that occurred in the past, can be repeated, and are therefore acceptable to others, or is capable of occurring in the future. When immersed in an exciting creative act, one feels ecstatic. This drive to learn is a built-in biological pleasuredrive that is as basic for all individual needs, as is the sexual pleasuredrive for species survival. (3) Collective modes of validation allows for more rewards from other people than does personal validation; the first joins us with people, the second separates us. (4) History tells us that our system has positive feedback inherent in it. Hence our growth in understanding and technology appears limitless; the more we create, the more knowledge we gain to expand our creativity.

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