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THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND HEALING

Once, in a discussion at the Weimar Bauhaus with his friend and colleague Lothar Schreyer, the painter, Paul Klee became very thoughtful. The two men were puzzling over the meaning and purpose of their art, with Schreyer arguing that their search to combine movement and tranquility in an 'agitated equilibrium' was a childish paradox, exasperatingly impossible. Seizing Schreyer's pessimism, Klee countered by pointing out that any affinity to child-like creativity is not to be criticized, as his work had often been for its own supposedly child-like qualities. He turned their conversation significantly by adding: "That criticism is true. But that's not the whole of it. The scribes and pharisees say that my pictures are the product of a diseased brain." Schreyer reports that a "mood of excited gaiety took possession of Klee" as Klee "took from the shelf Prinzhorn's recently published book of pictures by the insane, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*" which was "at the time going the rounds in the Bauhaus." Klee said to Schreyer, "you know this excellent work by Prinzhorn, don't you. Let's see for ourselves. This picture is a fine Klee. So is this, and this one too. Look at these religious paintings. There's a depth and power of expression that I never achieve in religious subjects. Really sublime art. Direct spiritual vision. Now can you say that I'm on my way to the madhouse? Aside from the fact that the whole world is an insane asylum."

From there, Klee turned toward the meaning of his own art and said, "My pictures are images of nature's possibilities" which see into and depict a hidden, secret world that is, perhaps, visible only to "children, madmen and savages." He went on to clarify that this world "is a realm of the unborn and the dead, the realm of what can be, might be, but need not necessarily be." It is, he concluded, "an in-between world . . . that exists between the worlds our senses can perceive, and I absorb it inwardly to the extent that I can project it outwardly in symbolic correspondences." And for him, the work of the child, madman or savage could only confirm his inner vision.

Although taking place in the 1920's, this conversation was not the first time Klee recognized and praised the importance of the art of the insane,

children and the so-called primitives. As early as 1912 he recorded in his *Diaries* that such painting must "be taken seriously, more seriously than all the public galleries when it comes to reforming today's art." This was a strong sentiment, especially at a time when the modern avant-garde had yet to truly ignite the interest of the wider public.

All well and good. But what do such insights, although coming from one of the foremost painters of the modern movement and an incisive critic of his times, have to do with the healing process which takes place in the analytic use of creative work with the psychiatric patient? Or how do such insights clarify the healing process as it occurred with particular impressiveness in the case of Mary Barnes, a former psychiatric patient who, in a moving autobiographical narrative describing a descent into mental illness, *Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness*, disclosed how it was her discovery of creative painting which provided the fulcrum around which the healing forces in her psyche could coalesce? Perhaps there are no direct answers to such questions. Nevertheless, what Klee is confirming is an opinion long held, that the creative experience in art shares a common paternity with the creative experience in mental illness, in childhood and among primitive peoples. More recently, Jean Dubuffet, the French painter, took Klee's prophetic words to heart by realizing the reformative power of the art work of hospitalized mental patients. He began to collect their work in the 1950's and helped to eventually found the now famous Musée de l'Art Brut* in Lausanne, Switzerland. Similar interest is increasing in Britain where there was a large exhibit of such work under the title of "The Outsiders." In addition, at the Museum of Art in Bern, Switzerland, there exists the Wölfli Foundation, dedicated to researching, preserving and exhibiting the art work of Adolf Wölfli, who was for years an in-patient in a psychiatric institution not far from Bern. Here in Zurich, the Klinik am Zurichberg, the clinic and research center for Jungian psychology, has mounted several very successful exhibits of the art work of its in-patients within the last few years. In a word, society is recognizing more and more the value of these

*"L'Art Brut" is roughly translated into English as "Outsider Art." The Collection de l'Art Brut: Catalogue describes it as "works produced by people who for various reasons have not been culturally conditioned. They are recluses, maladjusted persons, psychiatric hospital patients, inmates of prisons—all kinds of dwellers on the fringes of society."

works, psychologically, artistically and now even commercially. Astonishingly, a painting by Wölfli might sell for as much as \$25,000. But again, what of the healing process? Let me digress but for a few moments more.

In his *Notewooks* Klee speaks of this common paternity as an "in-between world" of infinite possibilities which is made visible through the creation of "symbolic correspondences." He calls it the "heart of creation" and the "primordial underground" from which emerges the work as gestalt, a living being. It is a world of universal laws and formative powers which gives birth to the art work as a living symbol. But it is also a world of tormenting, destructive darkness, a world of the dead. In the end, like Klee's own pictures, it is simply the neutral world of natural change and transformation, suprahuman and transcending human understanding, much as nature herself proceeds to build up and tear down eternally. It is a world of continual becoming, "the source point," as Erich Neumann said, "of transition and transformation" that "cannot be looked for and cannot be held," where only in "his creative flowing . . . man becomes a part of nature, is joined once more to the 'one reality' of existence in which no enduring thing can endure, because all is transformation." It is eternal death and rebirth, art as nature's possibilities.

This world of artistic creation was described in Jung's essay of 1930, "Psychology and Literature." In it he differentiates between two types of artists. The first is the one who creates out of his conscious experiences in the world; his thoughts and feelings, hopes and values, sufferings and passions; his humanity. His art radiates a sense of human proportions. The second sort of artist is driven to create from some other source. I will quote this important passage in extenso to preserve its intensity:

The experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression is no longer familiar. It is something strange that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind, as if it had emerged from the abyss of prehuman ages, or from a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding and to which in his weakness he may easily succumb. The very enormity of the experience gives it its value and its shattering impact. Sublime, pregnant with meaning, yet chilling the blood with its strangeness, it arises from timeless depths; glamorous, daemonic and grotesque, it bursts asunder our human standards of value and aesthetic form, a terrifying tangle of eternal chaos, a "crimen laesae majestatis humanae." On the other hand, it can be a revelation of beauty which we can never put into words . . . the pri-

mordial experiences rend from top to bottom the curtain upon which is painted the picture of an ordered world, and allow a glimpse into the unfathomable abyss of the unborn and of things yet to be. Is it a vision of other worlds, or of the darkness of the spirit, or of the primal beginnings of the human psyche? We cannot say that is any or none of these.

The similarity of word and flavor of Jung's statement with Klee's thoughts is striking. Both declaratively feel that certain kinds of artistic expression go well beyond the world of surface appearance and unveil a territory and a process which lies at the recesses of the human psyche. Such revelations can be terrifying or enlightening, or both together. The art which captures such energy abounds in awesome fascination, gripping artist and viewer alike in its emotionality, its numinosum. In the language of psychology these other worlds "the primal beginnings of the human psyche" and "the in-between world" of the dead and yet unborn are none other than the collective unconscious, a region of primordality, archetypal patterns of human behavior, perception and imagination. It is the objective inscape wherefrom every individual consciousness emerges and is the stuff of our nightly excursions into the world of dreams, of our day-time symptomatology and of the contents of our psychoses. Yet, as we know from the artists, mystics, poets and analysts who have ventured to enter and explore these dangerous inner depths, the collective unconscious is also the source of man's greatest creative potential, a storehouse of possibility, purpose and meaning. Thus, on this level of creativity, art and madness originate from the same source.

This is more graphically understood when we turn to the case of Mary Barnes. Mary Barnes was afflicted by schizophrenia, a term coined by the great Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, which literally means splitmindedness. In the word is conveyed the image of an illness characterized by fracture, splintering, falling to pieces of ordinary day-to-day consciousness. The sense of me-ness, of the ego as subject of experience, who has will and volition and who feels himself to be a unity, no longer functions as such. In the schizophrenic state the me in the personality is overwhelmed by a welter of powerful, sometimes conflicting, sometimes malicious or beneficent and often archaic, emotions, fantasies and images. Reality loses its safe, familiar face because as it is the ego which no longer feels in one piece but is the psychic factor which perceives and reflects an ordered world, reality is no longer experienced as being unified. Inner

and outer crumble together in a cauldron of disconnected, highly constellated archetypal pieces.

From this failure of ego functioning what emerges, or should I say re-emerges, is the prehuman chaos of the numinously archetypal, that primordial underground out of which consciousness was born. Where in the healthier personality the existence of this unconscious hinterland can be endured and the primordial experiences that often come at crucial phases in life can be creative and transforming, for the schizophrenic something goes painfully wrong. What is left is a living dream in which the primordial forces of things yet to be, things unborn and already dead rage against what remains of the ego, the self's archetypal representative of order, consciousness and light. Where the artist is able to "form" (*gestalten*), the patient becomes "de-formed." Where the artist's work actively retains a sense of unity and order, the patient's work exhibits a passive falling apart. Instead of being a vehicle of greater consciousness, the primordial experience announces a loss of anchorage in this in-between world. Although the ground of their respective experiences is undeniably the same, the quality of their involvement differs dramatically. Where the artist is playing *with* his madness, the patient is playing *out* his.

All the same, we know that for Mary Barnes and for other psychiatric patients, the creative act of painting, the attempt for "form-ulate" their inner imaginal turmoil in the daylight of the world as such, which retains an inherent order, can be healing. As a schizophrenic, Mary's ego could no longer effectively participate in the dynamic self-regulation of the psychic whole. When it could, the ego would automatically help to contain, integrate and render meaningful the contents of the unconscious depths when they entered the field of consciousness, be it through thoughtful analysis, feelings of meaningfulness, intuitions of purpose or perception of ordered formation. Having no conscious mediator strong enough, no locus of transition or subject of transformation, the liaison between inner and outer collapses and the unconscious world boils to the surface in psychosis. By objectively envisaging (place before one's face, contemplating from a distance) his inner state, the schizophrenic painter uses the daytime world of ordered collective conscious reality; the colors, the paper, the atelier, the act of creation itself, the guidance of an art therapist, and the approbation of and discussion with the psychotherapist, as a surrogate ego through which to capture, regulate and frame that very

unconscious chaos. By fixing the images and emotions, the disparate components of his inner turmoil, within the framework of a painting or binding them tightly into the substance of clay or stone, the residual strength of the wounded ego can be mobilized as it fastens itself to the mooring of concrete, physical reality. In the making of art, the ego actively reforms itself in the here and now, regaining a sense of meaningful purpose and participation in a formerly rampant experience of the inner and outer world. This is not unlike what the alchemists were attempting in their own experimentation with the projected unconscious *prima materia*, an effort they considered equivalent to nature's own work. The material reality of creating, contained within the boundaries of the object as hermetic vessel, warmed by the heat of psychotherapeutic incubation, restores to the ego its feeling of bodily efficacy and its role as *homo faber*, primary markers by which the emergent consciousness may take its bearings. According to Jung in his essay, "Picasso," making the inner world materially conscious in the substance of the object and standing before and apart from it as subject to object, as "I" to "Thou," heals the psyche's fracture. It becomes healing (i.e., makes whole) precisely because it is the restitution of the ego's place in the psychic hierarchy as a re-personalized identity delimited by the necessities of time, space and causality, conditions that were lost to it in the de-personalizing *participation mystique* of psychosis or archetypal identification. Thus, by creating the work of art, the patient is himself created.

Archetypally, this is healing because it reenacts that imaginal experience of primeval emergence of the ego out of the chaotic swirl of infancy on the personal level, and the birth of culture from proto-historical darkness on an impersonal one. It is here that madmen, children, savages and, finally, artists find their common source for, as Jung rightly observed, the work of art grows out of the artist's psychic depths as the child from its mother's womb. All are archetypal images of the birth/rebirth of consciousness from the collective unconscious, that primal beginning of the human psyche, "the heart of creation." It is the work of art, ego consciousness, the rise of culture and *l'art brut* as symbolic analogues. Each a variation of the other, but in the end expressing, as Klee wrote, "a final secret standing behind all our shifting views," which Jung called the mysterious "healing and redeeming depths of the collective psyche."

In the delicately slow maneuvering of a patient through madness,

accompanied by psychotherapist and engaged in creative activity, a bridge is gradually rebuilt between conscious and unconscious. One can feel this agonizing process in the works themselves, having as they do a sense of dire urgency about them and a kind of terrible beauty. They move us as much with their inhuman numinosity as with their human confusion. Perhaps it is this desperate struggle to recover that essential agitated equilibrium, the dynamic self-regulation of the psychic whole, experienced by the more healthy personality as a search for meaning, that has the greatest message for us. In the rawness of these works of art can be felt the powerful reply of an unconscious world whose purposefulness and living necessity is being ignored or taken for granted in an age of complacent reliance on rationality. If such creating can indeed heal the wounded psyche in the individual, perhaps the collective trend in consciousness to re-value and re-evaluate its origins, content and meaning is but one more instance of compensation on a larger scale. Whatever the case, it is a good chance that by paying attention to the creative process of the mentally ill (those psychiatric patients who live in our hospitals as wards of the state and in our souls as wards of our consciousness) something of its healing power might be worked on us. As Jung said:

Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he enthalls and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm of the ever-enduring. He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night.

If so, it will accomplish much more than Klee originally thought by reforming not only today's art, but today's consciousness.

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