

HOMAGE TO THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

By Paul Levy

WARNING: THIS ARTICLE IS DESIGNED TO ACTIVATE THE CREATIVE SPIRIT. PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK.

After my first year of college, I remember wanting to take some time off so that I could figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I had always been a good student, and my parents had high hopes and dreams for my success, so the last thing they wanted was for me to take time off from school. Remembering that as a little kid I used to love to draw, they suggested that maybe I wanted to take an art class, hoping that this might keep me in school. I decided to take their suggestion and I took a painting class. It came as quite a shock for me when, in this class, I accessed a long-forgotten creative aspect of myself, and realized that not just me, but that everyone, by “our very nature” is creative.

As if remembering what I was here to do, over the next few years of university I began reconnecting with my long dormant artistic soul. In the meanwhile, I began losing interest in the field of study I had taken on – economics. This career choice had been greatly influenced by my parents, so this change was very distressing for them, as they had great expectations for their only child’s success in a financially lucrative field. Matters were made worse by the fact that I had been such a good student that I had been hired by Princeton University to be a paid researcher while still an undergraduate at my university. Conventionally speaking, I was on the fast track to great success, on my way to fulfilling my parents’ dream. And yet, the more I was getting into art and exploring the creative process, the more bored – and depressed - I was becoming in my studies of economics.

My father, in his sister’s words to me years later, was “strutting like a peacock” during my tenure at Princeton. He was vicariously living his life through my accomplishments, and to say he was upset when I began moving away from pursuing a career in economics and moving towards, in his eyes, living the life of a struggling artist, would be a huge understatement. He did everything in his power (and then some) to disabuse me of the notion of pursuing art, treating my idea of becoming an artist as if it was a malignant disease that needed to be eradicated from my mind at all costs. He saw my pursuit of a career in art as taking me away from his idea of who he thought I was. This idea, I might add, had nothing to do with who I was but had everything to do with who, due to his own narcissism, he wanted me to be. He saw my interest in art as taking me away from reality, while I felt my desire to make art was getting me in touch with what was truly real. Our radically diverging points of view created an enormous conflict between us.

To create context, for readers familiar with my previous writings in which I mention going through intense experiences of abuse and psychic violence¹ from my father that almost killed me, these traumatic experiences were constellated around my strong desire to become an artist. Seen as a dreaming process, my father was acting out in full-bodied form a figure that evidently existed not only within my own mind but within the collective unconscious itself. It was as if a deeper, inner archetypal process had nonlocally spilled outside of my psyche and was being played out in embodied form through my relationship with my father. We were not just involved in a personal process, but were actually enacting a deeper mythic archetypal drama.

Oftentimes when a person is on their way to stepping into and connecting with their authentic selves, speaking their true voice, seemingly darker forces manifest trying to stop them. This archetypal dynamic has been symbolically represented from time immemorial in numerous myths and fairy tales. Instead of aborting my pursuit of the creative spirit, however, my father's oppression only added fuel to my creative fire, forging in me an "inner necessity" to connect with the living primal creative instinct I was discovering within a deeper, authentic part of myself. As Jung writes, "The creative spirit cannot be discouraged anyway, otherwise it would not be creative."²

Scholar Erich Neumann, author of the seminal work *The Origin and History of Consciousness*, has written beautifully about art and the creative process. A friend, student and colleague of Jung, Neumann, speaking about the "creative drive" of the artist "which moves through generations and peoples, epochs and individuals," writes in his book *Art and the Creative Unconscious* that this impulse "compels" the artist "to travel the road of Abraham, to leave the land of his birth, his mother, and the house of his father, and seek out the land to which the godhead leads him."³ Artists are "called" by a power beyond themselves. A slayer of mythic dragons, the artist must *symbolically* kill the father, who, mythically speaking, represents the dominant values, the old rules, laws and "shoulds." The creative artist becomes a hero who must deconstruct the old in order to make possible the dawning of the new. In making and living their own laws, the creative artist transforms, dethrones and overthrows the conventional, soulless world of the traditional canon filled with its life-killing routines to seek and follow an unknown directive, a higher authority, what Jung would call the Self, the wholeness and guiding force of the deeper personality.

It is the role of the creative artist to reveal what lies dormant in the unconscious, as if conjuring something to life out of the void. Artists are the first to divine the darkly moving mysterious currents of the collective unconscious. At first there is only the archetypal appearance of the gem deep within the collective unconscious; then unconscious intuition "sees" it, and artists are the ones who feel irresistibly compelled to subsequently search for its adequate formulation. The greatness of great art is that in and through it a higher order of reality is telling us directly about itself, as if it is a bridge leading us to an unknown shore. To quote Neumann, "When unconscious forces break through in the artist, when the archetypes striving to be born into the light of the world take form in him, he is as far from the men around him as he is close to their destiny. For he expresses and gives form to the future of his epoch."⁴ The creative artist is giving utterance to the authentic and direct revelation of the *numinosum*, which raises their function to the level of the sacred (please see my article "[The Artist as Healer of the World](#)"). Artists are oriented towards the invisible, towards what is beginning to become visible and reveal itself, towards the indescribable mystery alive at the heart of who we are. The images, sounds and movements that the artist perceives are possibilities of new ideas, different ways of seeing and interpreting life which might be able to give a fresh flow to the psychic energy stream of humanity, as if they are clearing the way not only for new tributaries of thought, perception and experience, but are helping to create a novel universe itself. Jung writes, "It is the great dream which has always spoken through the artist as a mouthpiece."⁵

Art is where the relationship of the creative individual to the numinosum takes form. The work of art is the zero point at which consciousness and the unconscious momentarily become a creative unity. The creative process synthesizes the transpersonal and the personal, the eternal and the transitory, allowing something utterly unique to happen: the eternally creative is actualized into an ephemeral creation. The creative impulse liberates itself through the medium

of art. The artist's job is to render into visible form the creative, formative and formless quality that is the living background behind the foreground of the seemingly objective world. The act of creating draws artists out of themselves while simultaneously helping them to come to themselves, as if in creating the work of art artists recreate themselves anew. Reversing our normal way of thinking, Shakespeare is created by Hamlet, Beethoven is composed by his symphonies, Rembrandt became who he was through his self-portraits and it is the egg that lays the hen that gives birth to it.⁶

The road which brings liberation is a road which leads downwards towards a deepening relationship and ultimate union with the depths of the unconscious, with the instinctual world of nature and the ancestors, whose messenger is the shadow. It is only when we are "taken down," compelled by sickness, misfortune or limitation to investigate and come to terms with our own nature, that we may experience the somber power of the shadow as a messenger from the creative potential living within our own psyche. Lucifer, the bringer of light, chooses the shadow through which to reveal himself. The shadow is an essential component of our creative vitality. It is the paradoxical secret of alchemical transformation that it is through the shadow that the saturnine lead is transformed into gold.

Humanity does not possess creative powers, but rather, is possessed by them. Every transformative or creative process comprises stages of possession, of surrendering to, being taken over and moved by something greater than our own ego. Transcendent to and greater than the momentary act of creation, these primordial creative forces existed before and after the act of creation, existing within the plenum of unmanifest potential itself. One of the many names for this power that can possess us and make us its instrument is the "daemon" (please see my article "The Battle for our Angel"), which can be envisioned as an indwelling force which can't be nailed down because its nature is to be homeless and nomadic, taking up residence in those who are receptive to its inspiration. The artist stands alone, delivered over to the creative impulse of the daemon, as if to create is the very act that opens up the channel to themselves. Being from elsewhere, the daemon has a drop of alien blood, which is what makes creative artists practically an alien species, as they see, hear and feel things that are invisible to most people.

Every possession is either a one-sided narrowing or an intensification and deepening; when we are taken over by something we either become one-sidedly fixed in our viewpoint and cut off from the wholeness and totality of ourselves, or we are able to add depth to our experience of who we are. One-sidedness can easily calcify into rigidity, assuming a fundamentalist position regarding the way things are, which is nothing other than a sclerosis of consciousness. To have eyes and not see, to have ears and not hear are unmistakable symptoms of an occlusion to the call of the creative spirit.

The creative process involves a concentration and deepening of experience such that we are open to ourselves in a new way that empowers us to translate our ever-expanding discovery of ourselves into new forms of language. An artist's regenerative power lies in their willingness to not cling to themselves or their fixed point of view, but to allow themselves to be shaped and formed by new experiences of the world, and then, in turn, to shape and form these experiences which have reshaped them into unique creative expressions. An artist cultivates a readiness to creatively respond to the continually reciprocal interactions between world and psyche, between the outer and inner realities. Art enlarges the universe by uncovering its new dimensions, while simultaneously enriching and expanding the consciousness of humanity, who will be enabled to experience these new dimensions inwardly via the artist's evocative productions, their art-ifacts. To quote philosopher Martin Heidegger, "A work of art is something new in the world that

changes the world to allow itself to exist.”⁷ The creativity of the psyche – which itself is an agency in a state of continual creative formation - is true magic, as it transforms reality as well as the psyche itself. As psychologist Otto Rank points out, the neurotic is an artist who, failing to access the creativity hidden within the daemonic energies from which they suffer, are unable to transmute their inner conflicts into art. One of the most toxic things in the human psyche is repressed creativity; unexpressed art becomes our symptoms.

The daemonic, which contains encoded within it the deepest evil as well as the highest, divine creativity, is the daily companion, as well as the inspiration of every creative artist. It is through coming to terms with the daemon that art is made. It is an ecstatic experience to allow what is highest and lowest in ourselves to take form and shape together. To quote Neumann, “Creative genius is never possible without the proximity of the devil.”⁸ In immersing themselves in archetypal forces greater than their own egos, artists allow themselves to become captivated by a power which threatens to destroy them if not brought forth and expressed creatively. An artist synthesizes their higher transcendental inclinations with the dark undertow of the powers of underworld, as if their higher angel needs a grounding connection with its brooding double to complete itself.

In their own individual suffering of the daemonic realm which pervades the collective unconscious, the creative artist intimately experiences the profound depths of the woundedness of the collectivity and the time in which they live. Artists are able to find within their own subjective experience a unique and creative response to this wound. Artists take the burden of the collective creative responsibility onto themselves so that others might see through the transparency of their art what is lacking in their own lives. Reflecting the malaise of the culture, modern art depicts the sickness of the times. Artists, like the archetypal figure of the shaman, carry deep within themselves a regenerative force, accessed through their own woundedness, that is capable of bringing forth a cure not only for themselves, but also for the community as a whole.

Our species is desperately in need of the guidance and aid of the forces latent within the depths of the unconscious to help us find new ways out of our multiple world crises. Consciousness can evolve and develop only where it preserves and cultivates a living bond with the creative powers of the unconscious. A creative artist is someone with very permeable boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious such that the contents of these two realms can easily pass back and forth to mutually inform and reciprocally influence each other. In suffering from the spiritual poverty and schizoid dissociation of their own culture, the creative artist can potentially arrive at the freshly opening source within the living waters of the unconscious that is destined to quench the thirst of their time. Only the source point, in which the stream emerges from the darkness and enters the light, and is thus both at once, darkness and light, is the creative spirit made real in time. Those who find their uniquely creative voice, to quote Jung, “create from the very depths of the collective unconscious, voicing aloud what others only dream.”⁹

The daemon which possesses the artist is not derived simply from their personal reality; it is also, at the same time, the individual expression of a collective existential situation. Creative artists are the alchemical retorts in which the poisons and antidotes of the collective are distilled, as if they are psychic organs for metabolizing and transforming the toxins of the collective psyche into medicine. Being open to the otherworld of the unconscious can subjectively feel like having an enormous wound. Their particularized wounds are the doorways through which flows

the revitalizing stream of the unconscious with its infinite creativity. Over time this wound can reveal itself to be a sacred affliction, as our wounds are mysteriously bound up with our gifts.

Compared to the “normal” person who tends to be more repressed, adjusted to and anesthetized towards the insanity that is playing out in the world, artists suffer from a heightened sensitivity to the inner psychic tension between the conscious and the unconscious. Art can only be birthed when its creators are able to hold the creative tension between a stable consciousness and a “charged” unconscious, thereby creating a container for the work of art to find its unique form so as to fully incarnate. Bearing this creative tension can be a source of vital energy which nourishes the gestating work of art to grow within the artist’s psyche. This creative tension needs to be endured, involving a genuine suffering of the ego which can potentially lead to a greater creative birth. As Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Creation—that is the great redemption from suffering.” It is redemptive to find adequate language for our suffering; a language called art. Art is the medium through which artists release themselves from the suffering of the unexpressed. When we have our own words to sing, our voice appears. Artists liberate themselves from suffering by connecting with and giving novel shape and form to something that belongs to the essential nature of reality.

To quote Neumann, “Consequently, the individual history of every creative man is always close to the abyss of sickness; he does not, like other men, tend to heal the personal wounds involved in all development by an increased adaptation to the collectivity. His wounds remain open, but his suffering from them is situated in depths from which another curative power arises, and this curative power is the creative process.”¹⁰ The artist is akin to the archetypal figure of the “wounded healer,” who has to suffer through the very sickness that they are able to cure (please see my article [“The Wounded Healer”](#)). This figure experiences their wound, however horrible, as being of divine origins. The wound is experienced as the opening to a higher-dimensional spring of inexhaustible riches, the gateway which opens them up to the psychic background which in-forms and gives shape to the universe. The living exemplar of the archetype of the healer who carries a wound is the cross-carrying Christ himself.

Artist Vincent Van Gogh regarded Christ as an extraordinary artist who didn’t make paintings, but rather, worked in living flesh to turn human beings into immortal souls. Similarly, visionary artist William Blake wrote that, “Jesus and his Apostles and Disciples were all Artists - A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect: The Man or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian.”¹¹ If we are not, in some fashion, an artist in and of life – offering ourselves as a channel of creative expression for the spirit that in-forms, moves us and sustains our life – we are not, as Blake points out, a genuine follower of Christ. As artists, we are continually re-creating both our world and ourselves anew at each and every instant. Anyone who is not an artist—which is to say, not following their deeper calling and creatively speaking their inner voice—is, ultimately speaking, a traitor to their own true nature. Making art is a spiritual discipline that requires incredible devotion. As author D. H. Lawrence writes, “One has to be so terribly religious to be an artist.”¹²

The artist casts a liberating fragrance, spelling out what is hanging in the air. When a group of people abdicate their individual responsibility to be creative, a great artist like Vincent Van Gogh becomes inevitable as a compensation for this one-sidedness. Art is the compensatory dream of the collective culture, a means by which the collective unconscious informs collective society. Art should not be viewed as an isolated phenomenon separate from the field of consciousness in which it arises; rather, artists and their work emerge from a synergy of interweaving socio-cultural factors. Artists are dreamed up by the spirit of time and place. Jung

comments, “The great work of art is a product of the time, of the whole world in which the artist is living, and of the millions of people who surround him, and of the thousands of currents of thought and the myriad streams of activity which flow around him.”¹³

Art speaks for the unconscious as the plant speaks of nature and the earth. Artists are the nutrient rich soil, the breeding ground for the work of art; they are the petri dish for the “culture” of art to flourish. Jung writes, “A great work of art is like a dream...It presents an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow.”¹⁴ We can conceive of the creative instinct as a living impulse implanted in the human psyche. The creative urge lives and grows in us like a plant which draws its nourishment from the earth. The unborn work in the psyche of the artist is a force of nature, a living being that arises from unconscious depths and grows out of the womb of the artist as a child emerges from its mother. Once born, the artist’s work takes on an autonomous, independent life of its own, outgrowing and outliving its creator as a child does its mother.

Even when the highest form of artistic reality has achieved existence in a fully completed work, it must be creatively reborn in the subjective human experience of those who engage with it. A mysterious inter-change, a reciprocal transmission passes back and forth between the work of art and those who experience it. The epiphany of the numinosum, the ecstasy of those who give it form through the creation of the work of art, and the rapture of those who participate, experience and celebrate the epiphany, constitute an indivisible unity. A work of art, like a living creature, undergoes the changes that daily life imposes upon us, only living through those who experience it. Art works its magic through its living effect upon us, becoming alive and creative again and again in our own experience.

To quote poet Allen Ginsberg, “The warfare’s psychic now. Whoever controls the language, the images, controls the race.”¹⁵ Reversing one of the most fundamental assumptions of modern civilization by giving pre-eminence to art, Blake writes, “Empire follows Art and not Vice Versa as Englishmen Suppose.”¹⁶ In the same way that instruments of war in the hands of generals are extremely dangerous, nothing is more dangerous and potentially world-transforming than implements of creative expression in the hands of artists, who are the moulders of the unconscious psychic life of humanity, the mythmakers for their age. Rather than passively letting our perceptions be managed and manipulated by the powers-that-be’s propaganda organs (such as the mainstream media), we as sovereign creative beings, can connect with our own perceptions and create our own unique and authentic experience of the world. We change ourselves, and the world, in the process.

The same divine creativity which has filled the numberless heavens and spheres of the universe around us is now welling up and emerging within the human psyche and is seeking to creatively express and extend itself outwards into our world. Our many world crises will be soluble only creatively – that is, by a profound and thorough alteration of our inner life and thereby of the outer forms in which life finds expression. When human beings are deprived of their power of expression, however, they will express themselves in the drive for power, which only feeds the will-to-power of the demonic and destructive shadow, with the baneful consequences we know only too well. One of the gravest perils of western civilization arises from the fact that it cuts its members off from their natural creativity. To quote Blake, “Art Degraded Imagination Denied War Governed the Nations.”¹⁷

When I reflect upon my life, it is clear that I, like so many of us, was being “called” by a deeper part of myself to step out of a traditional, mainstream vocation into my life as a creative person. If I hadn’t been fortunate enough to connect with the creative spirit, choosing the artist’s

sacred way and breathing its life-giving oxygen, I have no doubt that I'd be depressed, neurotic, crazy and/or dead. The conflict between my father and I was not only between two individuals, but between two world views. In one genuinely inquisitive moment which revealed his lack of understanding, my father asked me why people still make paintings after the invention of the camera. He mistakenly thought that the purpose of art was to describe reality instead of to create it, to capture our world instead of to liberate it.

A pioneer in the field of spiritual emergence, **Paul Levy** is a wounded healer in private practice, assisting others who are also awakening to the dreamlike nature of reality. He is the author of *[Dispelling Wetiko: Breaking the Curse of Evil](#)* (North Atlantic Books, 2013) and *[The Madness of George W. Bush: A Reflection of Our Collective Psychosis](#)*. An artist, he is deeply steeped in the work of C. G. Jung, and has been a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner for over thirty years. Please visit Paul's website www.awakeninthedream.com. You can contact Paul at paul@awakeninthedream.com; he looks forward to your reflections. Though he reads every email, he regrets that he is not able to personally respond to all of them. © Copyright 2013.

¹ One day, when the time is right, I plan on writing about these experiences in more detail.

² Jung, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 108.

³ Neumann, *Art and the Creative Unconscious*, p. 129.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵ Jung, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 591.

⁶ Note the similarity to something I had written about light in a recent article – “The inner light is sentient, intrinsically endowed with a primordial cognizant awareness enabling it to experience its own radiant, luminescent nature. It is as if the primordial, uncreated light, a light which empowers our ability to see and creates the very act of seeing itself, creates an eye in order to be seen; the eye, being solar (i.e., light-based) in nature, owes its existence to light. The creative and immaterial aspect of light has called forth and precipitated out of itself, in fully materialized form, an organ like unto itself so as to reveal itself, be seen and known.” In a similar vein, the formless work of art dreams up an artist so as to realize itself in form.

⁷ From Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

⁸ Neumann, *Art and the Creative Unconscious*, p. 191.

⁹ Jung, *Psychological Types*, CW 6, par. 323.

¹⁰ Neumann, *Art and the Creative Unconscious*, p. 186.

¹¹ Blake, *The Poems of William Blake*, ed. D. H. Stevenson, Plate 5, From an engraving of the Laocoon.

¹² Letter 550, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Vol. 5*, ed. James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹³ Jung, *C. G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*, p. 128

¹⁴ Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, CW 15, par. 161.

¹⁵ Quoted in Buckminster Fuller, *I Seem To Be A Verb* (New York, 1970), pp. 164-65a.

¹⁶ Blake, “Annotations to Sir Joshua Reynold’s Discourses,” in *Complete Writings*, p. 445.

¹⁷ Blake, *Laocoon*.