

THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF CREATIVE BLOCKS

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The purpose of this paper is to explore a much neglected area of research, namely, the unconscious fantasies and delusions that interfere with the creative process. I will examine in some detail the infantile strategies for dealing with dependency and psychic pain as illustrated in the analysis of two patients. When these strategies are used to cope with the feelings of helplessness and loss, triggered by the work in progress, the artist finds himself in a painful and prolonged impasse. Later I will explore more directly the psychodynamics of two cases of failed creativity from the standpoint of the creative ^{process} person itself.

The Nature of the Impasse

At the beginning of a new project, whether it is a painting, a short story, a new music score, there is an excitement but also great trepidation. One knows through experience that one will have to come to several painful impasses during the work and one does not understand enough about the nature of these impasses to trust they will be overcome. So, one goes into a new project with a mixture of excitement and fear.

I would like to examine here what actually happens inside one's head, or in one's mind, at these critical points. I will try to approach this problem from two different vantage points: (1) the emergence of feelings of discomfort, irritability, and helplessness, reminiscent of similar feelings experienced during

infancy; and (2) the experience of a sense of loss accompanied by depression.

Somewhere along the way, in spite of some anxiety, the artist has started this new work with a sense of his own power but he now seems to lose his sense of direction. He may need to make a decision and does not know exactly which way he ought to proceed. Along with his sense of direction, he loses his ideal of himself as being capable of controlling, directing, and "running the show" and also his ideal image of the work which is not turning out the way he envisioned it. Before he can proceed he has to come to terms with and accept this loss. If the loss is of an ideal self that knows what to do, he will have to relive again and again feelings of helplessness, discomfort, incompetence and ignorance. This is not merely a psychological shift from an omnipotent adult to a helpless, darling child, but a fall from an all knowing state to the messy, incompetent, and ignorant child. If he loses the ideal image of the work, he will have to face the fact that it is not what he envisioned - he will have to develop it in a direction that is more in line with where it seems to be going by putting himself at its service.

Submitting to the requirements of the work means getting oneself out of the way with all the expectations one has invested in it and seeing what it needs. If the work is to have a life of its own, the artist has to help develop that life rather than assume the role of a powerful "creator" having all the say in how its life is to be shaped. Paradoxically, while giving up the

sense of his own importance, the artist enlarges the scope of the work, which in the end produces more satisfaction. In the process, he will get a chance at being surprised by what happens between himself and the canvas, the page, the piece of clay. What goes on between the artist and the work in progress is pretty much like a communication between two people where there is no hidden agenda but a mutual responsiveness to what the other is saying. It is only then that the creative process is alive. The surprise and awe at what might then happen compensates many folds for the anxiety over one's lack of control during the process. It is that surprise and awe at something we did not intend what actually nourishes us and restores our strength to continue working.

We have referred to impasses which are not merely current editions of similar impasses or crises we have gone through in previous work, but to some impasses or crises we have gone through at different stages in our early development. It is not the scope of this paper to review what these are to understand that, ideally, we have to learn to resolve these impasses if we are to mature properly and lead full and real lives. This is not to say, of course, that we have to resolve certain issues in our lives in order to become good artists - this is a thorny issue that we could not even begin to explore here. I am assuming, however, that if the major crises in life have not been somewhat resolved this will have a negative effect both in the development of the artist's talent, and in his

capacity to overcome the many impasses that arise in the creative process. However, at these early stages of development, one has to arrive at a kind of resignation since our infantile needs and wishes cannot be completely satisfied. We will clarify these ideas later by examples showing the behavioral and mental manifestations of incomplete accommodation to early losses.

What about the unpleasant feelings stirred up during a creative project? Underlying both sets of feelings, helplessness and depression, is our need of something, ultimately someone, and the awareness of such need. My main thesis here is that one protects both sets of infantile feelings by inhibiting or repressing the awareness of need. If there is no need for someone, there is no helplessness, and we can continue to pretend we are in control. Helplessness is to be avoided because it implies the fact that one might need something from someone. If we do not need anyone and we do not have anyone, nothing can be lost - the possibility of a loss is ever present when we do have someone.

In light of defenses against dependency, what are the chances of overcoming impasses that stir again and again our dependency? We either relive and experience our helplessness, and our feelings of lost ideals, or we have to abandon the task, at least temporarily. In the first instance we will be continuing the work with more humility, perhaps, as to its goals or our own, until it catches fire surprising us with an unintended event; this also helps us get over our previous

infantile struggle. If we do not want to go through our painful feelings, we can either abandon the project, deciding it is not worth the effort, we are not creative enough, or we can pursue it but this time armored with a delusional system.

In the later instance, we deny our helplessness in the face of the problem, we deny we are losing ground, and we forge ahead nevertheless as though we still know what the work needs. We will probably enter into a power struggle with the matter at hand, an uncomfortable situation that has to be ended by suppressing the incipient awareness that the work needs something different. The work will be brought to a premature closure that no doubt will hurt it. In this case, the person distorts outer reality, or his view of himself as "creator". As we can imagine, the solution has a dear price for the work but also for the artist: confusion, a fragility of the self, the sense of not having a core, the fear of something not being true, the fear of being found out.

Why are we so fearful of reliving infantile needs and fears? What makes them so deserving of repression? Attached to the unpleasant feelings are other more frightening ones that would get awakened as well. The feelings of helplessness of the infant stir powerful feelings of envy of the mother and those that, like her, are perceived as having what one wants. The envy involves a wish to hurt and destroy the loved one and the infant does that in fantasy. Because for the child there is no distinction between a wish to hurt and actual destruction, the child has to

bear the consequences of having destroyed the mother. The situation is more complicated because once the infant destroys her - or those like her later on in life - he will be fearful of being destroyed by her or the now loved one. Therefore, the awareness of need bring with it powerful anxieties related either to the destruction of the loved one, or, in retaliation, the destruction of oneself. The infant is aware of his dependency on the mother and others for survival. How terrifying to be afraid that the person we need the most, might get hurt or hurt us and even destroy us? Therefore, saying that we have to become aware of our need in order to create is suggesting no simple task. The awareness of need evokes much anger, envy and paranoia; we have that infantile part of ourselves reacting in our unconscious just as we did when we were a young infant. We still resort to infantile solutions divorced from awareness and pain to avoid such anxieties.

Let me digress for a moment to talk about what happens in the therapy situation where we replay these early solutions during the analysis, especially when the analyst has been or is about to be absent. We have a chance then to re-experience these early feelings and make conscious what is now unconscious. Another opportunity for a replay is the one that concerns us here - creative work - although in this latter case we are at a great disadvantage not having the needed other observing and communicating to us what he sees us doing, again and again. One could say that creative work puts us in touch with these early

feelings, anxieties, and the early strategies to deal with pain just as the analysis does. Both the work in front of us and the analyst behind us can surprise us. In the creative act, however, we are left alone during the struggle with these feelings whereas the analyst's understanding is essential at these times to be able to look, tease apart and understand the source of our pain and confusion. No wonder many have said in the past that it takes great courage to create; one goes through early feelings again and again without a helping hand. I do not think the artist gets any more understanding of the conflicts involved as a result of this exposure but he gets at least an enlarged capacity to tolerate distress without having to run away from it or having to cover it up by delusions. In fact, one of the consistent findings in the research with creative people is their greater capacity to tolerate ambiguity and chaos. A test of creativity based on these findings predicts quite accurately that a person with this increased capacity will be more creative in a number of fields, not only the so-called creative ones.

We have talked several times about strategies to deal with the pain of dependency and to suppress the awareness of need. What are some of these strategies? What are the solutions the infant and, later on, the artist find to do away with the host of feelings we have been talking about? One solution or "cure" to the anxiety aroused by an awareness of dependency is that of fusion with the other, a fantasy that the mother and me are one.

Another cure is dissociating oneself from the infantile part of the personality that needs.

These fantasies occur in our unconscious mind and we can only infer their existence through some behaviors and feelings that are conscious. In the unconscious fantasy of being fused with the mother, one resolves the problem of dependency altogether: anger, destruction and fear of retaliation. One does not need the mother or anyone, one is the person needed. This pretension or delusion can be kept alive but one lives in a world of unreality. We forget events having to do with what goes on with relationships, anything that might remind us we are separate and possibly alone. One loses the sense of time, nothing matters that much so that things don't get accomplished and one does not understand why others are constantly angry at us. This person lives in a world without conflicts, without mental pain but a world with no roots, no clear identity, no consuming passion except maybe the one of wanting to blend with someone else who becomes idealized. The disposing of the infantile part of the personality as if garbage, on the other hand, does away with the infant that is needy, messy, and lacks control. In doing so, however, one does away with the capacity to enjoy life, to be spontaneous, curious, all essential in creating. If the dissociation is very successful, we have a person whose life runs like a computer but where there is a chronic depression and longing for a larger meaning in life. If the dissociation is less acute, the person finds himself in fear

of doing "stupid" things he cannot control where he loses face. The infantile part seems to resist this constant pushing him away and appears "through the back door", so to speak, everytime it has a chance. The person does not mind when the infantile self provides the excitement and passion for things or people, but he will mind a great deal when the child makes a mistake and the adult loses face - in this case he will berate himself without mercy. One can well imagine how both these strategies of dealing with need and dependency effect creativity.

Let us briefly look at how a patient may portray these conflicts in the consultation room. This 22 year old woman comes to the session and complains she is forgetting everything. She had also forgotten her first appointment after my return from vacation. She looks and acts in a dissociated manner, usually referred to as "spacy". She complains and worries she might be getting a heart attack. Here we begin to see how her solution to the need and pain of my absence is to forget me and her need of me. Her chest pain seems to be that of the infantile part of herself that has been squeezed out of existence in her effort to forget me, this new mommy, and the part of herself that needs me. She then describes a situation at home where her sister and parents were angry at her. She had completely forgotten to give them a message from her sister who had asked her to tell their parents she would not be sleeping at home; she did not want them to worry about her whereabouts.

Aside from the jealousy with her sister and her connection with the parents, one can see how in order to maintain the denial of her own dependency on her parents and on me my patient has to forget a message where there is concern and care for the other person's welfare. Then she also forgets the session with me. One could say that the poor memory is motivated by her desire to forget her own dependency and the complicated feelings associated with it. As I have said, delusions such as this will stand in the way for creativity to emerge and flourish.

In order to create, we need contact with what is happening and we cannot get such contact when we have shut off a part of the mind. This shutting off will not only affect our awareness of need, which is the true engine or motivation for any creative pursuit, but also mental functions such as perception and memory. One can draw a conclusion: if one pursues a creative activity one needs to develop the courage to limit this protecting of oneself against psychic pain. The denial of psychic pain increases the paralyzing effect of the impasses we have referred to earlier; it increases confusion, the fear of not having talent, the sense of unreality or falsehood of the self as we present it to others, and the constant fear of being found out. Delusional systems erected as a protection against pain (i.e., believing we are the person we need or we already have what we need) stand in the way of us having contact with our internal world and we need to have some access to this internal world. They in turn limit what we can see or use in the external world.

The artist has to tolerate loss both in his life and in his work. In order to go through and suffer the loss he has to be aware of his wishes and needs. If such awareness is distorted or denied, there is no chance to experience and mourn a loss since, in line with the delusion, nothing has been lost! The pain of one's neediness and the pain of loss are being avoided but there is much pain to be had in the person's life and work.

In what follows I would like first to illustrate these ideas with excerpts of sessions of two patients who are not dealing with what we call creative blocks as such, but with life situations and their responses to them. This seeming exploration in trivia may appear unrelated to creativity; I hope nevertheless to show how maladaptive responses in everyday life are bound to affect the creative work we do.

Judith, a woman in her early thirties, complains of a recurrence of psychosomatic symptoms she had when she begun therapy: stomach pains, allergies, the feeling she is coming down with a cold. Her wedding day is approaching. Last Saturday - she tells me - she had a splitting headache that began while she was buying lingerie. She hates spending money on such things, she says, and talks about how much healthier cotton underwear is.

Nothing seemed to fit. I would have walked out if it weren't for my friend who kept bringing me other things to try on. I also had to buy cosmetics - I had run out of most things. I hate to spend any time putting on makeup. If I can't do everything in five minutes I won't bother.

I say, "Trying on all those sexy clothes may have stirred up some feelings..." (Silence). "Mother had these awful looking cotton slips and underwear but my sister Mary..." Judith began to talk at length about her older sister (four years older) who was so beautiful, had flawless skin, green eyes, blond and curly hair and spent hours taking long baths and putting on makeup. In other sessions Judith had talked about Mary having such big breasts and how she had wanted to have breasts like that. "She walked around in those see-through negligees...[and laughingly adds] but all she got was father's crude remarks and a couple of obscene phone calls." She seems to enjoy this memory. I said, "It must have been painful for you to compare yourself to her. You laugh when you remember there were some crude comments from your father and a couple of obscene phone calls. These memories seem to be a 'cure' for that pain." Judith continues,

Her skin was so flawless while I still get zits!
 Sometimes I think I'll never get through puberty.
 [After a long silence] Actually I asked her a few
 times to teach me how to put on makeup but she
 never did.

I say, "You wanted your sister's good attributes very badly and the comparison must have hurt. You found a solution to cover up that pain by devaluing her fancy underwear and makeup as superficial things representing the wrong values. But that was a phoney solution, one to avoid the pain of the discrepancy between you, the little one, and your well developed, beautiful sister. You never truly resigned yourself to the fact that you were not going to have green eyes, curly hair, big breasts. If you had,

you might have come to appreciate what you do have and enjoy making the best of it: finding the best clothes for your figure, the most flattering cosmetics, and so on."

Judith is right when she says she is still in puberty. Puberty is a tumultuous age where one does not know what kind of man or woman one will become. Just as Judith, as a baby, envied her mommy, she also envied her sister, friends and anyone who seemed to have what she would have liked for herself. She gets around that painful resignation by devaluing all she does not have. However, confronted in the dressing room by her image in the mirror she gets flooded with early feelings of envy and rage and the wish to destroy what others have, namely her sister, and earlier her mother. The headache may be replacing the guilt over those attacks on them. After a long silence, Judith adds, "And then I went to this party [a shower in her honor] and I could not enjoy myself."

When she is the one to receive or to have the good things in life as her mother or sister did, she identifies with them in a destroyed form. Having unconsciously attacked them in the past and having denied them their sexuality, their beauty, and their womanhood, she cannot now enjoy it herself. In addition to the early unconscious fantasies brought up by the lingerie, she has difficulties in adjusting to a new type of resignation, that of losing her youthfulness. She says,

Standing there in front of the mirror I thought my thighs looked like those of an older woman. I wanted to get out of there fast. I could not stand it.

One can see denial and avoidance operating again.

How do avoidance strategies affect Judith's work and creativity? She started working in a small, fast growing company about a year ago. She was delighted at the opportunity to learn on the job, working with a couple of young bright, first rate professionals in her field. They needed someone who would get involved, learn their procedures, and in time become well-trained in their field. This suited Judith's wish to develop a successful career while working. She has assimilated complex ideas and procedures without having had earlier training. The partners are surprised at how fast she becomes knowledgeable and ask more and more of her, taking her to important meetings, asking her to make decisions on her own. This satisfies Judith's wishes to erase the discrepancies between them and her and, as she did earlier in life, it satisfies her desire to be thought of and to be considered an equal. But she is constantly afraid of being exposed in her ignorance, of being caught not knowing something or being found out. It is hard for her to accept her subordinate position with respect to her bosses and to acknowledge that she needs them. When she used to ask questions and receives quick answers she does not understand, she acts as though she does and struggles on her own to find the answer. The demands she put on herself show up in various physical symptoms of stress, anxiety in particular. She is slowly coming to understand how she avoids an awareness of her position as the little one in the company, the little one who needs help.

Recently she was asked to write a report about a meeting she was sent to that her partners could not attend. She writes very well and has always been commended for her clear ideas but she has always been terrified in front of the blank page and this time was no exception: her relative ignorance could become apparent as the ignorant little one would have been revealed. It is worth noting that her mother was well versed in languages and that Judith's difficulties with English composition and early interest in science and disinterest in literature had to do with her feeling that she could never equal her mother's command of languages. She procrastinated and procrastinated with this report to the point where she had to give excuse after excuse and began to fear being fired from the job. Her anxiety was mounting.

We examine the full extent of her wish to be equal to the partners and, having idealized them as perfect, to also be perfect; this is understood in relation to her earlier attempts to be equal to her mother. Only then is she able to write the report, amazed at how easy it is after she manages to torture herself for weeks. She becomes aware once more how being the little one puts her in touch, not only with her dependency, but with powerful feelings of envy and hatred and how much she fears destroying those she needs. As we have explained before, she is in fact destroying them in unconscious fantasy. The conscious awareness of this infantile envy and of her destructive wishes can now be mitigated by her more mature appreciation and

gratitude for what her bosses are giving her and recognition of how much they have helped her. As she finds it easier to assume her position of the junior one vis-a-vis them, her work is proceeding with much less conflict.

Let us now look at excerpts of a couple of sessions with another patient. Eleanor, an artist in her late forties, starts this session putting down everything, everybody and herself. Sarcastically she remarks, "Well, this session was the only thing for me to look forward to today." She implies that this is still another unfulfilled expectation. She talks at some length about a trip she had planned with Sue, an older friend and describes an unpleasant interaction with her about the trip. The conversation with her friend is left unfinished and she comments: "It's not going to work." I comment that she again seems to be doing something about which she has no conviction: "I don't hear you say to Sue or to me what you would like." Annoyed, she says: "I'll go, I am committed!" There seems to be a refusal even to think about what she would like to happen and I say:

Eleanor, if you don't allow yourself to want all the good things from Sue or me you can never hope to get a little of the good things. I agree with you that you are in for a disappointment because you, as many people, want everything. You probably would like me to give you advice, direction, wisdom, that I cuddle you or embrace you and comfort you and you will never get all that, especially in one session. But if you demand all 100% you cannot be aware of the little bit of goodie you are getting, like my complete, undivided attention, my care in trying to understand you, my compassion. That may be 10% or less of what you might like but it might make you feel good about me and about you, about the work we are doing together. You seem to be so afraid of pain that you don't even want to dream

of something good for fear of spoiling it or destroying it. Then you start protecting yourself by predicting a bad outcome and what do you get? A sense that you already knew it wouldn't work out. But this is no consolation for the little Eleanor within you who is kept starved -- only a consolation for this other part of you that wants power, control and wants to know ahead of time what is going to happen.

In the following session Eleanor brings along a long awaited letter from a man with whom she has had a long on again-off again relationship. She had been quite concerned that after she had been unpleasant with him the last time they were together, he would not want to continue seeing her. At the end of a long and revealing letter he invites her to spend a weekend with him. Sarcastically she says:

I thought of showing this letter to Dr. X [this other psychologist she had seen a few times]. I don't know why I brought it when I know I won't be getting any reaction from you.

I tell her, "You seem to want to have my reaction so that you can react to it, not to the letter. I wonder what your reaction to the letter is." Eleanor agrees and - tearful now - she admits to having no reactions. She talks about having walked aimlessly in Beverly Hills for a couple of hours looking for clothes, not knowing what to buy and adds, "I keep looking for myself, it seems, but I find nothing. I feel so lost. After a while I say, "Your sense of self is connected with your own reactions and your own reactions are, in turn, connected with your deepest wishes. You don't want to have any such wishes: it's so dangerous, disappointing, etc. and then the you, the real you is nowhere to be found." She starts putting down the letter, "As soon as I saw

it I didn't want it. I didn't even want to open it." She had been wanting this letter, the connection with him, his responding to her and the sense of his care for her, but she finds this too risky to admit to herself and very quickly there is a protective part of her that says "I don't care." She continues: "We are worlds apart: he is finding pleasure where I can't," And I reply: "I think you are both after the same things but he is taking some risk and you are not and the comparison hurts. You present the whole thing as an impossible situation so you won't have to risk anything. You want the whole thing or nothing."

I remind her of our last session:

"You can want the whole thing but then you have to settle for something like 10% or less in that direction. You have this pride and you want equality at all cost and don't like the idea of settling for anything less than the whole thing. If it is less than everything, it is all 'bad', like me. You were not sure how much I would be able to help you with the letter, therefore you treat me as though I am already the 'bad' therapist which won't help, whereas there is someone good, or more ideal, somewhere else. The problem is that once you decide I am not good enough you are in trouble because the hope of getting a bit of good from me disappears and leads you to a despair which is even more painful, so what do you gain? Better grab a hold of the 10%, don't you think?"

How do Eleanor's reactions affect her creative work? Her reactions to me and to that long awaited letter are the same as her reactions to people helping her exhibit her work. She recounts the several opportunities where she could have shown her paintings, but for one reason or another she rejected them, one after another. Accepting an offer would have meant accepting the loss of the perfect relationship, the whole thing. There were

other artists she would have to show with, other artists who would have shown before or after her. Any comparison would have been evidence to her that she didn't have an exclusive relationship with the dealer, with the teacher, with the potential buyers. (She has never accepted the loss of an exclusive relationship to her parents: mother or father). She takes the most immediate pleasure of being the one that says "no", the one doing the rejecting. In this way she can deny, devalue the offer and also turn the tables and put the little Eleanor into the other person who would have to be the rejected one, not her. But the pleasures are short lived as they leave Eleanor with a sense of her own incapacity to make use of opportunities.

In one of the sessions discussing this, she seems to have gained an awareness of how self-defeating these responses have been, and is appropriately sad. But very quickly the sadness of the loss gives way to anger and hatred towards a friend who makes good use of opportunities. She cannot tolerate her awareness of loss and depression; the hatred towards the little Eleanor, who needs something from others and has to accept loss, is turned outward once more in an envious attack on a friend who is idealized as getting all the good things or having qualities she does not possess.

We can see how the chances to develop our work are intimately tied up with our personality development and with the resolution of early conflicts. Whatever is not true or real in the personality seems to become amplified in one's creative work.

Failed Creativity

Let us turn our attention now to a couple of cases of failed creativity to see how these issues of need, loss, and acceptance of the loss play their part in the actual vicissitudes of a creative project. Karen is working on a book, on and off, for two years on a subject she knows well since the action takes place within a field with which she has intimate familiarity. It is a light-hearted tongue-in-cheek exposure of the corruption in that business and its effect on the public. With some variations she is the main character in the story and at this point in her treatment, she is not at all happy with the results. The book is episodic, lacks unity and she fears editors won't like it. She is right: editors do not like her dialogue and sense of timing, but suggest she needs a stronger story that can keep the reader's attention throughout the book. She tries to generate ideas that will tie the elements together and begins by attempting to take the lead from a successful writer in her family but the effort goes nowhere. Karen sets up luncheon meetings with people who are familiar with some events in their workaday world which might become the connecting threads of her book. These are woven here and there in the different chapters and, like the solution of the writer, forces her to change quite a number of the smaller vignettes. The editors find the stories not original enough to make a best seller but she is determined to write a best seller.

Karen complains to me that the character of the heroine - herself - is not developed enough but continues to try to satisfy

the editor and publisher's requirements. Her distress turns into open hostility when one of them suggests that she ought to play down the vignettes and give more strength to the story. She complains to me: "But his is not my book! I would have to completely forget what I wanted!" Disgusted, she follows the suggestion of one publisher and shelves the book for a while - maybe she will be able to use portions of it here and there in another project. By now she has begun to write another book related to a personal crisis of hers. The publishers express deep interest in this new book that promises to be scandalous and juicy, describing the details of the break of a relationship between two prominent people. This project has another host of difficulties as she struggles with the problem of truly understanding what is going on between them and not exposing too much of what does not belong to her.

Let us examine the obstacles to the first book. To start with, she is in grave danger of losing the connection with herself or getting off the track by her wish to have it be a best seller. In her case, it is not just a wish but a demand she imposes on herself. This will make her extremely vulnerable to other people's ideas, especially those of successful writers who have written best sellers, publishers who publish best sellers and successful people in other fields who present her with ideas. She is no longer trusting that she can come up with something but she has to take from someone bigger and more competent. She

begins to feel the insecurity of a child and anger at all these people who are withholding from her, including me, her therapist. My interpretations - which suggest that her demand for a best seller is premature and does not let her grow along with the book - are turned against me. She claims I don't understand her - she would not settle for something mediocre. Besides, she is used to having money and now needs that income. She does not want to consider such a possibility and makes me into the inadequate one who settles for mediocrity and cannot afford grown up luxuries. She turns the tables, a having me play the child part of herself which feels inadequate and lacks what grown-ups seem to have. She sees my interpretation as stemming from my envy at her success, not as a wish to help her understand the nature of her unrealistic, omnipotent demands which she is not likely to fulfill.

At the point where Karen complains to me about her heroine not being developed as a character, she is closer to finding something of value for herself which, if pursued, could enrich the character as it would make her confront, and eventually accept, aspects of herself - her infantile hostilities and fears that are dissociated and put into me and others. She engages in an instant cure of these feelings by her grandiose fantasies of incorporation of other people's ideas and by leaping forward to fantasize having a best seller. She now reads best sellers to understand what is the key in them. If she could figure out the ingredients of a best seller she would have no problem, she thinks.

Let us look at another example of this same problem with another patient. After struggling for a couple of years, David, a young comedy writer, gets some good television assignments and is recognized as one of the new writing talents. On the basis of a collaboration with an older writer on a movie script he is offered a movie, his first one alone. The subject matter has to do with a situation he is familiar with from his childhood and he is truly delighted. This movie is going to make him big - he will not have to apply for jobs ever again - they will seek him out. In the future it will be entirely up to him to choose a project or not and his financial problems will be over, forever.

The producers give him the main idea for the movie and he is asked to turn in the first forty pages in a couple of months. After a month's work David realizes that he cannot write the story the way it was suggested. The approach is too sleek: it presents things in a black and white way he detests - he would like more subtleties in the character development, no good guys and bad guys. After all, this is the problem he used to have with his ex-partner: he was quick in creating certain effects, great for story line but his treatment hit the audience over the head. He wants to show that he has a better way of doing things and this is his chance. He struggles with an idea that is quite a departure from what the producers had suggested to him and he has to ask for an extension. His anxiety mounts as he imagines they won't like his development of their story. He fantasizes

arguments where he defends his position and wins - they are amazed at his talent and give him a carte blanche to pursue his ideas. He is not happy with the forty pages and says to me, "It's not really an example of the whole thing because I don't know yet how the whole thing works out. I hope they understand that."

David finds out, through the assignment, that the producers hated his treatment. The assistant producer lets David know they are very angry at his changes and that they want to meet with him. David is devastated. When he finally meets with them he barely defends his idea and follows every suggestion they make. In the ensuing session he comments:

I was meek, I felt I had nothing, not one idea to contribute. They had it all: power, ideas, everything and I agreed to everything they suggested. I was scared - I didn't want them to fire me from the project - it meant too much to me. Yet I can't stand myself. I kissed ass all the way.

As in Karen's case, this project is invested with all the power to make him big. Even though he wants a more complex treatment than the producers suggests, he cannot live up to the requirements of the new version of the project. This new development requires time, but he is not willing to admit that he needs time to figure it out. After all, if the movie script is supposed to make him, he should be able to figure it out right away. He gets caught up in his own omnipotent fantasies and, as is always the case, he only has to hear that they are

angry with him to have all those fantasies collapse. He becomes a frightened child ready to agree to anything. In a strange way his negotiating with the producers mirror what he hates about the script: the good guys know everything, and the bad guys know nothing. Had he been more accepting of the infantile part of his personality, and able to learn from someone with more experience he could have been a better advocate for himself defending the notion he had earlier presented to me: i.e.,

They should not judge me on the basis of these forty pages since they are not an example of the ensuing pages; they are rather an example of the way I am struggling with this new idea. I would like them to bear with me to see the outcome of this treatment. I believe in what I am doing . . .

Again, as in Karen's case, he begins to frantically follow every piece of advice he gets and everything seems to lead to a dead end. His anxiety mounts. He begins to suffer stomach pains and is unable to eat or sleep. In a fit of despair, he tells the assistant producer he has decided to abandon the script and is willing to refund the money that has been advanced to him. It is no consolation that he is one of several writers hired for the project, the others quit or were fired. By this time he is dimly aware that his unwillingness to make contact and accept the infantile part of himself has a great deal to do with his inability to tackle this script at this time.

It is hard to assess to what extent the editors' suggestions for Karen's book or David's script are an improvement on their ideas. Many would agree that a good story line makes a book more

readable than would a set of vignettes, however interesting, or that viewers of a movie will get confused without a clear sense of purpose. The artist needs to be accepting and loyal to where he is, at that point in time, even though this may mean the work not succeeding in generating a desired response. Karen's state of mind was not integrated, and she cannot possibly write an integrated book, unless it is not her book. The one option in the direction of literary integration is, as she discovers herself, to find out what is not right with her heroine. But even with that, she might not have a best selling novel. The important thing is that her chances of maturing as a writer parallel her chance of growing up as a person and she is not taking that chance. She wants an instant, magical solution for her heroine and for the novel as a whole. Such a solution does not grow out of quick, magical cures. The artist is forced to take account of what is truly happening to him.

One may ask, "What about the productivity of great artists whose pathology is well documented? This is not the place to explore the relationship between creativity and madness, a complex one for sure. It seems to me that even in the most pathological cases the great art results from moments of integration and not from those where the pathology is flagrant. Van Gogh, for example, who is so cited as an example of a crazy artist, spent long periods of time when he was unable to paint at all.

How can the artist benefit from the help of others? An artist will truly enrich his perception of his work and make possible its further growth if he is not blinded by defensive maneuvers. He can stretch his capabilities and follow a lead but only if this lead is received with the conviction that it is right - "This is right, this is what I needed." In this case the lead is a pointer in the right direction but a direction that is already possible within the artist's conception of the work. Karen and David lack conviction of their own when they follow other people's suggestions. They cannot discriminate between what fits and what does not. They follow suggestions blindly, not for what they are but because they see them coming from someone powerful, someone who knows, someone who has what they feel is missing in themselves. Their only conviction is that they have nothing; and the only way of getting what they want is to take, rob and dispossess others whom they perceive have the goodies. This is clearly not a conscious conviction but an expression of unconscious fantasies which grip them. The result, as we have seen, is a dead end and leaves them empty. Furthermore, it leads them to confusion and mistrust about their own talent. Karen and David cannot find anything of value in what they are doing because they are not operating from their own need - to find, to reveal, to make fit. If they were, they would be empowered by that need.

And here again we come to an important paradox in creation: if we pursue the work with full contact with that part of our

personality that needs, that wants, and that is hungry, we will nourish ourselves from what we find. Only to the extent that we are in contact with this need can we engage in a fulfilling give and take with what we have in front of us. If, on the other hand, we are under the spell of an unconscious fantasy of having all that is needed - either having gotten what we need from someone, or about to get it - there will not be anything to guide us in the search. It is our need, our hunger, and our desire that guide us, that energize us in the pursuit of that which will be satisfying. It is only then, as I say, that we are "on track". Questions about having or not having a core self do not arise then as we are operating from something that feels like a core. The smugness resulting from the fantasy that we already have what we need results in a pursuit without conviction and a goal oriented relationship with the matter at hand that cannot enrich us or satisfy us.

The self defeating nature of omnipotent fantasies also applies to the relationship with the work itself. The artist can not only use the suggestions of others but can go on his own after material that he can use. The search is difficult, however, if he feels he has to have all of the knowledge inside him, another instance of omnipotence, in this case an omnipotent demand on himself. The attitude towards his surroundings will be very different if he is in the grip of omnipotent fantasies of having it, or if he is aware of an absence. In the first case, as he is not searching, he may miss many opportunities to enrich

his work. In the second, his need can guide him as he scans his environment for possibilities. It is only in the later case that serendipity is welcome and properly used.

And this brings us back to the beginning. Impasses in the work put us in touch with the more infantile, helpless, incompetent and needy part of ourselves and with the absence of that which will give us that help, knowledge and competence. We are faced with our aloneness, separation, and having to go for help from others - in short, our dependency. Again and again we relive the loss of union with mother, the illusion of oneness with her and all the losses thereafter. The loss of direction in the work makes all the earlier losses reverberate in unison and we have to resign ourselves to being the child once more without attempting to escape. Each time we succeed, we grow a bit more loving and tolerant. And the work, also, has a chance of growing better, stronger, and richer.