The field of psychology sheds some light on the subject of creativity. In my first year as an undergraduate at the University of Washington, I majored in psychology, which was behavioral psychology at that university, before I changed to political theory and English literature. Later, while still an undergraduate, I worked for two years in the office of social psychologist Edwin Guthrie when he was Dean of the Graduate School. I had an abiding interest in the psychology of human behavior and also in the subject of creativity. (My husband holds a number of patents for his inventions.) More insights from these subjects needed to be applied to the field of history.

During the academic year 1965-1966, I traveled once a month to New York City (once to Chicago) to participate in an Anthropological Research Seminar on the Creative Process sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. Participants took turns preparing the agenda for individual sessions. In the outline I prepared for the February meeting, "An Outline for Further Writing, Thinking, Discussion of Play, Constraint, Creativity, Change" (presented in this chapter), I referred to the writings of Freud, Jung, and Piaget. Psychology was also a facet of the summary of the Seminar I prepared for the May 10 meeting. The excerpts from that summary given below under the titles "Definitions of Creativity," "Constraints," "Play," and "The Creative Process," are extracted only from my own comments, to be consistent with the theme of this book and not to coopt the comments of other members of the Seminar, a very distinguished group.

Participants in the Seminar included Dr. Daniel Aaron of the Department of English, Smith College; Donald Barr of the Dalton School in New York City; Philip Borden of the Center for Application of Sciences and Technology at Wayne State University; Dr. Otto Brendel of the Department of Art and Archaeology at Columbia University; Robert N. Butler, M.D., of the Washington School of Psychiatry in Washington, D.C.; Dr. Theodosius Dobzhansky of the Rockefeller Institute; Dr. John W. Dodds of the Department of Humanities of Stanford University; Loren Eiseley of the Department of Anthropology

of the University of Pennsylvania; W. Frye of the Wenner-Gren Foundation; poet Anthony Hecht of New York City; Dr. Charles F. Hockett of the Department of Anthropology of Cornell University; Dr. Francis L. K. Hsu of the Department of Anthropology of Northwestern University; Dr. Gordon Kaye of the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University; Dr. Edward Lurie of the Department of History at Wayne State University (he had invited me to participate in the Seminar); sociologist Dr. Helen Lynd of New York City, emeritus professor of philosophy, Sarah Lawrence College; Dr. Leona Marshall of the Department of Physics at the University of Colorado; Dr. Joseph Mazzo of the Department of Comparative Literature at Columbia University; John A. Osmundsen from the science department of the New York Times; Dr. Charles Page, provost at the University of California at Santa Cruz; Lita Osmundsen of the Wenner-Gren Foundation; Dr. Hortense Powdermaker of the Anthropology Department of Queens College; poet and biographer Muriel Rukeyser of New York City and Sarah Lawrence College; Dr. George Serban of New York City; Dr. Heinz Von Foerster of the Electrical Engineering Laboratory at the University of Illinois in Urbana; Dr. Charles Weiner, historian of science at the American Institute of Physics in New York City; and Emanuel Winternitz of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

Play is an integral part of the whole being of selfhood and of society; hence it is an important part of holistic history. Play is not necessarily the basis for creativity; it can be profoundly conservative. But it is relevant to the subject of creativity and that subject, in turn, is relevant to the question of how historical change occurs.

CHAPTER 25

Some Comments about Play and Creativity

Definitions of Creativity

Definitions of creativity differ from culture to culture and from one era to another. Some employ a utilitarian standard; others see creativity as that which corresponds most closely to an abstract ideal; for the structural-functional social science school, creativity may be that which destroys or restores social equilibrium, may be a deviation from a norm, or may be that which challenges or establishes a prevailing paradigm; for the existentialist, each authentic being is per se creative. The deviation, paradigm, and equilibrium approaches assume that there are norms to be deviated from, and assume some degree of socio-cultural holism. Is creativity a vehicle for social adjustment, the manifestation of social forces, an articulation out of the unconscious, a picture of Being or Transcendence, or is it an expression of free will? Creativity is a relationship between the act and its environment. Is process more important than product? What is process? Conceptions of creativity are reciprocally related to questions of time. A female's definition would probably be different from a male's.

Kinship Structure as a Determinant. Kinship patterns are a variable of, or have a reciprocal relationship with, economic structures (division of labor, arrangements about property, distribution and succession mechanisms) rather than being an independent variable. Professional, peer, and intra-institutional relationships encourage or discourage creativity in varying degrees. Often, moderate innovation is appreciated and even necessary to maintain the group structure and keep it moving, but drastic changes which would disrupt the group must often be imposed from the outside.

Different cultures, cultural eras, and subcultures have different sets of basic assumptions, including assumptions about the nature of time and space, which are the products of—and reciprocally interrelated with—basic modes of economic production, related institutional patternings, and ecological orientations. What kinds of creativity occur and how creativity is recognized or perceived will vary depending on the prevailing set of asumptions. Value assumptions are symbolic, and are both the products of and implements for creativity. Whenever prevailing cultural symbols are most conceptual or formal or most attenuated—most removed from the natural impulses of spontaneous

human nature or unarticulated human needs—then creativity may be of a kind not tending to change the prevailing culture. [I would now dispute this statement.] When seemingly eclectic or formless images and symbols prevail, this may be a symptom of and an aid toward rapid major cultural change.

Constraints

Do constraints have a liberating or repressive role? Is creativity the overcoming of constraints? Constraint and creativity are not opposites. Creativity may be the overcoming of obstacles. If so, the obstacle may be necessary for creativity to occur. Creativity may have its own constaints, or express itself in terms of constraints. [Poetry comes to mind.] The prevailing culture and society are constraints: prevailing ontology, epistemology, axiology; ordering and focus—scheduling; distribution of rewards and punishments, etc. Is the form of art or science an intuition of a form of existence? Is it an archetypal statement of the collective unconscious? Is reality what we say it is?

Play

Creativity and constraint are not dichotomous; neither are play and constraint or play and work. One mode of analysis distinguishes four kinds of play:

1. The formal *ritual* or game as defined by Huizinga. The purposes it serves are external to immediate material interests or the individual satisfaction of biological needs. It has its own rules and goals and limits of time and place. Its constraints are self-imposed.
2. It can be pure spontaneous pleasure, but what is spontaneity?
3. *Learning:* The process of assimilating reality which temporarily frees the ego from demands for accommodation to reality. The exercise and toughening of skills. (Piaget)
4. An aspect of the *creative* process. Of the four definitions of play, the fourth is the only sense in which the meaning of the word *play* overlaps the meaning of the word *work*. We often find it difficult to distiguish between work and play [this statement, of course, applies only to some kinds of work], whereas many people in 19th-century Western culture had no such difficulty.

The Creative Process

In history, theories of social and cultural change are reciprocally related to assumptions about the nature of time. There are questions about the nature of creativity in specific fields and in specific individuals or types of individuals; also about motivation and about the very nature of the creative process. Given that "invention is the mother of necessity" or vice versa, what kind of innovation is more likely to be accepted in what social context?

The Act of Play, Definitions

(The word means little—or it means too much—because it means so many contradictory things.)

Play is Non-Functional

Huizinga: Play is freedom; it is not "ordinary" or "real" life, and the purposes it serves are external to immediate material interests or the individual satisfaction of biological needs; it has limits of time and place; it is irrational; it has its own rules; its proper elements are order, tension, movement, change, solemnity, rhythm, rapture; the point of play is play.

If creativity is purposeful, a means to an end, then play as Huizinga defines it is not creative, because it is an end in itself. It separates itself off from external constraints; but it rigorously adheres to its own self-imposed and inherent constraints. The constraints, therefore, are play. Much of culture is play.

"Man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man and he is only completely a man when he plays." (J. C. F. Schiller, "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man", in *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical* (London: G. Bell, 1884): 71).

"As soon as a man apprehends himself as free and wishes to use his freedom . . . then his activity is play." (J. P. Sârtre, *Being and Nothingness,* tr. H. E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956): 580–581).

Play is Functional

1. Its relationships to external (social) constraints:

Freudian thought: Play is freedom from external constraints; it is a manifestation of the pleasure principle of the id; in its pure form it would not be rule-bound and would burst the confines of the checkerboard, the playing field, the courtroom, or the altar. Play is spontaneous; play is pleasure; the times when it is "released" are brief, but its natural matrix is timelessness; in its pure form it would manifest itself as display (that is, it would be non-functional), but since the instinct is normally repressed, it serves as the primal fountain for social creativity. We create social forms and images in a struggle to try to recover the lost body of childhood, to recreate childish play.

Freudian thought: Play is the form of social symbols and images that states or reinforces social constraints. Through sublimation and objectification of the repressed wish, the primal impulse is attenuated and thus in its objectified form has already made its concessions to social constraints. Through this objectification, primal play lives a little and dies a little, asserts itself but in so doing lends itself to being controlled for social purposes. But it is only

through such sublimation that men unite as brothers and form community. Symbols recall the repressed and repress it again.

Piaget: Play is the assimilation of reality to the ego while freeing the ego from demands for accommodation to reality. Play, therefore, is the process through which social norms are internalized.

It is an instrument for the socialization of man. As such, it is not itself creative, but if you subscribe to the Durkheimian or Puritan view that to socialize man is to free him from the bonds of his natural (and evil) animality, then play paves the way for man's creative existence as a fully socialized being.

Freudian thought: Symbols (created out of the play impulse) are the link between the id and society. They make public, in a veiled way, the contents of the unconscious. They sustain the claim of the whole individual. They preserve the collective memory, the perpetual but repressed images of freedom. They link the individual to the past and the future.

2. Its relationships to internal (natural) constraints:

Freudian thought: Pure play is an expression of primal nature, but even within the id it gravitates toward the death instinct, which serves as a constraint. Social constraint may protect the play instinct from the death instinct.

"Beauty opens two doors—to life and to death. Art possesses mysterious possibilities for effecting a compromise between the two antagonistic powers . . . Play helps to transform irregular emotional response into a collective and standardized action. Play also is the constant assertion of activity as a means of contradicting and nullifying any reminiscence of a passive present in the creation of beauty. Life offers strong emotions . . . Death brings the striving after permanence, stability and immobility. . . . Beauty is life dancing— but dancing to the tune of death." (Hans Sachs, *The Creative Unconscious* (Cambridge: Science Art Publications, 1942)).

Jung: Play as ritual, myth, and symbol-making harnesses the energies of the unconscious, and channels the images of the unconscious, permitting and facilitating the individuation and integration of the self and a communion of the self with the past and mankind. Both the forces and the forms of creativity spring from the unconscious; play is the impresario of raw creative force. Symbols deliver us from the tyranny of instinct.

Kant: In the aesthetic imagination, sensuousness generates universally valid principles for an objective order characterized by beauty (purposiveness without purpose) and freedom (lawfulness without law), gratifying in free play the released potentialities of man and nature.

Dewey: Play remains as an attitude of freedom from subordination to an end imposed by external necessity, as opposed, that is, to labor; but it is

transformed into work in that activity is subordinated to production of an objective result.

Play, Time, and Rhythm

Play is the creating of a space apart, the conceptual life-space in which much of our living is done, structured by images of time. (Cf. Huizinga, Cassirer) Play is man challenging nature (God, death) by making his own world.

But play may also be a break in man-made rhythms, a falling back upon the relatively unmediated natural rhythms. Play is natural man behaving naturally in nature. (Once this was the nature God made; now it is becoming a "nature" man himself has made.)

Dewey: To have rhythm there must be energies resisting each other (life-death, play-constraint, tradition-innovation). "Underneath the rhythm of every work of art there lies, as a substratum in the depths of the subconsciousness, the basic pattern of the relations of the live creature to his environment."

Play, Symbols, and Social Change

Freud: Culture is accumulated dying, but the repressed returns.

Jung: The unconscious seethes with energy which has not been transformed, and particularly the collective unconscious. All the factors which have been suppressed by prevailing social views gradually accumulate in the collective unconscious and activate its contents. Certain individuals with strong intuition become aware of the changes and translate them into communicable ideas (what Yeats called the cry of Juno's peacock.) Because parallel changes have been occurring in the unconsiousnesses of other people, the ideas spread rapidly, but they also meet with violent resistance. If the ideas are successfully canalized into consciousness, they form a new source of power, but it may be a dangerous enthusiasm.

Dewey: ". . . the great original artists take a tradition into themselves. They have not shunned but digested it. Then the very conflict set up between it and what is new in themselves and in their environment creates the tension that demands a new mode of expression."

Sorokin: Culture moves in cycles from ideational, to ideal, to sensate (play) predominant patterns.

Gilb: The sensate stage is a stage of reversion to natural rhythms—back to the launching pad, from which new creativity then bursts forth. Periods of eclecticism are not necessarily periods of dying culture, but periods of nascent

growth, when borrowed random culture forms serve to hold the social order together, but not too cohesively; they are a bridge between old and new creativity, a symptom of creative transition.

Erich Neumann: Artists have all experienced the creative truth that the spirit blows where it will, and even where they seem to be playing and leaving things to chance, it is not only because the perplexed ego has renounced all hope of knowledge but because they believe profoundly that in and behind chance a greater truth may be at work. Conscious renunciation of form is often falsely interpreted as inability to give form, as incompetence. Actually the breakdown of consciousness, carrying the artist backward to an all-embracing participation with the world, contains the constructive creative elements of a new world vision. ("Art and Time," in *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks,* vol. 3 (New York and London: Pantheon 1958): 32).

Read: Art is the test, the exercise of an expanding consciousness.