

## **Remembering, repeating, working-through and creating**

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*...one who brings  
A mind not to be changed by place or time.  
The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven*  
Paradise Lost, Book I  
John Milton

Do we create when we analyse? Interpretation is always a new way of understanding what was already there. Construction is a new conjecture we propose to the analysand so as to fill some historical void, to complement partial memories, or to bridge and add a tentative piece to the puzzle of fragments of remembering. By suggesting an interpretation or a construction to the patient the analyst is shaping a new way to look, and to listen at things, so that the patient can reconfigure body, life and world. The old takes a new form under a different light, new harmonies can be heard encompassing the usual repeated sounds. By the analyst's interventions, when an analytic process is on the move, repetitions become staged remembrances previously unknown. The now registered and acknowledged new stands in place of the unregistered and unacknowledged old. The prospective present that transforms the past in the analytic situation, in first person would run something like this: I am not now the same I was thanks to the results of working-through, I will never again be able to repeat the same, I would have to repeat differently. Is it possible to repeat differently? Would a different repetition account for something altogether new? The problem of innovation and creation has sharp peculiarities when considered from the vantage point of the experience of the psychoanalytical process and in comparison to the artistic situation.

In a certain way it could be asserted that creativity in the service of overcoming resistances and fostering working-through has to deal with creativity proper to the formation of symptoms and in favour of building resistances. Destructivity and creativity as a dialectical pair have to be contrasted with creativity in favour of the analytical process and creativity against it. A disquieting interrogation arises when we

ask ourselves how creative in the production of resistances to analysis can we analysts be (Baranger et al., 1982).

A patient after eleven years of analysis, during a period of negative therapeutic reaction expressed his feelings with utmost clarity: “I will not talk as talking is contributing to the analysis and I am only interested in destructing it; so it is”, without showing the slightest intention of changing his attitude as a consequence of acknowledging what he was doing. The building up of resistances is usually astute and shrewdly creative in the service of the forces of evil. As Freud noted we work with the surface of our patients, it is in the depths of unconscious life that creativity and destructivity proceed along different paths and pointing at different aims. The “creative shaping process” (Holm-Hadulla, 2003) of psychoanalysis aims at: the destruction of whatever sustains ignorance and repetition, and the creation of new conditions that might allow the emergence of potentialities of love and work not previously put into action. Dismantling and demolishing is as important as fostering and breeding, discoveries and experience, so as to create possibilities of creating in favour of the true self, giving room to the selves of others, in spite of the scars and bleeding of trauma, and against the inherent human proneness to violence and destruction. Nothing new in what was just said but nothing old either.

How can creativeness, with specific qualities and traits in every field (Rothenberg & Hausman, 1976), as it operates in art, be put to the task in the psychoanalytical process, without falling down into the abyss of creationism and Pygmalionism? The analyst is no artist and the analysand is no work of art. Psychoanalytic treatment of artists is not necessarily creative. ‘*Per via di levare*’ and neutrality act as technical safeguards only if the analyst does not feel he is sculpting psychic matter and does not attempt to be neuter. Deliberately intending to be creative would amount to abandon neutrality in favour of enactment. Repetition in the transference is our *via regia*. We stage the sessions, we are protagonists of a stellar role, actors of a drama with an unknown script, co-creators of a process with uncertain results, artisans of listening who keep the winds blowing to impulse psychoanalytic sails and who will not let sleeping dogs lie forever.

From the inception of “Remembering, repeating and working through” (1914) to the production of “Beyond the pleasure principle” (1920) much took place in Freud’s life

and theorizing. Despite the occurrence of the Great War and the death of his daughter Sophie and one grandchild he managed to create new conceptions and to expand the horizon for new approaches that continued to develop further in the following years. During those years the initial Dada activities took place in Zurich, the strongest ferment in the art of the last hundred years. The “Further recommendations on the technique of psycho-analysis II” alert to a new technique, that of pointing at resistances; the 1920 paper shows how we are doomed by the inevitable at the same time that underlines the feasibility of surviving by play in action. Repetition and compulsion to repeat on a par (Bibring, 1943).

Another patient during the second part of his analysis after an interruption of four years (the first part lasted four years and was interrupted because he felt analysis was too demanding and he was too frail to continue) handed the analyst a short story, he is a very intelligent and informed person besides being a writer, and said: “Please read it as a brain scan”, implying that aesthetic considerations and the aesthetic experience of reading should be put aside for the benefit of his analysis. The shortcomings and the inspiration of his writing were under analysis alongside the actual writing of the story. In other case a patient brought the sketches she was preparing for a painting as analytic material. Her art work had narrative visual elements, a part of her own personal history, and the associations during the sessions in relation to the creative process in progress that included formal and aesthetic considerations were analytically relevant. In fact it was a touch of intense colour in an angle of the picture that let her evoke and revive the traumatic burning to death of her grandmother. In such a case the creative process and the psychoanalytical process had a great confluence due to particular circumstances.

Psychoanalysis is always new as long as it remains always old. Creativity in psychoanalysis means reconfiguring the psychoanalytic experience with every case, in each session, creating conditions that maintain the possibility of psychoanalysis, incorporating into the psychoanalytic process whatever appears in the scope of our evenly suspended attention, even psychoanalytic theories or other scientific findings, filtered through the analysis of countertransference. Very well known patterns of interaction intertwine with the spontaneous and the unexpected in the embodied, affective, rhythmic, experience of the crosscurrents of discourse in the analytical

situation as if it were a verbal jazz jam session (Doria Medina, 2005). Enthusiasm for the new can be dangerous for psychoanalysis if it carries aggressive refurbishing, that is to say if innovation is the façade of destructive transformation.

If the new in contemporary art is abject art or the new cacophony (see Kristeva, 1980, Steihaug, 1995, Saltz, 2005), shouldn't we understand what is creative in abject art and what amounts to destruction in it? The question of perverse creation (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1995) remains open in relation to trauma, horror and hate. Present and past effects of trauma, as well as the enigma of encounters with and differentiation from primary objects in the origins of psychic life which are beyond representative register, surge on behalf of artistic transformation and surpassing working-through are put outside in the work of art as symbolic precipitants of what has not been inscribed neither in the body, in sensoriality or in affectivity (Melgar, 2005).

When the meaninglessness of trauma, that which has no representation and is alien to the psyche, emerges during the production of the work of art, the difficulties of articulating, integrating and differentiating arise. Repetition that attempts to stop painful affect by way of enactment incites our attention to study the potential role of repetition in creative processes. We are at the crossroads between void and phantasy, between *nachträglichkeit* and creation, where suffering and pleasure coexist. War trauma and war neuroses, the research on narcissism, loss and melancholy, paved the way for Freud to conceive the autonomy of the death drive and the metapsychology of the repetition of pain and to its hallucinatory and visual components. It is remarkable how Freud developed a new insight that threw light on the evidence of the combination of destructivity and creativity every time the vicissitudes with the object lead to a new integration between the death drive and Eros. If repetition is capable of interiorizing the traumatic object and in such circumstance it alienates the psyche, the *fort-da* play shows that the psyche protects itself by means of a formidable transformation of the painful experience making out of psychic pain a revulsive source for creativeness. Freud's lacks, losses, uncertainties of the war years led in 1920 to "Beyond the pleasure principle" one of the most innovative papers in the evolution of psychoanalysis, creativity appears delayed in time after trauma; a time lapse is necessary to articulate the grievances of trauma with the creation of the new (Green, 2000). Creativeness is

delayed along a process of discovery, construction and invention as it happens in the psychoanalytic process.

Otto Dix volunteered to the army in 1914, he was 23: “I had to see... I ought to live that... I was curious... I had to observe all that with my own eyes to testify” (p.52), served in the artillery and in heavy machine-gun sections till the end of the war, medalled for his valour and promoted. “Looking at old paintings I had the impression that a part of reality had yet to be shown: the repulsive. War was repulsive...I could not miss it” (in Báez Macías, 2000). Yet, he was met by horror. He drew, painted and etched his perceptions and his nightmares of war, of distorted and mutilated bodies, appalling images which haunted his psyche. “For many years, at least ten, I had those dreams... ruins always were in my dreams... (in Báez Macías, 2000)”, “In my dreams I crawled along the ruins, trenches and guts” (in Catalogue, F. Maeght, 1998). He went beyond cruelty and introduced the abominable and revolting, which places him as an innovator in contemporary art.

In 1914 he painted a self-portrait as soldier (Fig. 1) that shows the inner transformation of the soldier ready for fight. With wild expressionism, the powerful forces in motion convey the emotional tone of the time, the realist going to war was well aware of its devastating side. The dramatic weight of the portrait denotes the metamorphoses of psychic structure which uncovers the inner origin of destructiveness setting the death drive in motion. From 1915 to 1918 Dix made 600 drawings that depict true life in the trenches. What amazes us is that the artist does not only picture external catastrophe but also attains the most extraordinary representation of the psychic effects of catastrophe<sup>1</sup>. (Figs.2-8).

At the end of 1918, already demobilized, he produces his first oil painting after the war, another self-portrait (Nostalgia, Fig. 9) very odd in relation to his paintings before the war. A flower, the head of a bull, the moon and the sun pull apart the painter’s distressed face. It seems he tries to depict a way to counteract traumatic disorganisation by representing feminine and masculine elements of sexuality, the organising axes of life. Dix attempts new transactions in his relation to the world. The following year (Fig. 10) another symbolist picture stands as an allegory of permanent and unending fecundity. This painting with certain narcissistic content is a response to his worries about the vexation of Mother Earth because of war. It questions us about regression to

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<sup>1</sup> It might be noticed a formal proximity with the signs of massive projection found in art brut works of psychotic artists at the moment of psychotic disorganisation (Lopez de Gomara & Melgar, 2000).

the primal scene and to damage on the body of the mother and appears as an attempt to reconnect himself with the prospective meaning of the original enigma of sexuality. Soon afterwards Otto Dix would reach his greatest and distinctive stylistic achievement by combining exacerbated realism with fiery expressionism. Also in 1919 “My little friend Elys” (Fig. 11) introduces us to the intensity that war adds to the Oedipal fraternal conflict, to the wish and consequent guilt for the death of another human being. Dix depicts himself with two friends, Elys and Lehmann, in an erotic scene involving their three heads which suggests a forceful brutality. The woman is malignantly seductive and Lehmann half hidden by Elys’ arm can scarcely be seen. This representation discloses artistic insight on the unconscious enigma that urges men to kill each other and to find in victory a lucid triumph over rival siblings. As a fact, Dix not only survived war but continued creating and married in 1928 beautiful Martha (Fig. 12) whom he met as a married woman (married to a friend of his).

By 1924, after years of preparatory sketches, studying photographs of the war and anatomical pieces, Dix produced fifty extraordinary etchings, to free himself of “a terrible truth, beating truth, furious truth”, to deliver himself from “all that” and to conjure up his nightmares (p. 122, Catalogue, F. Maeght, 1998). He exposes again the revolting horror: with glacial realism corpses, skeletons, bowels, mutilated fragments, agonizing figures, tombs, wounded and terrified soldiers, are presented without saving any small aspect of cruelty. Now the technique of etching enabled him to attain a remarkable refinement of the image, rich with careful details, getting an aesthetic quality and a sophistication of style that the drawings of the war years lacked. Although the series of gravures have an anguishing dreamlike atmosphere beauty can be found in the vivid reconstructed memory each image consists of (figs. 13-16).

In 1932, worried by his perception of a new war approaching and noticing how the evils of war had been forgotten he painted “War in the trenches” (fig. 17), intended to be a part of a triptych which finally remained as a single painting. A soldier can be seen as in trance, stepping on a dead and rotten body while another soldier with a gas mask crawls looking for something under the corpse. At the top and at the background a stormy sky is clearing up. It seems that the macabre scene sinks into the depths of the vexed earth and slowly tragedy dissolves into silence (“In the aesthetic experience two landscapes meet: that of the internal world and that of the external”, Resnik, 2006, p.136). The efforts of the repressed unconscious, to trap the meaninglessness of trauma in the unconscious search for meaning, submerge repetition. The picture has a splendid tragic

beauty, not found in the series of etchings of 1924, or even less still in the drawings of 1915-1918. Creativeness in the aesthetic process was able to achieve sublimatory pleasure by covering with beauty the phantoms of trauma and conflict. The weapons of the soldiers which pierce violently the blue sky are a meaningful metaphor of the finitude of repetition and of the acquisition of a sublimated void. Otto Dix did not include this painting in the triptych as intended, due to an unexpected turn, even though he had made along some years many preliminary drawings, etchings and a full size watercolour. In “War in the trenches” soldiers head towards the left whereas in the left adjoining panel they walk in the opposite direction which occasions a narrative disruption. So he detached this work and kept it autonomous and painted another for the triptych. The technical solution of detaching the picture implies a symbolic act in the direction of psychic change derived from aesthetic insight.

The 600 war drawings, the 50 war etchings and the painting “War in the trenches” can be seen as different paths of remembering, repeating, working through and creating<sup>2</sup>. For nearly two decades Otto Dix tried “to see” the unknown evil, attempted through art to free himself from its traumatic effects and to find “the truth” in his own interiority (“art illuminates reality in a particular way-from within”, Rose, 1987,p.207). He ended inventing a new artistic language (verism, new objectivity) that merited the destruction of nearly 300 of his works and his condemnation as “degenerate” by the Nazi regime, which brought to him prestige and personal success in better times, and the recognition of his position as an outstanding figure in the history of contemporary art. In the meantime he kept doing what he knew, once and again, till he reached the peak of art, discovering the aesthetic force of thought without abandoning the pleasure to look at.

We psychoanalysts who crawl in analytic trenches to delve into the unknown just keep doing what we do know with our well crafted tools (interpretation and construction) until analytic insight and psychic change come creatively into life in the analysand on behalf of our own psychic shaping in response to the analysand’s doings.

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<sup>2</sup> A working note by Freud, reproduced by Grubrich-Simitis (1993), asserts that the psychic motive to put the artistic capacity into motion is the drive to master a situation, the image acts as a substitute of the original and gives the author power over it, the same with a loved object (p. 157, Spanish version).

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Self-portrait as Soldier
2. The world bursts out
3. Crater. Craters crack the ground
4. Destroyed Village: everyday life is disrupted
5. field with corpses: stylized corpses mixed with raging violence
6. Sun: a radiant sun is framed by dark forces, almost a self-portrait of catastrophe
7. Ruins: flashing lines go through a hole
8. Soldier who sleeps and soldier who writes: the creative sources in repetition
9. Nostalgia
10. Pregnant woman
11. My little friend Elys
12. Portrait of Martha
13. Terrorized wounded soldiers
14. Aggressive ghosts
15. Living corpses
16. Agony
17. War in the trenches
18. .
19. .

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