

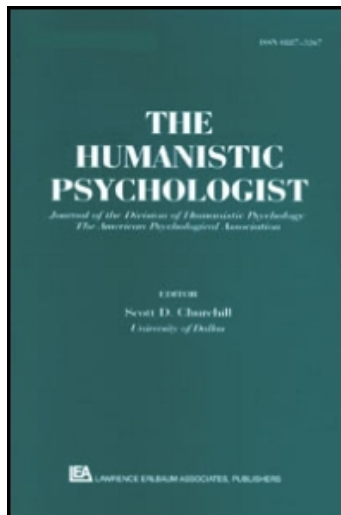
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Otto Rank's Art

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Abstract: Otto Rank's work has had an indirect influence on much of existential-humanistic psychology, yet his contribution has been unevenly acknowledged. Seeing Rank as a developing artist helps to put his creative contributions to psychoanalysis, post-psychoanalytic critique, and existential-humanistic psychotherapy, in perspective. After his separation from Freud, Rank's innovative thought blossomed; his later works have deep and lingering humanistic import. A look at convergences and divergences between Freud and Rank shows that Rank's art (of living, of theorizing, and of practicing therapy) is an uncannily familiar and inspiring model of humanistic practice in the world. The continuing relevance of Rank's ideas about art and artists is explored, and Rank is re-introduced to humanistic psychologists who may recognize aspects of his work as consonant with their own.

Background

Otto Rank was a poet and scholar as a young man, and Freud's early protégé. From the moment Freud discovered this precocious student of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, (humanities), he recognized Rank's talent for applying psychoanalysis to the arts and humanities, especially to literature, theater, and mythology. Freud sensed that Rank's intuitive abilities in these fields could broaden and deepen the emerging fields of psychoanalytic inquiry and lay analysis, for which he, Freud, strongly advocated. In early writings like *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909/1952) and *The Double* (1914/1971), Rank was "under the spell" (1932/1989, p. xxi) of his patron and substitute father. But after twenty years at Freud's side, Rank achieved an independent critical stance from which to regard not only psychoanalysis, but psychology itself.

After his separation from Freud in 1926, Rank developed an existentially-informed theory of art and creativity; a personality typology based on the artist as an exemplar of healthy development; and an innovative approach to the analytic relationship that may well qualify as the first existential-humanistic psychotherapy. Despite his importance, his influence has been unevenly felt among humanistic psychologists, who know little of his work, or know it indirectly. When encountered, Rank's writings often evoke an "aha!" of recognition by those who realize his ideas are already assimilated into their work.

Overlooked and ignored for many years, Rank has recently been rediscovered by scholars and clinicians. Rigorously non-dogmatic and determined to avoid the risks of zealotry and elitism he discovered in the Freudian movement, Rank never established a school of his own. His work nevertheless survives, and continues to appeal to theorists and therapists who have encountered him in *Truth and Reality* (1929/1978a), *Will Therapy* (1929; 1931/1978b), *Art and Artist* (1932/1968a), and *Beyond Psychology* (1941/1958)--the major works of his last ten years--or through the writings of Jesse Taft (1958), Ernest Becker (1973), Anaïs Nin (1966), and Ira Progoff (1956), who have kept Rank's name alive. Despite the difficulty and inaccessibility of some of his works, the impact of ad hominem criticism which accompanied his separation from Freud, and the absorption of his ideas into the mainstream, Otto Rank remains a central figure in existential-humanistic thought. His ideas have a recurrent relevance that ensures their rediscovery by each generation of psychology scholars, researchers, and clinicians.

There is no neat lineage from Rank except through the artists he befriended in Paris and New York, and the American social workers who embraced his ideas in the 1930's and 1940's. Although shunned for a time by psychoanalysts, his writings are now considered to be seminal in post-psychoanalytic object relations thought and ego psychology (Rudnytsky, 1991). Rank's later writings were "major works of social psychology and cultural history addressing religion and creativity" (Lieberman, 2001) that continue to interest humanities scholars. Among psychologists, theorists and researchers

like Henry Murray (1981) and Donald MacKinnon (1965) pointed to Rank's important understanding of art and creativity. Carl Rogers, who learned of Rank through psychologist Jesse Taft and social worker Virginia Robinson, generously acknowledged Rank's influence (see Raskin, 1948; Kramer, 1995; Rychlak, 1973), as did Rollo May (1975). Both helped to locate his unique post-psychoanalytic approach within the humanistic psychology tradition.

Recent scholarship has again highlighted Rank's prescience. An authoritative biography (Lieberman, 1985), several important books and articles on his anticipations of current theory (Menaker, 1982, 1996; Kainer, 1984; Rudnytsky, 1991; Kramer, 1996), the first English translation of *The Incest Motif in Literature and Legend* (1912/1992), a paperback edition of *Art and Artist* (1932/1989), and a new translation of *Psychology and the Soul* (1930/1998), have brought renewed attention to Rank's unique contributions to psychology. The relevance of his ideas to contemporary therapy has also increasingly been felt (O'Dowd, 1986; Wadlington, 1983). Rank was not an inhibiting precursor; his work is rich with possibilities and implications available for re-discovery and appropriation.

Rank's pioneering contributions include his understanding of human intention and agency (or "will"); his emphasis on the dialogical, interpersonal nature of the therapy relationship; his appreciation for the inevitability (but avoidance) of death and limitation in human experience, and therefore the importance of time limits in therapy; and his recognition of the potential humans have for creatively developing their personalities.

Seen from the perspective of twenty-first century psychology, Rank's ideas appear modernist in tone, and they are. Like other thinkers of his time, Rank conceptualized the self as embodied, and the will as individualized, and he emphasized a modern romantic vision of the artist as a unique person who strives for originality and authenticity despite a pull to cultural conformity. These ideas may seem particularly passé in an age when a proliferation of possible selves replaces the stable self, when responsibility for action is regarded as relational and shared, and when appropriation and simulation are valued over original artistry and vision. But even for post-

modernists, some aspects of Rank's thought have an enduring appeal: for example, his fascination with a diverse array of cultural and mythological forms, his egalitarian approach to therapy, his attempts to counter scientific reductionism, and his appreciation for proto-feminist concepts about women's sexuality (cf. Sward, 1980). The attempt here is not to "postmodernize" Rank by revising his thought, but rather to see it in historical and cultural context. The relevance of Rank's ideas to contemporary humanistic psychology and psychotherapy is conspicuous; it needn't be belabored. In what follows several of Rank's ideas are explicated: His post-psychoanalytic theory of art, his character typology, and his innovative approach to psychotherapy. These ideas re-introduce Rank to humanistic psychologists who in a sense have known him all along.

Rank's Existential Theory of Art and Creativity

In 1915, the same year in which Freud produced "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," "Mourning and Melancholia," and the twelve Metapsychological papers, he also wrote a beautiful little introduction to a commemorative volume, *Das Land Goethes* (*Goethe's Land*). In this piece, "On Transience," Freud described a summer walk in the mountains with a poet and another friend. Freud noticed that the poet "was disturbed by the thought that all this beauty was fated to extinction, that it would vanish when winter came, like all human beauty and all the beauty and splendour that men have created or may create." As Freud put it, "All that he would otherwise have loved and admired seemed to him to be shorn of its worth by the transience which was its doom" (1916/1957b, p. 305). The poet's mourning over the inevitable dissolution and loss of all that is beautiful in the natural world seemed paradoxical to Freud. While he agreed that the things of this world are transient and ephemeral, he "dispute[d] the pessimistic poet's view that the transience of what is beautiful involves any loss of its worth. On the contrary," Freud commented, "transience value is scarcity value in time. Limitation in the possibility of an enjoyment raises the value of the enjoyment" (p. 305).

Freud's scarcity metaphor reveals that his understanding of art is based on an economics of pleasure and desire. As he had first attempted ten years earlier in his writings on humor and creative artists, Freud sought to explain art scientifically, as tension-reduction in a system of biological drives and energies. He accounted for beauty as a "lure" (Spector, 1972, p.104) and "*incentive bonus*" (Freud, 1908/1959, p. 153) to pleasure. Freud's notion is linked conceptually to Fechner's concept of "aesthetic assistance" (Freud, 1905/1960, p. 124) and to "the theories developed by Darwin concerning the origin of the sense of beauty in the 'artistic' display of decorative finery in order to attract a mate" (Spector, 1972, p. 104). "*Incentive bonus*" or "*fore-pleasure*" is regarded as the preparatory inducement to the greater "end-pleasure" (Freud, 1905/1953, p. 210) of sexual intercourse. The notion here is that art is a uniquely human adaptation--a means of prolonging sexual pleasure, an elaborate form of foreplay. Freud's concept of sublimation, the diversion and redirection of lower energies into higher, is the ultimate in pleasure heightened by anticipation. Artistic mastery, for Freud, consists in the ability to conserve. The artist can resist libidinal impulses, sublimating desires, delaying, and moreover, enhancing gratification. Although he later articulated the concept of the death instinct, Freud's theory of art never went beyond the Pleasure Principle (Kainer, 1984).

Freud's story about the poet discloses something else--that his view of art focuses on the object and the pleasure it can provide. In contrast to his protégé Otto Rank, who aspired to be an artist, Freud disclaimed artistry, and instead adopted the stance of the collector, the aesthete who looks at art from outside, more in terms of the object, and less in terms of the subject (i.e. the artist's self.) In Freud's description of the poet he focuses on object loss. His perplexity at the poet's despondency, I would suggest, discloses that Freud missed the existential implications to the poet of the transitoriness of nature. Ironically, although Freud in this paper expresses a fundamental existential realization--that all things are temporal and nothing lasts forever--he fails to appreciate the further subjective implication of the poet's mourning. The loveliness of the external world is not diminished, Freud says, by its transience. But the loss

the poet is experiencing is not merely the loss of permanence of the external world, but also a symbolic loss of self. The poet saw reflected in his surroundings his own fate, his human limitation, and the inevitability of his own death.

Rank saw Freud's view itself as limited. It was these considerations--the need for a post-Pleasure Principle theory of art, and the need to counter Freud's object-dominated view of aesthetic phenomena--that became the focus of Otto Rank's work. Beginning with his precocious paper, *Der Künstler [The Artist]* (1907/1980), and culminating in *Art and Artist* (1932/1968a), Rank attempted to counter Freud's well known ambivalence toward artists (a mix of envy and admiration), with an existential appreciation for the personality development of what he called the "artist type."

Freud's theory of the artist emphasizes unconscious sources of artistic inspiration and the role of art in the fulfillment of wished-for pleasures and satisfactions. Rank, on the other hand, was concerned with the individual person of the artist and the process by which he or she forms a personality on the basis of conscious, willing choices. Where Freud saw art as escape and regression, Rank saw it as "progression," to use Ricoeur's term (1970, p. 491). He believed that works of art point toward something--that they have reference not only to the past but also to the future, and to the artist's own process of self-formation.

Ironically, Freud's attitude toward art has promoted both respect for and suspicion of the artist. Although Freud did much to legitimize the childlike, the primitive, and the fantastic as sources of artistic imagery, he left us with an image of the artist as introverted, regressed, and vain. As Phillip Rieff puts it, "the tendency of Freud's theory to normalize art--his idea that we are all artists informally, in the dream, the symptomatic act, the joke,--should be balanced against his inclination to retract art into neurosis" (1979, p. 120).

Initially, Rank emulated Freudian thought. In writings that Freud sanctioned and supported, he attempted to explicate the enigmatic concept of sublimation, but came to regard sexual drive as inadequate to explaining the motive to create. Rank's philosophical

grounding in existential thought began to inform his work, and more in the spirit of Nietzsche than Helmholtz, he linked artistic activity to the ego ideal and the will to immortality. In *Art and Artist* (1932/1968a), we see the emergence of Rank's mature view of the artist as the first representative of the "new type of humanity" (p. 430): the self-appointed creative individual who, faced with death, struggles with the dilemma of life versus art.

In *Art and Artist*, Rank describes his more existential view of the artist's task. Disclaiming the sexual origin of all pleasure, Rank invoked Schopenhauer's broader concept of aesthetic pleasure which "is not only nourished from positive sources but may [also]...be...characterized by the absence of fear or guilt." The "essence of pleasure," he suggests, lies in "brevity, and that of non-pleasure in the prolongation of any state, even one that was at first pleasurable" (1932/1968a, p. 107). On the surface this would appear to be nothing more than a restatement of Freud's transience metaphor, but Rank goes further, equating the brief and transient with "the partial." The "partial" in Rank is always contrasted with "the total," which means death.

Rank's attitude, first expressed in *Truth and Reality* (1929/1978a) and *Will Therapy* (1929, 1931/1978b), is that the initial separation of the individual from a state of wholeness in the experience of birth is ultimately compromised by the "final necessity" of relinquishing individuality "through total loss in death" (p. 134). Rank believed the neurotic response to the inevitability of death was totalism, an all-or-nothing approach to life. One form of neurotic totalism is compulsiveness--the concentration of the whole personality "on each detail of experience, however trivial or insignificant" (1932/1968a, p. 373). Another is gluttony--the attempt to swallow life whole. Yet another is total inhibition--the hoarding of potential experiences in the form of procrastination and avoidance. Neurosis is a "self-restriction of the life function in the interest of protecting from death," says Rank, and leads to guilt over the "unused life, the unlived in us" (1929-31/1978b, p. 149). The over-living or under-living of life is no way to face death, but Rank's artist-type has an alternative solution.

The artist, according to Rank, "finds a constructive...middle way." He or she "successfully partializes" by "absorbing" the world then "throwing it off" in artistic creation (1932/1968a, p. 377). Artists differ in the ways they accomplish this task: "Some...persistently partialize themselves and thus leave a greater complete work unaccomplished; others pour themselves out wholly in every partial work" (p. 373). The art work can be seen as a microcosm--a part which contains the whole--and so too can the artist.

While Rank's neurotic type stifles and inhibits full experience under the domination of a fear of life, the artist confronts the fear of death. Rank uses a powerful economic metaphor to explain the apparent self-punishing tendency of the neurotic: Life is a loan and death is the debt. The neurotic "refuses the loan (life) in order to escape the payment of the debt (death)" (1929, 1931/1978b, p. 126). But of course the attempt at bribery fails, and "the neurotic gains from all the painful and tormenting self-punishments no positive pleasure, but the economic advantage of avoiding a still more painful punishment, namely fear of death" (p. 126). Rank is not denying the inevitability of pain; instead he is challenging the self-serving instrumentalism of the neurotic--the attitude that self-inflicted suffering must have a payoff. As Rank puts it, "we are born in pain, we die in pain and we should accept life-pain as unavoidable--indeed a necessary part of earthly existence, not merely the price we have to pay for pleasure" (1941/1958, pp. 15-16).

Rank's artist-type is an individual who confronts the fear of death with a resolve engendered by the creative will. A central concept in Rank, the will arises first in the face of prohibitions. It is a "not wanting to" (Menaker, 1982, p. 43) go along with what is demanded that evolves into a mature willingness to do what one must (Rank's "volitional affirmation of the obligatory"). Finally, at its highest stage, the will is a creative urge to go beyond even the final limitation of death by immortalizing oneself in creative works. The artist seeks to make a mark on life for all time, and in this way transcend death. The artist recognizes that the external world is doomed to decay and extinction, and that even if Nature is eternal, human life is certainly limited. Therefore, it becomes important to live life fully

and spend time wisely, investing one's creative energies without attempting to cheat or bribe death. Immortality, as Rank uses the term, refers not to some consolation or after-life, but rather to the enduring impact of art that at once unites the temporal and eternal. Immortality is the mark one makes on life.

Freud's poet, I would contend, is at the first stage in the process of creative willing. Freud is witnessing the poet's rebellion against the ultimate dissolution of Nature. The poet's subsequent grief arises about the reality of self-limitation ("If nature itself is limited, then so is my life," is the poet's thought). Acceptance of the inevitability of loss on the part of the poet, if the process continues, will eventuate in creative willing. The poem he creates will live beyond him, just as, incidentally, Freud's own writings have helped to immortalize him.

Rank's theory of the artist was based in a recognition that the current image of the artist is always superceded. Just as the romantic image of the suffering artist has been replaced by a postmodern image of the artist as coolly detached and narcissistic, so will it also be superceded. What is constant, and what Rank realized gives meaning to the artists' attempt at *immortality*, is of course his or her *mortality*. Rank's existential aesthetic is a theory of art beyond the Pleasure Principle.

Let me summarize now, some of the economic problems of the artist. First, aesthetic experience itself is a function of scarcity. Freud's "transience value" is an acknowledgment of the pleasure to be derived from brief and limited experiences. Rank extended Freud's notion; the artist is a sublimator, but not *merely* a sublimator. Rank's artist-type has an existential understanding of limitation. Just as Nature is transient, so is human life. Facing the inevitability of death, the artist engages in a process of creative willing, an attempt to immortalize him- or herself. The economic difficulty is that the artist must hold back enough life so as not to be completely lived out. To conserve without hoarding is the task. He or she must preserve solitude and privacy for reflection and creation, and must invest, rather than foolishly spending, life substance. Immortalizing is

a way of bequeathing one's legacy to the future through creative works that live, and even gain in value, after the artist is dead.

Rank's Artist-Type

From his earliest works as a young man, which brought him to Freud's attention, to his later mature works, like *Art and Artist* (1932/1968a), Otto Rank attempted to understand the personality development of the artist. His study of mythology, folklore, and philosophy led him to search for a heroic ideal--a Promethean person--one both responsible and self-determining, one capable of overcoming fate and the past, and one who could respond creatively to life. Rank found his "artist-type" hiding within the neurotic. He regarded his patient's symptoms--alienation, suffering, inhibition--as signs of creative failure. He believed that the people he saw in therapy were too psychologically sophisticated for their own good; psychoanalytic interpretation of one's past is too often used to rationalize and justify the avoidance of change. Rank saw the need for a new approach to therapy based on a non-pathological view of the modern individual, which would free the creative resources of the patient, and encourage art and innovation by the therapist. Rank's "constructive" therapy or "Will Therapy" is a therapy addressed to the artist within.

Rank's notion of the artist-type is at once the culmination of a study sanctioned and encouraged by Freud, and the idea that took Rank furthest beyond his former master. Writing at first in the instinct-language of Freudian theory, then later extending Freud's ideas, Rank ultimately developed his own perspective. Once he achieved creative independence, Rank's thought on art and artists differed radically from Freud's on nearly every point.

As noted above, Freud regarded art as tension-reduction and the artist as a seeker, indirectly, of pleasurable release. He invokes the concept of sublimation to explain the artist's capacity for diverting energy away from sexual ends and into works of art. Artistic activity is considered a flight from reality and back again; the artist functions as an adept pilot and guide. The artwork is understood in terms of its references to the artist's past. Freud regards the artist

as “an introvert, not far removed from neurosis...[and]...oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs” (1917/1966, p. 376). Furthermore, the artist is a fame-seeker who “earns...[the]...gratitude and admiration” of those to whom he or she makes available, through skillful representations, their own unconscious “sources of pleasure” (p. 376). Finally, the artist’s quest for recognition is driven by the ego-ideal, a function of the superego which demands a perfection the ego strives to fulfill.

Rank took the notion of the ego-ideal further, distinguishing his view of the artist from Freud’s precisely on this point. He regarded as “artists” any persons capable of living their own ideals. As he put it, “one can say of the artist that he does not practice his calling but is it...his calling is not a means of livelihood, but life itself” (1932/1968a, p. 371). This idea of the artist as prototype or ideal is one of Rank’s lasting contributions to psychological thought. Rank believed that every person is capable of growth and change and that the human personality itself can be seen as a medium to be formed and modified in response to life’s changing demands. He went beyond the naïve determinism of his own earlier view of personality as a response to early trauma, and came to emphasize, instead, the importance of the person’s willing acceptance of the reality of limitation. Rank emphasized strength of will and the necessity for choice and self-determination in overcoming both external limitations and the internal doubts and inhibitions that contribute to unfreedom. He saw the artist as attempting to have an impact on the world, and on art itself. Artists strive to make a mark on life rather than seeking only to achieve homeostasis.

Rank’s conceptual scheme is based on three character types: the normal or “average” type, the neurotic, and the artist. He suggests that normal or average individuals seek to “be like the others” (1929/1978a, p. 60), to conform and comply with societal norms. Neurotics, on the other hand, wish they could be themselves; they feel alienated and internally conflicted, and are un-reconciled to their difference. They hold themselves in check, attempting to stave off fears and doubts with over-control or hyperconsciousness. Artists, in contrast, create themselves. The most important creations of

artists are their own personalities. Rank believed that for any person who chooses to oppose the prevailing ideology or morality, there is a risk of alienation, the pain of different-ness, and an attempt to avoid that pain through stifling and inhibition of self. Normal individuals never challenge authority; neurotics do so but seek to justify and rationalize their difference. Artists, however, transform alienation into individuation, suffering into passion, and inhibition into productivity.

While Freud saw evidence of neurosis in the artistic disposition, Rank saw evidence of art in neurosis. Rank considered the neurotic a modern individual living in a psychological age--a post-Nietzschean age in which the attempt to recover lost cultural identity falls short. The person is left in limbo, unsupported, alienated, and alone. The kind of self-analysis that Freud, and Nietzsche before him, undertook, appears to be a way out, but too often results in a self-conscious and self-controlling neurotic distortion. Rank thought neurotics were characterized by psychological--and especially psychoanalytical--over-sophistication and a desire to interpret their behavior rather than act. Neurotics attempt to rationalize and justify their "I can't," obscuring the "I won't" that lies behind it. The last thing a neurotic wants is to change. Rank's insight was that the neurotic symptom--the apparent inability to act--is a contorted attempt at creativity. He proclaimed the neurotic a "failed artist" (1932/1968a, p. 428), and sought to understand the re-direction of creative effort by studying in depth the successful artist-type.

In contrast to Freud, who considered the artist genetically predisposed and compelled by early experience to the creation of art, Rank saw the artist as self-appointed. Nomination of oneself as artist is the prototype of individuation. The neurotic asks a question about identity: "Who am I?" The artist's question is rather one about individuation: "Who do I want to be?"

Rank believed that self-appointment is the first step in the process by which artists are able to regard their differentness as uniqueness and originality. Naming oneself an artist begins the important work of personality formation by which one, to use Nietzsche's phrase, "[gives] style to one's character" (in Kaufmann,

1968, p. 251). Nietzsche believed that the person is not the passive victim of fate, but can take on his or her own life as challenge and as art. Nietzsche admired Goethe for that and said of him, "he disciplined himself to wholeness. He created himself" (p. 281).

The formation of personality is, however, not accomplished simply by self-appointment as artist. The world resists the efforts of the artist in every way. One form of resistance is the demand for cultural conformity implicit in the prevailing style. The artist can reject the style of the times and be resigned to being misunderstood, or adopt the accepted conventions and relinquish individuality. Pain is the consequence of either choice. One of the reasons Rank rejected the equation of art-making with escape into fantasy and avoidance of pain, is that he had a sense of the existential necessity of limitation and its consequence, artistic suffering. He saw psychic pain as the real repercussion of creative activity, in that every creation is at once a destruction, every birth a little death. He understood that artists give willingly of themselves, sacrificing parts of themselves and their lives for their work. On this, Rank quoted Nietzsche, who said of himself, "You think I strive for my happiness. Really I strive toward my art work" (1907/1980, p. 52). Suffering is the inevitable consequence of limitation and limitation is pervasive.

Rank believed that the inevitability of death is implicit in the experience of limitation. For instance, the artist who comes to terms with the limitations of the medium--sometimes encountered in the process of trying to push those limits--comes to terms, by implication, with death. While the neurotic tries to deny, bribe, or cheat death, by inhibiting or suppressing life and experience, the artist, according to Rank, makes a willing sacrifice, actively renouncing opportunities for pleasure in order to make art. As Rank expresses it, "for all created things there is needed not only a creator, but a piece of life, life itself, which is somehow withdrawn from its proper destiny and fixed in an intransient existence" (1932/1968a, p. 293). Only by confronting death and limitation can the artist create works that will have a lasting meaning. Rank believed immortality is achieved through the willing choice to live in spite of death.

Artists, for Rank, are Nietzschean “overcomers” who say “yes” to life despite its finiteness. But they have learned to say “yes” only after fully confronting the resounding “no” of the world. Artists are persons who have formed strong wills in reaction to negative experiences. For Rank, the will evolves first as a response to prohibitions, frustrations, and limitations. The child’s developing autonomous will runs up against the parent’s will. In reaction to the parent’s injunction, “Please do as I ask” the child says, “No, I will not!” In this first manifestation of “counter-will” the child learns that he or she *has* a will. Will affirmation is the next stage in growth and is characterized by acceptance of limitations--a saying “yes” to what one must inevitably do: “I will if I must.” The culmination of will formation and the highest expression of intentionality is the ability to creatively will what one wants, to acknowledge limitations without resigning oneself to them, to affirm oneself by saying “yes” to life through creative action.

According to Rank, both will and consciousness arise from negative experiences. Rank believed we need something against which to think and act. We need an opposing force, an other, to resist us in the process of forming autonomy and initiative. We need an opposing ideology in contrast to which we can independently think, and an opposing morality against which we can develop our own wills. For Rank, of course, psychoanalysis provided this necessary opposition. Artists like those Rank described need the resistance of the world against which to form their personalities. Where the world fails to offer resistance--for example when it rewards the artist prematurely with fame--the work may come to refer to nothing but the artist’s self. Pain, disappointment, and loss are necessary, lest the work become idiosyncratic, self-aggrandizing, and narcissistic.

When development is derailed it may lead to narcissistic pathology. But Rank’s theory of the artist addresses narcissism in another form--healthy, necessary narcissism of the type later Self theorists like Kohut understood.

Narcissism and the Double

In Magritte's painting titled "Not to be Reproduced," a man looks into a mirror at an image of his back. Something is wrong with this picture: As in much of Magritte's work, what can't happen, happens; what we least expect to occur, occurs. The mirror image--the double--is turned away, and we are left with an eerie feeling, a sense of something "uncanny," to use Freud's expression. The figure in the painting is outside and behind himself, observing in the glass actions which are his own but from which he is at the same time separated and detached. This state of affairs is akin to what Freud referred to when he spoke of the development of the superego: The subject has taken the stance of a critical observer and the ego has become an object. In Freud's view the double represents this hyperconscious, critical, superego state.

The topic of narcissism and the double fascinated both Freud and Rank. An early study of narcissism by Rank (1911/1920) was followed by Freud's major paper, "On Narcissism" (1914/1957a), which appeared in the same year as Rank's classic work *The Double* (1914/1971). The two thought along similar lines at this time (Kainer, 1984). Both subscribed to a drive (or instinct) theory and an economics of pleasure, and both undoubtedly saw in the Narcissus legend a potential for explaining human behavior comparable to the Oedipus myth. In 1919, writing about the double in his essay on "The Uncanny" (1919/1955), Freud showed how thoroughly he had been influenced by Rank, but also gave indications of what would become a subsequent divergence in their thought, especially on the significance of the double for understanding creativity and art.

Freud put the phenomena of "doubling, dividing, and interchanging of the self" (1919/1955, p. 234) alongside other experiences of an "uncanny" nature: the feeling of *deja-vu*, the sense of a place as haunted, or the apparent animation of inanimate objects. He spoke of the uncanny as the realm of the "secretly familiar" (p. 245) and suggested the evocative power of such experiences arises from the momentary lifting of repressions or the sudden encounter with previously surmounted beliefs. Uncanniness discloses an earlier--

infantile of primitive--belief. In the world of both the infant and the primitive, animism and magic predominate, and the omnipotence of thought is assumed. The return of previously surmounted beliefs: "So the dead do live [!]" (p. 248)--or the recurrence of "suppressed volitions": "So, after all, it is *true* that one can kill a person by the mere wish!" (p. 248)--leave us beside ourselves, frightened and astonished.

Freud follows Rank in assuming that the double originally functioned, in primitive cultures, as an assurance of afterlife, a consolation for the fear associated with death. Both Freud and Rank adopted a Romantic conception of the "fall" of the double in which the double "reverses its aspect" (1919/1955, p. 235) from friendliness to terror. Rank had speculated that in primitive cultures the double emerged first as the soul, the counterpart to the body that inevitably dies. The appearance of the dead in dreams and visions, he believed, gave proof to the primitive of the soul's immortality. Although originally it serves as a reassurance of one's perpetuation, the double eventually takes on a more ghastly form, appearing as the *Doppelgänger*, the spectre of death come to claim the living. Freud expresses it this way: "From having been an assurance of immortality it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (p. 235).

I want to highlight a striking contrast between this view of the double--a view shared by Freud and Rank--and the approach Rank later developed. The central point of contention is the issue of consciousness and will. The double in the earlier view is a reminder of something outside of conscious awareness that makes a startling reappearance. What is unconscious is our own past: wishes we had relinquished, intentions we had suppressed. Rank spoke of the double, at this stage, as one's past tragically returning as fate (1914/1971, p. 6). In this sense, the double is a reminder that what we don't know can hurt us, that there is a realm outside our awareness and control.

In the years following his separation from Freud, during the period of his development of an independent Will Psychology, Rank moved away from this view. He came to emphasize intention and action and he gave less importance to the notion of an unconscious

side of life. The double in this new conception is no longer the haunting reminder of an inescapable past and fate, but rather becomes what Esther Menaker called "a creative announcement of the prospective emergence of the self" (1982, p. 98). To cast it in terms of ego development, Rank extended the Freudian notion of the superego: the double evolves from an image of the ego-ideal or possible future self. Another crucial difference between Freud and the later Rank is that Freud took the double as evidence for a death drive; Rank saw the double as an aspect of the creative urge to immortality.

The Double and Creative Block

Rank's thinking about the double as a harbinger of creative possibility is ripe with implications for understanding the everyday problems of creative persons. Take for example the problem of inhibition or creative block. Invoking Rank's notion of the double, but considering it more as form than content, we can begin to see what the double discloses about the nature of the creative process. In particular, the double has a unique function for its creator; it has a dual role as both obstacle to creation and means of overcoming obstacles.

Among the ironies that surround the making of art is that works which evoke in us the sense that they were made in the easiest, most natural way, were often in fact achieved at great personal cost to their creators. We'd like to think of creativity as a smooth process from inspiration to execution, and never mind the "perspiration" involved. Works of art ought to be the product of exuberance and joy; they should be free and spontaneous gifts to the world. That this is rarely the case was well known to Rank, whose "artist type" is a self-appointed, strong-willed individual, a person who accepts responsibility for his or her choices, acknowledges the reality of death and limitation, and willingly makes the sacrifice necessary to achieve self-perpetuation through art. In contrast to the neurotic who "refuses the loan" of life and tries to bribe death by self-suppression; the artist pays the debt by giving a piece of life to the work. But neurosis, again, is only "failed art" in Rank's terms. Given a willing-

ness to face oneself honestly and pay the debt, every individual has the potential for creativity. To be creative, however, is to face inhibition.

Inhibition, in this sense, is the artist's double. Considering the awesomeness of the artist's task--immortalizing oneself through unique and original works that are nevertheless universally accessible--the potential for failure is great. Ironically for artists, either success or failure may interfere with further production. Each new act of creation can generate feelings of dread. Inhibition may manifest itself at either the beginning or the apparent end of the creative process. We're all familiar with the image of the writer staring at the blank page, or the painter at the empty canvas; every creation is in a sense a creation out of nothing. The artist may also struggle to complete the work in process. We would think momentum would carry the work through but often this is not the case. When inhibition becomes the double the creative person assumes a stance outside of the work. One looks over one's own shoulder, judging and criticizing, and interfering with further creation. Not all pauses in the creative process are problematic, of course. There is undeniably a place for incubation, for what one writer called the "essential delay" (Murray, 1985). But when inhibition interferes to such an extent that even usually powerful auto-therapeutic forces in the artist are inadequate to the task, the artist may turn to psychotherapy for help. Creative problems take many forms: avoidance or procrastination, low motivation, self-consciousness, self-criticism, perfectionism. Rank's mature psychology of human will provides an implicit basis for responding to such concerns (cf. Leader, 1991).

In works like *Truth and Reality* (1929/1978a), *Will Therapy* (1929, 1931/1978b), and *Art and Artist* (1932/1968a), Rank suggests that it is important to look at human behavior within the context of a psychology of intention and action; a theory of consciousness alone is insufficient to the task. As Rank saw it, will and inhibition are intimately related: the ability to intentionally inhibit action is a counter to impulsiveness; the capacity for overcoming stifling inhibition frees the spontaneous and expressive self. Rank saw the positive significance of negative manifestations of will. In therapy, for example,

he regarded resistance as evidence of autonomous resolve; and considered it inevitable, since the therapist also has a will; as a consequence he welcomed a "duel of wills" (1929, 1931/1978b, p. 12) between the therapist and client, and used the judicious setting of an ending as a stimulus to the client's will expression. His approach was constructive precisely because he was able to appreciate the importance of negation and destruction in the formation and development of the creative personality.

Several themes that pervade Rank's writing are particularly useful in understanding possible sources of creative inhibition. First, Rank repeatedly emphasized the dynamic of separation and individuation in human relationships. He thought it essential for the creative person to establish a separate identity, to nominate or appoint him or herself as artist, and in this way to separate from existing conventions and styles in order to make a unique statement. This powerful will to individuation in the artist is sometimes difficult to direct. To be too different is to be idiosyncratic, alienated, estranged from the world. Premature fame rewards who one is, not what one does, and can lead to narcissistic grandiosity and self-absorption. Artists need the challenge of achieving originality, lest their works become derivative of their own previous accomplishments. The work that has gone before, the artist's own work, can be yet another source of creative block.

Procrastination and avoidance have often been regarded as evidence of an irrational fear of failure or success. To Rank's way of looking at it, these fears are not so irrational. Artists have to let go of their works--give birth to them, so to speak. If artists could keep their works unborn they would never face the risk that works that carry their name might fail; nor would they face the challenge of competing with their own previous successes. Artists always give birth reluctantly, knowing that their creation may return as an inhibiting double with a will of its own.

Another pervasive theme in Rank's thought is the importance of coming to terms with limitation as an existential reality. Rank emphasized that the artist must "successfully partialize" (1932/1968a, p. 107), by which he meant that every creative individ-

ual must solve for him or herself the problem of the One and the Many, or the part and the whole. He believed each human act is partial, but is meaningfully connected to a larger reality. Awareness of limitation goes hand in hand with awareness of the inevitability of death. Rank believed death can't be bribed or cheated--artists are forced to deal with the necessity of sacrifice. The artist who faces limitations in the creative work must ultimately come to terms with limitations of the self. Every creative person deals with the natural limits of the medium, of time, of the potential permanence of the work. Artists may attempt to avoid these constraints by keeping their work perpetually in process, unfinished, preliminary. To face these limitations honestly is to acknowledge one's own limited energy, productivity, and time--in a word, one's mortality.

Just as an unwillingness to produce is a form of inhibition, so is excessive production. Destruction is a necessary component of the creative process--sentimentality and preciousness about one's own work can inhibit the important activity of refining the product. The artist must be free to innovate, to break at times with his or her own style and with the past.

A final theme in Rank is that art is a form of immortalization. Rank thought artists had access to a special means of self-perpetuation, a means above and beyond biological reproduction. The artist, he believed, can make a mark on life through works of lasting expressive significance. But here again an irony intrudes to stifle and inhibit creativity. Artists go beyond death by living a creative life. Although they pay a high price in terms of lost opportunities and missed experiences, they may earn a place in history through their accomplishments. This ultimate form of creative success brings with it something we might call creative guilt. Rank believed it resulted from "going beyond the limits set by nature" (1929/1978a, p. 69). He called the creative impulse "the most mighty will conquest, that of the individual will over the will of the species represented by sexuality" (p. 68).

Guilt is part and parcel of the creative process. Self-appointment brings with it guilt over voluntary separation from the group, creative sacrifice carries guilt over relinquished options, and

finally "going beyond," immortalizing oneself in lasting achievements, generates guilt over creation--over changing the order of things by introducing works of art into the world. The inhibiting double, in this sense, is art itself.

The double is both the source of, and the means to overcoming inhibition. The artist alone can resolve self-created conflicts. One way for an artist to challenge the daunting power of creative block is to actively invoke the double as alter-ego. The appearance of the double as content in a work of art--as a character in a novel for instance--gives an indication that its creator has called on a persona, a second self, in an effort to create in spite of inhibition. As John Updike puts it, "The creative writer uses his life as well as being its victim" (1986, p. 28). Updike's character Bech, a writer whose early work was a masterpiece and who now suffers from writer's block, represents just such a use of life experience.

There is yet another way the double can assist in creation. As Rank realized when he wrote about the idea of the two works (1932/1968a, p. 385), artists sometimes engage in a process of doubling, of dividing attention between several creative projects. The double may assume the form of two works--two simultaneous works or the current work and the *magnum opus*. Alternately, the artist may work at different times in two creative modes or forms: prose and poetry, portraiture and landscape, film and drama. Saul Bellow has two typewriters--one for fiction, one for essays; Joyce Carol Oates has two studies--one for notes, one for finished work (Sternhell, 1984, p. 21). In these and other ways, artists have intuitively discovered the autotherapeutic power of the process of doubling.

Two works, two forms, two studios--all of these approaches allow creativity to continue unimpeded. Perhaps the best advice for the artist who cannot move on to the next project until the former project is complete, or who cannot decide which of two works should take priority, is to do both! Better still, the artist may be able to discover for him or herself that productivity begets productivity, that the process of doubling or actively invoking the double generates a creative momentum that overcomes inhibition, doubt, and

postponement. In the final analysis, the double may be the artist's ally and friend.

Rank's Art of Psychotherapy

Rank's own art is nowhere more apparent than in his creative, constructive approach to psychotherapy. Rank's non-pathologizing psychology of the artist is not so much foundational in his thinking as it is pervasive. He believes that the capacity for creativity is universal; the possibility of creative action is always an option available to us. Rank emphasizes potential over need, the present and future over fate and the past. Rank is able to put a positive spin on neurosis--on the ways we all at times are our own worst enemies. He understands that self-inhibition is a form of creative block that can be overcome as part of a conscious and willing process of creative development. This is a realization that is especially relevant in psychotherapy. For the client coming to therapy for help with the "stuckness" of indecision and inaction, Rank's approach offers a creative "artist's way" of growth. The opportunity to take on their own resistances to change and to deal realistically with limitation gives clients an appreciation for their independence and self-reliance ("I no longer need therapy"). This approach also offers clients the opportunity to experience their ability to work collaboratively, and to be fully present in an intimate relationship with another human being. Rank acknowledged and encouraged what we today call the client's capacity for "self-healing," but also the client's growing capacity for relationship--for creative and "co-constructive" social interaction. Rank understood these interrelated needs for autonomy and relationship--for separation, and for collaborative, one-adult-to-another interaction--as central to the therapy experience.

Rank's therapy is not widely known; it was not taught and thankfully never became a technique. It is an approach that is recreated in each instance by practitioners, who learn to improvise in response to each unique therapeutic experience. As Rank saw it, "in each separate case it is necessary to create...a theory and technique

made for the occasion without trying to carry over this individual solution to the next case...the essential factor always remains the capacity to understand the individual from himself" (1929,1931/1978b, p. 3). Recollections of therapy with Rank often recount the client's own phenomenological experience, not what Rank said, and that is how he wanted it. A journal entry by Anaïs Nin describes the interaction with him this way:

I have blurred memories of vigorousness, of muscular talks. Of sharpness. The contents alone are indistinct. Impossible to analyze his way of analyzing, because of its spontaneity, nimble darting opportunism. I have no feeling that he knows what I will say next, nor that he awaits this statement. There is no "suggestion" or guidance. He does not put any ideas in my mind...(1966, p. 289).

Rank centered his therapy in the present and the actual relationship between therapist and client. His belief was that the present moment is a microcosm, a part by which we can gain access to the whole. As an alternative to what he saw as an undue emphasis in psychoanalysis on the past and fate, Rank focused on the present. He trusted that whatever needed to emerge in therapy would emerge in the present relationship. What Nin called his "opportunism" was his openness to the unexpected and interest in seizing opportunities here and now. He implicitly believed that therapeutic process, rather than any particular content that might arise, was what was critical for change.

Rank's divergence from Freud on the "here and now" is significant. In Freud's technical advice to the analyst to maintain "evenly hovering attention" (1912/1963a, p.118), or in his emphasis on the continuity of the flow of associations, Freud recommended bringing the acute observational skill and incredulity of the scientific mind into the consulting room, not necessarily for their own sake, but toward the end of interpreting connections between present and past experiences. Rank diverged from him on this point. Rank was no less acute an observer, but he wanted also to allow for intuition (a

more artistic mode) and for the irrational, unexpected things that occur in relationships. Rather than positioning the therapist as a neutral and detached observer of the transference, Rank advocated for the therapist to be active—to look at and talk with the client face-to-face. The therapist is a real person to deal with, a presence in the room. Rank thought the present moment and the present relationship, rather than the transference relationship, was what was important. Therapy is less a process of “recollection, repetition and working through” (as in the title of Freud’s famous, paper, 1914/1963b), but is rather an immersion in the phenomenological experience of the here and now, and an engagement in the dynamic relationship that we call therapy.

Freud saw his patients as inexorably drawn to repeating and re-enacting the past. In Freud’s thinking, Nietzsche’s notion of eternal recurrence was evidence of a compulsion to repeat, driven by death, entropy, and the winding down of the universe. Rank’s view is less fatalistic, more fully existential (Rank immersed himself in Nietzsche). For Rank, as for Nietzsche, “eternal recurrence is not a theory of the world but a view of the self” (Nehamas, 1985, p. 150). According to Rank, “what repeats itself...is only *willing*” (1929, 1931/1978b). Rank’s constructive approach elicits the intention and agency of the client. Consciousness alone, like that awakened in psychoanalysis, is not considered sufficient; action is needed to effect change. Insight is not enough; given the choice between new understandings of the self and new experiences, right here and right now in therapy, Rank would have always advocated for the latter.

Rank, the first non-medical or “lay analyst,” introduced will and choice in psychotherapy. Initially, Rank worked to distinguish his notion of will from the Freudian “wish,” and to counter what he saw as Freud’s tendency to reduce will to a biologically-driven impulse. Rank was less reductive and deterministic. He thought of will as an organizing and integrative force that can both inhibit and impel action; will and choice arise together. Rank came to regard the will as critical in self-determination and assertion of individuality, as necessary to the protest against absorption into the status quo, and as a means to living “in spite of” the inevitability of

death and limitations. In his latest works, Rank thought of will as a spur to creativity, and as a way beyond death, not in terms of an afterlife, but in terms of immortalization. Artists--and all of us are potential artists--find a way to leave a lasting mark on the culture. We leave a trace of ourselves biologically when new generations are born, and culturally when our works and actions outlive us.

Therapy is not easy. Rank emphasized the importance of struggle and conflict in therapy. Rather than pathologizing this conflict as "resistance," Rank turns "resistance" into evidence of independent will and motivation for change. He understood the necessity of ambivalence--of wanting to, but not wanting to--and he believed the task in therapy was not to cure ambivalence but to acknowledge it as inevitable. Rank saw the internal conflict of the neurotic as a manifestation of "life fear," a self-sabotaging holding back from living that we must come to terms with in order to change. Rank expressed it this way:

The conflict among opposing tendencies in the individual is not, as it first appeared to be, the cause of the neurosis, but the very basis of life, and the neurosis is only the expression of dissatisfaction with this condition of life. In the last analysis, a refusal of life itself (1929, 1931/1978b, p. 108).

Any therapy that would align itself with one side of the conflict is bound to fail. Rank's approach restores the conflict which has been ignored or denied, and from which relief is sought, by letting it play itself out in the therapy relationship. In its final stages, the therapy becomes a "duel of wills" (1929, 1931/1978b, p. 12), in which the client's emerging strength of will is pitted against the therapist's will. This duel is not heavy-handed and authoritarian, nor is it the didactic slap from a Zen master; rather, it is a well-timed reminder to the client of his or her own freedom of choice, including the choice to end the therapy. The therapist must be free to both facilitate and resist the expression of will by the client, stepping out of the way at the appropriate moment and allowing the client to creatively individuate.

Rank invented the notion of “end setting,” a forerunner of the time limit, as a way to highlight and intensify the duel of wills. The setting of an ending by the therapist, and the client’s attempt to bargain or negotiate about it in response, has the effect of demonstrating once and for all the strength of will of the patient who had come to therapy apparently weak, projecting strong will onto the therapist. According to James Lieberman, “end-setting was gently provocative, not arbitrary or cruel. Therapist and client focus on a limit that is both chosen and inevitable” (1985, p. 333). The ending of the therapy is necessary if the client is to have the experience of the reality and inevitability of death. Rank believed that therapy must not be interminable. End-setting for Rank was not another technique, but an opportunity for existential encounter with limitation as a fact of life. As Barrett put it, “if human finitude is not understood, neither is the nature of man” (1962, p. 290).

Rank’s constructive Will Therapy is an improvisational art. There could be no manual of Will Therapy. It is based neither on rules nor injunctions, and it adheres to no logical structure. Improvisation, by nature, is highly situational and present-centered activity. Just as it would be nonsensical to speak of scoring a jazz riff, or scripting a spontaneous dramatic dialogue, it is paradoxical to suggest we could predict and control the unique moments in therapy when genuine change occurs. Improvisation in therapy is lively, playful activity, a goal-less process of making things up as we go along, that can’t be anticipated, and that is often awe-inspiring and surprising. Improvisation is the opposite of treatment-planning; it is taking what is given to us by the other and going with it in the moment.

The writer Henry Miller once consulted with Rank, apparently for only one session. In a letter he wrote to Nin about the encounter, he described a “quick, brilliant exchange of minds” (1966, p. 58), and a duel of wills “that was like some preliminary passage of arms where you test out each other’s strength” (p. 59). He took it from his conversation with Rank that “Death is a point of departure, a crossroads where there are infinite possibilities. But all the possibilities must be lived out in Life” (p. 64). Clearly, Miller got what

Rank was saying, and was able to take it in and make it his own, to create it again for himself. Miller, the artist, comes away from his encounter with Rank with neither a recitation of truisms spoken, nor a catalogue of insights gained, but instead with a new (and richly-described) phenomenological experience of himself.

Rank assiduously avoided the rote application of technique; although he taught and lectured, he never did "how to" instruction. Instead he encouraged and supported the creativity of his followers and interpreters. Will Therapy was meant to be given away and used by whoever could use it. The best we can offer our followers is not becoming an inhibiting precursor, a "dead poet" who stifles and inhibits new creation. This applies especially to the theories that make sense now, to the current paradigm. Rank saw the danger of even psychotherapy becoming another monolithic institution of secular culture. He envisioned a world *Beyond Psychology*, as in the title of his last, posthumously published book (1941/1958).

Rank would have us live our lives rather than psychologize about them. The best we can offer our clients is to get out of the way of their growth. By making ourselves obsolete, we can help free the stifled creativity within our clients, and therefore their potential to go beyond their present selves. The therapy, as Rank puts it, "can and should be made a personal creation of the patient's, which he can then accept without guilt feeling and without extreme reactions, as his own accomplishment, indeed as an expression of his own newly gained personality" (Rank, 1928/1968b, p. 38).

In summary, Rank's approach to therapy calls on the creative resources of both patient and therapist to free the will for creation of self, followed by creation of art. Will Therapy arises directly from Rank's effort to distinguish art from pathology. It addresses the creative potential residing in the neurotic individual. An improvisational approach that is re-created in each situation, it attempts to avoid ideology and moralism by offering neither technique, nor prescription, nor consolation. Therapy becomes the context in which the client learns to artfully separate and individuate, to tolerate the limitation of the ending of the therapy itself, and to go beyond the need for psychological self-justification and rationalization and to-

ward creative living. Will therapy is a spontaneous, improvisational art that encourages creativity in and between therapist and client.

Rank's Lasting Work of Art

Otto Rank's lasting work of art was a way of thinking psychologically and practicing therapeutically that is perpetually being re-discovered and re-invented. Rank was an intuitive thinker of considerable breadth and depth. His comprehensiveness makes him hard to take in; he must be read in smaller doses. His breadth of scholarship crosses many traditional disciplines: anthropology, religion, philosophy, education. Rank's ability to grasp and catalogue universal (cross-cultural) themes, iconographic motifs, myths, and stories, is pervasive in his work, and reminds us often of his importance as a humanities scholar. Rank's depth, his attunement to existential issues (life, death, alienation, choice), informs the kind of practice he advocated: a very active therapy that takes on the reality of limitation in the microcosm of the here-and-now. Rank's own will is evident in the story of his revolutionary break with Freud and psychoanalysis. His independence and resolve assured that he'd be remembered, if not for his works, at least for his place in the history of psychology. Rank's creativity is the quality that perhaps speaks most directly to psychotherapists. His gift to his clients was helping them to discover their own creativity. For future psychotherapists, Rank stepped aside and opened the way to the experiential, relational, and improvisational therapies we have come to associate with an existential-humanistic approach.

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