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On "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" by Sigmund Freud (1908)

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Summary

Relatively early in his career, Freud wrote a short text on creativity, arguing that, far from being the privilege of a few artists, it was part of a process naturally developing as a continuation of children's play. After presenting that text, this chapter discusses it in the light of past and recent developments, focusing on the idea that creativity is a process. British psychoanalysis has examined that idea, with an emphasis on what may hinder creativity and its variations. In Russia, however, Vygotsky's work, without quoting them explicitly, has largely drawn on Freud's intuitions, yet including them in a more socioculturally aware psychology. Three ideas need further theoretical and empirical investigation: the continuum between child and adult creativity; the nuances between daydream, imagination, and creativity; and the role of emotions and personal motives in any creative endeavor.

Introduction

"Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908/2001) is a short text written by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), a medical doctor and neurologist known as the founder of psychoanalysis.

Freud (1910/1957) defined psychoanalysis as a theory, a method of investigation, and a therapy. One of the breakthroughs of his approach to illnesses otherwise unexplainable in the late 19th century was to listen to hysterical or depressed patients and believe that their pain had a meaning to be reconstructed. He progressively made the hypothesis of the existence of powerful unconscious dynamics in people. The basic

argument, roughly summarized, is that desires (sexual, ambitious, narcissistic, etc.) surge, and that for various reasons—mainly linked to internalized sociocultural rules and conventions—these need to be repressed, or disguised and transformed into acceptable forms. These transformations occur at a semiotic level and follow various processes, as identified in the dreamwork, or are sublimated. Eventually these substitutive forms appear in embodied symptoms, dreams, lapsus linguae—as well as in authentic scientific and artistic work. These dynamics thus require a certain model of the psyche, presented in the early 1900s as a layered apparatus, with deeper and more embodied zones (unconscious dynamics) and more superficial ones, accessible through dreams or analysis (preconscious dynamics); human consciousness is thus a very small portion of our psychic life.¹ On this basis, psychoanalysis as therapy develops techniques aimed at turning unconscious motives into conscious ones.

Besides his work as a doctor, Freud was extremely well informed about archaeology, poetry, sculpture, music, and painting. Arts had an important status in his work, providing inspiration (as did the figure of Goethe [Zittoun, 2017]), cases to be analyzed, and, in the text presented here, problems to be explained.

“Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” was initially written as a conference paper given by Freud in 1907 at the publisher and bookseller Hugo Heller’s place in Vienna.² In this address to a literary audience, Freud questions the origin of creativity in the poet: Is it unique and specific—genius—or is it present in each of us? His provocative argument is that creativity in the artist is actually a dynamic present in everyone, and even more, a continuation of child’s play. The core argument unfolds as follows: children can freely externalize their inner lives and desires in the symbolic world of play, expressing their needs and finding resolutions to tensions; becoming young adults and adults, people learn to hide these inner lives and desires and, in most cases, engage in fantasizing; poets, those who create art, actually translate such fantasies into an artistic form. Creativity is hence triggered by current events that reactivate infantile experiences, from which a desire oriented toward the future will find a new accomplishment. Creative artifacts thus result from the synthesis of the artist’s earlier and current experiences, transformed through unique aesthetic work. These allow everyone to enjoy now transformed fantasies.

Reading: “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”

Source: Freud, S. (1908/2001). “Creative writers and day-dreaming.” In J. Strachey and A. Freud (Eds.), *Jensen’s “Gradiva” and other works*. Vol. 9 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (pp. 141–153). London: Vintage. Translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. (Original English edition 1959 by Hogarth Press). Reproduced with permission from the Institute of Psychoanalysis, London. All notes to Freud’s text are from the 1959 Hogarth edition, reproduced in the 2001 Vintage edition.

1. This early formulation of Freud’s model was revised and enriched many times.

2. According to the introduction to the *Standard Edition*.

We laymen have always been intensely curious to know—like the Cardinal who put a similar question to Ariosto¹—from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable. Our interest is only heightened the more by the fact that, if we ask him, the writer himself gives us no explanation, or none that is satisfactory; and it is not at all weakened by our knowledge that not even the clearest insight into the determinants of his choice of material and into the nature of the art of creating imaginative form will ever help to make creative writers of us.

If we could at least discover in ourselves or in people like ourselves an activity which was in some way akin to creative writing! An examination of it would then give us a hope of obtaining the beginnings of an explanation of the creative work of writers. And, indeed, there is some prospect of this being possible. After all, creative writers themselves like to lessen the distance between their kind and the common run of humanity; they so often assure us that every man is a poet at heart and that the last poet will not perish till the last man does.

Should we not look for the first traces of imaginative activity as early as in childhood? The child’s best-loved and most intense occupation is with his play or games. Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him? It would be wrong to think he does not take that world seriously; on the contrary, he takes his play very seriously and he expends large amounts of emotion on it. The opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real. In spite of all the emotion with which he cathects his world of play, the child distinguishes it quite well from reality; and he likes to link his imagined objects and situations to the tangible and visible things in the real world. This linking is all that differentiates the child’s “play” from “phantasying.”

The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously—that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion—while separating it sharply from reality. Language has preserved this relationship between children’s play and poetic creation. It gives [in German] the name of *Spiel* [play] to those forms of imaginative writing which require to be linked to tangible objects and which are capable of representation. It speaks of a *Lustspiel* or *Trauerspiel* [comedy or tragedy: literally, “pleasure play” or “mourning play”] and describes those who carry out the representation as *Schauspieler* [players: literally “show-players”]. The unreality of the writer’s imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art; for many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of phantasy, and many excitements which, in themselves, are actually distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of a writer’s work.

There is another consideration for the sake of which we will dwell a moment longer on this contrast between reality and play. When the child has grown up and has ceased to play, and after he has been labouring for decades to envisage the realities of life with proper seriousness, he may one day find himself in a mental situation which once more undoes the contrast between play and reality. As an adult he can look back on the intense seriousness with which he once carried on his games in childhood; and, by equating his ostensibly serious occupations of today with his childhood games, he can throw off the too heavy burden imposed on him by life and win the high yield of pleasure afforded by *humour*.²

As people grow up, then, they cease to play, and they seem to give up the yield of pleasure which they gained from playing. But whoever understands the human mind knows that hardly anything is harder for a man than to give up a pleasure which he has once experienced. Actually, we can never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another. What appears to be a renunciation is really the formation of a substitute or surrogate. In the same way, the growing child, when he stops playing, gives up nothing but the link with real objects; instead of *playing*, he now *phantasies*. He builds castles in the air and creates what are called *day-dreams*. I believe that most people construct phantasies at times in their lives. This is a fact which has long been overlooked and whose importance has therefore not been sufficiently appreciated.

People's phantasies are less easy to observe than the play of children. The child, it is true, plays by himself or forms a closed psychical system with other children for the purposes of a game; but even though he may not play his game in front of the grownups, he does not, on the other hand, conceal it from them. The adult, on the contrary, is ashamed of his phantasies and hides them from other people. He cherishes his phantasies as his most intimate possessions, and as a rule he would rather confess his misdeeds than tell anyone his phantasies. It may come about that for that reason he believes he is the only person who invents such phantasies and has no idea that creations of this kind are widespread among other people. This difference in the behaviour of a person who plays and a person who phantasies is accounted for by the motives of these two activities, which are nevertheless adjuncts to each other.

A child's play is determined by wishes: in point of fact by a single wish—one that helps in his upbringing—the wish to be big and grown up. He is always playing at being "grown up," and in his games he imitates what he knows about the lives of his elders. He has no reason to conceal this wish. With the adult, the case is different. On the one hand, he knows that he is expected not to go on playing or phantasing any longer, but to act in the real world; on the other hand, some of the wishes which give rise to his phantasies are of a kind which it is essential to conceal. Thus he is ashamed of his phantasies as being childish and as being unpermissible.

But, you will ask, if people make such a mystery of their phantasing, how is it that we know such a lot about it? Well, there is a class of human beings upon whom, not a god, indeed, but a stern goddess—Necessity—has allotted the task of telling what they suffer and what things give them happiness.³ These are the victims of nervous illness, who are obliged to tell their phantasies, among other things, to the doctor by whom they expect to be cured by mental treatment. This is our best source of knowledge, and we have since found good reason to suppose that our patients tell us nothing that we might not also hear from healthy people.

Let us now make ourselves acquainted with a few of the characteristics of phantasing. We may lay it down that a happy person never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one. The motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correlation of unsatisfying reality. These motivating wishes vary according to the sex, character and circumstances of the person who is having the phantasy; but they fall naturally into two main groups. They are either ambitious wishes, which serve to elevate the subject's personality; or they are erotic ones. In young women the erotic wishes predominate almost exclusively, for their ambition is as a rule absorbed by erotic trends. In young men egoistic and ambitious wishes come to the fore clearly enough alongside of erotic ones. But

we will not lay stress on the opposition between the two trends; we would rather emphasize the fact that they are often united. Just as, in many altarpieces, the portrait of the donor is to be seen in a corner of the picture, so, in the majority of ambitious phantasies, we can discover in some corner or other the lady for whom the creator of the phantasy performs all his heroic deeds and at whose feet all his triumphs are laid. Here, as you see, there are strong enough motives for concealment; the well-brought-up young woman is only allowed a minimum of erotic desire, and the young man has to learn to suppress the excess of self-regard which he brings with him from the spoilt days of his childhood, so that he may find his place in a society which is full of other individuals making equally strong demands.

We must not suppose that the products of this imaginative activity—the various phantasies, castles in the air and day-dreams—are stereotyped or unalterable. On the contrary, they fit themselves in to the subject's shifting impressions of life, change with every change in his situation, and receive from every fresh active impression what might be called a "date-mark." The relation of a phantasy to time is in general very important. We may say that it hovers, as it were, between three times—the three moments of time which our ideation involves. Mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish. What it thus creates is a day-dream or phantasy, which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and from the memory. Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them.

A very ordinary example may serve to make what I have said clear. Let us take the case of a poor orphan boy to whom you have given the address of some employer where he may perhaps find a job. On his way there he may indulge in a day-dream appropriate to the situation from which it arises. The content of his phantasy will perhaps be something like this. He is given a job, finds favour with his new employer, makes himself indispensable in the business, is taken into his employer's family, marries the charming young daughter of the house, and then himself becomes a director of the business, first as his employer's partner and then as his successor. In this phantasy, the dreamer has regained what he possessed in his happy childhood—the protecting house, the loving parents and the first objects of his affectionate feelings. You will see from this example the way in which the wish makes use of an occasion in the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future.

There is a great deal more that could be said about phantasies; but I will only allude as briefly as possible to certain points. If phantasies become over-luxuriant and over-powerful, the conditions are laid for an onset of neurosis or psychosis. Phantasies, moreover, are the immediate mental precursors of the distressing symptoms complained of by our patients. Here a broad by-path branches off into pathology.

I cannot pass over the relation of phantasies to dreams. Our dreams at night are nothing else than phantasies like these, as we can demonstrate from the interpretation of dreams.⁴ Language, in its unrivalled wisdom, long ago decided the question of the essential nature of dreams by giving the name of "day-dreams" to the airy creations of phantasy. If the meaning of our dreams usually remains obscure to us in spite of this pointer, it is because of the circumstance that at night there also arise in us wishes of which we are ashamed; these we

must conceal from ourselves, and they have consequently been repressed, pushed into the unconscious. Repressed wishes of this sort and their derivatives are only allowed to come to expression in a very distorted form. When scientific work had succeeded in elucidating this factor of *dream-distortion*, it was no longer difficult to recognize that night-dreams are wish-fulfillments in just the same way as day-dreams—the phantasies which we all know so well.

So much for phantasies. And now for the creative writer. May we really attempt to compare the imaginative writer with the “dreamer in broad daylight,”⁵ and his creations with day-dreams? Here we must begin by making an initial distinction. We must separate writers who, like the ancient authors of epics and tragedies, take over their material readymade, from writers who seem to originate their own material. We will keep to the latter kind, and, for the purposes of our comparison, we will choose not the writers most highly esteemed by the critics, but the less pretentious authors of novels, romances and short stories, who nevertheless have the widest and most eager circle of readers of both sexes. One feature above all cannot fail to strike us about the creations of these storywriters: each of them has a hero who is the centre of interest, for whom the writer tries to win our sympathy by every possible means and whom he seems to place under the protection of a special Providence. If, at the end of one chapter of my story, I leave the hero unconscious and bleeding from severe wounds, I am sure to find him at the beginning of the next being carefully nursed and on the way to recovery; and if the first volume closes with the ship he is in going down in a storm at sea, I am certain, at the opening of the second volume, to read of his miraculous rescue—a rescue without which the story could not proceed. The feeling of security with which I follow the hero through his perilous adventures is the same as the feeling with which a hero in real life throws himself into the water to save a drowning man or exposes himself to the enemy's fire in order to storm a battery. It is the true heroic feeling, which one of our best writers has expressed in an inimitable phrase: “Nothing can happen to *me!*”⁶ It seems to me, however, that through this revealing characteristic of invulnerability we can immediately recognize His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every day-dream and of every story.⁷

Other typical features of these egocentric stories point to the same kinship. The fact that all the women in the novel invariably fall in love with the hero can hardly be looked on as a portrayal of reality, but it is easily understood as a necessary constituent of a day-dream. The same is true of the fact that the other characters in the story are sharply divided into good and bad, in defiance of the variety of human characters that are to be observed in real life. The “good” ones are the helpers, while the “bad” ones are the enemies and rivals, of the ego which has become the hero of the story.

We are perfectly aware that very many imaginative writings are far removed from the model of the naïve day-dream; and yet I cannot suppress the suspicion that even the most extreme deviations from that model could be linked with it through an uninterrupted series of transitional cases. It has struck me that in many of what are known as “psychological” novels only one person—once again the hero—is described from within. The author sits inside his mind, as it were, and looks at the other characters from outside. The psychological novel in general no doubt owes its special nature to the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes. Certain novels, which might be described as “eccentric,” seem to stand in quite special contrast to the type of the day-dream.

In these, the person who is introduced as the hero plays only a very small active part; he sees the actions and sufferings of other people pass before him like a spectator. Many of Zola's later works belong to this category. But I must point out that the psychological analysis of individuals who are not creative writers, and who diverge in some respects from the so-called norm, has shown us analogous variations of the day-dream, in which the ego contents itself with the role of spectator.

If our comparison of the imaginative writer with the day-dreamer, and of poetical creation with the day-dream, is to be of any value, it must, above all, show itself in some way or other fruitful. Let us, for instance, try to apply to these authors' works the thesis we laid down earlier concerning the relation between phantasy and the three periods of time and the wish which runs through them; and, with its help, let us try to study the connections that exist between the life of the writer and his works. No one has known, as a rule, what expectations to frame in approaching this problem; and often the connection has been thought of in much too simple terms. In the light of the insight we have gained from phantasies, we ought to expect the following state of affairs. A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging [to] his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfillment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory.⁸

Do not be alarmed at the complexity of this formula. I suspect that in fact it will prove to be too exiguous a pattern. Nevertheless, it may contain a first approach to the true state of affairs; and, from some experiments I have made, I am inclined to think that this way of looking at creative writings may turn out not unfruitful. You will not forget that the stress it lays on childhood memories in the writer's life—a stress which may perhaps seem puzzling—is ultimately derived from the assumption that a piece of creative writing, like a day-dream, is a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood.

We must not neglect, however, to go back to the kind of imaginative works which we have to recognize, not as original creations, but as the refashioning of readymade and familiar material. Even here, the writer keeps a certain amount of independence, which can express itself in the choice of material and in changes in it which are often quite extensive. In so far as the material is already at hand, however, it is derived from the popular treasure-house of myths, legends and fairy tales. The study of constructions of folk-psychology such as these is far from being complete, but it is extremely probable that myths, for instance, are distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity.

You will say that, although I have put the creative writer first in the title of my paper, I have told you far less about him than about phantasies. I am aware of that, and I must try to excuse it by pointing to the present state of our knowledge. All I have been able to do is to throw out some encouragements and suggestions which, starting from a study of phantasies, lead on to the problem of the writer's choice of his literary material. As for the other problem by what means the creative writer achieves the emotional effects in us that are aroused by his creations—we have as yet not touched on it at all. But I should like at least to point out to you the path that leads from our discussion of phantasies to the problems of poetical effects.

You will remember how I have said that the day-dreamer carefully conceals his phantasies from other people because he feels he has reasons for being ashamed of them.

I should now add that even if he were to communicate them to us he could give us no pleasure by his disclosures. Such phantasies, when we learn them, repel us or at least leave us cold. But when a creative writer presents his plays to us or tells us what we are inclined to take to be his personal daydreams, we experience a great pleasure, and one which probably arises from the confluence of many sources. How the writer accomplishes this is his innermost secret; the essential *ars poetica* lies in the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and the others. We can guess two of the methods used by this technique. The writer softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies. We give the name of an *incentive bonus*, or a *fore-pleasure*, to a yield of pleasure such as this, which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychological sources.⁹ In my opinion, all the aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us has the character of a fore-pleasure of this kind, and our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds. It may even be that not a little of this effect is due to the writer's enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame. This brings us to the threshold of new, interesting, and complicated enquiries; but also, at least for the moment, to the end of our discussion.

1. Cardinal Ippolito d'Este was Ariosto's first patron, to whom he dedicated the *Orlando Furioso*. The poet's only reward was the question "Where did you find so many stories, Lodovico?"
2. See section 7 of Chapter 7 of Freud's book on jokes (1905).
3. This is an allusion to some well-known lines spoken by the poet-hero in the final scene of Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*:

Und wenn der Mensch in seiner Qual verstummt,
 Gab mir ein Gott, zu sagen, wie ich leide.
 And when mankind is dumb in its torment, a god granted me to tell how I suffer.
4. Cf. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900).
5. "Der Traumer am helllichten Tag."
6. "Es kann dir nix g'schehen!" This phrase from Anzengruber, the Viennese dramatist, was a favorite one of Freud's. Cf. "Thoughts on War and Death" (1915), *Standard Ed.*, 14, 296.
7. Cf. "On Narcissism" (1914), *Standard Ed.*, 14, 91.
8. A similar view had already been suggested by Freud in a letter to Fliess of July 7, 1898, on the subject of one of C. F. Meyer's short stories (Freud, 1950, Letter 92).
9. This theory of "fore-pleasure" and the "incentive bonus" had been applied by Freud to jokes in the last paragraph of Chapter 6 of his book on the subject (1905). The nature of "fore-pleasure" was also discussed in the *Three Essays* (1950). See especially *Standard Ed.*, 7, 208ff.

Commentary

TRACING THE INFLUENCE OF FREUD'S IDEAS IN CREATIVITY RESEARCH

When Freud presented "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" as a conference paper, it was positively received—more so than his earlier *Interpretation of Dreams*—and reviewed in the daily newspapers. Not mentioning explicitly sexuality and the unconscious, the paper

has thus been considered by commentators to be Freud's position on the "applied" uses of psychoanalysis (Hillenaar, 2007, p. 145).

The main point of "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" is the continuity between children's play and adult fantasy and the common dynamics at work between laymen and artists. Regarding the actual work of the artist, Freud is more implicit; he mainly gives the example of "easy" literature that simply plays with common desires (narcissistic, ambitious, or erotic). An author who constantly revised his model in the light of new cases and theoretical elaboration (Zittoun, 2015), Freud will come back to his earlier formulation in his later work. (The topic occurs in almost every one of his publications up until the late 1930s [Delrieu, 2008, pp. 89–96]).

In his *Introductory Lectures*, Freud (1915–1916/1999, p. 478) thus writes that the "true artist" knows how to elaborate his own fantasies in such a way that they lose their too personal features, to "model" certain material until they reproduce his imaginary ideas and attach to it such pleasure that it may pass over the usual (sociocultural) repressions. Hence his implicit theory of creativity takes shape: it implies working with invested material and personal experiences, yet giving to them a semiotic form (in whatever mode, e.g., literary, visual), distancing them enough from their source so that they acquire some generality, and giving them a form that is "pleasurable" to the self and the audience. This is where aesthetic mastery intervenes, as the "pleasurability" may imply at least three aspects: that the creation satisfies a shared cultural aesthetic of conventions and norms, both in content and form; that the art form creates tensions and their possible resolution; yet that they also play enough with conventions to bring an extra quality to it: that of overcoming codes and rules.

As with any production by Freud, this paper received abundantly comments in the psychoanalytical community (e.g., Anargyros-Klinger, Reiss-Schimmel, & Wainrib, 1998; Spector Person, Fonagy, & Figueira, 1995/2013). According to Trosman (1995/2013, pp. 33–34), the psychoanalytical study of creativity took three directions: the study of artistic creation as an indirect way to analyze their authors; the study of literary or artistic work; and the analysis of the sources of creativity—Freud's 1908 paper belonging to the third type. In what follows, I will ignore the references to Freud's paper made by literary criticism, psychoanalysis, or cultural studies interested in the first two directions and will turn to two lines of work interested in creativity as a process.

A first important line of studies clearly inspired by Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" stems from British psychoanalysis. At the end of his life Freud moved to London, where his daughter, Anna Freud, became one of the leading figures in the psychoanalytical community, the other one being Melanie Klein, developing her object-relations approach. These ideas are systematically discussed by authors interested in artistic creativity and especially therapists treating people impeded in their creativity (see, e.g., Milner's [1950/2010] *On Not Being Able to Paint*). Some of the criticism of Freud's text focuses on the superficial needs it addresses (i.e., fame and women), its ignorance of the actual creative process (aesthetic transformation), and the fact that it considers the creator in isolation (Segal, 1991; Wright, 2002).

An important British psychoanalyst, Donald W. Winnicott, developed a core concern in the 1950–1970s for the conditions under which life can be creative. Winnicott did not mention explicitly Freud's text (as he often did not quote his sources), yet one of his main arguments has a comparable continuity hypothesis: it follows the development of the child's capacity to be alone within his relation to the mother figure, allowing also for his creative capacity—coming from the experience of omnipotence of being able to "create" the mother—and progressively expanded to transitional phenomena, children's play, adult

daily creativity, and cultural creation in science and the arts (Winnicott, 1988, 1989, 2001). Winnicott thus maintains Freud's idea of a continuum, yet brings in the fact that creativity is enabled by fundamental relational dynamics.

The same argument is developed in Hanna Segal's (1991) *Dream, Phantasy and Art*; she closely discusses Freud's 1908 paper and a series of criticisms it has raised, before expanding Freud's argument along a more Kleinian line. Her proposition is that the need to create, or the creative impulse, is rooted in infantile experiences of the loss of an initial harmony, and is thus an attempt to "rediscover and recreate this lost world" (Segal, 1991, p. 94). The creative process itself is a way of "working through" experience, that is, engaging in psychic work, turning emotional or rough experience into a semiotic form; the authentic work or aesthetic process demands balance between the "ugly" and beautiful aspects of one's experience within the chosen artistic language. Hence artistic creativity is both an internal work and a work addressed to an external audience.

The same group of scholars also discussed Freud's apparent hypothesis of an equivalence between daydream and artistic creativity. Based on his work with young children and adults impeded in their creativity, Winnicott (2001) distinguished a sterile rumination, or fantasy, from imagination that actually participates in the elaboration and transformation of experience.³ This intuition is followed by Segal (1991, pp. 106–109), who distinguishes daydreaming as an "as-if" phenomena, which can remain purely private, from imagination, which he sees as a "what-if" dynamic and which takes into account the demands of reality, where it can lead to actual creativity; imagination demands the work of creation, artistic (or scientific) command, and faces various internal and external obstacles. Wright (2002) similarly brings Freud's (1908/2001) proposition together with Winnicott's.

A second line of study was developed in total independence, in Russia. First interested in literature and the arts, then emerging as a key developmental psychologist, Lev S. Vygotsky (1971, pp. 73–75) explicitly summarizes Freud's 1908 text in his *Psychology of Art*, the result of his work in the USSR in 1915–1922 (Leontiev, 1971). He however follows this summary with a wide-ranging review of different, more or less psychoanalytical accounts of artwork or artists' lives, which according to him present a quite inconsistent picture. Vygotsky (1971, p. 80; quoting Marx) criticizes these accounts, then rejects the proposition that creativity is anchored in unconscious motives, as it finally excludes consciousness and mainly ignores social dynamics that may play a role in the choice of topics to be addressed by art or the diversity of artistic forms. Vygotsky thus seems to radically reject Freud's 1908 propositions, yet these reappear in his work. First, in the second part of the *Psychology of Art* Vygotsky develops a model of catharsis through art, which is actually a model of working through emotions through the art form, compatible with a processual understanding of Freud's work. Second, Freud's 1908 argument is still present, without the critical tone, in Vygotsky's (1931/1994, p. 275) "Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent," where the argument of continuity between the child's fantasy and the adult's art is mentioned in reference to "a psychologist" without explicitly naming Freud.⁴ Vygotsky further discusses children's play development in adolescence, where he sees two developmental lines: one where the adolescent continues fantasizing to elaborate emotional frustrations and needs (still quoting Freud's 1908 text without naming him; Vygotsky, 1931/1994, pp. 283–284),⁵ and the other where imagination becomes coupled with the

3. In addition, the Kleinians will distinguish between "fantasy" as conscious daydreaming and "phantasy" as unconscious scenarios (Isaacs, 1948), which leads to the question: In which is creativity grounded?

4. The editors put a note to an unattributed quote, saying the author could not be found; it was likely Freud.

5. The editors refer to the previous note.

development of intelligence, abstraction, and the mastery of more complex cultural knowledge, and where it can become creativity in the arts or science. Vygotsky's work on art and imagination starts to be abundantly quoted in developmental and cultural psychology, yet Freud is rarely acknowledged in that field.⁶

In psychology of creativity more broadly defined, Freud and the 1908 text is usually mentioned as one point in the study of creativity (Albert & Runco, 1999) and reduced either to the "psychodynamic" hypothesis of the origin of creativity (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 6) or to being a case of a creative author himself (Gardner, 1993). Even Jack Martin's (2016) recent sociocultural approach to creativity using perspective exchange theory mentions Freud's 1908 paper only as an example of Freud's creative work, not for its content (but for a rare exception, see Glăveanu, 2011). However, there are elements of its content to be further examined.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH BASED ON THESE HISTORICAL INSIGHTS

There is a series of ideas in Freud's essays that deserve further exploration in psychology, and especially in its sociocultural branch, and that have been identified by the two lines of studies highlighted earlier; I will mention three.

First, the hypothesis of a developmental continuum from children's play to adult creativity needs closer attention. Are their functions, their processes, and their outcomes equivalent or comparable? What is it that develops, and how much is that continuum dependent on other developmental dynamics—maturation, cultural learning, personal and social experience, and so on? In the literature we have recently distinguished a "continuum hypothesis" in the development of imagination (and creativity) similar to Freud's proposition from a "parallel hypothesis," for instance in the cognitive work of Bogdan (2013), who suggests that children's relation to objects develops in a route parallel to people's relation to others. To these we have opposed a third, "recursive hypothesis": the mutual dependency and equal importance of people's relation to others and objects in the development of imagination and creativity (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016, pp. 94–97). But this still needs careful empirical investigation, for instance through much needed, careful longitudinal studies.

Second, the similarities or specificities of the processes involved in daydreaming, playing, imagining, and creating have to be further explored. As suggested earlier, psychoanalytical authors have tried to disentangle this knot by suggesting that some processes have a different hypothetical quality than others, are more or less conscious, or have outcomes in the real world and are not only beneficial for the self. This needs to be further examined in a more unified theory of mind and psychological elaboration, taking into account both the sociocultural dynamics at stake as well as the psychic work involved. Recent progress in semiotic cultural psychology may allow us to go in that direction (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013; Salvatore, 2016; Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011; Valsiner, 2017), but further theoretical integration is required.

6. A PsycINFO search with keywords "Freud, Vygotsky, and creativity" (May 28, 2017) lists five occurrences, two being scholarly discussions on Vygotsky, one a psychodynamic paper, one an encyclopedia, and the third Vygotsky's work. Developmental work on imagination, even when sharing the hypothesis of continuity between childhood play and adult imagination and creativity, does not mention Freud's (1908/2001) paper either (e.g., Singer & Singer, 1992).

Third, current research on creativity, especially in cultural approaches, has not looked at the inner emotional work of engaging in a creative process, or its consequences for the self in a constitutive sense. Whether or not one subscribes to Freud's assumption of the existence of unconscious dynamics, one cannot ignore that inspiration, creative block, energy, flow, or whatever lay or scientific terms are used to describe the creative process refer to emotional, embodied dynamics. Even Vygotsky, with all his insistence on sociocultural dynamics, would not deny these internal aspects. Seen as dynamics as well, these can be shared, mediated, culturally transformed; they do not need to be reduced to personality traits or characteristics. The suggestion is thus to examine, in daily creativity as much as in scientific or artistic creation, what supports engagements, allows overcoming obstacles, or what "drives" people, and which may be, on the one hand, socially supported, and on the other, as suggested by Freud, related to different layers of personal experience. Conversely, Winnicott's intuition that it is creativity that makes life worth living probably refers to some fundamental dynamics at the core of what makes us human; it may be worth examining this perspective on creativity to understand life in extreme or challenging situations. Here, I believe, theory needs to avoid the sociocultural trap that loses the subject and the personalist trap that reduces dynamics to a measurable "motivation." Theoretical work may thus also be needed to bind intuitions developed by psychoanalysis with other domains of psychology currently examining these sociocultural and psychic dynamics of living (e.g., Brown & Reavey, 2015; Dreier, 2007; Hviid, 2015; Stenner, 2015).

As a whole, with all its limitations—its time and context of production, its relatively early formulation in Freud's overall work, its superficiality on some aspects—"Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" remains a rich and inspirational text for creativity research. Although I have addressed only some of the issues it raises, I believe it can still root important explorations as it invites us to consider the hybrid, temporal, and synthetic nature of the creative process, referring to various layers of emotionally invested experience, yet turned toward the social world and drawing from the past into the future.

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