

V

CERTAIN ASPECTS OF SUBLIMATION
AND DELUSION

(1930) *

IN 1879, a Spaniard, interested in problems of the evolution of culture, was exploring a cave on his estate at Altamira, in Northern Spain. He was searching for new examples of flint and carved bone of which he had already found specimens. His little daughter was with him. The cave was dark and he worked by the light of an oil lamp. The child was scrambling over the rocks and suddenly called out "Bulls, bulls!" She pointed to the ceiling, so low that he could touch it with his hand. He lifted the lamp and saw on the uneven surface numbers of bison and other animals drawn with great realism and painted in bright colours. These drawings are now accepted as the work of the Hunter Artists of the Reindeer Age, computed to be 17,000 years ago.

To execute these drawings, palæolithic man penetrated to the cave and must have burned animal fat in a stone lamp in order to see. It was a purposeful act and a purposeful journey, for the people actually lived at the entrance to the cave or under shelving rocks near the entrance.

Seventeen thousand years later a man by the aid of a lamp penetrates to those recesses. A child sees the animals first and points them out to her father.

At that dramatic moment of recognition in the bowel of the cave a common impulse unites the ancient hunter artist and modern man. Between them lies the whole evolution of civilization, but the evolution that separates them springs from the impulse that unites them. By which I mean that the Spaniard is driven to the far recesses of the caves by the same inner necessity that sent the hunter artist there. The hunter-artist goes to make life-like representations. The Spaniard goes to find flints and carved bones, in order to piece together evidence of the life of primitive peoples. In other words to reconstruct, to make a representation of, life that has passed away.

* Read at the Eleventh International Congress of Psycho-Analysis, Oxford, July 31, 1929, and reprinted from *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 1930, Vol. XI, p. 12.

My intention in this short paper is to deal with certain aspects of this many-sided complicated subject of sublimation, viz., in dancing, singing, painting and historical research, since my clinical experience has enabled me to see that these sublimations have a common root, an inner necessity that is in essence in no wise different from the necessity that animated the first artists. The dawn of civilization is the dawn of art. The two are inseparable. From the moment man began to carve his flints and make drawings on the walls of his cave, there begins recorded history and civilization has started on its intricate development.

Behind that first appearance of man with whom we claim our kinship, that is when man appears as Hunter Artist, there is conjecture and dispute. Mousterian Man, it is computed, says Falaize in *Origins of Civilization*, lived 50,000 years B.C. He says evidences of cannibalism practised by Mousterian Man are afforded by human remains found in Croatia. Behind the appearance of the mummification rites of ancient Egypt, Flinders Petrie has deduced the age of cannibalism. From dismemberment of bodies which accompanies cannibalism we pass to the age of mummification in Egypt, to the building of tombs and to ceremonies for the dead. Elliot Smith sees in the tombs of the Egyptians the beginnings of architecture in stone, and the beginnings of overseas trade in the search for wood and spices for embalming purposes. The death mask in ancient Egypt was followed by the making of the statue.

Sublimation and civilization are mutually inclusive terms: cannibalism and civilization mutually exclusive. Civilization begins with the first art forms, and these first art forms are inseparable from the problems of food (life) and death.

The first drawings were those of the animals that primitive hunters killed for food. The explanation given is that it was a magical way of producing and ensuring the food supply. Draw a bison and bison will be plentiful. But this does not explain why the first artists crept to the recesses of the cave to draw their pictures. Other hunter artists followed, driven by the same necessity, and superimposed their drawings over the ones they found in these hidden places. We see here an inner compulsion first to make a vividly realistic drawing, secondly to place that drawing within the bowels of a cave. The problems of food and of death are implicit in these cave drawings,

for the animals drawn were the food supply of the hunters. The drawings are life-like representations.

I would next recall to your memory the fact that the figure of man appearing in these cave drawings of palæolithic times often wears an animal mask. Behind the animal we have the man. So I see in the drawings of primitive man, in the animals, and men with animal masks, the first attempt in art to resolve a conflict raging around the problem of food and of death.

The first dancer in Europe, perhaps in the world, was the cave dweller. The cave drawings of palæolithic man illustrate dancers. In the earliest rock drawing of a ritual dance, the figures appear in processional formation in connection with a slain bison.

Dancing, like drawing, was a magical performance. Like drawing it is, from its origin, associated with the same problems of food (or life) and death. The dance was part of ancient Egyptian funerary rites. The cave dweller wearing an animal mask imitated the movements of the creature he had slain. The impersonation of ghosts, the enacting of the resurrection of the dead person by the dancer, point to the same motivations in the origin of dancing as in the origin of drawing. The dead are made alive again by magical acts.

From the dramatic dances, which the world over are connected with ceremonies for the dead, arose the beginnings of drama. Ridgeway contends that wherever they are found tragedy and serious drama have their roots in the world-wide belief in the continued existence of the soul after the death of the body. Drama began, not as entertainment, but as ceremony. This aspect is voiced in modern times by Bernard Shaw, who considers art as a department of social hygiene.

"The swaddling clothes of drama are the winding-sheets of the hero king" (Ivor Brown). The masks worn by early actors were for the purpose of portraying the dead. The persons who wore the masks were for the time being the incarnations of the spirits of the dead.

A modern writer has said: "At least we need not relate our play-going to our food supply or regard our actor as the most likely guarantor of our survival after death." I believe that art rises to its supreme height only when it performs the service—first for the artist, and unconsciously for ourselves—that it did in ancient times. That service is a magical re-assurance. Great

art is a self-preservative functioning. A vital communication is made to us in picture, statue, drama, novel. It is *life* that is danced, a world that is built in music. When these things are supreme, are perfection, we rest satisfied in contemplation. From a world of apprehension and anxiety, a world of temporal things, of vicissitudes and death, we temporarily escape. In those few moments of conviction, immortality is ours. "Because I live, ye shall live also."

The word "drama" is derived from the Greek, "a thing done." "To do" is the characteristic of the artist in distinction to the philosopher, whose necessity is "to think." In ancient days these "doings" were vital to the prosperity of the community. More complicated, more subtly interwoven in our lives, they remain as vital to-day. The great artist must "do"—driven by the inner need. It is the actual painting, the actual doing, that is the vital thing for him.

An analysis which removed an inhibition against dancing revealed the following: The patient knew herself *how* to dance. She knew how to have control over her muscles. To see new steps, a new dance, was to receive a picture through her eyes. She could then practise "in her head." Like a negative she had taken the image. Then it could be re-produced as a picture taken from a negative. She was the negative and she reproduced the picture. Sounds of music suggested dance. Sound and movement went together naturally. The body bent this way and that, swayed and moved as though it were one thing—all one thing—as a bird in flying is all one thing. She was like a bird, was a bird. She was it and it was herself. That is, she was the magical phallus. The dancing was in her. She had become the thing she once saw through eyes of desire, love and hate. She had incorporated it and after the manner of cannibalistic beliefs she had become endued with the power of the thing incorporated.

The ancient dancer became the dead of whom he was afraid. He imitated the movements of the thing he had slain and eaten. The mourner at the ceremonial funeral in Rome imitated the dead. The white face of the clown even yet testifies to the ghost he once impersonated of intent.

A delusion of omnipotence finds a reality channel. Eyes have seen and ears heard and body felt, and the ego in some cases uses its functioning and says "I can do that." In the stress

of anxiety this "can" becomes "must." The phallic personification in dancing is a "must be," "am" as powerful as the father, psychically "I am the father"—a delusion and yet an ego-functioning result.

One has to search further to understand why this magical personification was for my patient a talisman for prosperity, a talisman against an evil fate, for herself, even as dancing was in ancient times for the community. I found that men's admiration and approval were a support for her, but it was clearly not to secure it that her dancing was unconsciously a necessity. It secured no release from anxiety. She needed their support and admiration for precisely the same reason that she needed to identify herself with the father's phallus. Perfect dancing released her; reaching a standard that satisfied an inexorable demand within her gave her security. In reaching this standard, she had then gone beyond anything expected of her; that is, she had more than satisfied her ballet mistress. At that moment she felt care-free, could snap her fingers at one of whom she was in constant dread, until she left that mistress in a state of ecstatic approval. I came thus to a certainty that the person of whom she stood in terror was unconsciously the mother. On to the mother had been projected those wishes that were inimical to life itself. As she would have taken those things from her mother she desired and envied, from milk to children and the father's penis, so there had been projected on to the mother intents as destructive to herself.

From this terrifying situation she is saved by perfect dancing. She becomes the magical phallus. She restores in herself what her hostility wished to take away, to destroy. It is an omnipotent restitution, an assurance of life. You will remember the bison were drawn in the recesses of a cave. The father is restored to the mother; the penis, the child, are back again magically in the womb.

Dancing is a magical control of the parents by becoming the father. The need for it is anxiety due to hostility which itself derives from frustration. By this delusion of omnipotence, the dancer is the father, and dancing is an atonement, a restitution. It is life that is being danced, and the evil that the hostile wishes to the mother would bring is averted.

A singer revealed this. Analysis enabled her to get rid of bad habits in her voice that she had contracted through trying to

follow the instructions of various singing teachers. She is now able to say: "But I knew *how* to produce it quite naturally myself, all the time, ever since I was a child. Their instruction has made me go wrong always. I *knew* instinctively, but teachers assume you don't know; they alone know; you know nothing—as if it were wrong to know. When they said, 'Your voice is so big, we must be careful nothing spoils it,' I thought: 'How big? How can it be spoiled? Is it so big it can't get through?'"

Now that she has lost her voice-tricks she says: "The voice is inside you. All you need to do is to relax. Breathing takes care of itself if you let your diaphragm work in and out, up and down. The voice pours out like water, like cream. You remember you are not *really* reaching up higher and higher, only pretending to do so, for the notes are all in one place. You put them where you like, *control* them. You are a bird flying up in your voice. It draws people to you. They feel as you feel, sad or gay. The Pied Piper drew children from their homes by music. Orpheus drew stocks and stones. The Sirens drew men to destruction."

She is thus, in singing, the powerful parents. Her very body is the breast and the penis. The voice is the milk, the water, the fructifying semen. She has identified by incorporating the power of both parents. By the magical singing she is reproducing, externalizing again what is incorporated. It is a delusion of control over those whom she feared. As they made her feel sorrow and joy, now she has the power to make others feel these emotions.

The ego secures release from anxiety of the incorporated hostile parents by a power of externalizing it into an art form, and this art form is an omnipotent life-giving, a restoration, milk, semen, a child.

The way in which an artist worked revealed this: She said in effect: "It is strange people have to learn perspective, rules for fore-shortening. If you see a flower looking as if it were coming towards you, you draw it as you see it. That is all. The eyes take it in just as it is. The pictures in my mind, I see on the blank paper, or canvas, and I just put outlines round them and paint." That is, the pictures were outer realities once, the images of infancy. They are incorporated. Then they are projected on a blank sheet, like the bison in the cave.

Thus the hostility of the incorporated object no longer

menaces the ego, for the omnipotence has become an adjunct to the ego. Eye and hand deal with it. Every stroke of the brush is a power over the parents. To paint a picture, no less than to have a piece of toe-nail, is to have the real person magically in one's power. Yet painting is a restitution too. The blank space is filled. All those things which the child would wrest from the mother are restored, the food eaten, the children, the father's penis. The first drawing at the age of three this patient did was intended to represent a mother holding a baby under a bower of roses.

I would gather up these arguments briefly:

A patient bordering on a delusion of persecution is obsessed by a prophecy of a woman palmist that she will have a child who will die. The patient cannot rid herself of this fearful future. She harbours and plans revenge on the palmist. Analysis speedily transferred thoughts of the palmist to the analyst. The analyst, she thought, was doing magical evil against her. Further analysis revealed that she believed her voice had been spoiled by a singing mistress. The patient had previously given up painting because she thought her originality was being taken from her. Dancing had been abandoned in late childhood. Out of twelve months' brooding she emerged into high states of excitement, and activity gradually became a necessity. Anxiety broke out, and with bursts of hostility which became most marked against a mistress on whom was projected her own hostility to the mother-*imago*. The repressed hostility to her mother in childhood has become quite accessible. Meanwhile, her voice has broken loose from all the tricks she acquired. The delusion of persecution has disappeared, and anxiety has become more manageable. It disappears entirely when she sings. Then she is care-free. That is, a delusion of being persecuted is resolved when sublimation goes forward. *The sublimation springs from the same root as the delusion of persecution.* It is worked out from inside into a form of art. This form of art is a bringing back of life, a reparation, an atonement, a nullification of anxiety. It is an omnipotent phantasy of control, of security from evil, in a world of reality, because it finds expression in ego functioning.

The delusion serves the purposes of the super-ego. The hostility is *felt* as emanating from another. The patient feels persecuted. It is the other person who is wrong, not herself who is

to blame. Analysis brings to consciousness the repressed hostility to the mother. The super-ego is modified to the degree that the repressed hostility (and its cause) becomes conscious. The delusion disintegrates. In its place sublimation occurs. The hostility is worked out from inside, externalized into a form of art.

A state of unstable equilibrium was reached and maintained for a period of years by a psychotic patient under the following system :

1. The crystallization of a fixed delusion.
2. The operation of an intense super-ego severity in the rest of her psychic life.
3. The carrying on of routine work which was clearly punitive. It called for diligence and loyalty. It was a "making good" for childhood misdemeanours and offered psychically as a propitiation to the mother-imago.
4. The last stabilizing factor in this system was the possession of a doll. The period from twenty to twenty-nine years of age in her life was covered by the power of this doll. It was a lady doll, holding a baby. During these years the doll was reverently treated. Every week it was taken out and looked at to see that it was intact, without harm or blemish, and then gently laid by again, wrapped up and put in a drawer.

The fixed delusion was in essence the Œdipus fulfilment, a belief that a doctor had made sexual overtures. There was no affect, no feeling of guilt. The super-ego was served because the overtures were projected on to the doctor delusionally. Anxiety was held in check and controllable through the doll, for since the Œdipus wishes are inseparable from hostility to the mother and the desire to get rid of her and to have the father's child, the patient had provided for the projected menace of the mother by a magic assurance. The doll was the uninjured, unbereft mother.

It has taken seven years to disintegrate the delusion and reach the embedded memory traces and childhood wishes. It has taken seven years for the doll to shrink down to the proportion of a real doll. This doll was the magical talisman, the mask, the statue of primitive times.

The slow disintegrating of the delusion, the shrinking of the doll, the loss of interest in routine work, the lessening of super-ego severity went on simultaneously with the emergence of

hidden interests that had been latent since childhood. The major of these was a confession of interest in history. This became the main avenue of the subsequent analysis. The first figures elaborated were those which in the closest way were representative of her unconscious phantasies concerning her father and mother and herself. She began to dramatise, to project her own identification on to figures that represented the mother and father in the world of history. These figures became extraordinarily real. She lived their lives and no searching out of detail was too fatiguing in order that they might be completed.

The pursuit of this led eventually to the patient leaving routine work and becoming a university student in history.

The interest here lies in what happened during analysis. I do not think there was any diminution of omnipotent phantasy, but a different disposal of it. Briefly I would track the path in this way :

1. An extremity of anxiety in childhood due to real frustration. An actual trauma that exacerbated anxiety.
2. This led to violent aggressiveness. Analysis showed that owing to her own hostility in frustration her safety lay in being omnipotent over her parents. This was delusionally accompanied by a male identification and played out by being a warrior. She massacred her dolls and so symbolically she had power of life and death over her parents.
3. At puberty the super-ego reinforcement brought a complete change of behaviour, complete suppression and condemnation of her former misdemeanour. This was another form of omnipotent control. "Honour thy father and mother that thy days may be long in the land." The good behaviour achieved the same end omnipotently as the previous violence, viz., self-preservation. At the same time there was a *postponement*, not a relinquishing, of id wishes—one day, if not now, there, if not here, in Heaven, if not on earth.

4. The Œdipus wishes then emerged in a delusion of fulfilment. This delusion fulfilled demands of both id and super-ego, for it was projected on to the doctor, whose guilt it now was. The delusion of the doll went alongside, a magical restoration of the mother and therefore a guarantee of her own safety.

The disintegration of the delusion laid bare the Œdipus wishes and brought back memories of her violent childhood.

This brought about a diminution of the super-ego severity, and a corresponding strengthening of the ego. This ego-strengthening led to increase of social contacts, and self-confidence. This was accompanied by giving up of routine work and a sublimation in the study of history. The omnipotence that found a pathway to a delusion and expressed itself in a magic doll now found a pathway in terms of reality, a sublimation vested in the ego. The first figures in history were parent imagos. From them interest passed to the period of time in which they were set and gradually, as anxiety lessened, the historical interest broadened and deepened in its range.

In history the people are all dead. They are brought to life again by the vital interest put into them. Their lives are re-lived, reconstructed. Their lives are first absorbed by the student. There is an imbibing knowledge, symbolically no separation from the parents. In the essays and theses written there is an externalizing of what has been incorporated, a re-creation, and therefore a nullification of anxiety.

The sublimation has at its roots the same phantasy of omnipotence as the delusion, it has become an ego-adjunct, has found a pathway into reality.

Behind the ego-ideal, says Freud,* "there lies hidden the first and most important identification of all, the identification with the father". Perhaps it would be safer to say "with the parents." Earlier he says, "At the beginning, in the primitive oral phase of the individual's existence, object cathexis and identification are hardly to be distinguished." Mrs. Isaacs* pertinently says in her paper on "Privation and Guilt" "that Freud's primary identification may perhaps play in the total drama a greater part than was originally thought."

Freud† says the relation of super-ego is not exhausted by the precept: "You *ought* to be such and such" (like your father): it also comprises the prohibition: "You *must not be* such and such (like your father), that is, you may not do all that he does; many things are his prerogative." One form of this prohibition, 'Thou shalt not' is embodied in Mosaic law. "Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth, for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous

* *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 1929, Vol. X, p. 335.

† *The Ego and the Id* (transl. 1927. Hogarth Press). Pp. 35, 39, 44.

God." The artist has clearly not succumbed to this prohibition. I think the reason for this is to be found in the primal identification with the parents, where Freud says object cathexis is hardly distinguishable from identification. These parents are the active sexual parents. They are very human beings, permitting themselves much in the infant's presence, because of its infancy.

In the stress of anxiety caused by super-ego severity and the claims of the id I see three extreme contingencies.

1. The ego may be rent from reality and overwhelmed by the id.

2. The ego may remain true to reality, but its functioning impaired by severity of the super-ego. Sublimation will be curtailed by a "Thou shalt not."

3. We have the artist. Hanns Sachs has said, "in spite of his specially developed sense of guilt, the artist has found an unusual way, closed to most men, of reconciling himself to his super-ego." He suggests that this escape from super-ego severity is through the mediation of his work.

Art, I suggest, is a sublimation rooted in the primal identification with the parents. That identification is a magical incorporation of the parents, a psychical happening which runs parallel to what has been for long ages repressed, i.e., actual cannibalism. After the manner of cannibalistic belief, psychically the same magical thing results, viz., an omnipotent control over the incorporated objects, and a magical endowment with the powers of the incorporated.

The safety of the ego will depend upon its ability to deal with the incorporated imagos. We know from the mechanism of melancholia that when the ego itself becomes identified with the reproached love object, super-ego sadism, reinforced by id sadism, may destroy the ego.

At the oral level the ego must magically control the seemingly hostile parent, because of the infant's inadequate knowledge of reality.

Then everything depends upon the ability of the ego to eject this hostile incorporation from itself. This means in effect an ego control, in the outer world, of *something* which can represent the primarily introjected hostile imago.

The artist externalizes that hostility into a work of art. In that work of art he is making, controlling, having power over—

in an external form—an introjected image or images. During creative periods omnipotence is vested in the ego, not in the super-ego. At the same time that he is externalizing the introjected hostile image, controlling it in a definite form, moulding, shaping it, he is re-creating symbolically the very image that hostility has destroyed.

Should we find, if we looked deep enough, that all sublimation depends upon the power of the ego to externalize the incorporated imagos into some form, concrete or abstract, which is made, moulded, and controlled by the ego in a reality world?

If for us the idea of the dead is freed from the cruder superstitions and fears of past ages, it is because we are phalanxed right and left, behind and before, by a magical nullification of fear in *sublimation* that is the very woof and weft of civilization. The past lives in our consciousness, in history, which is the living past, in anthropology, in archæology. Music, art, drama, creative literature, perform their age-long service. Of all arts, the last, the moving picture, is destined for the widest human appeal. The resources of science and art here converge in answer to man's deepest necessity and will consummate the most satisfying illusion the world has known. Future generations will be able to see the past as it really was. The great figures will move and live before them as they did even in life. They will speak with their authentic voices. There, in that darkened theatre, with all our knowledge and enlightenments we will not hesitate to reach out a hand through time to the first artist, painting his bison in the dim recesses of the cave.

*"If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again."*

or as the English magician puts it:

*"Graves, at my command,
Have waked their sleepers, op'd and let them forth
By some so potent art."*

VI

SIMILAR AND DIVERGENT UNCONSCIOUS
DETERMINANTS UNDERLYING THE
SUBLIMATIONS OF PURE ART
AND PURE SCIENCE

(1935) *

THE sublimations of art and science in all their multifarious aspects, pure and applied, make up roughly what we mean by civilization. They represent an infinite range of subtle combinations and transformations of psychological energies. We find these sublimations compatible with a well-developed reality-sense and adaptation to adult life. My concern in this paper is an inquiry into the determinants that underlie "pure" art and "pure" science. "Pure" art and "pure" science represent limited psychological phenomena, and in them we see on a massive scale the mechanisms which are more modified, more fused, or more partial in the scientific and artistic activities which are inseparable from civilized life.

By pure art I mean those products of creative genius which have been dictated only by the inner laws and urges of the creator. They serve no practical end and bow to no public criterion. The public bows to them. The pure artist of whom I speak will, if a section of the public acclaim and follow him, become a wealthy man—he for whom wealth has least worldly reality. Epstein is now affluent, but his practical life is virtually the same round of intense industry as when he was unknown. The goal of endeavour is neither worldly wealth nor ease. The pure artist who is not acclaimed by a section of the public, nevertheless, owing to the urgency of his inner nature, can be nothing else but an artist. In the last extremity, the "pure" artist will starve unless provided for by friends and patrons. He has no conscience in the matter of earning a livelihood in the generally accepted sense. As a contrast and companion picture to Epstein, one thinks of Van Gogh, who lived on the verge of starvation during his life. Van Gogh once said he

* Read before the Thirteenth International Psycho-Analytical Congress, Lucerne, 1934, and reprinted from *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 1935, Vol. XVI, p. 180.