

emptor: If the expensive price tag does not discourage, the vacuous contents should. Sue Davidson Lowe has no lack of affection or respect for her Uncle Al and says so herself:

It was not until 1932 or 1933, when I was ten or eleven years old, that I began to sense the deep respect in which he

was held even by the artist and writer friends who visited him at Lake George; it would take considerably longer for me to learn that references to a worldwide reputation were not hyperbole.

Unfortunately, today, at age 61, she has yet to fully comprehend what Alfred Stieglitz was all about. □

Tales of the Unknown

Howard Gardner: *Art, Mind, and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity*; Basic Books; New York.

by David A. Hallman

A strong case can be made that Western culture began to define itself with the remarkable conjunction of art and philosophy which emerged in Periclean Athens during the fifth century B.C. Arguably, also, the "decline of the West" began—or at least accelerated—with the development of modern psychology as a popular pseudoscience during the current century. The trivialization of philosophical inquiry in modern thought opened the gates wide for what might be called the "Humanistic Fallacy" of developmental and therapeutic psychology: that is, psychology as a "social science." The classical attempt to *understand* man's complex relationships to the mysteries of nature and life was crudely transformed into an effort to *explain*—and, by natural extension, to *control*—that has turned into the bizarre Theater of Contemporary Psychology. What Allen Tate once called the "modern squirrel cage of our sensibility, the extreme introspection of our time," may well have produced the ultimate Frankenstein monster, a self-consciousness that paralyzes instead of liberates and which finally destroys the very phenomena it seeks to explain.

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To the ancients, the intimate relationship between art and philosophy must have seemed natural. From the beginning of sophisticated aesthetic thought, art was judged as an "imitation" of that life the philosophers sought to understand—a pejorative to Plato, but to Aristotle a profound statement of the possibilities of life. But in the modern world, as philosophy has become more abstruse and removed from the "human" concerns of the *bomme bourgeois* (existentialism is the obvious and rebellious exception here), its role of seer and mentor has been assumed by psychology, which should have been philosophy's younger sister in the humanities, but which instead revealed itself as an unfaithful relation: an intellectual transvestite—or even transsexual—ally of the social sciences. Instead of "interpreting" the mysteries, modern psychology "explains" them



away. Once we are educated to our lives, we are able to cope with that which our ignorant ancestors thought inexplicable. In effect, we have swapped the Oracle at Delphi for the twin oracles of "Dear Abby" and "Ann Landers." Or perhaps we ourselves have just become irrelevant to the great traditions of philosophy, and maybe the relationship of art to psychology in our time is just as intimate and natural—and as profound a reflection of our own sensibilities—as was the classical marriage.

Certainly the influence of psychology on modern art—both popular and high—is almost all-pervasive. Freud and Jung themselves, not to mention the behaviorists and others, permeate modern art in all of its forms. For better or worse, the psychologists have created our sensibilities just as extensively as Plato and Aristotle created those of their own and later cultures. And much of this modern intercourse has been fruitful. Carl Jung's influence on T. S. Eliot alone would justify his sometimes-quirky work; Freud's thought is so pervasive in modern mind, literature, and criticism (although it is often simplistically adapted and misunderstood by both writers and audiences) that even today we are confronted with such overtly Freudian novels as D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*, Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, and countless others. But it is questionable whether the role of psychology, either in art or in our private and public sensibilities (if these can be separated), has been efficacious on the whole. Tate's comment on our "extreme introspection" suggests a protest against the narcissism and self-conscious reflection that psychology forces on individuals, which is reflected in much art. Such solipsism (another term Tate uses to "denote the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society") can cause a paralysis of will: Hamlet, the quintessential modern man, complains in his great soliloquy on indecisiveness that his "native hue of resolution/ Is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought." It is therefore unsettling to find psychol-

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ogists, under the guise of a scientific quest, struggling to explore perhaps the greatest mystery of human nature: that of the creative imagination. Not that we weren't warned. In 1917, Oswald Spengler, in *The Decline of the West*, described the threat of the scientific attitude:

Reason, system and comprehension kill as they 'cognize.' That which is cognized becomes a rigid object, capable of measurement and subdivision. Intuitive vision, on the other hand, vivifies and incorporates the details in a living inwardly-felt unity. Poetry and historical study are kin. Calculation and cognition also are kin.

Howard Gardner is a "cognitive" psychologist and a recipient of one of the lucrative MacArthur Foundation Fellowships awarded annually to "exceptionally talented individuals" who have shown significant achievement in the humanities, sciences, or just about any other intellectual realm. He is also a member of Harvard's Project Zero, a research team dedicated to "unravel the nature of artistic thinking." *Art, Mind and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity* is a collection of essays drawn from Gardner's study and organized so as to give a summary overview of this last frontier of psychological inquiry. (Indeed, the very title of the project was chosen to indicate that the researchers were hoping to add substantive knowledge to an area where "virtually 'zero' was known.") The book's separate essays survey the early work of such pioneers as Jean Piaget, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Ernst Cassirer, and Gardner's own mentor and fellow project member, Harvard philosopher Nelson Goodman. A second section is devoted to Gardner's especial interest in the creative impulses of young children; other groupings deal with the cultural consequences of mass media, and the effects on the imagination of mental breakdown. Having established the backgrounds and fundamental points of his own thought, Gardner offers a discussion of the creative impulses that have marked the great masters who carried

their creativity with them into old age; he concludes with a consideration of Mozart, perhaps the most atypical, magical, and inexplicable creative genius of all. Gardner's book is interesting mainly for its general background and perspective on the question of the creative imagination and as a fairly straightforward exposition of his own ideas. Unfortunately, for all its clear organization and careful development, the reader is apt to feel as unenlightened at the end as when he started. It seems, simply, that not very much is known—or perhaps can be known—about the mysteries of creativity, even to the self-proclaimed specialists. From that, I think, we can all take some faint hope.

To the lay reader, many of the academic specialist's questions—especially those involved in some kind of "scientific" inquiry—may seem, well, rather academic. Not many people are prepared to become exercised by the Scholastics' puzzle about the exact number of angels able to dance on the head of a pin, and, by the same token, many of the psychologist's questions, and answers, often seem simplistic and obvious, if not patently irrelevant. And although Gardner often falls into this trap, he must be granted the license due to any scientist starting at point "zero" in his inquiry. At the risk of his own dignity, the researcher must be prepared to ask questions which to the layman may appear obvious to the point of triteness. Gardner seems to build the scaffold of his inquiry on just such points.

The book abounds with the sort of "how" and "why" questions that offer interesting possibilities for discussion but which remain ultimately unanswerable, especially in the context of the imagination. There is room aplenty for speculation, and the first section of Gardner's book is a useful survey of some of the earlier studies in imaginative development. The relationship of language to perception and thus to the imaginative faculty is central, of course, and Gardner begins with the Swiss biologist-turned-

child-psychologist Jean Piaget, to whom linguistic ability was essentially a part of the normal growth and development patterns of the human mind. For Piaget, whom Gardner characterizes with mixed affection as a "Swiss watchmaker poring over an unassembled instrument," artistic and imaginative activities were less interesting than the day-to-day processes of functional development. Piaget is contrasted initially with the American linguist Noam Chomsky, whose views on the sources of language are, to be charitable, more interesting than his much-publicized political ideas. The two men met in a famous debate in Paris in 1975, and the encounter set forth the main lines of argument between the Piagetian developmental school and those thinkers who see language as having certain innately symbolic qualities and thus, by its very nature, as a "creative" expression. To Chomsky, language ability seems a kind of Jungian collective universal, always present and waiting only to be tapped. Like the liver or the heart, in Chomsky's metaphor, the mind is an organ of the body (albeit a symbol-creating one), maturing but functioning from birth. The problem as posed, then, pits the mind as a developing, "learning" faculty which achieves an ability to use language in a symbolic capacity against the concept of linguistic and symbolic sensitivity as an inherited and universal human characteristic.

Successive chapters place increasing emphasis on the symbolic or "mythopoeic" powers of language. To Claude Lévi-Strauss, myth serves as a cultural "mask"—a communal symbol—which language serves by conveying. Primitive arts, which are so closely akin in form and style to the linguistic and visual creations of children, are expressions of shared symbols; the move toward individualism in the modern arts suggests a breakdown in the communal soul and so explains much of the apparent chaos of modern culture. To philosophers like Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, symbol-making is an innate human need; indeed, the mythopoeic, symbolic im-

pulse perhaps most distinctively sets us apart from the lower forms. As Langer has so poetically expressed her insight, "Of all born creatures, man is the only one that cannot live by bread alone."

Gardner is especially interesting in his discussions of the actual creative expressions, both linguistic and visual, of children. The developmental tendency toward realism in both perceptions and creations presents a uniquely exciting problem for study. Why, for instance, do children in their early stages of linguistic growth show such a happy and natural affinity for metaphor (he cites charming examples of a young child who describes her naked body as "barefoot all over," and another who sees a trail of vapor left by a skywriting plane as "a scar in the sky") only to pass into a literal-minded stage which demands realistic presenta-

tion at the expense of metaphorical fancy? And why does children's art—those surrealistic drawings which often seem so revealing and archetypal in their distortions—give way with the advent of social maturity to the demands for representational naturalism? And what, finally, can be made of the self-conscious return to the primitive in so many moderns? To review a chronological perspective of Picasso's art is to be exposed to more lessons on the creative impulse than the whole history of psychology affords. Fittingly, the master himself is quoted on his "development": "I used to draw like Raphael, but it has taken me a whole lifetime to learn to draw like a child."

If such questions are baffling, Gardner usually has enough humility and caution to confess his ignorance. He poses, for instance, such unanswerable questions

as why certain children seem to lose their creative instincts forever at an early stage while others regain them with a renewed vigor after languishing through adolescence. How are we to understand the prodigy (Mozart is the example par excellence) who develops his talent almost without interruption right into maturity, or those few masters (Verdi, Thomas Mann, W. B. Yeats, Picasso) who seem to retain their creative powers to the ends of their long lives? (Interestingly, Gardner does not deal at all with the phenomenon of performing musicians who seem, of all artists, to have the key to longevity.) Is it valid, in the first place, to discuss the "creations" of children—whether striking figures of speech or hauntingly expressive drawings—as art? And, perhaps most important, what is the role of the individual talent; "why" or "how" do some individuals create more and with acknowledged higher talent than others? On such questions, Gardner's answers tend to be limp and unsatisfactory: A supportive environment will encourage the budding artist, and it helps if the artist has a consuming interest in his work, and so on. At some points, though, the psychologist admits his ignorance of the whole affair.

Gardner's book is obviously intended as an inconclusive progress report on his project's work. As one who has, for about four years, observed firsthand the imaginative development of a lively and bright child, I find Gardner's study interesting but ultimately unsatisfactory—as he would probably admit. I must confess that I am not wholly sympathetic to his mission. Mysteries, as such, are important. I, for one—and I am not frivolous here—am eternally against those scholars who are always searching for Loch Ness Monsters, or Abominable Snowmen, or the true author of Shakespeare's plays; something indefinable but irreplaceable would be lost if "positive" answers to these questions were ever found. But this prejudice, which I hope is only human, points to what I believe is the book's most serious flaw: a sin of omission.

LIBERAL CULTURE

Drugs & Other Toxic Wastes

Timothy Leary, who should be known as Dr. Doom rather than as Uncle Tim, is back on the TV talk-show/college circuit again, his eyes betraying the same vacancy that they've displayed for some 20 years. Leary, in a recent newspaper interview, was asked whether he still takes drugs. Yes. Does he still take LSD, the drug that he touted and which has destroyed countless lives (our interpretation: the interviewer would never dare alienate the man with the truth)? No. Leary went on to remark:

The ones I use are improved drugs, which increase intelligence and improve memory.

Given (A) his past exploits and (B) his recent comments (e.g., "All drugs will be legalized within ten years"), it's evident that Leary would need the output of an



entire pharmaceutical facility to provide the drugs needed to improve his intelligence and memory to the level of one of our simian ancestors. □

As a psychologist, Gardner is strangely silent on two modern figures who would seem to be indispensable to his study. Sigmund Freud is mentioned only casually and in passing; Carl Jung is not alluded to by name at all. Freud's notion of the neurotic foundation of art is well known, if not notorious, and is understandably repugnant to Gardner's cognitive discipline. Jung, though, with his emphasis on the collective unconscious as a repository of symbols and myths, would seem to be more relevant, if not more congenial, to the study at hand. But despite his famous attribution of the artistic impulses to the deep recesses of the psyche, Jung places those impulses outside the proper realm of psychology and even asserts that the attempt to ex-

plain the relationship between the art object and the creative process is invalid because it is scientific. "The creative aspect of life which finds its clearest expression in art," he writes, "baffles all attempts at rational formulation . . . creative art will forever elude understanding." And again: "Creative man is a riddle we try to solve in vain." However hostile it may be to Gardner, one suspects that Jung's respect for the privacy and mystery of the creative imagination has more appeal to the artists themselves than the project which would explain them. Henry James once wrote that all we can "see of the charm-compeller is the back he turns to us as he bends over his work." In this context, we might ask whether anything was really learned by viewing the *other* side of the moon. □

judgment, both experience and understanding. Too many in our time, including Morris and Wachtel, have forgotten.

But both do deserve some praise, especially Mary Morris, who has more skill and, I think, more independence from current fashion than Chuck Wachtel. *Joe The Engineer* has been compared to *Marty* and, indeed, it gets inside the stereotypical New York workingman's confined, bar-to-bed-to-boredom existence. Marty was able to reach past that quotidian reality and order it into meaning with a decision for marriage—to a plain, unsexy, brighter woman. Joe also attempts to "search for himself and for salvation from a life of futility," but he seems unable to make *any* decision, even to save his marriage—to a brighter, more ambitious, and decisive woman.

Wachtel reveals all the forces arrayed against Joe—his narrow family conditioning, traumatic Vietnam service, limited intelligence and perspective. And Wachtel is good at conveying both the honorable working life of Joe (and of his wife, a waitress) and also his undirected yearning for something more:

Sometimes when he's walking around like this in somebody's basement, he walks out of himself for a while and just wanders around in their lives. He stops being a person who . . . is completely absorbed in the things they do

Creative Writing 101

Mary Morris: *Crossroads*; Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

Chuck Wachtel: *Joe The Engineer*; William Morrow; New York.

by Eugene England

The authors of these two books seem to be nice, earnest young people, and their work already has been highly praised. Part of the reason behind this praise is clear: these first novels, both about failing marriages, about "finding oneself," about vulnerability in the irrational but implacable rush of urban life, are fetchingly "with it." These writers give us cool, knowing humor, convincing New York local color, satire on various forms of Manhattan chic, from grubby to professional, and trendy experimentation with point of view. And, as the promotional copy insists, both are "compassionate": they want to say something important about being human.

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But ability, knowledge, even what is misnamed compassion, are not enough. Apparently, young writers have heard in their writing classes "Show, don't tell," to the point where they have forgotten that language *must* tell (subtly, precisely, of course); thus, they seem unable to tell their readers what the lives of their protagonists mean. They can only show what

"[Chuck Wachtel is] solidly in the tradition of the best American proletarian writers. *Joe the Engineer* is a passionate, political—and important—book."

—*Village Voice*

it looks like. If an author believes that pain and futility are imposed upon us by the system, the universe, fate, *something* outside us and that therefore our basic moral responsibility is sympathy, then he or she cannot make essential judgments about characters nor give readers what they need to make their own judgments about "life" or to endure it. And if an author thinks breadth and intensity of experience is all that literature should provide, then he will not give understanding. Great literature has always provided both show *and* tell, sympathy *and*

and own. He likes the feeling. He becomes a ghost.

Wachtel obviously *wants* to tell us something about how to make sense of life's seemingly random, fated particulars. His failure is not in purpose but in means.

Morris has better means. Her first-person narrator/heroine, Debbie, gets into our hearts quickly. Debbie's voice is a fine element of her characterization—fluent, witty, slightly obtuse, off-balance, occasionally brave, often fright-