Occasional Paper

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations

http://www.psicopolis.com/psilavorg/strumenti.htm

No 6

Work and Creativity

Eric J. Miller

WHAT PEOPLE MEAN BY 'WORK' AND 'CREATIVITY'

The English language, like others, is rich in abstract nouns: our everyday conversation is littered with them. Unlike concrete nouns, such as 'table', 'chair', 'door', 'window', they have no obvious physical referents that we can point to. Yet most of the time when we use them we take it for granted that we shall be understood with just as much precision. We all know what we mean by .....(democracy, freedom, intelligence, work etc.) ...., don't we? We fail to recognize that our usage relies not only on a socially determined classification of the world - which, after all, is equally applicable to concrete nouns, in that it defines a chair as a four-legged something to sit on - but also an assumption of shared experience and shared feelings and values associated with that experience.

If we want to question such assumptions, a good starting point is to ask ourselves what our associations are to, say, 'work' and 'creativity'; what synonyms and meanings do I assign? We can then check this out by putting the same questions to others. These lists are a product of three such exercises.

Work	Creativity
Labour	Curiosity
Drudgery	Discovery
Toil	Divergent Thinking
Exertion	Eccentricity
Action	Excitement
Energy	Expression
Industriousness	Freedom
Repetition	Genius
Boredom	Imagination
Frustration	Innovation
Occupation	Inspiration
Job	Intuition
Employment	Inventiveness
Earning Money	Joy
Duty	Making
Constraint	Newness
Obligations	Originality
Conformity	Play
Compliance	Spontaneity
Producing	Truth
Making	
Creating	

Imposing my own classification, I see the 'work' items as roughly grouped into three sets. The first ten describe activity *per se* and the experience of it. Then there are a couple of ambiguous words - 'occupation' and 'job' - which lead into a second set that has mainly to do with relationships involved. Finally, there are those concerned with outputs. These last few show an overlap with creativity. Finding no such obvious classification for the second column, I have resorted to alphabetical order.

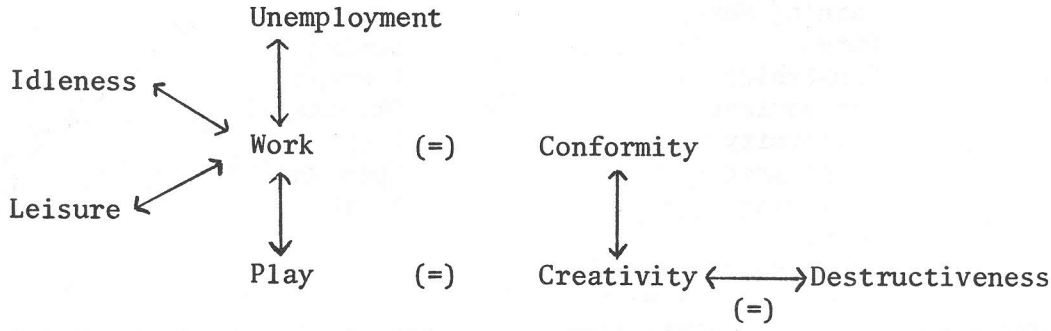
We can take clarification of meanings one step further by asking what the antonyms or opposites are. I myself, and apparently many others, think of two quite divergent antonyms to 'work'. One is 'play', which is a well-established opposite: for example, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". The other is 'unemployment'. Secondary opposites that come most immediately to mind are 'idleness' and 'leisure'. So work is 'non-play'

and also 'non-unemployment'. Moreover, there seems to be a hierarchy of values that put play and unemployment in almost polarized positions: play is better than work; work is better than unemployment.

Since the industrial revolution, and more acutely in the last 50 years, work in the sense of being productive has become almost inextricably confused with being a member - often non-productive - of an employing organization. Association of work with drudgery and repetitiveness seems to belong particularly to this fairly recent period of history. Our borrowing of the word 'robot' illustrates this forcibly: in Czech, *robota* = work and *robotnik* = worker. A crucial issue for our time, now just beginning to be recognized, is the re-separation of the ideas of work and employment; but I shall not be exploring this explicitly in the present essay. The nearest Greek translation of 'unemployed' was *a-ergos*, which seems to have had the fairly neutral meanings of 'fallow', 'idle', 'doing nothing'. When idleness came to be classified as a sin, that made work a virtue: hence, "The devil finds work for idle hands", and Voltaire's moralistic assertion that "Work banishes the three great evils: boredom, vice, poverty".

The accompanying diagram shows how I believe these opposites are related to concepts of work in our society today. Alongside, 'creativity' is positioned in relation to its commonest antonyms, 'conformity' and 'destructiveness'.

Exploration of opposites confirms that associations to work are mixed but largely negative, whereas associations to creativity are extremely positive. However, there is a disequilibrium here, which I have tried to illustrate in the diagram. 'Conformity' has divergent values attached to it: I might be praised as a loyal team member or despised for my lack of initiative. When conformity is viewed positively, it is almost the opposite of destructiveness, and that brings destructiveness uncomfortably close to creativity.



In arranging the diagram, I have used the sign (=) to show the apparent equation of creativity with play and conformity/compliance with work, and also to indicate the seeming ambivalence about the relatedness of creativity and destructiveness, which is a major theme of this essay.

SOME PROPOSITIONS

This essay explores six propositions:-

1. The potential for creativity is present in all of us as infants.

2. Creativity always carries with it potential destructiveness.

3. Every society, every social institution, therefore develops ways of keeping the range of expressions of creativity within acceptable, permissible, non-destructive limits.

4. In contemporary Western society, with its (a) individualistic values and (b) high rate of technological change, a high value is placed on creativity. But this heightens anxiety about the potential for destructiveness.

5. Our social institutions (e.g., family, education, employment) function as if their task were to contain/prevent the destructiveness. They give a few selected individuals a monopoly on creativity and offer employment - without creativity - to the majority.

6. But this has two consequences:- (a) greatly restricting the creativity available to organizations - and to society as a whole - to respond adaptively and proactively in a rapidly changing, turbulent environment; and (b) adding to the likelihood that the unutilized, frustrated creativity of individuals will be expressed in destructive ways.

In conclusion, I shall refer briefly to some of the work - in the sense, I hope, of 'productive activity' - through which colleagues and I are trying to combat the negative implications of the final proposition.

Proposition 1

"The potential for creativity is present in all of us as infants."

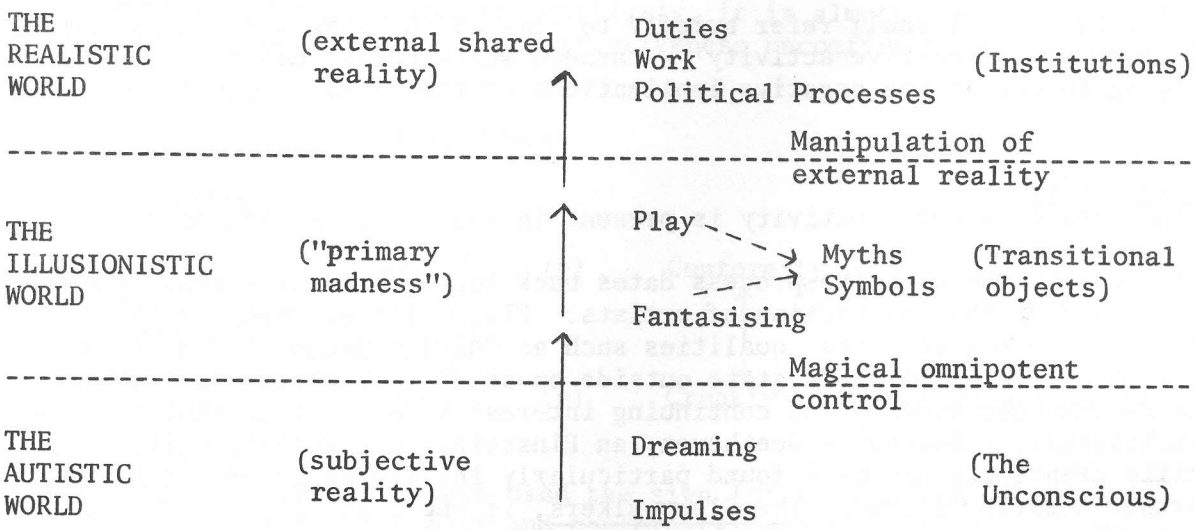
Interest in the creative process dates back to the ancient Greeks, who were intrigued by the inspiration of artists. Plato, for example, in the Io, was attributing to poets qualities such as "divine madness" and "ecstasy" (which literally means "a state outside oneself"). Over the last 200 years there has been renewed and continuing interest in what it is that makes a Shakespeare, a Newton, a Beethoven, an Einstein. Not surprisingly, scientific creativity has been found particularly intriguing in recent decades: Arthur Koestler's study, The Sleepwalkers, is one example.

In all this, however, the focus has been on the creativity of the "great man". Maternity, presumably, has been seen as women's only contribution to creative processes. Beyond that, the notion that the potential for creativity might be present in all of us could be seriously formulated only in 20th century western society, with its particular blend of egalitarian and individualistic values, emphasising that achievement is open to all and that nurture is more important than nature.

The proposition is supported when we consider the relationship of the individual to his environment, starting in infancy - the relationship between the internal world of subjective 'reality' and the external world of objective 'reality'. ('Reality' is another of those vague abstract nouns. Although I shall avoid the tedium of always putting it between quotation marks, it is essential to the argument of this essay that its meaning should always be treated as problematic, rather than taken for granted.) Here I shall draw on a model of infant development proposed by Winnicott 30 years ago (Winnicott, 1952) and also the more recent extension of his notions by Pruyser (1979). (For a fuller exposition of the condensed argument here, the reader is referred to these papers and also to Winnicott 1971.) The model is presented schematically in the accompanying diagram.

The process of infant development can be looked upon as a progression, first across the boundary between the Autistic World and the Illusionistic World, and then across the second boundary between the Illusionistic World and the Realistic World. But it is not a progression in which the "lower" worlds are "superseded" by higher worlds and left behind. Both the developing infant and the adult move back and forth between these worlds, without necessarily realizing it. *"The task of reality-acceptance is never wholly completed ... No human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality"* (Winnicott, 1978, p.240).

Winnicott postulated - and child observation has amply confirmed - that initially the infant does not distinguish between the inner world of dreaming and impulses (the Autistic World) and the external environment (the Realistic World). There is no experience of a boundary between infant and mother. The mother, he says at one point, is "created by the child" (1978, p.311).



To put that more fully:

> *"The mother's adaptation to the infant's needs, when good enough, gives the infant the illusion that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's capacity to create"* (1978, p.239).

And to paraphrase:

> *"The mother met the child's primary creativity, and so became the object that the child was ready to find"* (1978, p.311).

Since the mother is thus the product of the infant's omnipotent fantasies, the abiding notion that derives from this phase of development is of relating to the outside through magical omnipotent control.

So far, however, there is no outside. The infant has no recognition of a boundary between himself and the mother he has created. To relate, the infant must separate and have the experience of being separate, of a 'me' and a 'not-me'; and separation implies space - by which I mean not physical distance as such, though this is germane, but mental or psychological space. Apparently essential to the process of separating and of relating to a 'real' external other is what Winnicott called the 'transitional object' - the woolly toy, the thumb, the scrap of blanket - which the infant grasps and manipulates to express impulses and to represent reality. It is his first possession, the first recognized object that is 'not-me'. Unlike an internal object or image it is not susceptible to magical control; but neither does it exert control. Through the transitional object the infant enters what I have called here, following Pruyser, the Illusionistic World. It is the world of play, make-believe, fantasy, discovery, inventiveness, and later of symbols and myths. It is also the seed-bed of religious ideas and the arts. Movement into the Illusionistic World makes it possible for the young child, and also the adult, to realize that the Realistic World is not entirely intractable. Impulses arising in the realm of instinctive and unconscious process can become converted into fantasies and these in turn can be translated into actions upon the Realistic World. Hence as a development from magical omnipotent control we have emergence of planned manipulation of external reality: see diagram.

Winnicott equates play and creativity: his book Playing and Reality (1971) develops this important insight with illuminating clinical examples. I find it more useful to conceive the Illustionistic World as the realm of potential creativity. Creativity occurs when new ways of looking at things, new models, new paradigms are actually transported across the boundary into the Realistic World and in some way impinge on external reality. However, that is a refinement. What this Winnicott model of development shows quite clearly is that every normally maturing infant acquires a space and way of using that space in this Illusionistic World, where use of play and imagination enable him to simulate and rehearse his roles and actions in the Realistic World. He is the incipient artist - a sculptor, perhaps, moulding his transitional object into imagined shapes - and the incipient scientist, framing hypotheses about what-will-happen-if and testing them experimentally - for example, the repeated experiment of dropping the toy over the side of the pram to test whether Mummy/Daddy will pick it up again. The Illusionistic World is not the exclusive preserve of the young. It is available for all of us to move into and out again. But what happens to the infant artist and scientist? The potential that is so evident in the very young somehow evaporates.

Some of the reasons for this will be explored in subsequent sections, in which a major theme is fear of destructiveness. Interestingly, Winnicott gives a hint of this in his term for what I have called the Illusionistic World: for him it is "the intermediate area of primary madness". The madness lies in behaving as if there is an actual identity between the transitional object and the person or thing that it is taken to represent. In the infant it is a madness that is legitimated by adults: they do not challenge his illusions but in the early stages actively encourage them and join him in make-believe. But the adult who does not make the distinction is unequivocally defined as mad. "He lives in a world of his own." "He is out of touch with reality." Whereas for the child the Realistic World may be frightening and difficult to cope with, the adult seems to acquire similar fears of the Illusionistic World and finds the Realistic World safer.

Proposition 2

"Creativity always carries with it the potential for destructiveness."

At one level this is a truism, a statement of the natural order of things, of man's fundamental relation to nature. The Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva - Creator, Preserver and Destroyer - express the deep human awareness of natural cycles. We share birth, growth, maturation, decline and death with all organic life; but we are conscious of this process and find a need to give it meaning; and in particular death of the individual has to be reconciled with continuity of the species. Leaves that fall to the ground in autumn form mulch in the soil that feeds the fresh green leaves of spring. Belief in reincarnation is a reasonable extension of this observation of being part of a system that - however large and complex it may be - is a closed system. As an anthropologist I once lived among a people in Northern Thailand known as the Black-Bottomed Lao,* who vividly reflect this belief-system. Each individual has his quote of *pii*, or souls. Like chromosomes, they number 48. Illness is caused by temporarily mislaid *pii*. Each newborn infant acquires the *pii* of a dead member of the family - typically a grandparent or grandparent's sibling. Hence the stock of *pii* is limited. Occasionally it is divined at the birth that the infant is the legatee of a living forebear. In that case both will ail until one or the other dies.

Cosmologies are built into social structures. They confirm and maintain a social order which also provides order for the internal worlds of individuals. New modes of looking at the world, new meanings, or just new ways of doing things, all threaten to destroy that "shared reality" on which social and individual order is felt to depend. Anxiety and hence resistance are evoked. A line is set between permissible and impermissible areas and acts of creativity. Transgression of that boundary is a threat to established authority; it is deviant behaviour.

The importance of the politics of creativity is reflected in the rich terminology we have to define creativity-turned-deviance. Four of the commonest terms are:

> Heresy. Less heard nowadays, but not quite obsolete. Certainly very potent in the past as a rationale for hounding and persecuting Galileo and others who dared to point out discrepancies between the accepted cosmology and scientific observation.
>
> Subversion. A more overtly political version of heresy, reserved for those who offer a new perspective from which to view the social order. May sometimes be included in the statutory offence of treason. Socrates; Christ; Marx; Gandhi .....
>
> Delinquency. Robin Hood, a popular hero for his innovative method of redistributing wealth, was plainly a delinquent in the eyes of the Sheriff of Nottingham. The social advantage of this term is that it dismisses any creative element and devalues it by lumping the perpetrator into a huge category consisting mainly of manifestly non-creative common criminals. A similar purpose is served by .....

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* They earned this name from their practice of tattooing males in such a way as to give an unbroken navy blue coloration of all flesh between waist and upper thighs.

Madness. The number of artists and scientists who have been labelled mad is legion. Some have been locked away. By no means obsolete. For example, it is little more than 50 years since Wegener was scorned as mad by fellow-scientists when he propounded his hypothesis of continental drift. Now it is established theory.

The richness of the vocabulary reflects social anxiety about the boundary between the permissible and impermissible. It is a thin, wavery, changing line. A flower in one man's garden is a weed in another. As my few examples indicate, what is perceived as creative in one social context, or at one time, is defined as deviant, dangerous and destructive in another. Nowadays, for example, many governments proclaim Robin Hood's philosophy of redistribution, but implement it less efficiently: thus the really rich avoid or evade paying their taxes and the really poor do not get the benefits.

The anxiety also belongs to the individual, who is uncertain about distinguishing between creative and destructive impulses in himself. The socially defined categories of sin, disloyalty, crime and craziness and the social sanctions against deviants guilty of such acts provide a mechanism whereby the individual can split off and disown uncomfortable parts of himself and not have to judge on his own what is creative and what is destructive. The lesson that society teaches is: when in doubt, don't.

Proposition 3

"Every society, every social institution, develops ways of trying to keep the range of expressions of creativity within acceptable, permissible, non-destructive limits."

Creative/destructive impulses cannot be totally expunged by explicit exercise of social control - for example, as in the case of Galileo, the Church's assertion of its prerogative to determine what meanings could be assigned to 'reality'. More subtle, indirect and barely recognized social mechanisms are therefore used. Here I briefly discuss two: the process of socialization of infants and children; and the provision of openings for legitimate expression of creative drives.

Processes of Socialization

The omnipotent infant has no doubts about his authority. If he is to develop and mature, that sense of authority has to be built upon. Winnicott's notion of 'good enough' mothering is important here. Essentially his argument is that the mother's adaptation to the infant's needs, when good enough, gives the infant the illusion that there is an external reality that corresponds to his own capacity to create. It is in that sense that Winnicott speaks of the infant "creating" the mother.

But there are also disillusionments: the wanted breast that is absent, the internal pain that mother cannot take away, and especially the loss of the breast at weaning. If the infant by then has a picture inside of a good mother that he has created - a sense of trust perhaps - he can weather these storms and still make positive use of the Illusionistic World as a means of exploring his relation with external reality. And most babies and young children love to explore, with all their senses and with their expanding minds.

Socialization, however, is a process that first encourages and then increasingly restricts curiosity and exploratory drives. Play gets transformed into games; games have rules; and rules are there to be obeyed. "Why?", the repeated question, gets no answers, or evasive and misleading answers. The child is taught what he should feel and to deny what he does feel - to assent to an adult definition of meaning and not to impose his own. Painting is a case in point. The act of painting is a creative process, an experience of self-expression; but the child is taught to value not the process but the product - a good picture, a better representation. Artistic vision is reduced to the camera lens.

The child's exercise of his authority becomes redefined as naughtiness. In a telling colloquialism, the mother says to the obstreperous child, "Oh, do stop creating".

In ways such as these the Illusionistic World is cribbed, cabined and confined. Play is to be restricted to the play-pen. Hence one might say cynically that any residual creativity is a failure of perfect socialization.

Openings for Legitimate Expression of Creativity

In primitive societies and in our own until the Renaissance, permissible areas for expression of that residual creativity have been artistic. Watertight cosmologies and rigid social structures eliminate intellectual creativity of the kind that might ask "why?" and question meanings, and, as we have seen, sanctions such as the Inquisition can discourage curiosity. Moreover, certainly until the early 19th century and to some extent still, painting, music and to a lesser degree literature have been institutionalized through the system of patronage. Whether patronized by the Church or the nobility, artists have had to turn their creative talents to the greater glory of one version or the other of established authority. The alternative seems to be to paint or compose for a limited coterie. Hence, whereas Winnicott is right to regard the arts and also religion as deriving from the Illusionistic World, their institutional manifestations belong firmly in the Realistic World and so set effective limits to the range of permissible expressions.

Since the Renaissance, scientific creativity has been subjected to a somewhat similar process, except that a dearth of patrons for the sciences for a long time kept this field as the preserve of the wealthy amateur. Gifted technologists found patronage for their inventiveness in the Industrial Revolution. In the 20th century it has been the universities, backed more recently by bodies such as the Science Research Council and Medical Research Council, that have provided the institutionalized patronage for scientific research. Their control of research funding seems to be quite an effective mechanism for inhibiting divergent lines of scientific enquiry. That 'mad' scientist has to find a 'mad' patron, and few academically controlled funding bodies would willingly choose that label. The Wegeners of the late 20th century find just as much difficulty in getting heard as he did 60 years ago.

Moreover, creative ideas, whether intellectual or artistic (and I am not implying that these are mutually exclusive), can significantly affect the Realistic World only if they are communicated to a large enough audience, and here of course another set of institutions - the media - exert a powerful influence.

At the other end of the scale, one wonders how much creative potential has its wings clipped by being defined as a privatized hobby - a sort of individual occupational therapy - which is at best shared among a band of fellow-enthusiasts. Not all hobbyists, of course, could be called creative: the question is how far the available category of "hobby", with its slightly pejorative overtones, leads the individual to devalue his own creativity and protects society from it. On the positive side, there are plainly instances where the hobby opens up unrealized potential.

Some primitive societies offer an alternative to the hobby in the form of opportunities for ephemeral creativity, especially rituals. Pots are carefully made and finely decorated, only to be broken again; and I have seen in South India elaborate temporary shrines, incorporating intricately carved plantain stems, all painstakingly assembled for an annual religious festival and then disintegrating within a few days. We can interpret this as limiting - even trivializing - the domain of artistic creativity; but that would be to deny that the very ephemerality of the product and its inevitable destruction reinforce the value attached to the creative process. This is the thesis of some contemporary artists. And the sandcastle into which the child puts heart and soul is the one he knows that the incoming tide will engulf.

Proposition 4

"In contemporary western society, with its (a) individualistic values and (b) high rate of technological change, a high value is placed on creativity. But this heightens anxiety about the potential for destructiveness."

The concept of the individual was absent in the Middle Ages. Person was inseparable from role or status - serf, knight, craftsman. Correspondingly, work could not have the meanings it has today as a distinct field of activity. The more apposite notion was 'duty', attaching to the social role, and this might encompass activities that we would now put into quite separate categories - for example, tilling the soil, performing rituals, maintaining kinship bonds. Through role and status the individual was tied to a natural order in which creativity was really the domain of God: man's function was to conserve and celebrate the order that God had created. Individuality was a product of the Renaissance. Starting in the mid-15th century, and gradually gaining ground, was a legitimation of curiosity, questioning, exploration, discovery. Opening up a New World could not but raise questions about the Old. Columbus, as we know, when he found the Americas, was testing and falsifying a hypothesis about a short cut to the East Indies. So Western Europe embarked on an age of hypotheses, theories, contraptions, machines - and modern capitalism. Individual enterprise, initiative and originality gained increasing esteem, though they remained essentially the preserve of an élite together with hand-picked protegés. Transformation of the notion of individuality into individualism, as we know it today, with its myth that everyone in society, and not just an élite, can aspire to separation of person from role, is a much more recent phenomenon, which I see as closely associated with consumerism. Cultivation of the consumer was a necessary condition for the growth of an industrial economy - and expansion also required the recruitment of inventors, technicians and entrepreneurs from a broader range of society. But this has also led, of course, to societal contradictions, which we shall need to discuss later.

The high value placed on creativity in a society dedicated to technological progress was at its most explicit in the United States, after USSR was first into space with its 1957 Sputnik. This event provoked an urgent debate on the educational system, which was accused of fostering conformity. Conventional intelligence tests, it was found, measured convergent thinking; whereas it was divergent thinking that needed to be encouraged. Research into creativity became not just fashionable but an instrument of national policy: suddenly large new funds became available. Up to 1957, articles on creativity in the scientific journals numbered 10-12 a year. By the early 1960s, this rate had doubled, trebled, then quadrupled, far outstripping the growth - quite considerable - in the social science literature generally.*

I am also postulating that the high value placed on such creativity correspondingly heightens societal anxiety about destructiveness. The obvious and dramatic example is atomic energy and the Bomb. This epitomizes the perception of creativity out of control. But more subtle evidence is available. If we return to our review of research, we find that the annual output of articles on creativity peaked in 1967; after that, it dropped quite sharply, recovering only in 1971. Knowing what was happening among and around students in American universities in the mid-1960s, culminating there and in Europe in the events of 1968, with their echoes of 1848, it is plausible to suggest a tacit consensus that the educational shift away from conformity had gone too far. Hence research into creativity became less respectable and harder to get funded.

Proposition 5

"Our social institutions (family, education, employment) function as if their task were to contain/prevent the destructiveness. They give a few selected individuals a monopoly on creativity and offer work - without creativity - to the majority, the so-called 'working class'."

The general point, of course, is that employing institutions in modern society have become a major instrument of social control. Recently I heard a British trade union leader say - as if it were a statement of the obvious - that "people must be kept occupied" and "it's the responsibility of those in authority, those in control, to provide work". (The words are his; only the underlining is mine.) It is the shared vested interest, of right-wing governments, left-wing unionists and the state bureaucracy, in containing a large proportion of the population in well-structured employing organizations that makes it so difficult to re-establish the notion of work as a productive activity separable from employment.

The specific point to be noted here is the uneven distribution of creative activity within organizations. The fashion industry is a particularly vivid example. A highly successful British company in the women's clothing industry carries the name "Laura Ashley". Laura Ashley herself creates the designs; the entire organization exists to produce and sell her creations. On a much bigger scale, huge corporations - for example, Ford - exist to implement and keep alive a single creative idea of the founding entrepreneur. The authority of managers and even of research departments to create is constrained within closely prescribed parameters. The analogy to a religious institution is compelling. Managers are the

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* I am grateful to Margaret Walker, Librarian of the Tavistock Joint Library, for this literature search.

priests who preserve and safeguard the work of the initial creator. It is the duty of everyone else - notably the people on the production line - to carry out the rituals, as currently defined by the priests, in meticulous detail. Failures in observance carry the threat of excommunication.*

Scientific and professional specialization is another defence against anxiety that diffusion of creativity spells destructiveness. The builder's creativity is stolen by the architect, the craftsman's by the production engineer. Family and community are persuaded that they can no longer cope with the elderly or crazy: social workers and psychiatrists take over. As Winnicott noted, *"The patient's creativity can be only too easily stolen by the therapist who knows too much"* (1971, p.67). In such a specialized world, where the goal is to learn more and more about less and less, the creative breakthrough is hard enough for, say, the scientist. More ordinary people cease to trust their capacity to think. How can I discover or create anything? Potentially the arts are an outlet; but even there the dilemma is the same. If it is the product that is valued, if the works of art of previous generations are carefully preserved - archaeological layer upon layer - and if faithful reproductions are available for every sitting-room wall, how can an artist hope to gain acknowledgement of his creativity except possibly negativistically, by overturning past conventions? So we have seen in recent decades the art of protest, perhaps more destructive than creative. But the protest and destructiveness are themselves largely contained within yet another specialized domain - that of institutionalized art. It is the rare Picasso who can break thorugh that institutional barrier and cause the ordinary mortal to reconsider his conventional ways of looking at the Realistic World.

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* In his Anatomy of Human Destructiveness, Fromm also argued that *"the degree of creativity that is desirable in various classes and occupational groups in a given society varies"* (1977, p.66). However, he goes on:

> *"Scientists and top managers, for instance, need to have a great many of these qualities in a technological-bureaucratic society like ours. For blue-collar workers to have the same degree of creativity would be a luxury - or a threat to the smooth functioning of the whole system"* (ibid.).

I believe he underestimates the constraints on permissible exercise of creativity even by scientists and top managers. In the last sentence, "to have" is presumably sloppy writing: it should probably read, "to be allowed to exercise". Elsewhere, Fromm uses psychological and neurophysiological evidence to argue that creativity and originality are deeply rooted human impulses.

Proposition 6

"But this defence against destructiveness has two consequences: (a) greatly restricting the creativity available to enable organizations, and society as a whole, to respond adaptively and proactively in a rapidly changing, turbulent environment; and (b) adding to the likelihood that the unutilized, frustrated creativity of individuals will be expressed in destructive ways."

Defences against destructiveness are destructive of creativity.

Even organizations whose survival is at risk find it extraordinarily difficult to "hear" any questioning of the assumptions they are making about what their task is and how they are performing it. Hollywood was a classic example at the end of the 1940s: it was very nearly destroyed by television because it was focused on the big screen and could not conceive that it might re-define its task as being in the entertainment business. Some 15 years ago a colleague and I worked as consultants to an airline, in which the top management were enthuaiastically dedicated to flying aeroplanes and in collaborating with manufacturers to build more advanced aircraft. They were good at the job and enjoyed it; but the airline was unprofitable. The idea that in order to make money they needed to look upon themselves as being in the travel business, which might involve them in package holidays, hotels, car hire and the rest, was something they did want to hear. Marketing was 'dirty'. It also implied a relocation on the organization of creativity and power.

Hollywood and the airline were at least able to mobilize resources from within to make relatively successful transitions, if belatedly. Monopolization of creativity in large employing organizations, however, has the insidious effect of stunting any residual belief that employees may have in their own creativity. They become locked in a culture of dependency and compliance, from which it becomes not merely heretical but unthinkable to entertain any reconceptualization of the organization's task and strategies.

> *"[They] 'work for a system they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit'. Such submission is all the more absolute when it is made voluntarily, even enthusiastically"* (Burns & Stalker, 1961, p.11, quoting Marcuse 1956).

Novitiates into the managerial priesthood are beguiled by the proffered rewards of privilege and power and fail to notice until too late, or even then, the price they are paying in self-emasculation. Management development schemes, which seem to offer the inducement of extending people's capacities, often seem to serve the function of procuring conformity to organizational norms and rituals (cf. Lawrence, 1975). The one managerial capability that is atrophied rather than developed through this process is the questioning of the *status quo*.

Compliance with the institutional demands of the Realistic World may produce, as a schizoid defence, a false personality. A pseudo-self, which in the Realistic World passively and obediently accepts the roles and the meanings imposed by the organization, the institution, the society, is split off from a private self which is locked in the Autistic World (cf. Fromm 1942, Winnicott 1971, Lawrence 1982).

Destructiveness then is not the other face of creativity, but the product of primitive, omnipotent rage arising from repressed feelings of futility and impotence:-

> *"If man cannot create anything or move anybody, if he cannot break out from the prison of his total narcissism and isolation, he can escape the unbearable sense of vital impotence and nothingness only by affirming himself in the act of destruction of the life that he is unable to create. Great effort, patience and care are not required; for destruction, all that is necessary is strong arms, or a knife, or a gun"* (Fromm, quoted by Lawrence 1982).

A way of re-stating this theme is that these organizational and social processes threaten the exercise of individual authority - a self that can operate in and across the boundaries of the Illusionistic World. That World, that space from which so-called reality can be examined, is eroded. And I feel it necessary to reiterate 'so-called', to remind us that 'reality' is no more than a set of shared meanings into which one is socialized. "Coming to terms with reality" is the language of socialization and social control. "Testing reality" is the language of creativity. It is a more dangerous activity, but, as Winnicott reminds us, *"it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self"* (Winnicott 1971, p.63).

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

I believe I have made my own position clear: that the divorce of creativity from work as we knew it today is unhealthy - unhealthy for the individual, for the organization and for society. Much of my own work, and that of some of my colleagues at the Tavistock Institute, addresses this issue. More specifically, as I have just hinted, the concept that I find useful in making connections between creativity and work is that of personal authority. Whether as educator or as consultant, I see myself as trying to help people use their own personal authority to inspect, scrutinize, question and test 'external reality' as it exists in their own institutions and in their own roles within them.

Here we run into a paradox: what we think of as the 'external reality' of institutions, such as employing organizations, is a fantasy, an assumption. I am not here borrowing from the eastern philosophers and arguing that all the world is illusion; nor am I following the more modern thesis of physicists and psychologists that human perception of that world is a product of our limited repertoire of sense organs and the messages they send to the brain. I am concerned with assumptions about social order. It is not difficult to argue that different kinds of institutions - say, a steelworks, a school, a hospital - can be distinguished one from another by various objective elements, such as buildings, plant, equipment, and perhaps uniforms. But those are only the physical aspects. An institution gains its life and its capacity to carry out its task, with greater or lesser effectiveness, from the activities of people. We form structures that differentiate between functions and roles, and usually these structures are hierarchical in that they not only confer differing degrees of authority on different roles but also make distinctions of status between them. In addition, we develop institutional cultures that reinforce the structures: "this is the way we do things here". And "the way we do things" is supported by ideologies and values. These structures and cultures are a central part of our experience of an institution. They feel as though they are as real,

as solid and as unchangeable as the buildings and plant, or even more so. Yet my proposition is that this social order that we call an institution and which guides our behaviour is no more than an idea or construct in people's minds. Without largely shared pictures and assumptions of this kind, we would be unable to collaborate with one another, and we cling fiercely to such pictures; but they are still merely fantasies that we have been conditioned to believe have the substance of 'external reality'.

An idea that I hold in my head is something that I can change. In the terminology of this essay, then, I see it as my task to promote re-scrutiny of that which is taken to be the Realistic World. To provide the space in which this can happen, it is necessary to help my clients to move out into an enlarged Illusionistic World, to give them some distance and some new perspective from which to re-appraise 'reality'. But if the re-scrutiny is to be creative, they also have to transact across the other boundary, the boundary with the Autistic World; and this is a much more difficult transaction. It is one not provided for by most of the familiar approaches to training and consultancy. It is true that they often offer opportunities for clients to step aside from their day-to-day preoccupations and to reconsider what they are doing from a different perspective - a more 'objective' position. Usually, however, this does not involve leaving the Realistic World: the alternative perspective is derived from alternative constructs of 'reality' that themselves belong elsewhere in that same World - for example, theories and assumptions from the behavioural sciences. Actually to move into the Illusionistic World, leaving those props behind, and, still more, to get in touch with the Autistic - these are transitions that are much less comfortable and often ferociously resisted. Cherished assumptions that may have been used to underpin one's very identity are called into question.

The conferences sponsored by the Group Relations Training Programme of the Tavistock Institute offer opportunities to risk such questioning. The first of these 'Leicester Conferences' was held in 1957 and since then the design has been progressively developed (and the model has also been adopted and adapted by other institutions in Britain and many other countries); but the focus has always been on experiential learning in the here and now. Thus a two-week residential conference, which might involve, say, 50 members and 10 staff, is conceived as a temporary educational institution which is itself available for continuous study: indeed, the study of members' relatedness to that institution is the primary task. This means that they are invited to examine ways in which their behaviour is affected by the pictures or constructs they have of the institution in its various phases, as it opens, evolves and draws to a close. Or, to put it the other way round, their constructs, which are for the most part not consciously recognized, are inferred from their behaviour. Members may discover, for example, that fantasies they have about the power of staff, as 'management', are derived not from what staff are actually doing and saying within the conference but from assumptions that members themselves bring with them. These are assumptions that have been taken for granted in their work organizations. Beyond that, however, it may turn out that these assumptions have quite primitive origins - that the individual may be carrying internally a model of dependence on parental authority which has been carried forward and superimposed first on teachers at school and then, later, on bosses in adult life. In these conferences the staff do not interpret individual behaviour - we are engaged in an educational process, not in psychoanalysis - and indeed it is hardly necessary, because it is often possible to show that whole groups, or perhaps the entire membership, are acting on a shared unconscious fantasy. Staff have the task of trying

to identify these dynamics (which staff themselves also get caught in) and to offer working hypotheses which might explain them. Why, for instance, should members need to introduce a construct of hierarchy in relation to staff? The conference provides a setting in which it is relatively safe to ask such questions and to struggle towards answers, and safe also to experiment with different ways of behaving and being.

Just as the teddy-bear or the piece of blanket is a transitional object for a child, the conference is a transitional institution for its members. It is a space in which to rehearse, to play; but it is, like children's play, as we very well know, often very serious indeed. If, in this play, individual members are able to take some authority to examine and discard assumptions about the temporary institution of the conference, then they may be able to take authority in other roles to look more critically and sceptically at the 'external reality' of the institutions to which they return.

Conference members are drawn from a wide range of occupations, organizations and nationalities. As a second example of ways in which we try to reconnect creativity to work, I shall briefly outline an intervention in a British manufacturing company, in which I was involved as an external consultant in association with two internal consultants between 1975 and 1979.*

The company had been taken over by a major group and merged with another business, previously a competitor. If the financial forecasts were met, the new combined organization should have been commanding 60 per cent of the British market for its product. However, the rules of simple addition are not always applicable to organizational mergers, and in this case the market share had dropped, profits hovered around zero, and morale was low. Employees had little sense of identification with the organization as a whole or even with their own units: there was conflict not only between departments but within them. A succession of new general managers and new consultants came and went without achieving any improvement. There was a culture of individual survival.

Brought in as yet more consultants to put things right, my two associates initiated what came to be called the "People Programme". This began with an adaptation of a 'Leicester Conference', spread out on a part-time basis over more than six months, for 120 managers, supervisors and specialists - the top 15 per cent. First they met weekly in small groups of a dozen, each with a consultant, to study inter-personal relations within that group setting itself. Then two weekend conferences were held to study inter-group relations. And thirdly the whole group, or as many as could be available, met weekly to look at their relatedness to the organization as a whole.

Even before this formal phase was over, there were promising signs of change. Some individuals began to realize that they were less impotent than they had assumed, that they themselves could exercise authority and take initiatives without asking for permission from the general manager or group headquarters. Participants decided that the weekly 'large group' was worth continuing, and a substantial nucleus went on meeting over the next three years. Spontaneous task groups sprang up in various areas - for example, groups of engineers and of apprentices - to tackle pressing

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* The earlier phases of this project are described more fully in Miller (1977).

work issues. They took actions themselves and put proposals to their managers. One group organized an extension of the original training programme for another 40 or 50 employees. Over the next year, outcomes were impressive. Internal coordination improved; chronic problems got solved; there was a general increase in self-confidence and purposefulness, especially in transactions across the boundary of the organization with group headquarters; and, more concretely, there was a surge in manufacturing output and profits.

By this time my two associates and I constituted a Consulting Resource Group (CRG), which would be approached directly for consultation by any group within the organization. Our services were very much in demand, and our clients included, for example, the executive management team, several departmental groups, the group of apprentices, and also a joint trade union committee, which used a consultant at its regular meetings and also commissioned the CRG to provide training courses for all shop stewards.

Beyond that, the CRG took up a position as consultant to the organization as a total entity. We met one afternoon a week to try to elucidate the overall dynamics of the organization. Why was it, for instance, that for a time one department seemed to be carrying all the depression, almost as a scapegoat? Or, in a period when labour relations on the shop floor were especially cordial, how come the committee of the sports and social club was bitterly divided? Any member of the organization could join the CRG at these meetings and draw on his/her own experience in trying to understand what was going on. Numbers were always small, but there was evidence that the insights reached many more than those who actually attended.

One image of CRG was that of a satellite, orbiting around the organization. From this vantage-point it was possible to gain a perspective not available to those on the ground. So the weekly meetings were an opportunity to embark on the satellite. Like the group events at the beginning of the People Programme, they offered a space, in which people could take up what we called a "third role" - not as members of a work group or as union members, but as members of the organization as a community - from which they could re-scrutinize their actions and attitudes in the other two roles. And again there was evidence that they were able to take authority in their other roles to act on the understandings that they gained.

It was clear, then, that we had been able to help quite a lot of people to recognize that they were not impotent cyphers but could actually shape the organization and their own roles in it in creative ways. And the financial results continued to be positive. In relation to the larger group, our client had moved from the bottom of the league table to the top. A success story? What we had not foreseen was that this achievement would be a threat, not only to other companies in the group, which were now being pressed to improve performance, but to group headquarters itself. Culturally, our client organization had become deviant. Elsewhere in the group the prevailing culture was one of compliance and conformity; here it was one of exercising authority and taking initiatives. Headquarters saw this as insubordination - a threat, perhaps, to their monopoly of creativity. Strong pressure was applied to get rid of the CRG and the People Programme. Eventually a new general manager was installed and the consultation ended.

It would be easy to take a self-righteous position and to see this as another case of a traditionalist management clinging to its power and reasserting the *status quo*. In this scenario, the members of our client organization would be the innocent victims. But that would not be the whole story. Even the staunchest supporters of the People Programme were not without ambivalence. Opportunities to reflect, to question and to innovate are exciting; but they are also a threat to primitive needs for security and dependency. Those needs lie in all of us and are met by stable institutional structures and cultures. Upsetting those structures raises anxiety in individuals that their schizoid defences will break down and their destructive impulses will erupt into violence and chaos. Reassertion of control by headquarters served to patch up the defences; and so beneath the shock and dismay with which our clients greeted it there were undertones of relief.

Is it right to make interventions of this kind, which threaten to disrupt the mechanisms that individuals have built up to cope with the Realistic World? Are we doing more harm than good? These are legitimate questions, which I have to grapple with, whether I am running a Leicester Conference or advising on rural development programmes for impoverished communities in Third World countries. Personally, I hold that it is not only right but essential that each of us should risk, and help others to risk, taking authority to re-scrutinize the meanings we give to the Realistic World and to question the social control that the Realistic World provides. Contemporary problems demand all the human creativity we can mobilize. For that to happen, we need to move much more freely in and out of the Illusionistic World and draw on resources that are locked in our Autistic World. The process of giving up assumptions and moving into unknown territory can be disturbing, to be sure, but perhaps the minefields are mainly in the imagination. Monopolization of creativity has plainly failed us, in industry and in society at large. So we have a choice of futures: destructiveness, which will certainly be violent; or creativity, which may be anarchic.

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ERIC J. MILLER, MA, PhD, has been on the staff of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations since 1958.

After war service in India and Burma in the Royal Indian Artillery he returned to Cambridge to read anthropology. His doctorate was based on two years' field research in South India, and this was followed by a further 1½ years fieldwork in Northern Thailand. He then spent five years as an internal consultant in two companies in the textile industry in the United States and India.

At the Institute his principal interests have been organizational change and development and the relatedness of the individual to the group and the organization. His research and consultancy activities have taken him into a wide variety of organizations - industrial and commercial concerns; the public sector; educational, religious and health care systems; voluntary bodies, community groups - in Britain and abroad. He has been involved in the design and implementation of rural development programmes in several Third World countries. He is Director of the Group Relations Training Programme at the Tavistock Institute and is also policy adviser to OPUS (an Organization for Promoting Understanding in Society). He has also been Visiting Professor of Organizational Behaviour at Manchester Business School.

Arising from this work, he has written many papers, and his books include Systems of Organization (with A.K. Rice), A Life Apart (with G.V. Gwynne), Task and Organization (ed.), Desarrollo integral del medio rural: un experimento en Mexico (Integrated rural development: a Mexican experiment), and A Life Together (with T. Dartington and G.V. Gwynne).