

CREATIVITY – A VITAL TOOL

Iolanda COVACI

I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract: *What is the concept of creativity? Are we all born with it and if so, is it something that we can lose at one point? Is it something that we can recover, improve, adapt or is it a fixed variable? What are the origins of creativity? Is it a trait that is characteristic only of artists or can we find it in day to day life also? What are the psychological requirements in order to be creative? How can one measure creativity? How important is creativity in our lives? All of these are questions that I will explore in this article, based on real life examples and literature. The lens I will be using to address these questions are psychodynamic and theatrical.*

Keywords: *creativity, play, child development, symbol, object relations theory*

The subject of my doctoral research is “the development of creativity by using theatrical instruments”. I also taught a course last year in the Master’s Degree program at the National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, that had the same name. I remember starting my course by asking the students to recall a situation when creativity saved their lives. All of them were very surprised by the task. They had never before thought of creativity as life-saving. Desirable, charming, useful, maybe. But definitely not life-saving. After brainstorming together about what meaning this concept has for each of them, we concluded that it is not something that life offers as a bonus to a few chosen ones and that one can very well do without, but that it is one of the tools that can make a difference in one’s life. One of my students recalled a moment when her child was

in the hospital, couldn't breathe and also didn't want to put on the oxygen mask. The nurses were fighting with the child but that was only making things worse. The mother was more and more pressed to do something, to oblige the child to wear the mask. Authority led nowhere. But then, after a moment of inner silence, the mother came up with what proved to be the solution: she invented a story in which her child was the hero and he needed the mask as part of the costume; she came up spontaneously with a lot of details, many plot twists, put in a lot of energy and finally managed to save her child. Another student recalled an equally critical moment in her life when she lost a pregnancy and fell into a great depression. She was at that time asked if she would direct a children's play and participate in a national talent show with her group of little actors. She agreed and managed to redirect all of the repressed anger, to sublimate all that energy into a creative project that also won the big prize in the competition. That was the decision that helped her overcome her misfortune. The movie industry is also rich in such examples. The well-known movie "La Vita e Bella" presents the story of a young Jewish father and his son who are arrested and deported in a concentration camp. What keeps them alive is the father's creativity. He invents a story for his son that saves their lives. Literature is also a domain where such examples can be found. In Ana Novac's diary and bestseller book "The most beautiful days of my youth" one finds out how she managed to take her written testimony out of Auschwitz, without getting caught by the Nazis: she asked a group of five girls to memorise the pages and dictate them to her afterwards.

So what is creativity? For Ken Robinson, a pioneer in education, creativity is the process in which we come up with new ideas. "To know what to extract from a diversity of information in order to answer the needs of a present situation is a process of

creativity.”²⁸ He linked this concept to the ones of *imagination* – “the process in which we imagine things that are not accessible to our senses”²⁹ – and *innovation* – “the process in which new ideas are put in practice”³⁰. Jerzy Grotowski also had a strong opinion about creativity in acting: “The important thing is to use the role as a trampoline, as a chance to study and play with what is, in fact, behind our masks. Creativity, especially as far as acting is concerned, is unlimited but disciplined sincerity.”³¹ Interestingly enough, Sir Robinson illuminates the out-of-the-ordinary aspect of creativity, while J. Grotowski stresses the importance of being aligned with the ordinary, with the simple, honest life, in order to create “total” art. One is looking at the emergence of creativity in daily life, the other on stage. One of the preconceptions regarding this concept is that only artists can be creative. The concept of creativity is also mistakenly often linked to a fatalist view on talent: you either have it or you don’t; some are born with it, some are not and the majority of those who are, choose an artistic career. To my opinion, that is not true. I believe we are all born with a great potential for being creative, however, due to an unfavourable bio-psycho-social context, we can lose this ability. But what ability is it really? What can one do when we say that one is being creative? D.W. Winnicott, one of the world’s most appreciated psychoanalysts, states in his book “Playing and Reality”: “By playing and only by playing is the child or the adult capable of being creative and use his entire personality and it is only through creativity that a person can reveal his true self.”³² The ability to play, in his opinion, is the main priority in a therapeutical process. If the patient is not able to play, the alliance patient-therapist

²⁸ K. Robinson, *Out of our minds. The power of being creative*. Publica, București, 2011, p. 326

²⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 17

³⁰ *Ibidem.*

³¹ E. Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre*. Routledge, London, 2002, p. 336

³² D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*. Routledge, New York, 2005, p. 64

can't develop in a healthy, nurturing way. And without a strong alliance, an authentic healing process is impossible. The key word here is *relationship*. As Jiddu Krishnamurti, one of the greatest thinkers and philosophers of all times, states: "Only in relationship can you know yourself, not in abstraction and certainly not in isolation."³³ Therefore, the ability to play is greatly connected to the ability to form relationships. Gabriel Liiceanu, a valued Romanian thinker, considers that it is this precise capacity to engage in a relationship that marks the difference between *playing* and *gaming*. Gaming is an individualist, unstructured, purposeless activity, while playing is the ability to include the other in your universe and accept the changes that he will bring to the entropy of your system. "Gaming is an elementary scenario in which the child, by taking on a role, doesn't reach the point in which he transgresses it by interiorising the potential reactions of the others involved. Gaming is a succession of untwined roles that never managed to become organized in a system. Gaming announces the Self, but playing helps it mature. It is not enough to assume the role of the person who throws the ball, you have to carry within yourself the role of the catcher, also."³⁴

The ability to create and exist in relationships, according to the object relations theory, is a result of the experience of early childhood. The first object that the child usually interacts with is the mother's breast. In the beginning of his life, the child can't grasp the idea that an object can be both good and bad at the same time. Therefore, when the baby is fed, taken care of and thus happy, the breast is good. When the child feels hunger, pain, frustration, he perceives the breast as being bad. He does not realise that the good breast and the bad breast are one and the same. By using a defence mechanism called "cleavage", the child keeps the good breast

³³ <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/529733>, accesat la data de 14.11.2020

³⁴ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Preliminarii la o înțelegere a demnității jocului*, Humanitas, București, 2012, p. 12

separated from the bad breast. In his universe there is a constant war between the forces of Life (Eros) and the forces of Death (Thanatos). Also, early childhood is marked by narcissism. The child believes that he is the centre of the universe and that everything is an extension of himself, including his mother. Therefore, both the loving energy and the aggressive energy that he projects onto his mother are then introjected. What is outside is now inside. The war between the forces of good and evil becomes internalised. The measure of things is very important in this situation. In order for the child to have a strong cohesive Self and to be able to later have good relations with the objects (aka persons) in his life, the forces of Life have to outweigh those of Death. The way this happens is with the help of the “good enough mother” as D.H. Winnicott states. He claims that a mother doesn’t have to be perfect, but just good enough. What does a good-enough mother do? One of the most important things she does is to survive the attacks of the aggressive energy coming from the baby, to give the baby what is well known as “unconditional love”. As time passes and the neuronal system of the baby develops, the cleavage is less and less needed. The infant slowly understands that the good mother and the bad mother are one. However, this causes great distress. The process of moving from illusion to disillusion is a natural one. In the beginning the mother is an almighty goddess. Gradually, by providing optimal levels of frustration to her baby, he realises that she is not omnipotent, that he is not omnipotent and that he and she are not one but two separate beings, two separate universes. The process can be successful only as long as there was illusion in the beginning, as long as the mother was idealised. This means that the child’s needs were promptly met. In the beginning of one’s life, the reactions that are needed to calm a certain distress in the baby have to be as fast as possible. Then, gradually, from around 6 months old, the reactions can take longer. This is important for the future adult to have a good tolerance to frustration and learn to self-regulate his emotions.

The place where playing emerges is between the first universe and the second universe, between the moment of symbiosis and that of separateness. The quality of this play space is given by the trust that is built in the mother-baby relationship. *Trust* is a key concept for the ability to play, to be creative. Where there is no trust, no feeling of safety, of sureness about the existence of unconditional love in the relationship, there is no relaxation and without relaxation one can't act spontaneous nor particularly creative. The trust developed in the first object relation will set the tone for all the future relationships of the adult, as well as for his capacity to play. This first playing space that happens between the two universes also holds the first symbol, the transitional object. When the baby manages to have visual mental representations of his mother in her absence, he uses an object to help with the anxiety of the absence. This object can be a piece of soft cloth, a toy, a pillow, anything that is soothing and pleasant for the child. This object is a symbol of the good mother, the one that is nourishing and soothing. It belongs neither to the first universe, nor to the second, that is why it is called transitional. It is like the theatre convention. It's both real and unreal, both alive and not alive, somewhere in no man's land, marking the transition from oneness to individuality. However, if the mother is absent for too long because she is sick or absent, the symbol, by losing its symbolised object, also loses its meaning and oftentimes the child will just throw it away. Unless this happens, it is a very dear object, an indispensable partner for the child at a certain time in his life.

Therefore, creativity is something that we are all born with but, if anything goes wrong with the bio-psycho-social environment in the first period of one's life, it can be highly damaged. One good way to repair it is by recreating the primary object relation with a therapist. The process is called transfer and has a counter effect, the counter transfer. The patient unconsciously projects onto the therapist the person that he had a faulty relationship with as a baby.

Through counter transfer, the therapist identifies with this role, starts acting it out but changes the course of events. The new play is not simply a rerun of the old one but an improved, ideal version. The patient heals his attachment wound when given another chance at programming object relation dynamic and thus recovers his capacity to play, to be creative. He learns to trust and relax. I think this can be extremely important for the civil creativity as well as for the artistic one. On stage, the actor is supposed to engage in a relationship with his partner, to connect to the other. "Creating relationship is the heart of acting. It is basic. It is essential."³⁵ Sometimes it can be a very insidious process if the actor's own ability as an individual to bond in relations is altered. Healing his attachment wounds and enhancing his creativity could lead to a real progress in his career as an actor.

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³⁵ Michael Shurtleff, <https://www.quotesandthoughts.com/acting-quotes/>, accessed on 14.11.2020

Iolanda Covaci is an actress and a psychotherapist. She has been employed at the Jewish State Theatre since her graduation year in 2008 and also performed in different theatres in Romania and abroad. She is also a psychotherapist since 2016, since she specialized in psychodrama. She taught psychodrama for children in the art-therapy master degree at U.N.A.T.C. in 2019-2020. Her doctoral research is a mix of theatre arts and psychology, following the effects of psychodrama on a group of orphan children. Also, she suggests a program to help the caregivers of abandoned children. E-mail: iolandacovaci@gmail.com.