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Creative Will in Art Creation and Psychotherapy according to Otto Ranks Concepts ¹

Introduction: Whenever we deal with fundamental questions about the human urge to create and especially the function of the creative will for all human forms of experience and actions, there is no richer resource than the writings of Otto Rank.

For several reasons Ranks work might not be known by some of you. Although he belonged to the core group around Sigmund Freud for more than 20 years, and besides Freud the most inspiring and universal author from this exclusive circle, he was expelled and the intellectual work was from then on neglected by the psychoanalytical Community because his own and post Freudian, independent writings deviated from basic "dogmas" of the psychoanalytical truth of that time. I will here just to drop some ideas of his psychological concepts: Rank put the individual, will and responsibility (based not on Schopenhauers by

¹ Otto Rank, Freud's closest collaborator for 20 years, member of the close circle around Freud, then "dissident" after the publication of *Trauma of Birth*, due to incompatibility of his groundbreaking concepts, which he published mainly after his separation from Freud from 1925 until his death in 1939:

-He distanced himself from an interpretative understanding of the role of the therapist as an expert and contrasted this with a subject-subject dialogical relationship of psychotherapy oriented towards the subjective world of the client.

-He considered the quality of the therapeutic relationship to be the essential factor in healing.

-His work is the spiritual, theoretical ground for the humanistic Psychology (C. Roger, Gestalttherapy, ect)

-He emphasized the therapeutic significance of the immediate experience in the "here and now" and how this is influenced by the overall social processes in the course of individual development.

-He emphasized the importance of creativity, the promotion of individual will and the authenticity of the therapist for a therapeutically successful process.

-He drew the essential polarity of human existence between birth and death, of detachment separation attachment and separation, partialization and totalization of experience, creation and life; between truth and reality and many more in everyday life and as themes for orientation in the therapeutic process.

-He described the mother-child relationship before, during and especially after birth as being of primary importance for psychological development.

-He emphasized the importance of myths and spiritual dimensions for mental and spiritual development.

It is interesting that M. Buber's name is not mentioned once in "Gestalt Therapy" (1951), while O. Rank's is mentioned seven times. Nevertheless, Laura Perls in particular has expressed in interviews that, in addition to Tillich, M. Buber in particular "had a great influence on me" (in N. Amendt-Lyon.2017). His influence on the development of Gestalt therapy remains unexplored. The parallelism between the two concepts is striking. In view of Rank's intellectual conceptual closeness, depth, versatility and brilliance, and for Perls et.al 19951 "beyond praise", the little reference made by a large part of the Gestalt therapy authorship is completely incomprehensible to me.

Beyond the psychological realm of Psychology his publication on Art and art creation like *Der Künstler*, (the Artist 1907, *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden* (1909), *Die Lohengrin-Sage* (1911) *Der Doppelgänger* (1914), *die Don- Jouna- Gestalt* (1922) *Kunst und Künstler* (Art and Artist,1932, in German. 2000) are testimonies of his profound knowledge in the psychological and cultural grounds Art creation as well the dynamic and development of the artist's personality beyond Freuds theory of sublimation.

Nietzsches and Kants Philosophy) in the center of Psychology Theory and therapeutic practice, as well as the mother/child relation as the central early “object relationship for human development. He brought the importance of emotions, experiencing in the Here and Now, spontaneity as well as the personality of the therapist and not so much his technic as well as the human quality of the therapeutic relationship as the most important healing element in Psychotherapy. His theoretical and therapeutical Concepts, which he wrote after he separated from Freud and went to America was fundamental and most inspiring for later psychological and therapeutical concept, like Gestalttherapy, Client Centered Therapy of Carl Roger, Short Therapy, Object Relations Concept within neoanalytical Concept.

More unnoticed than any one of Rank’s psychological writings is his literary legacy to art, artistic creation, and the artistic personality. Precisely these fundamental works on the creative acts of human beings can contribute in essential ways to both better understanding and use of creative as well as psychologically blocked processes in psychotherapy and art-creation.

Especially in his post-Freudian writings (from 1925 on), Rank posed central questions as regards the human creative urge, artistic creation, and development of the artistic personality, ethics, and aesthetics (Rank, 1968), such as: *Where* does the human “urge to create” originate? *What* is needed to develop it? In which different ways and epochs is this creative urge expressed? What is its function for the individual and for society? How does it contribute to an explanation of the development and the functioning of the human personality? What is it that urges a person to create an artistic work rather than to simply enjoy life? What spurs one person to perform superhuman feats in order to become famous and possibly even eternal, while another, in seclusion, seeks wisdom, individual happiness, and even eternal bliss? For Rank, the answers to these questions are not only important for a deeper understanding of the creative process of the artist, but also for human psychology in general.

Creative motives, Rank argued, particularly in his discussions with Freud, do not arise from innate, sublimated drives, and they are not satisfyingly explained by

socialization, since much of what is human and creative occurs either without or against natural instincts and against all actual past experiences. Only the creative interacting with the world around, with all its realities, illusions, and ideologies, is able to explain the specific inner dynamism through which the creative work is born. Thus, unlike Freud, though similar to Perls et al. (1951), Rank emphasized the strength of the creative will, which is more or less at work within each individual in the task and process of assimilating past and present experience.

The reason Rank scrutinized the creative personality and the process of creation is because he perceived particularly in creative individuals, and especially artists, an example of an independent personality, independent from others – the collective, as he calls it – that is both ready to accept support socially from the collective and (through the created work or opus) to return something to it. This particular psychological dynamic of the creative individual – “to be with and in the world” – indicates Rank’s view about how to help people who breakdown due to the inherent human task of finding a satisfying individual, socially-oriented, *and* organized way of life (for instance, neurotics and sociopaths).

Based on the assumption of this human relatedness, Rank takes psychotherapy theory beyond Freud’s deterministic view of human nature and returns the focus on a person’s most important attribute: namely, the capacity to make individual choices, especially in relation to the outside world:

To live fully, even to survive, man must perform first of all an act of will, which includes even an act of surrendering. At first by a volitional affirmation of the obligatory, i.e., he must “say yes” to life. This act of the individual will, saying yes to the obligatory, then becomes a crucial creative aspect of adjustment. Secondly, according to his own capacities and the specificity of each situation, man must effect change. He does this by bringing forth the new. This is the adaptive aspect of individual creation (Menaker, 1972, p. 12).

Rank’s philosophical and theoretical paradigm, similar to that of Perls et al. (1951) is guided by thinking about polarities and processes. Rank, however, groups all of these polarities entirely around the single creative life impulse which, in its conscious form, he

calls the creative will. All who deal with esthetic, ethic, creative and therapeutic issues could greatly benefit from Rank's ideas on how individuals acquire the skill of ethical and aesthetic acts, which neither originates solely from outside nor from the super-ego.

Rank's Concept of Creative Will, Consciousness, the Creative Personality, and Will Therapy

Rank postulated the creative will as "a psychological factor of the first order" (Rank, 1929). He called his novel idea, in the years following his separation from Freud, the "neo-Copernican return to the conscious will" (ibid., p. 6): namely, the emphasis on the particular, free, and individual will as a fundamental biological disposition in each person, notwithstanding any specific stamp and childhood experience. For Rank, the individual creative will is the primary shaping or transforming force of the ego, of the individuality; it is also the decisive prerequisite for the individual's capacity to be responsible. According to Rank's dynamic and constructive volition psychology, the denial of the creative individual will forms the basis of all neuroses. Although Rank still considers valid the notion that the human ego is shaped by earlier identifications, especially in respect to the mother, he also believes that it can be formed above all by its own will. By "will," Rank means the strength of this autonomous original force, which represents the individual (the ego). And this will becomes creative insofar as it shapes itself – through the ego, which perceives as well as becomes aware of itself consciously – into a self-affirmed super-ego, which then leads to the self-created formation of ideals, which in the last instance originally derives from the id and not from the outside (ibid., p. 7). In contrast to Freud's conception of the world, Rank sees human beings as more than determined; indeed, there is an original cause within the individual! He calls it "the dynamic causality of the individual will," which influences the development of an individual personality as well as the development of the immediate culture or civilization (ibid., p. 53).

In his cultural-theoretical work originally published 1930 as *Seelenglaube und Psychologie (Psychology and the Soul, 1998)*, Rank demonstrates, in a distinct way,

how our entire cultural history should be explained as the history of the development and the repression of the creative will. And his response to one of the most central anthropological, theological, and psychological questions – “Where does ‘the negative’ in the world come from?” – is found in his thorough cultural history analysis of the soul: it is nothing else but the human counter- and self-will, which deny mortality.

Rank’s thesis that the id no longer reigns primary is of special interest to Gestalt therapy. Indeed, as mentioned above, Rank’s new psychological construct focuses on the equally independent and at times even tyrannical self-conscious and self-willed ego. In addition, the creative type and its more or less inhibited cousin, the neurotic, demonstrate that the ego is not simply a battlefield of polymorphously perverse drives (Rank, 1968), but should rather be viewed as a regulating and forming, dynamic original force. Rank understands “will” neither in the way of experimental volition psychology, as an intra-psychological, subjective entity, nor a momentary, directing force; for him it is rather a progressive, differentiated, and dynamic process, formed by inner and outer intentions and counterforces (cf. the expositions on the ego-function by Perls et al., 1951). For Rank, the psyche belongs above all to the present. The predominantly and individually co-determined acts of the will, in the context of the specific situation of their determination of meanings and goals, are continuously created anew (Rank, 1998).

It is only in the affirmation of the individual will that there exists a unique human phenomenon: direct creative and healing spontaneity. This flexible psychological functioning of the actual individual volition is thereby a decisively human quality, which defines humans as creators of themselves and their relationship to the outside world. Strengthening this self-definition, above all in those suffering from psychopathologies, is the aim of Rank’s will therapy.

In *Truth and Reality* (1936b) and in his three volumes entitled *Technik der Psychoanalyse I – III* (1926 – 31) (volumes two and three translated into English as *Will Therapy*, 1936a), Rank denotes “will” as: ego-function, as an energy or forming

psychological force, which allows the individual to select, reject, and make conscious decisions: that is, ultimately, to be creative.

In his posthumous collection of essays, *Beyond Psychology*, written and published in English, Rank arrives at his most comprehensive definition of will:

[By will] I mean rather an autonomous organizing force in the individual which does not represent any particular biological impulse or social drive, but constitutes the creative expression of the total personality and distinguishes one individual from another. This individual will, as the united and balancing force between impulses and inhibition, is the decisive psychological factor in human behavior. Its duofold functioning, as an impulsive and likewise inhibiting force, accounts for the paradox that the will can manifest itself creatively or destructively, depending on the individual's attitude towards himself and life in general (1941, p. 50).

In a very condense and summarized form, Rank (1929) presented the development of the drive, will, consciousness and, what is so interesting in this context, formation of values (psychological categories), as follows:

At first, Rank perceived the self as dominated by instincts. Then the ego gradually emerges – initially, as an accompanying interpreter of that which is and what by virtue of its instincts must be. The first conflict arises when the previously and merely confirming “yes, I will what I must” becomes a “it should not be” or “it is not”: in other words, the possibility of a denial of necessity determined by nature supervenes. The consequences of this is a change of the consciousness and of the will. The consciousness becomes an autonomous force, capable not only of supporting but also denying and inhibiting the instinctual will. And thus the will, up to now, with only an executing function, becomes creative for the first time: that is, initially creative *negatively* in the form of a denial, in the sense of “not to want something that is determined by nature.” In short, Rank stresses the far-reaching consequences of the negative origins of the will.

Consciousness, on the other hand, is the midwife of the freely creative will. Rank begins with the general assumption that the consciousness was originally only a sense organ of awareness of outer qualities; then followed the capacity of

awareness as well of inner sensitivities, out of which developed the psychological ability to differentiate between inner and outer, to delimit from one another, and also in part to control. Eventually, consciousness achieved the capacity of self-reflective realization and freed itself thereby not only from the control of surrounding forces of nature, but also from its own id. It influenced above all increasingly positive as well as super-ego-development and the concrete shaping of the outer world.

How, according to Rank, do ethical values and aesthetic standards – that is, the *what* of the concrete volition – develop, if actually (and thereby contrary to psychoanalytical conceptions) they are not thought to be exclusively shaped from the outside and through socialization (super-ego)? Consciousness itself – thus Rank further develops his theory based on polarities – in its development, is influenced in turn by the will. Therefore, both of these phenomena (consciousness and will) can be understood only in their interplay and in their continuous changeability. With regard to the will, consciousness orients itself both inwardly and outwardly. Outwardly oriented, it acquires the quality of the conscious expression of the drive or of the intentional act. Inwardly oriented, it acquires the quality of the conscious perception of the drives, that is, the quality of feeling, which Rank describes as an index for the concrete *what* of the volition (1929).

This interplay takes place continually and impulsively. This is why every interpretation of this event, carried over from the outside, is a disturbing attempt to interrupt this spontaneous and reciprocal process of interpretation of the will and the consciousness. Furthermore, this type of external interpretation arises particularly from a reluctance to follow the flow of life and from a longing for a firm footing. No doubt, Gestalt therapy would agree with Rank on this critical point. It is not possible to arrive at insights – and even less possible to arrive at therapeutic effects – through external interpretation, but only as an immediate and conscious self-experience of this mutual process of will and consciousness. Rank correctly

identifies his dynamic will therapy, in reference also to Einstein, as “the relativity theory of psychotherapy” (Rank, 1968).

With this, however, the focus of Rank’s theoretical discourse in the present context has not yet been placed on the highly important development of the *what* and the *how*: that is, of the ethical and aesthetic aspects of the volition and action. Necessary for that development are the mental structures, autonomously created out of one’s own ideals. Rank calls these structures psychological categories. Not only the will, but also consciousness, as an instance of realization, fundamentally goes in two directions; namely, turned inwardly, it searches for truth – or in Rank’s words, “inner reality,” as opposed to the outside truth of the senses, i.e., so-called reality.

Comparable to the twofold functioning of the consciousness on the volition (corresponding to the act of will and the awareness of feeling), the influence of the consciousness on the formation of ideals also has a double effect, namely:

- active, as creative expression in form of the ego-ideal; and
- passive, in the creation of specific ethical and aesthetic norms for one’s own action and creation: without the concrete acquiescence of the norms, as a rule, no deed is permitted.

It is therefore the inner-oriented force of consciousness which, through these self-made ethical and aesthetic norms, qualifies the content of the originally purely instinctual according to a single possible form, in which the individual realizes the content of his or her respective drive tendencies. In short, the ego itself does the qualifying, through its own force of consciousness which, in the sphere of volition, raises drives to specific interests. Their accomplishment depends, however, once again, on the created mental forms out of the own formation of ideals (cf. Rank, 1929, p. 43). Through the influence of this norm-giving force of consciousness, the will succeeds – not only impulsively but also inhibitingly, which means, above all, that it has a regulating significance. It has a constructive effect not only in the mastering of reality, but also in the control of the life drive as such. In this way, the

conscious will is an individual's decisively regulating and unifying force. Although many features of the concept of self from the viewpoint of Gestalt therapy remain unclear, especially the ego-aspect of the conscious contact-making, Rank's exposition provides some lucidity insofar as he describes extensively the interaction and the dynamic transformations from drive, will, and consciousness to the setting up of values and action in a concrete field. These ideas, through their philosophical and anthropological methods, approach those of Gestalt therapy. That clinical psychotherapy concerns the loss of a capacity of a flexible and autonomous interplay among consciousness, will, and autonomous determination of values, makes a detailed presentation about and understanding of this interplay very relevant for therapeutic success.

Creative Will and Guilt

In this brief section I will limit myself to the relevant question – as regards individual life and artistic creation – of guilt and the feeling of guilt as an example of the above-mentioned integrative theoretical and clinical relevance for Gestalt therapists.

Rank considers will and guilt complementary sides of the same phenomenon. This is because as soon as the above-described mechanism by the conscious ego to the ethical volition begins, feelings of guilt relentlessly follow. The psychological mechanism of the individually conscious volition produces, as it were, as frictional heat, exactly this feeling of guilt, which in part, however, veiledly manifests itself as a rationalization of the motive, as a distortion of the truth, and it is expressed in the form of doubts regarding the justification of the own volition.

For Rank, guilt, guilty consciousness, and guilt feeling are merely the consequences of the volition arising within the individual him- or herself. The function of guilt feeling and guilty consciousness is therefore to establish a balance between a giving and taking, the individual and the collective. It functions like a regulating thermostat with individual possibilities of adjustment. Rank emphasizes that it is not only possible that one owes something to others or to the collective, but also to oneself,

as a result of not having done justice to oneself. To describe the experienced guilt directed vis-à-vis the collective, Rank uses the term “guilty consciousness” (*Schuldbewusstsein*), whereas to describe the experienced guilt directed vis-à-vis oneself he uses the term “guilt feeling” (*Schuldgefühl*).

As to the origin of how the guilty consciousness arises, Rank claims that it derives from the dynamic relationship between the will and the consciousness: “In the conscious awareness of volitional phenomena, the aspect of insight is emphasized, whereas in the present content of volition, it is the aspect of experience that is emphasized” (1929, p. 37). In other words, I become aware, first, *that* I want something, and then I become aware of *what* I want.

Yet, Rank continued,

only when a moral value in the form of “bad,” which the individual receives from outside, from the particular content of the volition, entirely transfers onto the will as such, does an inner ethical conflict in the individual arise out of an outer conflict of will which, ultimately, instead of leading to a simple rejection to the particular act of the volition and content, leads to a denial of one’s own will altogether and, as a symptomatic lasting consequence, to guilt feelings (*ibid.*).

This sweeping denial becomes determined from outside as well as from the direction of the individual’s internal volition, because the will, in countering the predominance of the consciousness – which internally draws up for the individual ethical norms of right and wrong (not of good and evil) – reacts at times also by strongly and continuously condemning the consciousness, when the norms are felt to inhibit its volitious actions.

These facts constitute what Rank describes as the decisive dynamics in the formation of the guilty consciousness. The consciousness, which inhibits the will through its ethical norms, is felt by the will to be bad – to the same extent that the individual self-will is felt to be bad by the consciousness. This mutual inhibition of will and consciousness is what, according to Rank, can manifest itself as guilty consciousness. And this dynamic still finds comprehensive expression in our present cultural history. For Rank, it is essential to permit the individual not only volition, but also to lead him or her to *autonomous* volition in order for the unavoidable guilt

feeling, which accompanies one's volition, to be at least be justified constructively, namely, through the creative accomplishment itself, which often follows the willed and self-affirmed action and which, after all, often has a social dimension. In Rank's will therapy, as well as in his expositions on artistic creation, special emphasis is placed on an acceptance of the guilty consciousness that inevitably goes hand in hand with the conscious volition.

Creative Will and Neurosis

It is but a small step from these elaborations on the connection among consciousness, will, and guilt to a description of the features of a neurotic person, whom Rank sees as someone in whom an equally strong will is manifested, such as an artist or a creative person in action. However, in neurotic persons, this will in its original negative character is expressed as counter-will and fatally inward-oriented; at the same time, it is particularly felt, through conscious self-realization, as guilty consciousness: the "suffering person is not capable of acting creatively because his or her self-consciousness inhibits the will, which manifests itself in him or her as a guilt feeling vis-à-vis the action as such" (Rank, 2000, p. 40).

What Rank is presenting here is the neurotic experience and behavior, not as a form of psychopathology, but as a developmental phase of the individuality, in which the conscious, artistic self-will is still being denied (ibid., p. 66). Gestalt therapy later proposes the same idea.

A neurotic's cure is individually and socially possible only in one and the same way: namely, by permitting the wanting of something and being the one who wants to be him- or herself and is so. This person should not in any way feel guilty or inferior, but rather helped to become a creative and transformed person of action.

The person suffering from so-called psychopathologies represent in Rank's diagnostic conception, in simple terms, only the fundamental variations of today's type of person who, depending on which excessive predominance, is distinguished among one of four psycho-physical basic elements: the drive, the will, the

consciousness, and the angst (anxiety), whereby the dynamic relationship among these factors determines the respective psychological fundamental philosophy in a particular situation.

For Rank, a neurotic is very similar to an artist. Indeed, he calls the neurotic *artiste manqué*, a somewhat failed, inhibited personality, who does not take full responsibility for his or her individuality. Neurotics basically suffer because they cannot accept themselves, their own individualities, and their personalities. On the one hand, they are too critical of themselves and, on the other hand, they idealize themselves too much. They make claims of perfection, the failure of which leads to increased self-criticism. According to Rank, neurotics have such a bad and fixated attitude toward the past because they want, later, to re-create rather than accept it.

Artists are thus in a certain sense analogous counterparts to neurotics. It is not that artists fail to criticize themselves. But, in the acceptance of their personalities, they demonstrate a certain ability, which neurotics strive for in vain, and they also extend their already arrived-at limitations. In other words, the prerequisite of the creative personality is not the self's acceptance alone, but almost its glorification as such.

The emancipative and therapeutical task consists in accepting one's own self with all the individual aspects of the ego and of the autonomy of will and feeling. The goal of constructive volition therapy, for Rank – and later for Gestalt therapy – is consistent: not in overcoming resistance, which he observed as the phenomenon of will as well in its negative form, but in transforming the negative expression of will (counter-will, as an inhibition of drives and tendencies that are inwardly oriented) to one of self-regulated creative expression of personality.

The Artist's Creative Urge

Artists and artistic creation cannot, according to Rank, be explained psychologically on an exclusively individual level (2000, p.19): "The ideology of immortality is not

only a result but also one of the most important basic prerequisites for artistic creation” (ibid., p. xxvi).

Through his anthropological investigations, Rank concluded that in all civilizations, the safeguarding of eternal life, as a rule, has been a much more important concern than that of happiness and prosperity in real life. This is shown, for example, today in our civilization through the enormous, if not cultish, importance given to life insurance, beauty, and extreme health care.

The ordinary citizen, according to Rank, behaves rather contentedly to safeguarding immortality by conforming to what is given and by identifying with collective forms, such as religion, belief in the government, family, and the next generation. The self-confident, strongly-willed and ably dissociative artist-personality strives nevertheless to find an individual solution to this fundamental problematic. An essential source of the individual creative urge lies in the impulse toward a personally individual – in any case not a collective – self-perpetuation (Rank, 1968). Religion is formed through the collectively oriented belief in immortality. Art comes from the individual self-awareness of one’s own personality, from which follows a striving toward the individual path of safe-guarding immortality (ibid., p. 16). Naturally, both paths are not fundamentally divided. The collective needs an artist within it to make the abstract soul concrete and real through poetry, painting, and music. And the individual artist, who uses the collective – for example, cultural speech – for his individuality (for instance, to express himself in a poem), needs the cultural tradition and the confirmation of his fellow citizen or next generation in order to become immortal through their praise.

Creating art, like the human creative urge, according to Rank, is explained only by the constructive surmounting of the fundamental dualism between the collective and the individual (ibid., p. 2). The meaning and origin of all individuals and collective ideologies are also traced back to a common spiritual root, which Rank discovered in the belief in immortality:

The essence of the artistic type lies therefore in this, that he can pass through his individual struggle, the conflict between individual and genus, between personal and collective immortality, in an *ideological* form, and that the peculiar quality of this conflict compels him, or enables him to use an artistic ideology for the purpose (1968, p. 369).

It is this capacity of symbolization, of forging an artistic ideology, that the neurotic person is not yet in a position to achieve the way the artist is.

Essential yet different particularities of the artist personality include, according to Rank, their capacity of (symbolic) representation of total experiences, their courage and ability to call themselves “artists,” and especially the attitude to art itself.

The specialness of the artist is being able both to differentiate the intuitive playing child from the creative expert in the art of living and, along with aptitude, individual experience, and the id’s spontaneous intuition, to use the culture and the artistic style of his or her period to create, in contrast, something individually new: “The artist, as it were, takes not only his canvas, his colours, or his model in order to paint, but also the art that is given him formally, technically, and ideologically, within his own culture” (ibid., p. 7). Artists use what is collectively inherited to dissociate themselves individually, and they need the collective to allow them, if necessary, to confirm their new individual creations:

The artist, as a definite creative individual, uses the art-form that he finds at hand in order to express something personal; this personal must therefore be somehow connected with the prevailing artistic cultural ideology, since otherwise he could not make use of them; but it must also differ, since otherwise he would not need to use them in order to produce something of his own (ibid., pp. 6-7).

The special feature about Rank’s expositions on the creative personality is that this creation starts *with* the individual as well as *in* the individual, him- or herself: in other words, with the self-creation of the personality to the creative person or artist, whom Rank described with the self-designation of artist. Thus, the first creation of the productive individual is the self-designation to an artistic personality, transcending the way one used to understand oneself, and basically also remains that artist’s only major creation, because all the others that follow represent in part

an objectivized expression to the outside world of this original creation of the own self and, in part, a justification of the glorifying self-designation (2000, p. 70).

The self-shaping and self-formation into the artist, however, is also closely connected with the life and experience of the artist. Living and creating are reciprocal, because the human creative urge results in experience and in producing: namely, in quite specific ways for artists. Rank wrote that the artist had the tendency to flee from experience, that is, from the real, immediate life, which is also existentially threatened by death, while life is impressed by being shaped. In creation, the artist attempts to preserve or immortalize his or her transitory life. For this reason, creation and the process of life experience (everyday life) become opposites, and not only in the life of artists:

The artistic urge of the artist to create, which emerges out of a tendency to immortalize him- or herself, may become so powerful that the artist defends him- or herself against the transitory experience. The artist, with all his or her experience, flees from real life, which signifies predominantly transitoriness, whereas the experience shaped by the artist is calming and impressive as creation. As Rank thus dialectically summarizes:

In creation the artist tries to immortalize his mortal life. He desires to transform death into life, as it were, though actually he transforms life into death. For not only does the created work not go on living; it is, in a sense, dead; both as regards the material, which renders it almost inorganic, and also spiritually and psychologically, in that it no longer has any significance for the creator, once he has produced it (...) [and] therefore again takes refuge in life, and again forms experience (1968, p. 39).

Conclusion

Rank's investigations concerning the creative act and artistic personality as well as his conclusions about the emergence and healing of psychological suffering, connect many fields of knowledge and are much too complex to outline in one brief chapter. I recommend the reader pick up Rank's writings directly and, as a way of

introduction, not to forego reading Lieberman's (1985) dense and engagingly written Rank biography.

Rank's overflowing plea for creative, free, willful, and distinctive aspects of human beings has, I hope, become clear. In conclusion, therefore, let me add a few limited thoughts of Rank's on the creative acts of human beings.

Rank not only exposed the disseminated urge – and not only among Gestalt therapists – toward the excessive creative act and well-meaning help as a reaction formation of an unresolved Oedipus complex, which Rank naturally did not interpret sexually, but as ego-achievement in the sense of a reaction to the parents' restrictions against the child's own volition. Rank calls this the "Prometheus complex" in reference to the well-known Greek mythical figure, who on his own authority, i.e., against the Gods' will, wanted to help people and make them happy (Rank, 1928). The basic position of therapists, Rank indicates, neither as a passive mirror to the development of the repressed, nor as active in the sense of a creative realization of the personality of therapists, but rather in the "middle mode" of the participating readiness (cf. Perls et al., 1951) and as "midwives," who help by grasping or also separating, there where mother and child would like and need. For instance, in his important work co-authored with Sandor Ferenczi (*Entwicklungsziele der Psychoanalyse [The Development of Psychoanalysis]*, 1925), Rank warns not only against a mechanistic application of techniques, but also in particular against a self-image of the therapist that would be akin to a creative artist. Therapists do not heal through means and techniques: nor through simple or mere expressions of their creativity. They heal through their personality, which is professionally restrained and at the same time capable of spontaneous response. Above all, therapists in Rank's sense should allow themselves to be shaped by their patients and should let themselves be made into that which the patients want and need.

In the face of the abundance of knowledge, novelty and ever new products, on the one hand, and the threateningly exhaustive exploitation of natural resources on the other hand, which is caused by exaggerated productive human effects and

transformations, Rank poses the question whether we have not already some time ago reached the limits of our individual productive artist and culture ideology. As the artist Joseph Beuys formulated it, fifty years after Rank: “The mistake begins as soon as one buys a paintbrush and a canvas” (in: Oman, 1998). To create less, but to change internally through the self-creative transformation of the own personality is possibly the most important work of art of future human beings for our survival. Or, as Rank, at the end, in *Kunst und Künstler [Art and Artist]*, wrote: “A man with creative power who can give up artistic expression in favour of the formation of personality – since he can no longer use art as an expression of an already developed personality – will remould the self-creative type and will be able to put his creativity directly in the service of his own personality” (1968, p. 430). This programmatic proposition by a post-metaphysical, post-religious, and still wildly behaving cultural epoch, is not easy to digest. Yet Rank also promises some comfort, as he continues:

To reach this state of personal development will be for most a difficult task, because this would mean to overcome the fear of life. The fear of life and the wish to prevent danger and individual death has at the bottom of our psychic life led to the substitution of artistic production for life. (...) For the artistic individual has lived in art-creation instead of actual life. (...) [T]he creative type who can renounce this protection by art and can devote his whole creative force to life and the formation of life will be the first representative of the new human type, and in return for this renunciation will enjoy, in personality-creation and expression, a greater happiness (ibid., p. 431).

Thus, for therapists and artists much remains to be done: namely, to contribute in our society means and ways to reduce the fear of the full life experience – in Gestalt terms the full contact, when the self is diminishing (Perls et al., 1951, p. 404) – through the support of the creative volition, which permits one to mature in one’s own self-created, fully responsive personality. Translated from the German by Laurie R. Cohen

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