



Violence, Creativity, and the Unconscious of Nature

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Introduction

The argument of this essay is perhaps a strange one. I am persuaded that there is a deep inner connection between violence and creativity in the human process and that both are rooted in the unconscious of nature. First, a definition of terms is in order. By “violence” I mean the shattering of form that may or may not be redeemable. While violence permeates our Darwinian universe, my focus will be on what human beings do, both personally and collectively, to shatter legitimate form (or gestalts). This overthrow of gestalts is rooted in nature and has a deep evolutionary history. In our species, it has taken on an extra fold, as it were, and can easily enter the slippery slope toward genocide.

For most, creativity is the antipode to violence. Here, I am defining “creativity” as the deep struggle to transfigure what violence does into a new “gestalt of grace” (Tillich), especially in the realms of science, the arts, and in the structure of the personality (psyche). The artist especially has a dual task; namely, to generate, often through an immense struggle, complex and rich products that are of value to the community, and to remake her or his psyche into a more fully individuated being. I refer to this latter aspect as the “Selving process,” about which more will be said.

Harder to define is the “unconscious of nature.” Clearly, most can accept the existence of a personal unconscious, some of whom can also accept the notion of a collective (species wide) unconscious in Jung’s sense. For those of us who accept the reality of the human collective unconscious, it is still a huge leap toward the idea that *nature* has an unconscious dimension. But a key distinction can carry us forward toward an affirmation of this belief in the depth and abyss of nature. I refer to the ancient distinction (seen in Averroes, Aquinas, and later in Spinoza) between *natura naturans* (nature naturing) and *natura naturata* (nature natured). I define nature naturing as: “Nature perennially creating itself out of itself alone.” The focus is on the creating, not on a creator, while the temporal sense shifts from “infinity” to “perennially,” to denote that there is not an infinite time, but rather a cyclical process of self-renewal. A good analogue to my use of this notion is that of Schopenhauer’s central concept of the Will (*der Wille*). For Schopenhauer, the Will is but an endless blind churning that has no teleology and isn’t even conscious of itself as Will. It is truly opaque, as is nature naturing.

I define nature natured as: “The innumerable orders of the World.” These orders are innumerable because they simply can’t be counted, even by an alleged divine mind. The World’s orders have no contour, no inner verses outer boundary, and are endlessly complex. There is no super order or “organism of organisms” (Whitehead) that could serve as a container for all that prevails. Further, this complexity entails that there are no simples. Even an alleged “simple” would have to be located somewhere and thus have relational traits. I will



attempt to exhibit phenomenologically the multi-faceted relationships between nature naturing and nature natured.

Violence

It is my contention that violence is hard wired into our evolutionary heritage (Zoja) and that it is not simply a product of learned behavior. It is who we are as a species; namely, a predatory creature that turns on its own with waves of massive violence in which millions have died, and presumably will continue to do so. As noted, violence is the shattering of what I will call “legitimate” form, that is, gestalts that enrich the individual and the community. Obviously, this entails that some gestalts are destructive and what Kant would call “heteronomous.” These latter forms are shattering in themselves in that they already impose an alien norm onto the self and its communities that are struggling for autonomy. The individual belongs to many communities at once, but in different respects. Some of these communities are consciously affirmed and may have been solidified by a public oath, while many others are but dimly known at all, and there are even communities to which the individual belongs, but is totally unconscious of doing so until some crucial event opens their eyes. A prime example is that of white racism. Rarely will someone label themselves as a racist, thus signaling a pathology in the psyche of those who do, while for many of us, we are racists under the skin, as it were. Suddenly there may come an awakening that one was a racist all along, but with an unconscious denial of the fact, combined with the fact of white privilege providing many seen and unseen advantages. Clearly, this argument applies to sexism and other forms of the projection of Otherness.

But what triggers violence in the first place? In his brilliant book, *Paranoia: The Madness that Makes History*, Jungian analyst and historian Luigi Zoja, traces violence back to the ubiquitous presence of paranoia. How does his argument work? The first thing he notes is that paranoia often starts with a special “revelation” that is deeply tribal in its core. Revelations, so-called, are simply not subject to self-critique, especially insofar as they seem to have a divine origin. Revelations are “anti-psychological” in that they block any probing of the psyche by the psyche. As beyond critique they cannot be questioned by the community that becomes infected by one (and they often come in a self-reinforcing series). Wilhelm Reich refers to this process of infection as the “emotional plague” that ripples through the unconscious of a community at blinding speed. There may be no cure for it unless strong social psychological forces and analyses are brought into play. But this is rare given the power of a paranoid plague.

Freud’s ground breaking work should not be ignored. While I am much friendlier to Jung, and reject Freud’s patriarchal and paternalistic perspective, he did show the link between violence and in-born aggression, thus adding more heft to Zoja’s views. One of Freud’s key texts on this issue is *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). One can only adumbrate it in the briefest terms. The basic argument is well known; namely, that humans are distinct among the animals in having created civilization. Yet this ongoing creativity comes at a high price. The sublimation of the erotic drive makes art and other creative products possible, but the frustration caused by sublimation can be deepened by the need of the society for order, cleanliness, and control. We each become our own Führer principle through the super-ego that is what Hegel would call, “the spirit of negation.” At some point, this instinctual frustration boils over into aggression toward the Other.



Repressed instincts turn into aggression and guilt caused by the internal policing of the super-ego. A frustrated libido turns into neurotic symptoms. The civilized social grouping frustrates libido on a *grand* scale and diverts it into a sense of communal identity, which can lower unconscious anxiety. However, as noted, no homogenous and heteronomous community can be imposed via the Führer principle without at the same time demonizing the Other. In addition to close neighborly ties, the worm can quickly turn on these same neighbors. “. . . their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation [slavery], to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.” (pg. 111). This process includes violence and aggressiveness toward the Earth itself. In his recent lengthy article, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, David Wallace-Wells argues that the latest scientific evidence on global warming points to very rapid global warming and gives our species about 150 years to live. In this sense, Freud had it right, that our aggressive instincts have decimated not only whole human populations through genocide, but has also turned against the biosphere that makes life possible.

Linking this back to Zoja and others, Freud’s aggressive instinct could not flourish without the presence of personal and communal paranoia. The first thing paranoia does is to create a fear of the posited Other. This fear starts out as unconscious at first but can be made conscious via a powerful leader. In paranoia, the path toward violence increases, as the individual and the associated community want a removal of the anxiety that this uneasy fear produces. Thus, following Heidegger, we can make a distinction between fear and anxiety, with the latter being somewhat vague and less localized. If fear is of a specific and known object, it can be dealt with by personal and/ or communal means. But anxiety, especially in its purer forms, becomes an opening into nothingness. It is impossible to “deal” with nothingness as if it can be converted to solid being.

The self can react to the perceived threat of nothingness in one of two extreme ways, always on a living continuum. The first, and more common, extreme is to recoil in horror because self-identity is threatened. The self feels as if it will become fragmented and bereft of a stable personality. This impending sense of the loss of identity, personal and tribal, compels the self to react violently in the other direction and to take on a new identity that comes from the so-called revelation that the leader has and who conveys this revelation to the community. This relationship of the “born again” self is directly tied to the Führer principle. For only an extreme leader can have the will to impose a new mythology onto the tribe and bring that tribe into heteronomous obedience. Being “born again,” whether in a religious or secular context, is basically a pathological move to save identity at all costs, even that of killing the healthier self within.

At the other extreme, the self can welcome the liberating power of nothingness in its nihilating events, and more gently create a richer self-identity. But note, this remaking of the self is not due to a recoil motion that thrives on a dualism between: 1) the old and new self where the latter is a complete negation of the former, and 2) the special privileged self and its now demonized Other. The healthier self has no need to demonize the Other because it is not haunted by the Other within. For the paranoid and anxious self, it will constantly be reminded of its former *abjected* self and must become rigid to try and keep it at bay. Being “born again”



makes one more of a captive than before the violent conversion under the Führer principle. With the opposite momentum toward an embracing of nothingness and the Encompassing (Jaspers), the new self can become free from the abjection of itself and other communities. This form of the new self utterly rejects heteronomous impositions from the leader and engages in social critique and the quest for liberation from demonic abjections.

Violence comes into the picture quickly within the 'revelation' driven community. One of the surest signs that a community is prone to violence is with how they view their sacred text(s). Of course, there can be secular sacred texts such as the writings of Marx for a shrinking part of the earth's population. The height of this madness comes when a community takes its chosen text literally. While there can be no such thing as a literal reading of anything, except perhaps the phone book, the illusion of literalism has a strong hold on people who have succumbed to the "emotional plague." The claim to a "literal" reading of a religious text boils down to a rigid interpretation imposed on the tribe by the Führer principle. The leader, almost always a male, is ultimately concerned with power and self-glorification, but is usually not aware of the fact. He sees himself as being "righteous" and, though a sinner, above the fray.

Thus, the link between literalism and violence is becoming clearer. If one has a chosen religious or secular text and then affirms that it is infallible and can only have one true interpretation, it follows that all other such texts must be heretical or even demonic. A battle between and among these texts and their 'literal' adherents, is inevitable, very often of genocidal proportions. Violence is a child of paranoia and becomes unleashed rather easily, even in a democracy. The paranoid stance is one that believes that there is a hostile Other who is ultimately bent on one's destruction. There is what Zoja calls a "slippery slope," mentioned above, that makes the downward trajectory to ultimate violence quite possible. Paranoia begets paranoia about the selected Other, who then, in turn, develops paranoia about the first group. This is the slippery slope, as "evidence" is easily compiled about the machinations of the Other and alternative facts suddenly emerge to totally darken the impulse toward truth. Each side accuses the other of having generated made up or alternative facts. Truth is always the victim in the violence prone paranoid mind.

Creativity

True and great creativity cannot exist without some antecedent violence that shatters the gestalt that the artist, in this case, is trying to transform into a newer and more enriched gestalt. In addition, the cultural creative can deliberately crack open established genre forms to clear the way for the above mentioned "gestalt of grace." Thus, violence can be either inherited or created fresh. My argument is that high creativity cannot get off the ground without some violence to invoke it into being. There is thus a strange alchemical marriage between violence and creativity. However, there are certain limits. Extreme violence usually blocks the path to inquiry and it is not uncommon for cultural creatives to be the objects of direct violence, either through imprisonment, banishment, or execution. The loss to the community is great.

I distinguish between "sterile or inert communities," and "communities of interpretation." The former type of community is one in which violence and paranoia keep vigilance against the emergence of novel signs and symbols. The inert community moves on a rectilinear trajectory



that doesn't tolerate changes in direction or even novelty per se. No new interpretants (Peirce), that is, new signs, can enter public consciousness. A key example of this is the absurd notion that Darwinian evolutionary theory is somehow a *mere* theory and doesn't withstand the tests of biblical 'truth.' For the sane mind, the evidence for the truth of organic evolution is simply overwhelming, while for the pathological plague filled mind, genuine tested and replicated theories are reduced to the realm of fantasy. This pathology is one of the most dangerous in our era as it tends to further undermine scientific inquiry and the objective use of much abused reason.

Cultural creatives cannot function, except underground, in an inert community governed by the Führer principle. Their work is abjected and demonized, thus rendering creativity mute. The type of violence instantiated in the inert community is purely heteronomous and may not be redeemable. Anything radical or avant guard is quickly rendered under the category of the "degenerate," "secular," or "bourgeois." In its place, the tribe eulogizes propaganda and the purely banal. Thus, there is no real hope for cultural creativity in the inert communities.

However, the second form of community, the "community of interpreters," is a place where cultural creatives (geniuses) can flower and generate a rich tapestry of novel interpretants. Such a rarer community welcomes the admission of creative products that enhance personal and communal understanding of the Selving (individuation) process. In the Selving process, the self/psyche of the individual and that of its community, reach a higher level of intensity. New gestalts replace shattered forms with a radiance of more scope and power.

Selving involves the maximization of available potency within the psyche (personal and collective). It requires a high degree of self-consciousness of one's internal and external sign systems and their semantic meanings. Self-consciousness is not possible without meaning and formal hermeneutics can be a great aid in finding the regnant contours of meaning-fields, or horizons. Much effort has been devoted to the task of defining "consciousness" and whether other species have it in at least a minimalistic sense. The concern here is far more with that species within the genus consciousness we know as self-consciousness. Creativity is not possible without it and violence and paranoia can and do function without self-reflexivity. In fact, self-consciousness—the psyche probing itself—is a counter foil to the bland consciousness that goes with violence and paranoia. Simply put, the more self-consciousness there is, the less the likelihood there is of unconscious violence and the demonization of the Other.

What is a creative product and what is its relation to violence? Initially we can say that such an advanced product, be it in the arts or the sciences, wrestles with the ongoing disruption of form that ultimately comes from the abyss of nature. The cultural creative directly feels the shock waves of the breaking of form in the gestalts with which she or he is intimately concerned. These rude vibrations awaken a counter-response in the creative individual that aches for a generation of new form. Creatives almost always feel an uncontrollable longing for the sheer act of high level creation. When trained (or intuitive) talent is combined with genius, the impulse is to create a product within one or more genera or fields. Longing, fueled by an ache that won't go away, must generate a product to momentarily still that longing. Of course, there is no end to the process as one fulfilled longing leads to a further ache and longing and the will to create yet another product.



The product itself will be constituted by powerful gestalts of great scope and semiotic density. By “semiotic density” is meant that sign systems can fold in over themselves again and again. With each infolding meaning is enhanced and the product takes on more power of being. For the sensitive individual, and the relevant community of interpreters, meanings can ramify indefinitely, thereby one can affirm that any great created product can be probed, assimilated, and explored without end. This openness is the goad to query, which can be defined as “inventive wonder.” Cultural creatives thus serve to bring deep levels of query into the Selving process, enhancing its ability to see wonder in all its forms, whether natural or humanly created.

The next step in the creative Selving process is to transition from the generation of violence-assimilating products to the more demanding process of creating a new psyche. The cultural creative must now treat the psyche as a work of art itself. This holds as well for the scientist whose theories may also have personal implications for creating a more capacious and wonder-filled self. Both scientists and artists, not to forget all other types, must struggle to bring a new contour of gestalts into their lives. This also entails a greater awareness of the violence that permeates the human species and of its potential creative uses. For example, one could argue that the Big Bang in astrophysics is known nature’s single most violent act. Yet, all creativity emerged from that act as well. This violence continues on a cosmic scale, while creative transfigurations punctuate this larger state. Of course, the word “violence” here must be used with the proper semantic nuances to differentiate it from the “violence” of organic forms. But the main concern here is with how the Selving process makes the move from creative products to a self-created new psyche.

In my view, purpose is extremely rare in nature. It belongs to creatures with enough self-consciousness to *envision* a future state of new being. This emergent teleology can be highly creative for the persons well on the way to fulfilling the Selving process. However, for persons with only a minimal or even non-existent self-consciousness, purpose is imposed by the Führer principle in an inert community. Thus, it is not purpose or teleology at all, but a simple pre-determined trajectory not self-created by the community or individual. Purpose must be forged through creative will against the forces of inertia and bare continuity. When it does emerge, it brings about an ontological phase transition in the Selving process. This transition allows the future to become more open to the energies and forces of the past and present, while also refusing to rest on current or antecedent positions. The more open future, held open by the creative nihilating acts of nothingness, provides the room within which the psyche can find both its depth self and its even deeper link to the unconscious of nature.

The Unconscious of Nature

We will start with the human unconscious and its two dimensions. The first dimension is, of course, the personal unconscious. It is largely generated by perceptions and events acquired during the person’s life time. Much of it is accessible to memory, perhaps through hypnosis or psychoanalysis. Yet a large part of it will always remain unconscious in certain respects. It is a fool’s errand that assumes that the personal unconscious can be rendered into lucid consciousness. For Jung, and for me, the personal unconscious contains what he called “feeling toned complexes.” The language is precise here. A “complex” is a growing cluster of memories, intuitions, and analogous connections. It cannot be exhaustively rendered conscious



by any known means. It has depths that are beyond the reach of the attending ego. The complex is “feeling toned” because it has highly charged affects that become manifest whenever it is encountered, especially when least expected. For example, suppose one has a deep mother complex. It is constituted by actual memories from infancy and beyond of the biological mother or care giver. In later adult life, many events or perceptions in the world or in dream life, have a family resemblance to the originating traits of the growing complex. Thus, a given encounter with a woman could trigger the original complex and that woman would be subject to the, perhaps, negative projections that come from the core of the complex. This could taint all such relations. Further, via analogy, an object could come to symbolize the other traits of the mother complex, such as a knife or a patch of blood.

Feeling toned complexes can be partially awakened through technique, such as the word association test, but their shifting and growing content is never fully recoverable. What makes these personal unconscious complexes so powerful determinates of adult behavior and ideation? The answer lies in the collective unconscious that the person shares with the tribe and the species. The collective unconscious was never personal and never contains individual traits. It consists, not of complexes, but of archetypes that are part of phylogenetic inheritance. These archetypes were not acquired through the Lamarckian passing on of acquired traits, but are rooted in nature and its evolutionary momenta. Archetypes can evolve in the “infinite long run” (Peirce) and adapt to changing conditions, although at a glacial pace as is appropriate. What happens is that a personal unconscious complex becomes rooted in its corresponding archetype. Thus, a mother complex becomes embedded in the archetype of the Great Mother, who was the source for the oldest religion in species history and is still viable today.

The collective unconscious prevails before the split into what we mean by good and evil. This later distinction should not be imposed on the unconscious. What we have in the personal and collective unconscious is the above mentioned alchemical marriage between violence and creativity. It is up to the Selving process to move the violent traits of the unconscious (Jung’s “shadow”) toward and through the alembic of creativity. For Tillich, creativity always contains an element of the “demonic.” The German Romantic tradition, from Beethoven to Thomas Mann, eulogized this relationship in rather strong terms. I would argue that the shadow is the threat of inner and outer heteronomy.

We have already made a phenomenological move into the depths of the collective unconscious. But, one might ask: how can phenomenology, as the science of the evident and the given, ever render something non-evident and non-present into phenomenological description? The answer comes through a transformation from transcendental or hermeneutic phenomenology to what I call an “ordinal” phenomenology. I created this new version of phenomenology precisely to move beyond the present and the evident into the deeper surrounding territory of the unconscious. There is a striking sense in which complexes and archetypes are certainly co-present and leave clear traces of their makeup and activities. One can learn the subtle process of ‘seeing’ them out of the corner of one’s eye. The prefix “ordinal” refers to the notion that any complex or archetype has an ordinal location somewhere in human nature and in nature per se. Neither complexes or archetypes are non-located ‘simples,’ as there can be no such thing. Hence, they have deep and strong relational traits that vibrate through the psyche and nature. These traits can be rendered available to the carefully trained vision (not to forget the



other senses).

In the final transition, we move toward the unconscious of nature, which is the ground and abyss for the collective and personal forms of the unconscious. This rootless abyss and ground is fissured, as noted, into nature naturing and nature natured. Nature naturing (*natura naturans*) is the term/ eventing with priority. This is so because nature in its naturing is the ground and abyss for the ejection of archetypal Forms and the emanation of the orders of nature natured (*natura naturata*). Ejecting is a more violent movement to propel a potency into instantiation as a governing archetype. This process is perennial and self-renewing. Emanation is the gentler form of making manifest. There is no one emanation from the One, but a perennial series of emanations upon emanations that collectively form the orders of the world. The processes of ejection and emanation are without guile or reason, nor is the emitting source conscious of what 'it' does. The unconscious of nature, here equated with nature naturing, is an abyss without light or awareness, yet it is also the self-giving ground for what does prevail in whatever mode it does prevail.

Nature's unconscious is what makes both the collective and personal unconscious possible. It is my belief that consciousness emerges out of the unconscious of nature into its Selving process where the extra layer of self-consciousness can emerge, however fitfully, under the constraints of finitude. We can catch a real glimpse of these events through the ordinal lens of phenomenology, newly ground. One can 'see' and certainly feel the ejective potency of nature naturing once the right language is fashioned for these liminal experiences.

And one can feel the gentler emanations that lie in the inner propulsions of nature. Here Spinoza's word *conatus* comes to the fore. In *conatus* (striving toward more excellence of self-being) the dynamism of the orders of the world is manifest. This striving does not require or entail motion or change of place. In the unconscious of nature this striving is a central trait and our encounter with it, through our personal and collective unconscious, can be filled with the wonder that spawns query.

Finally, the unconscious of nature is the non-located location for the entwinement of violence and creativity. At a recent Congress at my university the theme was "Suffering and Evil in Nature." One would expect that the participants would easily slide into the 'obvious' distinction between suffering throughout nature and evil as confined to the human process. Yet some brave souls were willing to entertain the notion that evil was in non-human nature as well. It is to be noted that they were not speaking from a Christian framework in which nature is a fall from grace, but from a more philosophically neutral base. In pondering the notions of paranoia, violence, creativity, and the three dimensions of the unconscious, we have not raised the prospect that there could be something evil in nature. Schopenhauer came very close to this position from a decidedly atheistic perspective. I think that it is an issue worthy of our best philosophical and psychoanalytic efforts.

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