On Creativity

The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

William Shakespeare
(A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 5.1.12-17)

If, as the Shakespearean scholar Jonathan Bate (2008, 1998) tells us, these verses spoken by Theseus in A Midsummer Night’s Dream are “a critique of the imagination’s delusive power” (p. 179), in the second part of the eighteenth century they were treated as Shakespeare’s own viewpoint (as opposed to that of a particular character) and therefore “the authoritative, definition of poetic creativity” (p. 179). But as critic Marjorie Garber (2004) explains, this passage when not taken out of context implies the opposite: “That the imagination cannot be trusted. That poets are crazy. That art is an illusion. That lovers and madmen... are given to unrealistic fantasies that ‘apprehend / More than cool reason ever comprehends’” (5.1.6).

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this section, penned by Cynthia Hogue, Susan Roos, and Jenny Doughty, remind us further that the phenomenon of creativity is a process, an experience, a cerebral event, and, above all, not something to which we can point. In a conversation with the editor, Hogue related the three poems in the following way:

The first two poems track the act of writing to illustrate how creativity is experienced – the writer “huddles” and “hovers,” while “words like cats” brush against “the mind.” Such images verbalize precisely, playfully, inventively, what it means to find words for something. Creativity characterizes that which makes us most human, and as the third poem contemplates beautifully, art goes back to the very roots of humanity. With prehistoric communities, the “records” we have are creative: we have their art. And like the first two poems, the third poem contemplates the process, the experience, and the caring labor that materializes that which is imagined, what the mind creates: “line after line of circles blown/sharply through pursed lips/dead thirty thousand years.” The poems in this section capture that moment in which breath creates the “lines” – both of the bison and of the poems – which is to say, inspiration. (C. Hogue, personal communication, August 17, 2009).

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It is often stated that the methods of Gestalt therapy were created to help individuals heighten their awareness of the ways in which 1) obstacles prevent them from leading a fulfilling life, and 2) working at the boundary urges them to pay attention to where they may be stuck in the process and to what keeps them from moving on. This Gestalt Review issue on creativity would not reach its due “closure,” in the view of the editor, without invoking the polarity of creativity – its shadow side – and mentioning, however briefly and schematically, certain identifiable ways in which people may effectively block themselves from using their potential fully, and therefore from being fully creative. Almost 40 years ago, Sonia M. and Edwin C. Nevis, along with Elliott R. Danzig, designed and developed a program in which they defined 14 blocks to creativity, formulated from an assimilation of the literature and offered along with corresponding learning exercises. An organizational variation was later created as “Managing through Innovation.” Reproduced below, for your considered chewing, are the 7 blocks that S. Nevis and E. Nevis believe are found most often among helping professionals and managers.

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<th>BLOCK</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
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<td>I. Fear of Failure</td>
<td>Not taking risks; setting easy targets, drawing back when confronted with risky tasks. Settling for less in order to avoid the possible pain of failing; seeing failure as shameful; giving up quickly when faced with obstacles. Does not see the difference between “good” and “bad” errors. More focused on outcome than learning.</td>
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<td>II. Reluctance to Play</td>
<td>Literal, overly serious problem-solving style; not “playing around” with stuff. Fear of seeming foolish or silly by experimenting with the unusual; ignoring or mistrusting inner images or fantasies of self or others. Over-valuing of the so-called “objective” world. Distaste for “let’s pretend” or “what if.”</td>
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<td>III. Resource Myopia</td>
<td>Narrow vision; limited appreciation of possibilities. Failure to see one’s strengths; lack of appreciation for resources in one’s environment – people or things. Inability to let things happen naturally; lack of trust in human capacities and work styles different from your own.</td>
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<td>IV. Overcertainty</td>
<td>Rigidity of problem-solving responses; not checking assumptions. Persistence in behavior that is no longer functional. Polarizing things into opposites (“it is either black or white”) rather than knowing how to integrate different aspects of an issue. Rely heavily on past experience in dealing with current situations.</td>
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<td>V. Custom-Bound</td>
<td>Over-emphasis on tradition; much reverence for the past. Tendency to conform rather than to stand out as being different. Over-weighting what is known vs. what is not known; need to know the future before going forward. “If it was good enough for my father, it is good enough for me.”</td>
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<td>VI. Reluctance To Exert Influence</td>
<td>Fear of appearing too aggressive or pushing in trying to convince someone of something. Hesitancy in standing up for what you believe in the face of opposition. Difficulty in making yourself heard, or in standing up for what you believe. Give priority to the needs of others before satisfying your needs. Conflict avoidant: avoid expressing unpopular opinions.</td>
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EDITORIAL

Interview on Creativity
with Joseph C. Zinker, Ph.D.

JOSEPH MELNICK, PH.D.

Background

When I was a graduate student, one of my supervisors was receiving his Gestalt education at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland. He started telling me about a man named Zinker. He shared stories of Joseph's creative work with dreams and experiments. He talked about how his lectures and demonstrations left him sometimes laughing uncontrollably, and at other times filled with tears. What was also true was that his experiences were always filled with profound learnings. Upon graduation I followed my supervisor's path to Cleveland and got to know Joseph, first as a teacher and supervisor, and later as a colleague and a friend.

Joseph is many things. He is a marvelous teacher, able to translate complex concepts into understandable bites. He is a fabulous performer, captivating his audiences with his playfulness and passion. He is an important writer. Two of his books, *The Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy* (1977) and *In Search of Good Form: Gestalt Therapy with Couples and Families* (1998) are classics in the field. Above all, he is the embodiment of creativity not just in his work but also in how he lives his life.

Sadly, he has spent most of the past two years recovering from surgery. He has faced this challenge with his usual mixture of courage, humor, and creativity. It seems appropriate that this issue of *Gestalt Review* begins with an interview with Joseph, followed by a short piece that he crafted over thirty years ago.

Joseph Melnick, Ph.D., founding editor of *Gestalt Review*, has been practicing, teaching, and writing about Gestalt therapy for some thirty-five years. He has recently co-edited a book (with Edwin C. Nevis), *Mending the World: Social Healing Interventions by Gestalt Practitioners Worldwide* (GISC Press 2009).

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REFERENCES


VII. Need for Balance

Inability to tolerate disorder, confusion, or ambiguity; tend to keep things simple rather than complex. Excessive need for symmetry. Strong reliance on rules and regulations. Uncomfortable with emotion, especially with negative feelings. Lack appreciation for the importance of feelings in achieving commitment and results.

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