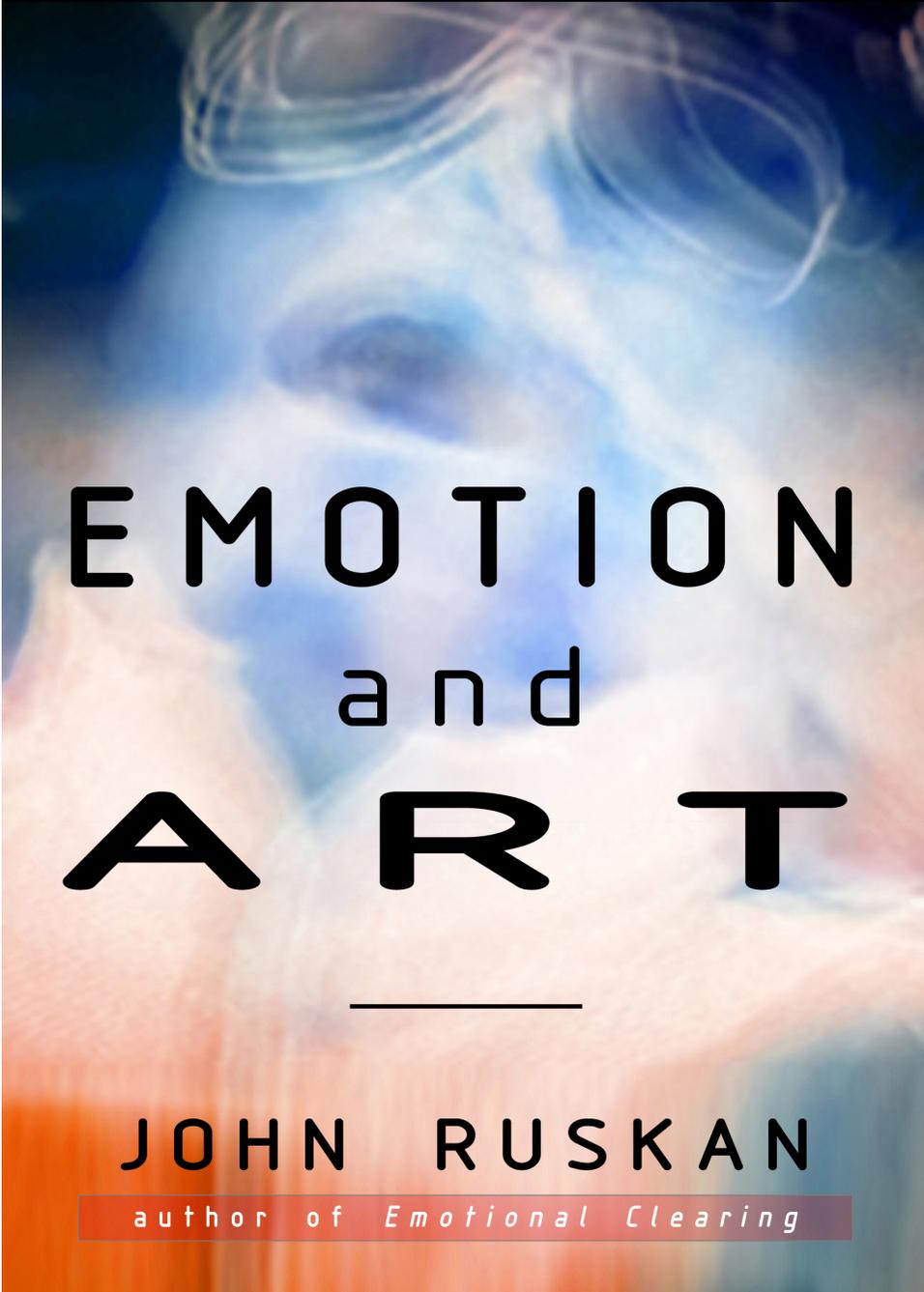


Mastering the Artist's Path



EMOTION
and
ART

JOHN RUSKAN

author of *Emotional Clearing*

EMOTION and ART:

Mastering the Challenges
of the Artist's Journey

JOHN RUSKAN

R. Wyler & Co., New York

**EMOTION AND ART: Mastering the Challenges
of the Artist's Journey by JOHN RUSKAN
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dedicated to the soul of the artist

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Making Art

*Finding ourselves in the art; Projection;
The movement to wholeness;
Product and process art; Darkness in art*

What do we really do when we create art? How can the experience be so powerful, in both a positive and negative sense? What draws us in so intensely? In order to address these questions, we must look more closely into the psychological dynamics of art-making, and in particular to how the phenomenon known as *projection* operates within the artistic experience.

We began a discussion of projection in chapter two, when we noted that as experiencers of art, we tend to create our own meaning. The art we view may be assumed to be a “screen” of sorts, which serves as a means for us to become aware of – to project – the inner, subconscious contents of our minds.

The most common way in which the subconscious first becomes known is through feeling. If we accept whatever our feeling may be as we engage the art, taking responsibility for it without acting it out, witnessing it, we may move through the feeling – where we were likely to have been stuck – to a higher, more liberated experience of ourselves. In using art in this manner, it takes on its healing benefit, becoming an accelerated microcosm of life,

where we unwittingly engage in exactly the same process, projecting onto other people and circumstances, creating our own meaning.

It is important to understand that projection is an unconscious, natural process. It is not desirable or possible to stop it – it is a central way we grow. We make best use of it when we understand how it works, and then work with it. Whenever we experience some emotionally meaningful event, it is likely we have contributed to it substantially through our projecting. If we recognize that we are projecting, we take the first crucial step. We become conscious.

Our most common experiences with projection will involve objects that are not normally considered to be art. For example, walking on a dark, lonely road at night, you become unusually frightened even though you know there is nothing to harm you; you project your fear. When the inclination and capacity to project onto art is developed, a similar process takes place. You may see a painting or film, or read a description of a dark, lonely road. If your empathic powers are strong, you may have the same feelings you had on the actual road. At the same time, you know that your interaction with the art is not “real,” and you are delighted with being stimulated and tricked.

As the art we engage becomes more varied and complex, greater range is available for our projections, and we can go to deeper levels within ourselves. It is important to allow for and even to seek out these types of experiences, and to see them for what they are – a means for the subconscious to clear itself – and to use them productively.

artistic projection

Artistic projection is the foundation of the creative art experience. Until projection occurs, the art we make has no real meaning or power for us.

It is only when projection occurs - when subconscious feeling has entered the work - that the work comes alive. The work comes alive only when projection has occurred.

You find a piece of driftwood on the beach. It intrigues you. It becomes a wonderful, graceful, abstract representation for you of something, but you don't know what. You linger with the object, you take it home, you place it carefully on a table, you spend time with it, admiring it. You somehow feel more at peace and less in need. You feel more whole within yourself. This delightful fascination is the signal that you have entered into an *artistic projection* with the object – you have entered the magical realm of art.

The exact nature of the relationship is not yet known, but it is quite likely that if you continue to contemplate the object, meaning you sit with it, observe it, admire it, feel your relationship with it as far as is known and let it affect you, you will eventually see what it holds for you. You see that the driftwood represents that hidden part of you that longs to be free and spontaneous, symbolized by the random, free-form shape that has become smooth and graceful by simply allowing itself to be worked on by the elements; and by the history of the piece, as it has been romantically carried from distant parts of the world by the sea with no plan but has ended up with you.

As you continue to be with the object, you realize you are attracted to these qualities – the qualities you are projecting –

because they are absent in your life. You are led to other feelings, feelings of being held-down and restricted, and associated circumstances of which you were not particularly aware. What has been revealed to you through sitting with the object are aspects of yourself that were previously unknown and suppressed. These feelings can now be productively integrated by processing them – accepting, experiencing, and witnessing them – in order to clear them and the circumstances, and the art itself can further be used to assist in the integration, by continuing to sit with it. Note that if you attempt to change the circumstances that appear to be holding you down without first clearing the feelings within, you are likely to be unsuccessful. It's the suppressed feelings that attract the circumstances, not the other way around.

This is the nature of artistic projection. At a certain point, we have had enough experiences with either “found objects” or other people's art and are compelled to produce our own images, enabling us to move to a deeper, more direct representation of the subconscious. We dabble for a while with paint, or play for a while with a few chords, but then the fascination hits, signaling the occurrence of an artistic projection. An image has emerged from the subconscious, mirroring a *lost part* of ourselves that needs to come into the light, a part that is cut-off and unknown but now symbolized and reflected by the art, and known to us through feeling. The lost part of ourselves is seen as an *other*, as part of the art, but because we *identify* with it as we perceive it projected in the art, we momentarily experience a greater level of the wholeness towards which we are unconsciously striving so intensely as human beings.

The *projection, recognition, and identification* with the cut-off aspect of ourselves first takes place on an *unconscious* level, though not as unconscious as before the process began. The aspect is emerging, and we are only beginning to get a glimpse. We do not yet know why we are attracted so strongly; we just know that we are. In time, the nature of the attraction will be fully revealed.

the movement to wholeness

Being brought into contact with lost parts of ourselves results in a greater sense of inner wholeness. We have been unconsciously cut off from these lost parts, but now that they have been brought to our attention, we become aware of just how much we have been lacking. The reunion with cut-off parts of ourselves is intrinsically joyful, fulfilling, and emotional. The drive towards wholeness is our strongest impulse; it is our basic spiritual need. The satisfaction of this need is what we mean by happiness.

It is the experience of reunion that gives meaning and power to the artistic encounter. As we find those previously cut-off parts of ourselves emerging in the art under our hand, we are mesmerized and elated. We unconsciously recognize ourselves, we move towards wholeness, and we feel the incredible joy and satisfaction that accompanies it. This is why we become artists. It is what makes the experience of making art so captivating and transcendental.

Even though the experience of wholeness is temporary when it takes place within projection, it is still emotionally meaningful. Other steps will follow in which we naturally *withdraw* our projection from the object, and see clearly that the qualities we now sense to be part of the art are really part of ourselves, just hidden because of our suppression or our natural unfolding of consciousness as we progress in our evolution. Then, we experience a final and authentic reunion with this aspect of the hidden self, and the particular growth cycle is completed.

It's important to have a full understanding of these cut-off parts of ourselves that enter the art. As they remain trapped in the subconscious, we experience the limitation of the human condition. The parts themselves are bursting to come forward into consciousness. They have an elementary form of intelligence and will-

fulness that propels them to attach to appropriate objects of projection – objects that will carry that kind of feeling. We don't really have any conscious control over exactly what type of projection and resultant animation will occur. However, this is part of the fun. We surrender to the wisdom of the subconscious, and let it bring forth what it deems most appropriate.

These suppressed aspects of ourselves that enter our art through projection are of two types: positive and negative. It may be assumed that negative aspects derive primarily from subconscious shadow material, largely of our own making, but with the possibility that some may have collective or archetypal or some sort of "original sin" derivation. This shadow material is primarily composed of painful feelings that have remained unfelt and therefore undischarged, such as sadness or helplessness. "Negative" projections are therefore experienced as uncomfortable or painful.

For example, if you are watching a film and especially dislike a certain character, it is likely a negative projection has occurred. You perceive a suppressed quality of your own transferred unconsciously to the character. Since we essentially condemn a quality when we suppress it within ourselves, we tend to transfer that condemnation to the perceived projected quality as well as the object on which we are projecting. The condemnation results in our getting upset or annoyed. We are repelled by the qualities we see in the character.

Most difficult projections will be concerned with emotional feelings. If you have a lot of suppressed anger inside, you will be sensitive to anger or violence portrayed in the film. You may tend to be impatient with any display of anger. You may even see anger where there is none, your perception colored by inner layers of suppressed and projected feeling. If you have suppressed the feeling of weakness, you may tend to despise any character who displays weakness. If you have suppressed the feeling of hatred, you may condemn, perhaps condescendingly, anyone who exhibits hatred. If you have condemned sexuality within yourself you may be uncom-

fortable or even despise others when you perceive it in them, especially if they appear to be giving it uninhibited expression.

At the same time, however, another consequence of carrying suppressed feelings is a fascination with them when we perceive them projected, and being drawn to them in an attempt to find wholeness and to unite with what is lacking in ourselves. So while we disapprove of anger, we are mesmerized by it. We are attracted to and can even be in awe of those who seem to be able to freely express their anger, inviting them into our lives even though we may understand that they are by no means well-adjusted and that associating with them is self-destructive. We might even erroneously think their ability to demonstrate anger is a kind of strength. Similarly, we abhor weakness, but root for the underdog. We self-righteously condemn hatred, but thrill in seeing acts of hatred enacted. We consider sexuality a sin, but are drawn into dark, secret tunnels of acting-out unfulfilled passions.

Positive cut-off parts of ourselves may be considered to have been suppressed along with painful shadow feelings. The blocking we create to shield us from the negative also blocks the positive, and that's why as we release the negative, we enjoy spontaneous access to more positive feelings, qualities, abilities and experiences. This inner blocking of the negative is the main reason creativity becomes limited.

When the positive is blocked, we tend to project the positive as well as the negative onto other people or art. Not being in touch with our love, we think we see it outside ourselves, and we must possess the object to regain our wholeness. For example, in a romantic projection, harmonious inner aspects of ourselves, yet to be actualized, are seen in the other. A man may be attracted to tenderness, charm, softness, intuitiveness, beauty and nurturing qualities in a woman – qualities from which he is cut off within himself. A woman may be attracted to strength, intelligence, power, cleverness and ability in a man – qualities from which she is presently cut off in herself. If there's also a sexual attraction between

them, we have what we call romantic love. Both are attracted to aspects of themselves yet to be activated. In the attraction, they each become more whole, and the sense of incompleteness, or emptiness, is assuaged, at least temporarily.

making art

As we enter the creative process more fully, we begin to work in various media. We paint, we write, we compose, we sculpt. We invite the subconscious to come forward in the form of projection. We experience the satisfaction inherent in any creative activity, whether it is making a painting or building a house or cooking a meal. However, as we have touched upon, not all creative activity is art. Creative activity that does not include the projection process may be called “craft.” Certainly much skill may be applied in the creation of a beautiful object, but art happens when subconscious feeling enters the work; when the steps of unconscious *projection, recognition, and identification* have occurred. Then, we open the door to the deep, hidden self and the essence of art.

Art is the intersection of feeling and matter; that place between the moon and the walking; the language of the magical realm. “Feelings” include emotions, desires, needs, impulses, moods, intuitions, pain, joy and in general any of the infinite levels of human beingness including the universal archetypes. When any of these elements of spirit enter into a material object or composition, which occurs primarily through artistic projection, we have created art. We have infused the object with psychic life, giving birth to a magical entity with, to a considerable extent, an independent existence. We, or anyone else, may enter into relationship with it, interact with it, and be influenced by it. If we impart feeling into matter with a developed sense of esthetics, we produce a powerful art statement that will entice us with its beauty and presence, opening us to the dramatic presentation of the human experience.

We make art as a spiritual discipline and celebration – a means to advance our personal and collective unfolding evolution of consciousness. More specifically, we make art for two purposes: to know a part of ourselves better, or to make the unknown known. We call these two types of art *product* and *process*. Product art is *representative*. It shows and explores further what is known. Process art is *evocative*. It invites the unknown to come forward. In practice, both types may blend. We may start with a product approach and glide into process, but it's important to understand the potentials and limitations of both modes in order to be able to apply either as may be appropriate, and not to avoid any one mode because of lack of familiarity.

product portrayal of feeling

In making art that is concerned with feeling, our first attempts are usually to *illustrate* or *communicate* a *known* feeling. We may try to portray our inner experience, as if we are telling it to another. We put our sadness into a song or our anger into a painting. This, in its most basic form, is the *art therapy* approach. This can be an important step. For those who are deeply repressed, just being able to look in the direction of feelings is therapeutic. Portraying an experience in any art form shows that sensitivity to feelings is developing. But it is important to understand that if our level of expression does not go beyond this point, it is unlikely that we will experience significant healing benefit from our art. We may even be seduced by the high of the creative act itself, and not realize that we are not fulfilling the therapeutic purpose of engaging in the art, which is to release feelings.

We do not experience growth by merely portraying the known, even when we are trying to “express” a feeling. We usually hope that by illustrating a feeling faithfully in the art, we will exor-

cise it, that the feeling will enter the art and leave us. This kind of art is sometimes called “scapegoat” art. The art may then even be destroyed, with the hope that the transferred feeling will also disappear. The operation is similar to primitive black magic rites where talismans are imbued with undesirable qualities and then disposed of. Reports can be found about these rites that might seem to confirm their effectiveness; however, such results are illusory. Even though short-term energetic manipulations are possible, the eventual result is only further build-up of the subconscious reservoir of suppressed negativity and an increased need to defend against the build-up.

Product art is often associated with a “message” – what is the artist telling us? We think that art must have a point when we come at it from the left-brain. But art that contains a preconceived message is of questionable value as art. It is basically only a lecture with an esthetic presentation – a means to persuade others to a point of view – and quickly becomes boring. Art intended in this sense will not contain the timeless vitality that good art has.

product containment of feeling

In order for authentic feeling to be evoked and for art to be healing in product mode, we have to move to a different relationship with the art. We may start with a product illustration of feelings, by representing where we are now. But as we keep working with the images, whatever our media, we allow for a shift in the way we interact with the art. Instead of working with the intention of getting rid of a feeling, we work with the intention of *being with* the feeling, and of *experiencing* it through the art.

We allow the art to contain the feeling for us.

This crucial shift of purpose aligns art with emotional healing work. Entering the art, which we are simultaneously producing, with the sense of a participant, with the sense that this is happening NOW, that I am not merely illustrating what may have happened in the past, allows the *realness* - the presence - to enter the art that is so crucial in making it come alive, and for authentic healing and energetic shifting to occur. In practical terms, if we are working with an event of the past, we *relive* the event as we make the art. As we go through the steps of what happened, putting those feelings into material expression, we both contain the feelings and distance ourselves from them. We are with the feelings, but witnessing them.

It's important to distinguish between portrayal and containment of feeling. In portrayal, the artist starts with an awareness of the feeling that will be depicted. The intention, which may be unconscious, is to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling. But, for reasons we may not entirely understand, the portrayal of the feeling has a sense of self-consciousness about it, a sense of self-indulgence. It is being portrayed as means to an end. It is almost or blatantly a cry for attention: look at my pain. It is a self-centered *illustration* of a feeling, but the work does not *contain* the feeling. There is no inherent power that might draw us to participate in the creation as viewers.

Contrastingly, in containment, the feeling is not illustrated in order to get rid of it. It might be hoped by the artist that this would occur at some point, but this is not the purpose of the work. Indeed, the work has no ulterior purpose, except *to hold the feelings so that the artist may experience them through the work*. The artist uses the art to *be with* the feelings. The work *embodies* the feelings, and is not merely telling about them. In doing so, the work invites the archetypes to enter – it acquires universal significance – and takes on power, realness, and presence, becoming something with which everyone can identify and experience. The art becomes magical.

As you continue working in product/containment, your mode may shift to process. This means that new feelings will emerge through the work – feelings of which you were not aware. You may have been sad to start with, without knowing why you were sad. As you allow the art to shape itself you might see, for example, images of being hungry. You soon realize it's an emotional hunger. You are sad because of an absence of nurturing in your life; you don't feel nurtured by people around you, and you don't nurture them. You mourn the lack of this quality. You make another picture and through the image come into contact with the suppressed anger previously buried under the sadness and depression that resulted from the frustrated need for emotional nurturing. You may have flashbacks to earlier times when you painfully experienced the absence of nurturing, such as childhood.

These are the kinds of feelings that are to be consciously integrated through the art. You continue to just *be with* the feelings, experiencing, witnessing, as they embody themselves in image after image, expending their energy. You then experience spontaneous, unexpected growth. You are then able to rationally explore how these needs may be addressed in present close relationships.

You may notice that some degree of psychological facility is required to recognize and make your way through the kinds of feelings that are encountered when the subconscious is evoked. If you have been involved with inner work over the years, this will be of great advantage. This facility can be acquired through therapy, workshops, reading, or talking with knowledgeable friends.

process art

Process art is a term used in the art field to describe a particular approach to making art. In process art, we usually do not start with the intention to work with any particular feeling. In fact, feel-

ings are usually stuck in the subconscious and are not known, except for possibly some superficial, first-level feelings that might, or might not, lead to significant deeper waters with a product/containment approach. Instead, we enter the flow of the subconscious, following what *attracts* us, allowing it to unfold on its own.

The art work itself will definitely show a difference with this kind of orientation. When portrayed as product, art tends to be sterile because no life has been captured. What has been represented is an intellectual conception, possibly the intellectual conception of a feeling. In process, we enter the river of the subconscious, where life is happening NOW, in this moment. Working without intention to portray any particular image, we allow ourselves to be guided, according to what attracts us. The work unfolds itself, in either representative or abstract form, and brings to light rich gifts of the subconscious. The work shows a greater sense of connection. It goes beyond being intellectual to being authentic.

Authenticity is the subtle but essential element in any art that is perceived by the sensitive viewer and enables the art to come alive. Because life has been allowed to enter the art and because the art has a powerful sense of *realness* and *presence*, another person may engage it. The art will reach out and pull them in. If the work is only intellectual, if it only illustrates, even when concerned with important personal feelings, there will be no power in the art to move the viewer.

What is it exactly that goes into the art to give it this essential authentic realness and presence, and how do we provide it? For me, the first requirement is *a sense of being in the moment as the art is created* – of seeing the art always as new, letting the art act on us, evoking responses from the subconscious in the form of genuine feelings that will magically find their way into embodiment, letting ourselves be guided and opening to the emergence of the unknown in the art. This does not mean, by the way, that feelings or emotions as we normally think of them need be in ostentatious display for an art piece to contain presence. Great presence can be evoked simply by being.

A good example of the importance of coming into the moment within the art experience can be seen in the field of acting. The actor must respond spontaneously to the drama as if encountering it for the first time. We have all seen actors who have not developed their skill to this level. It is apparent that they are *expecting*, that they know what is coming, that they are prepared to react, that they are thinking and have their lines ready, that they are acting and not inter-acting. They are not in the moment. The performance lacks realness, presence, soulfulness, sensitivity – those magical qualities that give power to the work. In contrast, the actor who has mastered the skill of being in the moment appears totally real and believable, and transmits the power that moves us. But in order to appear spontaneous, the actor must actually be spontaneous. This occurs with movement into the moment.

The same principle can be applied to any art. Any performance, such as music or dance, must be engaged in the moment – not only when performing for others, but when we are composing in private – in order to allow realness to enter and the new to come forward. If we are not in the moment with a visual art composition as it evolves before us, continually seeing it as new, we lose the connection to realness. We are thinking about what to do next, instead of just letting it happen and watching as a witness. In writing, especially when editing, the greatest skill is to be able to clear the mind, to come into the moment, and see the page as if for the first time, letting the work act on us as it will on a reader new to it.

The capacity to work in the moment is developed as we advance on our personal path. It is essentially a spiritual quality. In this context, spirituality might be defined as the opening of consciousness through movement into the self. Perhaps that is why so often the spiritual and artistic paths coincide. In practical terms, the capacity to be in the moment is developed as we practice witnessing.

The key to deep process work, whether in psychotherapy or the arts, is to hand over direction to this other guiding force, however we may conceive of or experience it. This guiding force oper-

ates by revealing to us various qualities and components that we will want to include in our art because *it pleases us*. Who or what is this guiding force? It is composed of our shadow subconscious, which is trying to come forward into awareness to be released, and which will impel us to include dark elements in the work; and that superconscious part of ourselves, which some may think of as a power outside ourselves, which will urge us to include elements of light and love. When we hand over control to these forces, the work becomes inspired. We recognize that it is not our conscious ego-mind that is coming up with the artistic manifestation. Some other guidance is surely at hand.

Sometimes we don't at first see the significance between parts of the art piece as it is forming when guided by the unseen intelligence. Elements will seem out of place, awkward, wrong, like mistakes. If we learn to trust, we often see later that the apparent incongruities come together in a way we could not have foreseen or planned. We are presented with the unconscious recognition of the hidden, split-off, undeveloped parts of ourselves. We thrill to the emergence of these aspects in the art as they take shape before us. Trusting in guidance, we are rewarded.

interpretation

Process art is characterized by the postponing of interpretation, possibly indefinitely. The notion that art must be interpreted to be of value comes directly from the early psychoanalytic, scientific reliance on the rational mind. This approach holds that inner healing must be accomplished through analysis: Finding the original "cause" of the current condition, usually presumed to be in early childhood; understanding how the cause resulted in a "complex" – a dysfunctional pattern that was adopted unconsciously in order to compensate for the traumatic psychic injury; and then

“intervening” – an action by the therapist designed to disrupt the pattern. This kind of attack on the problem is typical of the intrusive, left-brain approach, where intellect rules.

Reliance on the left-brain has much to do with the alienation that we as a society currently experience between each other and within ourselves. In believing that we can solve all problems logically, we have cut ourselves off from the right-brain, intuitive, nurturing side of ourselves that connects us to the earth, the feminine, the mystery of creation and the ultimate healing that we seek. When we attempt to interpret art to find out “what it means,” we turn away from this magical realm. Indeed, the idea that art has to mean anything is a left-brain distortion and expectation.

Moreover, if we interpret the art we are creating, we usually do so prematurely, before the art has reached the point where it might be said to be a full representation of any subconscious condition. We are meddlesome with our interpretation. We do not allow the art to work on us as it must. Process art should not be seen primarily as a statement. Instead, it becomes an extension of one’s inner process; it *is* one’s inner process. It is oneself, cloaked in metaphor, hidden behind a veil. If we go up to it and brazenly demand that it reveal itself, it will flee and the magical state will be lost.

If we are not to intellectually interpret, how is the art to be of value? We must approach the art carefully and quietly, and wait for it to reveal itself through *feeling*, not intellect. We must contemplate the art as we are creating it. To contemplate means to be with, to relax with, to notice, to admire, to enjoy. Just being able to extend this kind of attention to any object represents a developed consciousness. Through contemplation, we invite the art to show itself as ourselves. Feelings will emerge. Memories may be stirred of times when strong feelings were present but were suppressed. Or, we may just linger with present feelings that are evoked, which are essentially the same feelings that were suppressed in the past, now projected. Either way is satisfactory to effect emotional release. There is no imperative need to go back to some past episode.

positive process

Deep process work means we become aware of hidden parts of ourselves – not only feelings, but also qualities that have become lost. One of the classic artists of our time who comes to mind relative to the yearning for freedom I have mentioned is Jack Kerouac. I remember reading his books when I was young and being enamored by all his central characters, who are rebellious, free-spirited, who drive wildly and romantically across the country, unbound by the conventions of job, responsibility, or family. In them, I found encouragement to follow my own impulses to break free. I imagined Kerouac himself to be a fierce, wild personification of these qualities and regarded him as a hero. I was disappointed to later learn from his biography (*Kerouac* by Ann Charters, Warner 1974, New York) that Kerouac the man was nothing like his characters – a syndrome quite common among artists, I now understand. He lived most of his life in his mother's house, unable to support himself, an alcoholic. His books represented only his unrealized desires.

Intense longing for rebellious freedom is symptomatic of a deeper frustration. The biography does not specifically explore this frustration, but we could speculate that Kerouac might have encountered unusual restriction at some point in his past, possibly inflicted by a father or other authority figure. Or perhaps because of his personal make-up, he is especially sensitive to this aspect of society today, which in its patriarchal/corporate phase has instilled fear of the spontaneous as a common emotional orientation. In being so sensitive, he feels for the rest of us. He brings our attention to this frustrated part of ourselves that we may have been overlooking. We identify with his sense of being held down and find satisfaction in further identifying with his characters in their noble quest. In skillfully depicting their drama, he taps into the archetype

of rebellious freedom and escape from oppressiveness that makes the work irresistible, particularly to those who share a common inner orientation.

But let's look more closely at how he executes his work. We know from his biography that Kerouac did not possess the qualities he gave to his heroes. These were qualities he needed to retrieve or integrate from their repressed or undeveloped places. We know he did not enter into his art as a means to express what was bothering him, in order to get rid of it, to get it off his chest. If he had been following this "art therapy" approach to art, he would have directly shared his feelings of restriction in some way. Instead, he shares the opposite – what he *unconsciously* conceives to be the antidote.

In not directly portraying his inner conflict, it seems apparent he is not following a *product* approach to art making. The product would have been the known inner condition of restriction, but he is not particularly aware of the condition. Instead, he has come across a type of character that excites him by allowing a *positive process*, meaning process art that engages primarily positive feelings, to occur as he develops his art.

We can envision this happening as he plays around with stories and characters. It seems unlikely he intellectually chose these characters – they needed to develop and emerge over a period of time, allowing him to form an emotional attachment to them. He begins realizing that what really excites him are characters who take the archetype of rebellious freedom to the max, and he starts a novel. But still it is likely, in fact almost certain, that he is not aware of the inner restriction as the motive behind his attraction to this kind of character.

This unawareness is not to be seen as a flaw; as neither is the presence of the motive itself. These conditions are simply representative of the state of human evolution and the individual as a focal point of the collective. These are the factors that make life as we know it go around, and artists the trailblazers they are.

As with all artists working in process, he identifies strongly with the central characters as he works and re-shapes the writing.

The identification is unconscious. This phase of art is euphoric and intoxicating. When we connect to our suppressed selves, *unconsciously* through the art, we feel whole and fulfilled. But at a certain point, identification becomes conscious and breaks down as we move into the next stage with the art; the bubble bursts. The creative, artistic euphoria takes a turn to cynicism, usually in exact proportion to the high that has swept us away, and the self-critical aspect of the art process hits.

This is the crucial point of any creative art endeavor that determines whether the art will be used for healing or not. If we do not successfully negotiate this final integrative phase, we do not move into healing. This is ultimately why artists do not heal with their work, why they turn to suppressive means to push down the darkness that appears, and how they can enter a vicious syndrome of creating, invoking the subconscious, and suppressing – what is called the manic-depressive cycle.

When the bubble bursts in this final stage, we see deeper. What we see is the motive – we see the darkness that is impelling us to long for, to create, and to identify with what we think will bring us into the light. But, as with any emotional process, darkness will not be eliminated by light alone. The darkness must be faced directly. It has been revealed through the art process; the process has served its purpose. If we turn from the darkness, we suppress it, and we fall into self-critical depression. Kerouac's life-long addiction to alcohol and the depressive condition in which Charters found him when she interviewed him towards the end of his life suggests he did not productively handle this stage of the art, but succumbed to the temptation to unwittingly suppress the negativity that was revealed.

To make the most of the art process, to use it as a means to personal evolution, we must take the darkness presented to us and work with it, both through conscious emotional processing and by recycling the darkness back into the art. To work with the darkness means to *integrate* it – to take it through the steps I have touched on. It means first, to become aware of it, and not turn away from

it, thinking the art has let us down. It means accepting and experiencing the darkness as the means to balance it. It means recognizing that what we perceive as the critical voice is just the recognition of the darkness and has no rational reflection on the quality of the art.

All this may be aided by the inclusion of the darkness in the art as we create it. As process art continues, the artist introduces elements that mirror the pain that is uncovered within, in order to *be with* the pain and not avoid it. This is the essential element that gives art depth and makes it great as well as introduces the healing element. It allows the artist to transcend the collapse of the projection. The artist becomes *aware* of the feelings that have entered the art, and is no longer unconsciously enmeshed in them. As we look at Kerouac's work from this point of view, it is apparent that darkness has been included, even if it was not taken to the point of personal healing. Perhaps understated and implied, the pain and poignancy of his characters becomes evident as well as an enlightened, detached compassion for them.

To be fair with him, we should note that his artistic achievements represent an enormous goal realized. He did accomplish great work and made a significant contribution to contemporary culture. But in order to move his art experience to a healing level, Kerouac would have needed to see that the disproportionate, compulsive longing for wild, spontaneous freedom was a knee-jerk reaction to the subconscious inner feeling of being controlled and restricted, and that no amount of indulgence in the wildness, either in fantasy or reality, would bring about a resolution.

Next, he would need to *take responsibility*. It must be recognized that the experience of being controlled and restricted is the result of *inner blocking*, and is only *projected* upon the object that appears to be inflicting it. This is true even if there seems to be no question that some outside agency, such as father or society, is acting independently and cruelly upon him. Our psychic energies go out to mold and attract circumstances and obstacles in order to

bring our suppressed feelings into consciousness for clearing. This is how karma operates and is the nature of our spiritual task.

Next, it is necessary to move to a place of *acceptance* regarding the inner feelings. It is very likely he would be in conflict with the authority figure – this is a natural reaction – but it would be a mistake to allow the resistance to carry over to his emotional experience. He must cease resistance to the feelings, accept them and move to a place where he can *experience* them. When he is finally able to experience, inwardly and fully, the control and restriction within himself, he becomes free of it. The art can be used to contain the feelings as he sits with them, watching them, experiencing them.

Some might argue that psychologically deconstructing Kerouac in this manner removes the magic and mystery from his art, and that if he had had an analyst to tell him these things, he never would have produced his books. But I disagree emphatically. I believe he, or any artist, would produce exactly the same art. We still need the art process to bring the shadow into the light. Becoming psychologically aware does not remove the impulse to create art; rather, the art process is made more rewarding. We are less apt to stumble around lost in the maze of subconscious forces we are attempting to bring forward and make sense of. We gain the opportunity to use the art for healing and personal evolution instead of being driven by it and ultimately sacrificing ourselves in bringing it to life. Indeed, as we enter deeply into the subjective mode necessary for the creation of art, we need all the guidance we can get.

darkness in art

As we pursue process art, we follow what intuitively attracts us. We may not really understand why something draws us; we just know we are drawn to a certain object. The object represents, either as an abstract symbol or a concrete, representational image, parts of ourselves that have been exiled from our conscious sense of self; hence we feel incomplete. When we interact with or identify with the object, we experience a greater sense of wholeness and fulfillment, although we usually don't think in such terms.

The projected qualities can be either positive or negative, resulting in positive or negative process art; in both cases, we are attracted. In life, we are often compelled to possess people or objects when we project positive qualities onto them in the unconscious effort to regain these qualities for ourselves. Typical projected positive qualities include loveliness, softness, sweetness, strength, free-spiritedness, confidence, generosity, reliability, sensitivity, even happiness itself. However, the positive projection usually leads to disillusionment, because it is a false premise to begin with. Sooner or later, we are let down. Our hopes of wholeness are shattered, and we must regroup. Most of us who do not understand the unconscious process of projection simply try to find new objects on which to project: a new lover, friend, or job. We then proceed to experience the same cycle of projection and disappointment, not getting that we must find these qualities inside.

When we project negative qualities, such as selfishness, insignificance, weakness, ugliness, loneliness, forbidden sexual feelings and darkness in general, we often experience aversion and even hatred of the objects to which we attach our projection. The aversion we feel is a reflection of the rejection we carry within towards those qualities, and is not a function of the qualities themselves.

Because we condemn our darkness, we condemn the object on which we project the darkness. Nonetheless, if we carefully look at our feelings, we will find that behind the aversion is an attraction for the same object. And the more powerful the aversion, the more powerful the attraction. We are attracted to the darkness in spite of ourselves, and often, this split in itself leads to great pain and confusion. The attraction to darkness exists because we need that repressed part of ourselves to make us whole.

As we move further down the road to enlightenment, we recognize that our aversion to many forms of darkness is just a conditioned mind-set. We outgrow the conditioning little by little, and as a result, our attraction to the darkness is no longer opposed. Even though, of course, we naturally exercise prudence about integrating dark elements into our lives, we recognize and are at peace with the realization that we are, indeed, attracted to darkness. We do not need to deny it. We understand that it is part of our evolutionary journey.

It's possible we might not allow ourselves to recognize an attraction to darkness. We might think we should always be associating with light, love, and happiness. Such positive feelings are of course important to our sense of well-being, and we would hope to be able to fill our lives with an abundant sense of them, and I do believe this is possible. Even though, from the holistic point of view, existence is composed of a balance of opposites, yin and yang, light and dark, I believe that life experience will be essentially positive when we begin to significantly uncover the suppressed subconscious and bring it into balance. We *transcend* the duality of light and dark. We reach a point where we are no longer affected in the same way by the so-called negative because our acceptance has freed us from it. We are unattached, and the negative is not experienced painfully. We are in balance. But in order to reach this point, we must engage the darkness.

As we allow darkness to enter our art creation, we begin the process of integration. Art provides a safe arena for these cut-off dark parts of ourselves. If we did not direct them into the art, they

would no doubt appear projected in life, where they cause disruption and tempt us into acting them out. Sometimes artists believe they enhance their ability to feel life and make art by acting out darkness, but I believe this is always a mistake. A central purpose of art is to work out darkness in symbolic, safe ways, *in the art*. The experiencing of dark elements through the art is more effective in releasing their energies than any acting out in life might be.

Art that contains both light and dark images is the most fulfilling to produce and to experience, but in practice we often find that mature artists tend to lean in one direction or another, as their personal needs may suggest. Kerouac was drawn to the light, working with images of freedom and spontaneity, as compensation for the heaviness of restraint he most likely felt within. Another artist drawn towards the light in compensation for darkness was the quintessential Vincent van Gogh. His work has been described as an embodiment of mystical, transcendental, spiritual forces. But we know he was driven by intense darkness within, which he was never able to successfully integrate. Instead of using his art as a means to self-healing, it appears he allowed the cycle of projection and the subsequent uncovering of darkness within to overpower him.

In contrast, we see in the contemporary painter, Jean-Michel Basquiat, a predisposition to work directly with darkness, like many of today's most powerful artists, including visual artists, writers, film-makers, and musicians. This trend is now occurring in order to balance the global restriction that has allowed the collective shadow to build over long centuries of social, sexual, economic, and spiritual repression, by bringing the shadow into awareness for healing. The building of the collective shadow is what accounts for the incredible chaos we see in today's world. It seems all the suppression of past centuries is now coming up. That is why I view the current time as most challenging yet one which contains unprecedented opportunities for growth.

Basquiat's short life has been superbly portrayed in the film *Basquiat*, written and directed by Julian Schnabel, himself a successful artist. Basquiat's art and the manner in which he works, as

represented in the film (actually paintings executed by Schnabel because the real work was not available) brilliantly typify the process approach to the subconscious. We see in his work the inner landscape brought directly into visual form. We see jagged edges, incongruities, sloppiness, ugliness, harshness and pain, but there is unmistakably a sense of *realness* permeating the work that makes it breathtaking. There is no question the work is magical. It represents the artist's handing over creation to the subconscious. It is not a product of the conscious ego, there is no sense of "look at me," even though, of course, Basquiat was driven by ego-needs as are we all. It is apparent that he was moved by, that he was attracted to, the portrayal of the negative shadow as a means to experience wholeness and peace, even though he may not have been able to articulate this motive. And because he was successful in its portrayal, the art reached the point of holding the archetypes of suffering, striving, freedom, and pathos with which we all can identify. It is tragic, however, that success as an artist does not automatically carry over to personal, emotional success; this is one of the points of the film. Basquiat died from a drug overdose at the age of 27.

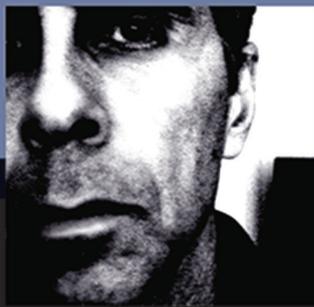
In looking at the lives of van Gogh and Basquiat, we see artists who possessed enormous capacity for evocation of primal forces. Van Gogh uncovered the depths of darkness indirectly, to the same extent that he directly portrayed the spiritual; each of these forces must balance. Basquiat was impelled to directly uncover the negative in his art. Neither artist possessed the tools to use the art for ultimate self-healing or self-realization, and was unable to integrate the negativity that was uncovered. We might say that this is a peril of genius, if genius means the ability to see and feel deeply.

about John Ruskan the artist

John has been on the artist's path all of his life. Working primarily in the music field, he has composed and recorded over 10 albums throughout the years, and continues to release new work. He feels that working as an artist has been a critical factor in his personal growth, especially regarding emotional maturing. He was the owner of Crossfire Recording, one of the first 'budget' recording studios in New York City in the artistically vibrant 1980's, which hosted a great number of spirited independent recording projects. He started out as a singer-songwriter, playing guitar and performing solo in public. As electronic music synthesizers became available, he was strongly attracted to the uniqueness of their sound, and started producing compositions ranging from abstract, free-form music to pop song-based pieces. One of John's guiding artistic principles was always to bring together seemingly opposite forms into a new, hybrid expression. Thus, the singer-songwriter merged with the electronic and resulted in New Wave Rock. Another life-long passion has always been consciousness study and Yoga. This merged with the music and produced meditative, instrumental albums unique in the New Age music field, aimed at evoking the deep subconscious along with the transcendental witness. Throughout, John has been completely comfortable playing all the parts of any musical composition, which was possible because of technological breakthroughs in multi-track recording and synthesizers. He has come to feel more like a painter than a musician, composing and executing the entire musical landscape, and this natural solo artist inclination has enabled him to more easily use his art as a tool for consciousness work, as he has written about here. Lately, the trip-hop genre, which is in itself the coming together of two musically opposed fields - catchy rap rhythms and spacey ethereal sounds - has attracted him and resulted in another prolific musical phase. Although the concept of each of John's albums differs, a common element in his music is the strong 'body' sense. The rhythms are deep and moving, with a deliberant restraint. His intention is to connect to the subconscious through the body, bypassing the mind, evoking and integrating primal and hidden feelings, both in himself and the listener. In recent years, John's main career focus has been in the psychology field, turning his life-long avocation in consciousness work into a vocation, and re-inventing himself as a writer. A companion book to this present one, called *Between The Moon And The Walking*, presents a spectrum of stark and startling right-brained vignettes, straight from the personal and collective subconscious. His previous book, which brought together yet another set of opposites, East and West psychology with a new original synthesis called *Emotional Clearing*, has been widely hailed by experts. His music and other writing is available at www.johnruskan.com. His ongoing Emotional Clearing work is at www.emclear.com.

Inner Growth and Healing Through Art
Why Artists Get Stuck
Overcoming Artistic Depression
The Three Stages of Art
Art and Sex

In this highly original work, John Ruskan explores the intricacies of feeling-oriented art. He presents radical insights about the nature of the art process that explain exactly what it is that artists do, how they can do it better, and how to make art an essential route to enlightenment through revealing and integrating the personal unconscious. He demystifies artistic manic-depressiveness, clarifying in remarkably simple terms how it forms and how it may be handled and reversed. His original three stages of art provide a road map for those traveling the glorious yet often perilous path of the artist, revealing those perils and how to avoid them. He will enable you to experience art, either as a viewer or creator, as a vital part of your evolutionary advancement.



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