

Colloquium Series Presentation: Review of Spyros Orfanos, PhD
Stolen Kisses: Creativity and Psychoanalysis

On May 6th, 2011, Spyros Orfanos, PhD, a former co-director of *Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis*, Clinic Director at the *New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*, and President of the *International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*, gave a multimedia presentation addressing three intersecting issues around creativity and psychoanalysis to a full audience at the NYU Kimmel Center. Early in his presentation, Dr. Orfanos explored the tempestuous relationship between creativity and psychoanalysis and their dance of rupture and repair. He also looked at today's neuroscientific flirtations between creativity and psychoanalysis and finally, discussed both artistic and psychotherapeutic dyads and the potential meaning of their relational bonds.

Dr. Orfanos expressed having a personal interest in creativity. He commented on how naive Freud's interpretations of imaginative processes as concealed wishes of ambition and sexuality were. It was Dr. Orfanos' aim to raise our consciousness regarding the elegant complexity and mysteries of various domains of creativity. He indicated that he believes that we all have a very ambivalent relationship with creativity, in part, because of its dark sides--- in the world we live in there are overwhelming dangers, and our failure to find creative solutions is as alarming as it is invigorating. He offered quotations from three prominent psychoanalytic theorists to illustrate his views:

“All psychopathology is a failure in imagination.”
- Stephen A. Mitchell

“Creativity lies equally at the root of artistic production and of life experience.”
-Otto Rank

“Before the problem of the artist, analysis must, alas, lay down its arms.”
-Sigmund Freud

Dr Orfanos went to state that the word ‘creativity’ may convey everything from just making something happen (like creating a mess) to artistic creativity, mathematical insights, and children's finger painting. In psychoanalysis we speak about creative sessions or their co-creation, and Dr. Spyros believes that like Donnel Stern, creative disorder may be welcomed as an opportunity to create something new out of confusion and chaos.

In that sense, he continued, psychotherapy takes on a life of it's own. Dr. Orfanos feels that it matters more that therapists and patients work together to find meaning than merely focusing on particular mental contents. If the analysis goes well, he believes, there will be times of creative disorder with surprising developments. Much of what the analyst knows is hard to put into words because it involves implicit and non-verbal modes of intimate relating, predominantly out of our awareness. He feels that this mode of relating shares salient features with interactions like friendship, love and parent-child relationships. It's more art than science working with patients struggling for security, mastery and recognition, asserted Dr. Orfanos.

Dr Spyros' lecture itself was more like an improvisation, complete with video clips and slides beginning with commemorating today's date as both the 80th birthday of baseball great Willie Mays, as well as the anniversary of the birthdate of *psychoanalytic* great Sigmund Freud. Dr. Orfanos went on to highlight that what made Willie Mays great was a combination of extraordinary athletic ability, a unique style and heroic accomplishments, which he explored in terms of Mays' personal capacities and creativity.

Dr. Orfanos also utilized details of the artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera's relationship to illustrate the complexities of a partnership and collaboration--- an artistic partnership, one that was both painful as well as enriching to the participants.

Dr. Orfanos then went on to highlight several historical accomplishments of the late 19th century and the period of high Romanticism, as well as 20th century arts and the concept of the *avant garde*, in which the source of great works was generated by creative individuals.

Dr. Orfanos asserted that he believes that genius is manifested by those who break with tradition. To be a pioneer, one has to be a bit on the margins. To be creative, one has to be deviant, but this should not be confused with being psychopathic. Deviance pushes the envelope of ideas and actions. According to Dr. Orfanos, Freud was one of the most evolutionary thinkers the world has ever known, but when it came to the subject of creativity itself, he could not somehow make a dent in the creative process.

Dr. Orfanos made use of a couple of clinical examples to illustrate the ensemble work of improvisation in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, and the ways in which improvisation involves more than just simply being spontaneous. He went on to state that improvisation is quintessentially relational, and that what emerges in the participants' play has to do with the unconscious mind of each: a co-creative, relational unconscious, that is, a kind of "thirdness" in which both parties are paradoxically distinctive authors while simultaneously also inextricably *co-authors*.

Also discussed was neuroscience with some effort made to narrow the divide between humanities and neuroscience. According to Dr. Orfanos, a complete understanding of the brain is not synonymous with a full understanding of the mind.

Dr. Orfanos spoke finally about vitality as a manifestation of life, of being alive. He expressed that he thinks of it as a mental creation, a product of the mind's integration of many internal and external events; as a subjective experience; and as phenomenal reality. Vitality however, must have a basis in physical action and traceable mental operations, according to Dr. Orfanos, thereby seeming to have a type of fluidity and movement similar to the famous catch of Vic Wertz' flyball by Willie Mays that he had showed the audience.

Dr. Orfanos ended his presentation with a dance clip echoing such vitality. The clip was from a documentary called *La Danse* by Frederick Wiseman. The clip was of a rehearsal that demonstrated a certain type of "contact improvisation," a creative action between two bodies in spontaneous motion. Dr. Orfanos believes that this is close to the aspects of a relational psychoanalytic session viewed not after it is over but from the middle of the session when one does not know what will happen next.

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