UNFETTERED FLIGHTS OF THOUGHT

Between Madness and Creativity

This paper is in two parts. The first examines the relationship between creativity and madness as it manifests itself in the work of Freud and Lacan and culminates in Lacan’s theorising of the operation of suppléance, a proxy device that prevents subjective dissolution and provides a key to understanding the hidden order of artmaking. The second problematises suppléance by testing it against Ehrenzweig’s theory of creativity. The aim of the paper is to identify schemata that link madness and creativity using a psychoanalytic frame in order to question theory in ways that may be helpful for artists, and more specifically creative writers. It does so by focusing on Lacan’s conceptualisation of the real as ambiguous and ‘extimate’, two ideas also present in the work of Freud and Ehrenzweig. The ambiguity and ambivalence at stake here are retrieved from the unconscious as the ‘equivocation’ between the real and the imaginary (Lacan 2005a: 102; emphasis added). This equivocation is precisely what must be negotiated, I suggest, when madness beckons and a threat to the ego looms, unless some creative solution is found which enables the knotting of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. As an art, writing may be that which knits together the ex-sistence of the real, the consistence of the imaginary and the hole introduced by the symbolic, while also showing how these can each be transformed according to the way in which suppléance works at each level.

Keywords: creativity—madness—literature—suppléance—ambiguity

Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those, who do not write, compose, or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear, which is inherent in a human condition. (Greene 1980: 320)

That which signifies death for the somatic support is as relevant as life for the drives which are tied up with what I have just called the life of language. (Lacan 2005: 148; italics in original)

… condemned fool, anarch, egoarch, heresiarch, you have reared your disunited kingdom on the vacuum of your own most intensely doubtful soul. (Joyce 1992: 188)

The notion of the mad genius may be one of the oldest clichés in western thought, and the vexed question of the possible link between madness and creativity is one of its more enduring themes (Becker 1978; Jamison 1995; Kaufman, Bromley & Cole 2006). Perhaps this is because creative expression is a tool used by many either to address or to heal emotional trauma. Perhaps this is because creative expression enables us, echoing Beckett, simply to ‘go on’ (Beckett 1976: 382). Nonetheless, this does not explain why ‘the writing cure [does not] help poets’ (Kaufman & Sexton 2006: 268). In order to approach this question, we need to recognise the reality of the unconscious.
This paper examines the hinge between madness and creativity using a psychoanalytic frame. It does not seek to enter an old debate, but rather to identify schemata responsible for creativity, which may be akin to those of madness, in order to suggest how the latter are transformed and stabilised in the creative act. I address the question of madness and creativity from a structural point of view to elucidate Lacan’s concept of *suppléance*, an operation that, as I have suggested elsewhere, prevents subjective dissolution (Hecq 2005; 2008; 2011). By singling out the activity of writing as an instance of *suppléance* incipient in ‘the early Lacan’ (the logic of the signifier) and comparing it with ‘the later Lacan’ (the topology of knots), I posit here that psychotic phenomena are failed attempts at *suppléance*. I argue that although *suppléance* has a structuring function for the ego, it needs to be constantly reiterated in order to be effective. As will become clear, *suppléance* is not part of the subject’s structure, but rather an artifice that allows the articulation between the real, the symbolic and the imaginary, thereby outlining a hole which is the locus of *objet a*.

But there is a catch. If *suppléance* is an artifice, then the hole is false (Lacan 2005: 118) and the articulation between the three registers can be undone (Lacan 2005: 87). This is the condition of psychosis. What if this condition presented itself in the process of writing as happened to Marguerite Duras? We know from her testimony that while writing *The ravishing of Lol V Stein* (1964) she screamed, so ‘scared’ was she of ‘going mad’ (Duras & Porte 1977: 102) and had to take herself away from her desk. What if she had not left the scene of writing? Would she have gone mad?

By paying attention to the mechanisms of the unconscious specific to the condition of psychosis as conceptualised differently by Freud and Lacan (including his various elaborations of it), I suggest that Lacan’s concept of the real provides the key for understanding the nexus between madness and creativity as an index of psychical ambivalence that manifests itself via a triangulation between the imaginary and the symbolic. While the term ‘real’ seems to imply a simplistic notion of an objective external reality, a material substrate that exists in itself, independently of any observer, psychoanalysis disputes this view because the real also includes such things as hallucinations and traumatic dreams. For Lacan, the real is both inside and outside (Lacan 1992: 118). This ambiguity reflects the ambiguity inherent in Freud’s own use of the two German terms for reality (*Wirklichkeit* and *Realität*), and the distinction Freud draws between material reality and psychical reality (Freud 1900: 620). As we shall see, because of Lacan’s emphasis on the real in his later work, the ambiguity at the heart of the real impacts on his earlier views and radically alters the structural difference between neurosis and psychosis (Thurston 1999: 155). In fact, the concept of *suppléance* itself suggests that it is possible for psychosis to ‘simulate’ neurosis, since *suppléance* acts as a neurotic invention that prevents the triggering of psychosis (Lacan 2005: 118). In light of this, I will seek to explain the precariousness of *suppléance* by using Ehrenzweig’s theory of creativity (1967). I will suggest that subjective dissolution may happen when writers identify with ‘unfettered flights of thought’ (ambiguous and ambivalent material) that appear in the process of writing and produce overwhelming anxiety despite the potential, yet unacknowledged, disavowed, or foreclosed, possibility inherent in the prefix ‘un’—the mark of repression (Freud 1919: 241).

But first, let me briefly attempt to define madness. I use the term ‘madness’ for its poetic resonances, just as Lacan does (1993: 40) throughout his teaching to refer to psychosis. This might seem odd as Lacan’s ideas about madness originally derive from the work of the German psychiatrist Karl Jaspers (1997). To use the term ‘madness’ instead of psychosis, however, brings it closer to creativity than pathology. Jaspers suggested that the phenomenon of psychosis involved two dimensions: on the one hand, the history of the patient’s reactions to lived experiences as commonly understandable (*Wirklichkeit*); and on the other hand an unknown change in function in which something new of either psychological or organic origin occurs, and manifests itself by a series of primary disturbances (*Realität*). These primary disturbances might consist, for example, of an awareness of troubling noises,
feelings of being the object of ridicule, or presentiments of danger. Jaspers argued that the subject cannot easily pinpoint the starting point of these perceptual changes, suggesting the difficulty of determining the dividing line between illness and normality over the years preceding the onset of psychosis.

Lacan used Jaspers’ work extensively in his doctoral thesis (Lacan 1932) about the case of a paranoid woman he called Aimée after a character in a novel she had written, grappling as he was with Freud’s ideas about ties of love, identification and projection as they move back and forth between the ego, superego and ego ideal, and the love object. Freud showed how these identifications and projections can shift, so that one’s ego or superego can be modelled after the love object (Freud 1922: 221-33). A libidinal relationship of self-love, or hate, could then be internalised, as in some forms of masochism or narcissism. Reciprocally, these dynamics could be re-externalised in the form of an object relationship characterised by love, persecution, or jealousy. As Lacan saw, the difficulties of the ego that were central to Freud’s thinking did not explain the specificity of paranoia, and he extensively used this model to explain the foundation of human subjectivity in various elaborations of it.

Lacan redefined what psychiatry calls projection as the effect of a failure of primary repression, which he posited as the basic deficiency in psychosis. To describe this mechanism, he adapted from Freud the term Verwerfung, which he translated into French as forclusion (see Grigg 1999: 49), later becoming accepted as ‘foreclosure’ in English. Freud had used Verwerfung to describe a form of defence different from Verdrängung (repression) in that its object was repudiated or expelled from psychic reality and thereby treated as nonexistent. Although Freud did not explore this concept in any depth, Lacan used it to account for his interpretation of the Wolf Man case, a case of ‘infantile neurosis’ (Freud 1918: 3-123). Freud had written that what is rejected from psychic reality can reappear in external (material) reality as not being part of the subject, just as the Wolf Man’s visual hallucination of his finger cut off was interpreted as an effect of his repudiation of castration. In the famous case of Daniel Paul Schreber, an Appeal Court judge in Dresden in the early twentieth century, Freud stated, ‘It was incorrect to say that the perception which is suppressed internally is projected outwards; the truth is rather, as we now see, that what was abolished internally returns from without’ (Freud 1911: 71).

Although Lacan’s most comprehensive discussion of madness appears in his seminar The Psychoses (1993), his most specific and detailed study of it, appears obliquely in his seminar on James Joyce, Le sinthome (2005a). In the former (the early Lacan), psychosis is defined as one of the three clinical structures, that which is determined by the mechanism of foreclosure. Lacan elaborates his concept of foreclosure in terms of a primary rejection of the Name-of-the-Father, a master signifier that ensures the structuring of the subject via the operation of the paternal metaphor, a kind of primary repression that breaks the fantasy of dual union with the mother and engages the subject in the symbolic order of language and culture by introducing the law and regulating desire (Grigg 1999: 55). This means that for the psychotic, the Name-of-the-Father is not integrated in the unconscious, thereby leaving a hole in the symbolic order and causing disorders of language later in life (Lacan 1993: 92). The very concept of suppléance called sinthome with specific reference to Joyce in Seminar XXIII (2005) suggests that the hole in the symbolic can be patched up, an idea at the core of this paper since suppléance itself is understood in that seminar as a neurotic device.

In Lacan’s early theory of madness, for psychosis to be triggered two conditions are necessary: the subject must have a psychotic structure, and the Name-of-the-Father must be ‘summoned to that place [of the Other] in symbolic opposition to the subject’ (Lacan 2006: 481). In the absence of the first condition, no confrontation with the paternal signifier will ever lead to the triggering of
psychosis (Lacan 1993: 15). In the absence of the second, psychosis may remain untriggered, or will be triggered at a later time as happened to Schreber when awarded a promotion. Lacan argues, with Freud, that this promotion, coupled with Schreber’s inability to father a child, triggered the onset of his illness (Freud 1911; Lacan 1993).

For the later Lacan, due to the introduction of object a in the 1960s which, as Luke Thurston points out, corresponds to Lacan’s first references to topology (Thurston 1999: 154), Lacan’s conception of the subject begins to shift due to ‘a certain lack in the Other [being] given a theoretical place’ (Thurston 1999: 154; emphasis added), hence adumbrating a shift in emphasis from the symbolic to the real (Vanheule 2011: 157). Indeed, from Seminar XIX, a remarkable change can be discerned in how Lacan conceptualises the relationship between the registers of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. Whereas in his earlier work a dialectical logic on the relation between these registers predominates, in the 1970s he begins to discuss this relationship within a triangular or three-dimensional logic. Lacan now strives to conceptualise how the real, the symbolic and the imaginary mutually connect and interrelate (Vanheule 2011: 169). From now on, Lacan’s teaching is a teaching of psychoanalysis without the Name-of-the-Father, where the Name-of-the-Father is reabsorbed in plurality (Thurston 1999: 154-55). In fact, after May 1968, Lacan’s teaching is one where the real prevails and the Other does not exist, thereby opening up the field of suppléance as both theoretical concept and clinical approach.

To come back to Joyce, what is intriguing is that both conditions of psychosis may have been present in his case, yet he never experienced psychotic phenomena such as delusions or hallucinations. This prompted Lacan to theorise the operation of suppléance in the mid-1970s. At that juncture, he emphasises the notion of ‘savoir-faire’, or ‘know how’ (Lacan 2005: 118) within the framework of the unconscious as the equivocation between the real and the imaginary (Lacan 2005: 102; emphasis added) rather than over-determined by the symbolic. Reading the later Lacan in light of the early Lacan, one can conceive of suppléance as a continuous ‘cascade of reshappings of the signifier from which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, until the level is reached at which signifier and signified are stabilized in the delusional metaphor’ (Lacan 2006: 481) as ‘savoir-faire’ (Lacan 2005: 118) involving the three registers. Suppléance may thus be understood as a relentless re-making of the ego.

As briefly mentioned above, Lacan had argued early on that the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father produces psychosis because this master signifier is not admitted to the symbolic system, and thus leaves a hole where it should have been inscribed in the unconscious. Foreclosure occurs at the moment of the Oedipus complex, and the onset of psychosis is triggered later on by a particular type of encounter that Lacan calls an ‘encounter with One-father’ (Lacan 2006: 481). For Lacan, this implies that the psychotic structure is in place before psychosis suddenly and dramatically appears, as is obvious in the case of Schreber, who had led a normal personal, social and professional life until his promotion. The encounter with One-father, which is a call for symbolic recognition, is brought about in situations that arise under two circumstances: when the subject is in some intense relation with a narcissistic component; and when, in this situation, the question of the father arises from a third position external to the erotic situation. This means that once the psychosis is triggered, everything changes. But, as Russell Grigg asks, ‘what about before the onset?’ (1999: 63). It is, Grigg goes on, in pursuing this question that Lacan discusses Helene Deutsch’s work, in which she refers to the ‘as if’ phenomenon, where an adolescent boy identifies with a friend in what looks like a homosexual relationship but turns out to herald a psychosis (1999: 63). Here there is something that plays the role of suppléance, a proxy, for what is missing at the symbolic dimension of language.

When the psychosis is triggered, it stabilises into a delusional system, suggesting that psychotic phenomena themselves are attempts at suppléance. This may explain why some psychotics have been
capable of making important contributions to science, philosophy, art and literature before, or in between, psychotic episodes. Invoking such cases, Lacan speculates that there may be others where the psychosis is never triggered. In these cases the subject seems to find or make up a substitute for the foreclosed signifier that enables him or her to maintain the symbolic links necessary for functioning. Lacan argues that Joyce was such a case (Lacan 2005).

Before turning to literature, however, let us pause and see if we can learn anything from madness. Schreber's delusional system revolves around the relationship between One-father (God) and his own body. This emphasis on the body is crucial if we recall what Freud said of the ego: it is 'first and foremost a body-ego' (Freud 1923: 27). In fact, Schreber's *jouissance* centres on his whole body, and in particular on the 'divine miracles' (Schreber 2000: 141) performed upon it. Schreber imagined that the rays of God would 'unman' him, by carrying out 'various changes in [his] sex organ: several times (particularly in bed) there were marked indications of an actual retraction of the male organ'; he also detected 'a softening approaching almost complete dissolution' (Schreber 2000: 142), the loss of hairs from his beard and moustache and a diminution in body size. Similarly, his heart, lungs, stomach and other organs were relentlessly attacked. He was persuaded that God's project was to transform his body into that of a woman. He had nerves from his wife's soul inserted into his body. Little men, the souls of the dead, were attracted to him and lived for a short time in his head. Scorpions and other crab- or spider-like creatures would repeatedly be inserted into his head to carry out their own destructive work. Finally, he is summoned to behave as if he were a corpse. Interestingly, as if to urge us to witness the suffering this must have caused, Schreber adds a footnote to his account:

This, as indeed the whole report about the miracles enacted on my body, will naturally sound extremely strange to all other human beings, and one may be inclined to see in it only the product of a pathologically vivid imagination. In reply I can only give the assurance that hardly any memory from my life is more certain than the miracles recounted in this chapter. *What can be more definite for a human being than what he has lived through and felt on his own body?* (Schreber 2000: 142; emphasis added)

This excerpt highlights the function of writing as social bond or symbolic link and therefore as attempt at *suppléance*. Schreber invites the reader to witness his pain. In swapping from first person to third person, moreover, Schreber gives away some ambivalence at the level of the imaginary. Perhaps this is because in psychosis the body painfully becomes an enigma, the locus where all ambiguity and ambivalence come into play. Schreber makes the point not only that the subject in psychosis is not the owner of his own body, but also that he finds it extremely painful. A symptom is not only 'what causes suffering, indicating something amiss in the Real', writes Robert Harari; 'it has to be identified as such by the sufferer' (Harari 2002: 45). Isn't this what Schreber does in the above paragraph, suggesting that his ego *qua* body is a symptom, as Freud does in his study of the splitting of ego (Freud 1938)?

Let us compare this with Lacan's reading of Joyce's relationship with his body to see how psychoanalysis can learn from literature. While Lacan had originally followed Freud in his conception of the symptom as a formation of the unconscious, which translates a compromise between two conflicting desires, the conceptual shift from linguistics to topology that marks his later work conceives of the symptom as a kernel of *jouissance* immune to the efficacy of the symbolic, as the trace of the unique modality of the subject's enjoyment (*jouissance*). This he highlights by calling his 23rd seminar *Le sinthome* (Lacan 2005). *Sinthome*, as Lacan makes clear when he (re-)introduces the term for its punning possibilities as the title for his seminar on James Joyce, is an archaic spelling of the French *symptome* from which the English 'symptom' derives. Lacan's intention is to highlight what is particular about Joyce's symptom. Through an elaboration of his topology of the subject as
underpinned by the concept of the Borromean knot (developed the previous year, 1974-75, in *Le Séminaire. Livre XXII: RSI*) and a reading of Joyce’s writings, Lacan redefines the symptom as that which ensures the subject’s survival by providing a unique organisation of jouissance. Joyce’s symptom / *sinthome* is the writing that allows him ‘to go on’ by providing a unique mode of jouissance. In this sense, the *sinthome* is an unacknowledged symptom with a stabilising effect for, as Lacan shows, Joyce managed to avoid the onset of psychosis by deploying his art as *suppléance*. Here, the symptom acts as a supplementary device that patches up a hole in the imaginary. Lacan explains this in terms of the Borromean knot, the figure is found on the coat of arms of the Borromeo family, because the Borromean Knot is a group of three rings linked in such a way that if any one of them is cut, all three become separated. In his late seminars, i.e. from Seminar XX onwards, Lacan uses the Borromean knot as a way of illustrating the interdependence of the three orders of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary (*Lacan 1998*). This corresponds to a rethinking of the relationship between language and the body in the structuring of the subject. The *sinthome* is thus the trace of Joyce’s particular modality of jouissance, the kernel of enjoyment immune to the efficacy of the symbolic.

In Chapter X of *Le sinthome*, Lacan shows how strange and peculiar is Joyce’s relationship with his own ego. Joyce’s ego, he says without elucidating, has a specific function. I speculate here that it is not so much Joyce’s relationship with his ego that is peculiar, but rather his relationship with his body *qua* ego. This can be traced in his autobiographical novel *A portrait of the artist as a young man* (*Joyce 1978*). Joyce’s position, Lacan argues, can be understood by way of the knotting of thought, body and soul. First, it must be noted that, for Stephen, thought provokes a conflict between body and soul. This conflict is related to the evocation or interplay of four signifiers: the father, sin, the relationship to the body and the symptom. The symptom is what Lacan calls ‘Joyce’s ego’ (*Lacan 2005*: 145). From Lacan’s perspective, for Stephen the knotting of thought, soul and body depends on the relation between the abdication of the father (the lack of support), an acute awareness of sin and the corporeal sensation of ‘a letting it fall’ (*Lacan 2005*: 150). In his explanation of a passage in *A Portrait* which highlights Stephen’s relation to his body through the metaphor of a piece of fruit divesting itself of its peel, Lacan uses the verb *laisser tomber* (to let fall), a term that also resonates with his seminar on anxiety (*Lacan 2002*: 129-37) as well as with Freud’s case of the homosexual woman (*Freud 1920*: 145-72). In the seminar on anxiety, *laisser tomber* refers to the workings of *objet a* and in particular to the deathly consequences of identifying with the desire of the mother. In this instance, the *a* remains and the *I* is discarded together with the imaginary. Subsequently, the ego attempts to salvage what has been lost, an attempt that occurs in the body, since the ego is inscribed in the imaginary. Interestingly, this sensation of letting fall is apparent in the Schreber case, too, when Schreber feels that God ‘leaves him in the lurch’ (*Lacan 2006*: 467, 470).

Two situations determined by the Borromean knotting arise in Joyce with regard to the three registers (*Lacan 2005*: 150-53). First, from his early epiphanies to *Finnegans Wake* his writing presents us with enigmas, namely statements (*énoncés*) that cannot find their enunciation and thus present us with a fault in the imaginary and its eventual patching up. For Lacan, the epiphany may be the result of this error: namely, that there is a lack of symbolic support due to the failure of the paternal metaphor. Since ‘the unconscious is tied to the real’ (*Lacan 2005*: 129), and is moreover the *equivocation* between the real and the imaginary (*Lacan 2005*: 102), the enigma as epiphany is bound up with Joyce’s ego. Or, rather, it is bound up with the slip of the imaginary through excess or absence, which occurs in the writing of the Borromean knot, in this instance a trefoil, a slip that calls for the reparation to be crafted by the ego (an artifice, a *suppléance*). This is poetically adumbrated in two epiphanies of the artistic vocation in *A Portrait*. The first, cryptically, epiphaniises Stephen’s name and presents a moment of near imaginary collapse (*Joyce 1978*: 14-15). The second occurs at the climax of Stephen’s exilic positioning in Ireland, when he has rejected father, church and country (*Joyce 1978*: 152-54).
As a visionary insight an epiphany is a creative event; but as a slip of the imaginary it bears the mark of manic omnipotence. In any case, it is possible to read into it the traces of three registers of foreclosure, namely ‘the ex-sistence of the real, the consistence of the imaginary and the hole introduced by the symbolic’ (Dravers 2005). Similarly this complex correlation of the three registers can be traced in Stephen’s first epiphany of the artistic vocation. In this instance, what he calls ‘the soul’ (Joyce 1978: 152) is born after he has rejected a possible career in the religious orders. Teased by his schoolmates who disfigure his name, he suddenly understands how his name contains the potentialities of his vocation. Thus, realising the prophetic meaning of his own name, Stephen’s imagination takes wing. He sees a Daedelian figure ‘flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air’ (Joyce 1978: 153). This causes him to wonder whether this ‘hawklike man’ (Joyce 1978: 154) stands for ‘a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve … a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being’ (Joyce 1978: 154). Symptomatically, Stephen identifies with this birdlike figure, and struggles to articulate a cry:

His throat ached with a desire to cry aloud, the cry of a hawk or eagle on high, to cry piercingly of his deliverance to the winds. This was the call of life to his soul, not the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair, not the inhuman voice that had called him to the pale service of the altar. (Joyce 1978: 154)

What this excerpt shows is that psychosis and creativity have in common a certain amount of self-destructiveness, and a threat to the ego. The important difference between the two phenomena, however, is the fact that creative artists are obviously able to alternate between contrary modes of perception. Thus, from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, their egos must be constantly re-made to ensure symbolic anchoring, and in this they differ from those who, though structurally akin, fail to do so because there is no stabilising mechanism to assist the transition between opposed kinds of thinking. It would be trite to end this discussion by saying that Joyce never went mad because he became God ‘paring his fingernails’ (Joyce 1978: 34). Yet there is some truth in this: unlike Schreber, who remained subjected to his symptom and his God, anchored as these were in the real (the corpse), Joyce managed to identify with his symptom and with the God of writing, and thereby transcend pain and despair.

Although it would seem from the above discussion that the ego may be stabilised through writing, as suppléance it is a double-edged sword: the knot may come undone when ambivalent material previously repressed, disavowed or foreclosed reappears from the real—for example in the process of writing, as may have happened to Duras—and must negotiate overbearing anxiety.

As I discuss elsewhere (Hecq 2012), for Julia Kristeva rhythm plays a crucial role in mapping subjectivity, integrating as it does the symbolic with the imaginary in the chora (Kristeva 1984). By canvassing some of Ehrenzweig’s ideas on creativity, I conjecture that rhythm anchors the subject in the real as well, thereby suggesting that writing and other artistic practices perform a symbolic function akin to the structure of the Joycean epiphany. My aim in this section is to attempt to conceptualise the operation of suppléance in ways that may be more practical for writers (and readers). This will involve examining schemata responsible for our emotional involvement in writing or reading, two activities which constantly entangle feelings experienced as positive or negative. Such ceaseless transformation is important inasmuch as it may allow for some stabilisation of the creative process. In short, intending to explore the mechanism of suppléance, I play out Ehrenzweig’s psychoanalytic study of creativity against the above discussion.
Freud does not speak about what may trigger psychosis, yet he does make the link between anxiety and the onset of hysterical attacks (Freud 1909). Lacan, as we have seen, speaks about two conditions, but recent research has rightly questioned his early views on psychosis and foreclosure in light of his own later topological turn and focus on the real being over-determined by the symbolic (Harari 2002; Skriabine 1987, 1995; Soler 1989, 1993; Thurston 2003). Ehrenzweig, theoretically somewhere between Freud and Lacan, investigates in detail the way in which musicians, painters and sculptors produce works of art. Ehrenzweig is not concerned with writers. His theory offers a way of conceptualising the emotional dimensions implicated in the creative process because his insights suggest a parallel between the structures of creative processes that surface in structures that enhance or limit the reception of art. Moreover, both the production and the reception of art are characterised by a specific form of creativity, one that is analogous to the realisation of a poetic text that involves the author as both writer and reader.

In his book *The Hidden Order of Art: a Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination*, Ehrenzweig brings some order to the chaos from which the creative process arises. The origin of creativity appears chaotic because, at the deepest levels of our imaginative capacities, orderly linear thinking interrelates with the multidimensional and disorderly circulation of signs, affects and drives. This ‘polyphonic structure’ (Ehrenzweig 1967: 17) arises from a superimposition of several different strands of thought. Ehrenzweig argues that artists are able to alternate between rationally determined thinking and the polyphonous structure of unconscious processes, using both in new and surprising ways. This is interesting, for in psychosis the subject is overwhelmed by the (real) chaos of the unconscious, thereby losing control over rational capacities altogether, whereas for Ehrenzweig this can be overcome through rhythm.

In order to conceptualise the hidden order of creative chaos in abstract terms, Ehrenzweig reinterprets the concept of the unconscious as developed and constantly modified by Freud. Most notably, he abandons the Freudian notion that unconscious primary processes are unstructured, and that primary process thinking precludes the distinction between binary oppositions. In Freud’s version of the unconscious, the concepts of time and space are non-existent, all boundaries are imploded and chaotic impulses circulate freely. In Ehrenzweig’s model, on the other hand, unconscious processes are conceived of as precise instruments which prove qualitatively superior even to our rational (conscious) ways of understanding the world (Ehrenzweig 1967: 7). Concurrently, Ehrenzweig modifies Freud’s concept of censorship, the agency which separates the unconscious from the conscious: where Freud saw the substance of certain ideas as necessitating repression, Ehrenzweig postulates that the undifferentiated structure of many concepts suffices to make them inaccessible to conscious thought processes. Other parts of the unconscious, however, can be accessed and exploited for ordered thinking. In light of our earlier discussion of *suppléance*, this is in itself interesting.

Ehrenzweig diverges from Freud’s theories on the question of how we gain access to the unconscious. According to Freud, the conscious ego develops from the unconscious by means of differentiation processes that can only partially (if at all) be undone. Only in dreams, the psychopathology of everyday life, or psychotic episodes can undifferentiated impulses ever erupt from the unconscious. Ehrenzweig, however, distinguishes between two different modes of access: ‘undifferentiation’ and ‘dedifferentiation’. Undifferentiation describes primary processes in the Freudian sense as well as certain static image structures that are also at work in the unconscious; whereas dedifferentiation is a dynamic process that opens up the way to unconscious resources and creativity:

I will speak of undifferentiation when referring to the static structure of the unconscious image making, of dedifferentiation when describing the dynamic process by which the ego scatters and represses surface imagery. (Ehrenzweig 1967: 19)
Thus, whereas psychosis is characterised by undifferentiated chaos, creativity is understood as a structured sequence of dedifferentiating and differentiated (purposeful) modes of thinking.

The peculiarity of the dedifferentiation processes lies in the fact that our usual mode of thinking in binary oppositions is suspended, and no choice has to be made between images and thoughts that are mutually exclusive. The ‘either or’ of rational thinking is replaced, as in Freud’s primary process—a contingent series of images. One of the challenges creative artists repeatedly face is the question of choice: that is, of having to choose between several possibilities before even possessing the information needed to make a selection. Unlike the secondary process, which endeavours to reduce complexity, dedifferentiation processes can tolerate the concurrence of the non-concurrent, the multiplicity of open forms with blurred boundaries.

Ehrenzweig calls the concurrent grasping of the many different ways in which a certain problem might be solved ‘scanning’ (Ehrenzweig 1967: 19). Unconscious scanning is the indispensable requirement for pursuing a creative impulse in the ‘right’ direction. During immersion in the realm of unconscious imagination, the weight of the images and structures characterised by static undifferentiation must not become too dominant. To prevent this, the ego must constantly oscillate between dedifferentiating and conscious thought processes. Only a reasoned train of thought can initiate such an alternation between opposed modes of perception. One can see that the ability to utilise both modes of thinking simultaneously is an ego function involving the real, the imaginary and the symbolic.

Ehrenzweig thus proposes a different construct to address the question that has long been asked about the link between madness and creativity. He does so rather convincingly. Moreover, his theoretical notions are easier to grasp once we consider some of the examples he offers by way of illustration. Ehrenzweig suggests that dedifferentiation processes play a central role in many different areas, including the structural patterns of myths and legends that centre on the ambiguity, not the antithesis, between the death and the life force. See his discussion of the myth of the dying god, Osiris (Ehrenzweig 1967: xiii) pertaining to the madness / creativity question (Jamison 1995; Kaufman & Baer 2002: 271-86).

Ehrenzweig postulates an ego rhythm, a rhythmical movement through the various levels of our mental organisation. He sees this movement as essential for the functioning of all our mental processes, not only for the special case of creativity. It is just that the ego rhythm is more clearly marked during the creative act, and thus it can be more easily studied in the light of this act. Any perturbation, including the arousal of anxiety, within the rhythmic movement, within the oscillation between phases of ‘dedifferentiation’, results in psychopathological phenomena. While, during creative phases, functional use is made of the self-destructive aspects of immersion in levels of the unconscious—in that linguistic structures showing concurrence of the non-concurrent can be subjected to unconscious scanning—immersion in the unconscious during psychotic events is almost entirely self-destructive: the ego rhythm is impeded, no dynamic movement between different modes of perception occurs and images of static undifferentiation multiply. It is exactly this multiplication of static undifferentiation that one might attempt to translate into poetic texts, particularly if these are stylistically experimental. Flirting as they may do with the unnameable, writers often challenge the flexibility of literary discourse, tacitly asking or answering the question of how structured language can convey a conglomerate of unconscious images which, according to Ehrenzweig, are inaccessible to the ego, not only because of their threatening nature but also because of their undifferentiated, static structure.

Unlike creativity, then, madness may be defined by the very fact that the rhythmical alternation between opposing modes of thinking is impeded. The emotional responses in the writing process are
not linear, or even static, but markedly dynamic in structure; a phenomenon which, no doubt, is both familiar and strange for many writers. Phases of pleasurable experience alternate with oppressive phases. Only by means of such alternation can the creative process be stabilised.

The interplay between author and text compounds anxiety—as writers we experience it and as readers we re-experience it. Ehrenzweig’s notion of what the reception of pictorial art and music entails applies to creative writing:

Pictorial and musical space have the same capacity for compression and simultaneous expansion, stability within constant change, envelopment and repulsion. The pictorial space of great painting repels and envelops us. *We may feel trapped and lost in the infinite at the same time.* (Ehrenzweig 1967: 94)

A sense of an enveloping oppression, a sensation of being trapped in the text—which is further enhanced by the virtual dimension of the creative act—could also be Ehrenzweig’s topic. This virtual dimension comprises proliferations of phantasies relating to the subject, which are expansive factors, as well as intertextual references to literary conventions. The dimension is virtual because, although it is stimulated in the act of writing, it is not contained by any definite textual strategy, it is ‘as if’ it must be supplied by some ‘other’, who may well ‘feel lost in the infinite’ (Ehrenzweig 1967: 64). Thus intertextual references are ambivalent inasmuch as they—at least initially—counteract a strongly negative (because suspended) openness by evoking stabilising reading experiences embodied in the virtual reader who nods as we write. When the expectation of stabilisation is thwarted, however, disappointment of the reader’s expectations reinforces his sense of an enveloping oppression to an even greater degree. In Lacanian terms, the other is confused with the Other. In that event, neither pain nor disgust can affect us; only anxiety.

The communicatory situation pre-structured by textual strategies at that point become expansive and open. It is ‘as if’ the author’s concretisation of textual strategies, including grammar, syntax and lexemes, is shot through by repercussions from the text’s virtual dimension, which, as in Joyce’s epiphanies and in non-mimetic poetry is brought to the limit of intelligibility through the use of metaphor. Like some un-fettered flight of thought itself, metaphor only apparently controls the expansion inherent in the text that we are writing for, in the last resort, the virtual dimension, also wedged between the other and the Other, enhances the openness of the text. Thus, at least potentially, forces of expanding and contracting, dedifferentiating and re-differentiating, are at work simultaneously.

Reflecting on the analogies and discrepancies between madness and creativity as these are conceptualised by different thinkers opens up a way into those dimensions of experience that are situated in the extimate recesses of the unconscious, and constantly repelled by conscious perception. If productive creativity is defined as a rhythmic oscillation between different modes of thinking, one that has to be actively initiated by the ego functions, such alternation will not necessarily be rhythmic during revision. Shifts are contingent. Their function is to modify unpleasure.

In order to elaborate on his notion of creativity, Ehrenzweig modified Freud’s concept of the unconscious by dividing it into static and dynamic structures. Ehrenzweig’s theory of creativity is defined on the one hand by an unconscious scanning of mutually exclusive phenomena, and on the other by a rhythmic oscillation between conscious and unconscious modes of perception. I would like to extend his concept of creativity to include the idea that productive as well as receptive creativity requires toleration of the concurrence of the non-concurrent and that in both cases the ego carries
out certain distinct movements. The difference between the two lies in the fact that receptive creativity does not have the rhythm essential to productive creativity.

Referring back to our example of reading about Schreber and Joyce, this means that the success of suppléance may be determined by the ways in which the arrhythmic oscillation between pathological phenomena that arise from the real are discarded by their imaginary component and bound to the symbolic. Ehrenzweig suggests that a rhythmic oscillation between the different forms of mental organisation is part of the ego function; as soon as this rhythm is interrupted, illness or even death impend. The failure of suppléance that sometimes happens during the writing process may thus be defined by a pattern of counterfactual movements that are experienced, in the imaginary involvement at work in processing the text, as a contingent alternation between pleasurable and oppressive experiences. Mutually exclusive movements may surface simultaneously, a phenomenon that otherwise occurs in this form only in the unconscious. Whether this process is experienced as enriching and pleasurable, or threatening and anxiety-provoking, depends on the ways in which the imaginary and the real, as the equivocation that is constitutive of the unconscious itself, are wedged in their knotting with the symbolic.

End notes

1. Suppléance is an operation whereby the pre-psychotic subject mimics neurosis by using creative resources to patch up a hole in the symbolic owing to the non-integration of the Name-of-the-Father. In light of its etymological roots in French, suppléance is a 'stand-in' which acts as de facto, thus indicating that it refers to a dynamic process as well as the function that it fulfills. As such it is a symptom necessary to a person's functioning in that it ties the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. Suppléance can take the form of art-making, including writing, as was Lacan's thesis about Joyce in his twenty-third seminar (Lacan 2005 [1975-76]). Recent research and clinical practice also suggests that in the 21st century addictions and may function as suppléance.

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