OPEN DISCUSSION

MANGIONE: On the subject of the writer's block, and I speak mainly from my own experience, it comes mostly from fear—usually at the start of a work—the fear of not getting a good start which, of course, means a tremendous waste of time because you might go off in the wrong direction for a long time. It's very important to start well, and this fear sometimes paralyzes one's ability to work. I have found this so in my own experience.

I would like to ask George Rochberg whether musicians have musical blocks.

ROCHBERG: Well, we have the same blocks you have. They're not musical. They're just blocks.

MANGIONE: I guess the "writer's block" has become sort of a cliché.

ROCHBERG: Yes, because there are more writers than there are composers, and because writers are always talking about their blocks and composers never do, and that's not to criticize writers. But I can recall, for example (to be autobiographical for a moment because I'm the only person I can speak about with any authority) in 1958 I had reached a peculiar kind of emotional, psychological, spiritual state in which I found I was unable to compose. I found myself in a curious kind of condition where I was beginning to doubt the validity of a particular way of working. Now I think that is a kind of block which could begin to produce some very serious problems, and I went through hell!

MANGIONE: Yes. I was talking about the same sort of thing.

ROCHBERG: Now the second quartet of which you heard only fragments, was the second work which I wrote as I was pulling myself up and out of that state.

JENNINGS: I would like to hear what Kenneth Burke has to say about a writer's block.

BURKE: I found that the problem was not so much on that end, it was on the other end—coming out of it. You made some mention of that. When you get through with something you've got into a state whereby the real world is unreal and the thing you've been in is the real world, and it's extremely painful. Re-entry is a very big problem. I found that when I got through my novel, there was a violent man going crazy, and I was just about as near to it as I could get and stay on this side. I really had a terrible job getting out of that. And even in straight theoretical books—that did the same thing. I'm going to talk a little bit about that when I get to my paper because it's one of the things I want to bring up—why I'm so insistent that you cannot just treat creativity as a good word. You can get caught in it in all kinds of ways. It could ride you; it can get you into a terrible amount of trouble.

GADDINI: The whole question could start from the problem of fiction that Mr. Mangione mentioned, one of the creative problems, be it a musical one or one of fiction or some other art product. The problem would be, what does it mean to the creator—to the artist? In my opinion, the art product is something that doesn't just stand in reality as such, but in an intermediate area; something between the person who creates and reality which, as such, has nothing to do with the product of art.

Now, what is real for the artist, is not reality as such. His own production must be real for himself, and this feeling of reality of his own work is part of his self-esteem and his believing in what he does and the real feeling of himself. When this is not at the right level, it means trouble. This means depression, and then the way to go back to creative work is a way of escaping the negative wave, which perhaps happens to every artist almost rhythmically (if you may talk of rhythms). But I don't believe so much that the problem would be the publisher or the criticism in themselves, but rather what they can mean in terms of this inner problem. The criticism certainly affects the artist tremendously, because if his work is threatened by the outer world, he feels that what he does is not real, inasmuch as it is not accepted. This may induce the relative depression and the difficulty of getting back his own self-esteem enough to produce. This may be a hard job sometimes without psychological help. And that's why, as Professor Servadio said this morning, it is important for the analyst not so much to cure an artist in his own neurotic patterns, but just to put him back to work—to create, because creativeness is the real basic need of an artist, and you can't assume you can cure him by making him a normal being in the usual sense. So much for that problem.

But, of course, there are many other very interesting points in the papers by Mr. Mangione and Mr. Rochberg. I'll just take one, what Mr. Rochberg said about "this feeling of the infinite," and also what you, Mr. Mangione, said about "the secret of the writer." Now, my impression is that when you go to the psi factor, this is just the feeling of the mystery within yourself as a creative person, this something that is coming to you and it is not you who are doing it. This is a basic feature of creativeness. Inspiration is the capacity of being passive enough to bear what's coming from within, and then being active enough to master it and then translating it into something that's the product of art. And the first phase is perhaps the most threatening, because that implies getting in touch with the deeper strata of the mind, which may be frightening, and this is the capacity of the artist which has been called "the regression at the service of the ego," to use psychoanalytical terms.

Now, I had the impression that the way you said you felt is still not the psi factor. The psi factor is something that perhaps is underlying all the creative attitude, because, what would the creative purpose be? To create a reality? To create a reality as valid as reality itself? Now, when the psi factor intervenes, then something has happened that brings a real piece of reality into the creative product.

I would make this distinction because when you can speak of the psi factor in creativeness, then you should be able to demonstrate that really there was some perception which was beyond the normal way of experiencing reality, which implies an extrasensory perception which could be used by the creator or the creative process. When you can find that, then I would talk of psi factor. In my opinion the psi phenomenon itself is still not a factor; but the moment it is used by the creative process in terms and for the purpose of the creative process, then it may be called a psi factor in the creative process.

SERVADIO: I wanted to make a few remarks about something that was said by George Rochberg about the possibility that certain music can enable a man to trespass limitations and "get in tune with the infinite," to use his words. For some time I've made some reflections on what are usually called "magic words," that you find in fables and legends, words like "abracadabra." Now this, in my opinion, is just the end result of a very long process which, if you do it in reverse, brings you to musical expressions.

The mantras, for instance, in India, are not just words. They're words, but said and chanted in a particular way. I was in India and I heard what they said in the morning when the river was flowing, and

it wasn't just the words they were saying, but the emphasis on the music attuning themselves with the river, so to speak, with the flowing of the water. I read several years ago, and was very astonished at first, the words, the magical words and chantments of a liturgy which belongs to a great magic—a ritual of a legend. If you read the printed words there is a series of vowels and consonants that you can hardly pronounce, but I am convinced and positive that in those times they knew how to make these consonants and vowels live with a certain rhythm, a certain breathing accompaniment that could certainly enable the priest who conducted the ceremony to get in touch with something that went beyond his knowledge and brought him probably towards something that we may call parapsychological for lack of a better word.

JENNINGS: Mr. Towle, you wanted to say something?

TOWLE: Thank you. I have a few short comments and then a question. The first one was to Mr. Mangione about the faith of the writer in knowing that he can do it, even though he doesn't know how. I just wanted to mention that a philosopher who just died recently, had a philosophical concept for that kind of a thing, if you care to explore it some time. He called it "negative wholeness," as distinguished from the "positive wholeness" of omnipotence. Negative wholeness, to him was to feel as though one has no limit.

MANGIONE: That's like saying you have faith in your psyche. You don't know what it is, what induces it, or what will come of it, but you believe in it.

TOWLE: Right. It's a feeling of having no limit, but not necessarily being omnipotent. And the other comment was to Mr. Rochberg and he mentioned the "sound of liberation," and Dr. Meerloo said something about the self as a symphony—the bodily rhythms of beating of hearts and secreting of hormones, and temperature and so forth. Dr. Servadio spoke about the mantras, the sound of liberation, that will help you to come to an inner psychological state where you actually hear that sound without any vocal cords. It's like some kind of a resonant frequency of the nervous system which affects the auditory sounds of the brain, possibly. I'm not sure how that would work, but it is a definite sound that one hears without hearing through the ears.

Then my question is: about a writer's block, or artist's block I was wondering if it's like a need to be blocked in order to create, in order to achieve liberation, so that the block is perhaps a step on the way to the creation rather than necessarily always freely flowing like a gush ing fountain—to punctuate creativity with these blocks.

JENNINGS: We have a complaint on that last, by Dr. Servadio.

SERVADIO: I don't think of the writer's block or the artist's block as a necessary step towards creation. It's a downright inhibition. I'm quite in agreement with Dr. Meerloo when he said it is not a paralysis of creativity; it's a paralysis of production. Just as a hysterical malaise of the legs prevents a person from walking, but doesn't mean that he doesn't know how to walk.

MARGENAU: There have been references to the emergence of reality which comes to the fore during creation, and these I do not yet fully understand because I lack knowledge as to the meaning of the word in this context. I will brush these off for the time being as irrelevant to my particular theme which is a parallelism between the psychology of the creative act in the arts upon which this afternoon's discussions have dwelt, and the creative act in the sciences. I merely want to note that in the sciences you have precisely the same psychological features occurring.

There is the psychological block—the frustrating period in which you're prevented from achieving what you set out to achieve, and have only a very vague notion of what you want to do. There is a pattern in your mind, but to achieve it presents a number of obstacles. We, in the sciences, speak with less fervor and with diminished pathos and indulgence about those things, but we could, I think, speak in precisely the same terms of the magnificent feeling of achievement that occurs, of the devastating experience of the block, the psychological block, etc. That is one thing. Now there is one point on which I would like to ask a question in this general connection:

I, myself, have found a block frequently occurs because of what we in the sciences call lack of information. I think there is an equivalent to that in the arts, however, it's not for me to speak of that. The point is simply that external circumstances at our disposal frequently remove the block and the scientist then goes at a rapid pace towards discovery. You may recall that Kekulé who formulated a theory concerning the structure of the benzene ring, was enlightened by a dream he had. He dreamt of a serpent eating his own tail. He got up the next morning and wrote down his theory of the benzene ring. Now there was a psi factor. I myself remember one time being greatly troubled by a problem in physics. I worked my head off on it and couldn't get anywhere. In the sciences we don't quite despair when this happens, we turn to another problem. I don't suppose that's done very often in the arts, or maybe it is, I don't know—at any rate, it took about a year until I saw the point, and the point was yielded to me by the discovery of another

man. This now was precisely the missing link, in what I had attempted. Now this was a creative act. It was stimulated, indeed, by an incidental circumstance. I wonder if you have neglected to emphasize these incidents in your own work in the arts.

ROCHBERG: I certainly can't speak for Jerre and Pat Mangione in relation to their own way of working, but I frequently keep many things going. I'm working directly on one thing, and I'm thinking of two or three or four or five or ten other things, and I think that really this is the experience of every worker in the arts, whether he's a painter or a composer. The remarks which you make about stimulation from an external incident, I don't know that I can actually match that in terms of my own experience, but my way of resolving at least minimal blocks (let me use that term), is to get away, like the painter who stands away from his canvas to see what he's done so he can go back to it and continue. I have to get away from my work and I usually find the best way to do that is to go down to the seashore and just simply relax and give myself to the elements, as it were, and I don't think. At least twice in the last three years, I can recall when in this condition where I was as I thought not thinking—suddenly there was the answer! So I suppose that sometimes the external influence comes in the form of somebody else having supplied you with the missing link as in the case you described, Dr. Margeneau. It may or may not be germane to the point you're making, but I think it will be interesting at least to know that in the second quartet, there are four tempos which are going on pretty much simultaneously, and they phase in and out of each other constantly. Now, in terms of calibrating time, just simply in terms of durations, this was a head-breaking job for me because I had to deal with proportions of not just two to one (that's simple), but two to three, and three to four, and of course, the climax of the work for me comes at a point (you haven't heard it yet because we haven't had the time to play the whole work)—but it comes at that point just before the second arioso for the soprano—all the instruments of the quartet combine each in one of those four tempos. So in a sense, there you have a musical analogue to your human parallelisms. I just wanted to mention this because I thought it would feed you some similar information.

MANGIONE: Coming back to the point of methods of work, I think it really differs with different people. For example, the doctor was telling me that Kafka was able to work on three books at one time. This to me is extraordinary. Most of the writers I know, and myself included, have to work on one thing without too much distraction. That

is, if it's something important. If it's writing a review or writing a speech during the same period, those, of course, are a different thing. But I'm talking about writing a poem or a novel. It seems to require concentrated effort and it's very hard to get away from. You keep at it for fear you will lose whatever you've achieved in the way of acceleration of feeling.

I would like to mention a personal experience I had. I was writing a novel and it took a great deal out of me. A novel called "The Ship and the Flame," which is about a group of refugees escaping from Europe, and I had a brief inspection of the very ship where these refugees were traveling. I saw the ship, of course, after the war. I was describing the situation of a group of people sometime during the early forties. You'll remember there was a period when ships were going from one port to another; people were trying to get in.

I wrote this novel and it was a very difficult novel for me to write because I had to project. I didn't know many of the people on the ship and I had to do a great deal of imagining, and it was a great effort of a kind, and yet I was able to be rather explicit about the life and conditions on the ship, which were rather horrible. Shortly after I finished this novel, even before it was published, I took a trip to Europe and I was on a ship where I had some of the very same experiences I had written about. This struck me in such an extraordinary way that I couldn't even talk about it for awhile. I thought that people would think I was fantasizing. But, in other words, what I had written in my novel came to life so far as some of my personal experiences were concerned. Of course, my experiences were not as extreme or as dramatic as those of the people on the ship, but nonetheless some of the very same details occurred. For example, getting a delegation together to complain to the captain about the conditions on the ship—a delegation, incidentally I myself led on the ship that I took to Europe. That was one of the details that I had described in my novel.

I wonder whether this comes within the realm of extrasensory perception or premonition or suggestive power.

GADDINI: That's very impressive because what I said about what the psi factor is in the creative process and what it is not, is just a test situation. One can never say, after all, when an artist may reach the psi level or not, because the only testing situation would be the reality experience itself. But still, then, some critical examination is compulsory and in this case, for instance, I would suspect that it is not a real psi factor which has intervened, but you just living out, in a way,

what you had created. This is something that one should take into account.

We see patients who, after having dreamed of something, may then experience something which they relate to the dream, but which they say happened afterwards. This is common experience. Now, in this case how much a person is just continuing his line of thought which was already present in the dream, and continued in reality, and how much of the dream was a premonition of what was going to happen, this is a difficult problem to solve.

SERVADIO: I just wanted to make a comment about something Dr. Gaddini said. It is the richness of the details that sometimes gives you the impression that it could have been a premonition rather than the phenomenon of being the reverse of what Dr. Gaddini just explained. I remember one of my patients, many years ago, a lady, who had these premonitory exploitations of some pieces of reality that could fit very well into her own particular problems. For instance, in one dream she dreamt of a little elephant playing clumsily in a courtyard, and of course it was an infantile clumsy aspect of herself. Then after three or four days, going through Villa Borghese Road, she saw a little elephant taking a stroll with his guardian. Another time she dreamt of a lady holding a little monkey in her arms, and, of course, that again was an aspect of herself as a baby, and she would have liked her mother to cuddle her in her arms as that girl in the dream was holding the monkey. After five or six days, a magazine appeared and there was a photograph of a girl holding a monkey in her arms, and she brought the photograph to me to see. That was the second incident of that kind and was certainly premonitory. At the same time it was dynamic since she needed that kind of material to help her dreams because they fitted in, as I said, with her own problems.

MEERLOO: I want to come back to this other question of black mood because something has to be said about what happens after the production is done. This is universal. After Mr. Mangione has finished his book or task, as he did, he's empty afterwards. He feels a little bit depressed more or less. But a creative man overcomes it. He finds another task. That's very important. Last year I gave a lecture about people who are not able to overcome this sudden abstention from work. We know that at vacation time, for those people the heart doesn't do its work and accident proneness increases. They don't know how to use their own emptiness. That is very important.