

CREATIVITY, FUN AND MAGIC

by

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It seems clear that there are several different levels of creativity, which are really rather different from one another. Let us look at six of them, recognising that there may well be more. Each of them seems to entail a different notion of the self, such that we cannot have that form of creativity until we have developed to that level of the self.

The Child Self

This is where the fun comes in. This is a level of consciousness where fantasy and reality are not always too well distinguished. Fantasies may be very vivid and emotional, and the person may come to conclusions about what is going on in the real world which are really more to do with private fantasies. At the earlier stages there may be no external implementation of such fantasies, but later they may express themselves in the form of play. Such play may take permanent expression sometimes in the form of paintings, models, constructions or even writing. Creativity may become very intense at this level, because there are few inhibitions

due to knowing what must logically be the case; there is a wider sense of possibility than we have later. It is possible to get back into this level of creativity by lowering our barriers and being childlike.

The Magical Self

At this level we use creativity to conquer death. It has to do with the production of fetishes to ward off fear and anxiety. It consists of techniques, often of a ritual kind, which will give or restore life. These are tied up with a group, and it is the needs of the group which are the key to creativity at this level. What the creative person does is, as it were, to tune in to the group, and to realise its fears (and answers to them) in concrete form. Very often trance is used for this purpose - a trance in which the individual becomes more part of the group and can speak out in terms of the group's obsessions. The production of ritual objects in primitive cultures can be an example of this. In our own culture the production of good graffiti, spellbinding speeches, popular music and successful

advertising may occasionally take this form.

The Role-Playing Self

At this level creativity is turned towards being used or exploited, in order to give the person a niche in society. Creativity is used to get social rewards of one kind and another. The whole emphasis seems to be on problem-solving. Fantasy for its own sake is disapproved of and suppressed. There may be a notion of creativity as regression back to the unconscious, in the service of the ego. But more usually, creativity is regarded as something which is fully tamed and at the service of society. There is a lot of emphasis on techniques, amounting eventually to a technology of creativity which can be packaged and sold for a price. Creativity is simply another skill to be learned, another role to be played.

The Autonomous Self

At this level creativity is seen as the expression of the most central self. It is something which can be fully identified with and in that sense owned - "I am my creativity". At first, the emphasis on problem-solving may be kept, but often this gives way to a more spontaneous approach. There may sometimes be a negativistic tinge to it, as in the case of the rebel who said - "If they give you lined paper, write

sideways". But more often it seems to go with an independence which is not attached to being positive or negative. There may still be a use of techniques, but usually these techniques are self-invented or put together in an idiosyncratic way from existing materials. And in any case the person at this level will improvise in any real situation which may come up. The person can respond with fresh, brand-new actions to events which present themselves.

The Surrendered Self

At this level creativity is essentially seen as coming from a source other than the self. Action has to be taken to open oneself up to this source, which may be experienced as internal or external; but once this decision to open up has been taken, the rest is acceptance rather than doing. The source may be conceptualised as inspiration, as the Muse, as an archetype, as a goddess or whatever. At this stage one can tune in to this guidance, and be receptive to specific energies. There may be an experience of being a channel for this Otherness. There may or may not be an interest in problem-solving. There is often some selection of problems for solving - some problems are not worth solving, or might do harm if solved. There is a sense of wanting to be worthy of being used in this way.

The Creative Self

Beyond this I am not sure. But it does seem as if there could be a further stage, where the person has fully digested the Otherness, and identified with it - entered into a concrete unity with it, through worship and prayer. At this stage the person may say, perhaps - "I am creativity. Creativity has overcome the me-ness of me. I'm not interested in solving problems - I can't even see any problems". But I am really quite unsure about this.

Further Thoughts

It seems to me that this analysis, which obviously owes a great deal to the general approach of Ken Wilber (though he himself has not, to my knowledge, written about creativity), makes it a lot easier to explain why there should be so much disagreement about creativity, when people get together to talk about it. If people are coming from such widely different levels of consciousness, it is no wonder they fall out. Such differences in basic assumptions can run very deep, and be very hard to perceive.

Of course it is tempting, but I think indefensible, to fudge these issues by saying something like - "I am not at just one of these levels - I flit about amongst them". I do not really believe in this butterfly notion of

the self - such remarks are usually self-defensive and self-deceiving. Of course, having got to one level, one still has access to the earlier levels, but from a lower level, one does not have access to the higher levels. In Ken Wilber's terms, Child and Magical are pre-personal stages, Roleplaying and Autonomous are personal stages, and Surrendered and Creative are transpersonal stages of development.

After recognising these different approaches, it would seem absurd to now ask - "Yes, but what is creativity really?" It would seem to say about creativity, as Hegel says about God, that - "The idea which a person has of (That) will correspond with that person's idea of self, and of freedom".

A story to finish. I did a workshop for the GRTA in the course of which people were given exercises to explore each of these levels, and invited to deal with a real problem with their help. A Marxist came up to me at the end and said - "I don't like what you were doing. I think it's very mystifying". "Did you solve your problem?" I asked. "Yes, that's the whole point", he said. "I got the answer, **but I don't know how I got it**". He was very worried by this, but my view would be that creativity, in all its forms, is like this - we don't know how we got it. We just get it.