

THE ILLUSION OF POTENTIAL

The Delusion of the Creative Person in Relationship

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The creative person is characterized by the ability to see potential where nothing exists. However, the hallmark of the creative person, the gift of envisioning, is fraught with its own nemesis. The detailed palpable image, idea, chemical formula, proposed city, which the artist, composer, scientist, architect advances, is, inherently, illusion. A projection into the future belies the reality of the present, and relies on faith for its eventual realization. The creative person tends to adhere to the projection even though s/he knows that during the process of realizing the image, accidents and unforeseeable events stemming from the vehicle itself, and/or the serendipitous nature of real events in time, will affect the resulting outcome. Thus the creative person continually lives in a mental and emotional framework constructed with belief in the illusion of potential.

When one examines the words envision, faith, projection, illusion, potential, one finds an airy concept of that which constitutes reality. Yet it is exactly this empirically illogical approach to life which has given each culture the great achievements for which it is remem-

bered. In fact, those creative people who have given us the most in terms of cultural, intellectual, and scientific advances, shared the most glaring disparities between the known truths of their time and their abilities to project other realities. These people, in retrospect, are later recognized as having been "ahead of their time," and are reverently labeled visionaries or prophets.

When one looks into the personalities of those who have and use the capacity to envision, project, and go toward an "unreal" goal, and who do not call themselves or are not practicing artists, composers, scientists, architects, etc, one identifies disassociated, ungrounded, dysfunctioning individuals. The one who hears singing voices and does not write opera, the one who bumps into fantasy buildings and is not an architect, or the one who paints the images of the tormented psyche and is not an artist, would all be deemed mentally ill.

If projection is common to both the ill and the well, what distinguishes that which comes to be valued over time and that which is pathological expression? The concept of talent may

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be introduced at this point. A talent originally meant a unit of Babylonian money. This eventually turned into a gift (of money), then into a naturally endowed gift of the personality. In that domain, Van Gogh had both talent and mental illness. He "saw" the night as a swirling mass of cosmic energy, and painted it that way. His talent was in translating his (psychotic, unreal) vision into a universally emotionally moving reality of paint on canvas.

In this case the fact that Van Gogh was deluded, does not undervalue his work. His talent was of such greatness that it transcended his personality. It is this quality which distinguishes the art of a great artist who is suffering delusions, from the mentally ill person who indiscriminately expresses with a medium.

Illusion and potential are frequently used words in the realm of creative process. As in the art of magic, we are convinced of an illusion by the skillful hand of the magician/conjurer/artist. Potential to create this illusion is the quality of skill that the conjurer has.

"Illusionistic potential" is a theoretical art term which means that when a certain amount of data is provided, one can impute closure because the input is enough to trigger an associa-

tion with that which is known. This implies faith in the cognitive process to categorize appropriately so that the correct association is catalyzed. If most of a figure is drawn, the rest will automatically be pulled into the consciousness of the viewer. If the hearer hears La-la-la, la-la-la, and has grown up in the United States, there is a good chance that s/he will complete the rest of the first stanza of Jingle Bells. Both of these examples would work for the especially creative person as well as for the not particularly creative person.

By repeatedly noticing these automatic responses, our faith in its predictability grows. We become affirmed in our projective capacities. Enough affirmation of faith will establish a foundation in which hope begins to flourish. We hope, then trust, that a constellation of ideas, forms, behaviors which we recognize in a partial state will "automatically" eventuate into a hoped-for reality.

In other words, we live in a state of illusory projection, buoyed up by concepts of hope, faith, and trust, based on a relatively small amount of information which is actually valid only for the moment.

There are those who believe that they can predict outcomes from personal to planetary scale. Yet they do not account for each of the infinite number of hidden variables which are continually being bombarded by both intimate and distant contextual changes. In behavioral terms, one can imagine a hundred different endings to any situation, and none will materialize.

A difference between the process of the well-functioning creative person and that of the psychotic, as well as the predictor, is that the genuinely creative person will be aware of and use immediate information and events as significant ingredients in their work. In that sense, the original projection is constantly being modified by the fresh experience of the moment. In so doing, the creative person still focuses towards a future which is different from the present, but is realistically dealing with the materials, dreams, visitors, relational situations, politics, bird calls, light shifts of the present. The psychotic, on the other hand, cannot change his/her fixed image, sound, fantasy, because s/he does not acknowledge nor assimilate the conditions of the present.

In human behavior, most of our behavioral projections are based on our patterning

of the past. The creative person, whose talent, strength, and external affirmation lies in an ability to envision something different than is current, may, in a dysfunctional mode, have a particularly difficult time in realistically assessing the nature of a relationship or relational situation.

The creative person will most likely evaluate a relational situation with the same "automatic" operational procedure with which s/he envisions and pursues an outcome in a creative endeavor. Seeing a spectrum of potentially realizable qualities in another, the creative person will enter into a relationship based on hope, faith, and trust that in time these will bud and grow much as his/her personal work does. This kind of person has the ability to recognize the "illusionistic potential" of the behavioral pattern of the other presented to them, but fails to acknowledge that there are at least two processes at work simultaneously, rather than the sole process of the creative person. Even after years of frustration, continuing to deal with an unsatisfying reality, the creative person still imagines, hopes, that the positive ingredients of the other will align themselves in such a way that the creative person's fantasy will be realized.

The discrepancy between the creative individual in creative process and in relational process, is that the creative person fails to deal with the present reality within the relationship. The truly creative person is attentive to and gathers pertinent information which most accurately reflects the shifting currents of the mind as s/he moves through the surprising and unpredictable episodes of life. This ever changing material is fuel for the continuous transformation. Yet, that same creative person in a problematic relationship, holds fast to the illusion of potential, disregarding the messages and actual behavior of the present. The incongruity of vision and information often results in depression. In this sense, the behavior is equivalently pathological to the fixed delusions and concomitant emotional pain of the psychotic.

At that point the creative person has several options available both in work and in behavior. S/he may stop working entirely and have a breakdown; may create veiled work which vicariously bypasses the emotional state—a condoned and affirmed version of denial; or may create work which accurately reflects

and expresses the emotional field. This last option allows for an honest, realistic, intelligent, creative way to deal with the present and work through to the next step without interrupting the important momentum of creative flow.

It is in a similar way, and often simultaneous in time, that the creative person may break a deeply imprinted negative pattern in the behavioral makeup. Tackling this is in itself a courageous creative act. The creative person learns to assess the reality of the pluses and minuses of the relationship as events are occurring, much as s/he continually assesses and dialogs with the work as it evolves. The joy in creative process lies in the perpetual change which is necessitated by the organic nature and rhythm of stimulus/response/change between the creator and the work—stroke by stroke, word by word, note by note. It is this quality of responsiveness to the incremental events of relational living which yields a vital life.

Hope plays no part in this process. Faith and trust are not extended to the projected image but do exist in knowing that it is the process itself which works.

The issues—creative process toward product, and creative process toward relational efficacy and satisfaction—must be logically separated so that the natural talents and skills can be applied appropriately. The first steps are taken once the creative person can see that those very gifts which are his/her treasures, may and often do defeat his/her capacity to live well in reality. The second, more difficult task, is for the creative person to interact with behavioral reality in the way that s/he successfully interacts with work.

The delusions will subside when s/he begins to focus on the present, evaluating and dealing with what is being presented on the behavioral "canvas" at the time. A more rewarding future will be shaped by more wisely responding to ever-changing behavioral situations. As this perspectival shift is learned and practiced, the native gifts of creative problem solving will be activated and will result in clear understanding and innovative solutions.

It is in this way, that hope becomes redirected toward personal harmony, and potential is reshaped into individual power. ■

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