

Madness, genius & the creative mind. Part 1

July 5th, 2006

What is the creative mind?

First

In Transactional Analysis terms the creative mind would have to include a combination of the Free Child ego state (FC) and the Rebellious Child ego state (RC). As for the amounts of Adult and Parent ego states, well that can vary considerably and may be a key point in the line between madness and genius. The mad would also have high FC and maybe RC, as would the genius. In madness the Adult would be very low but with genius it would have to be at least average if not high.

So the genius, the mad and the creative have high Child ego state (FC and/or RC). However RC by itself is self defeating. It does what it is told it can't do, but does not know what it wants to do, that comes from the FC. So RC does not have its own direction. Its direction is what those in power tell it not to do. FC has its own direction.

So it is said that the creative individual is a combination of RC and FC. People can be creative in either ego state, but it is probably best to be able to do both types of creativity.

RC creativity is creative because the person does something that others have not done before. A good example of this is the reality TV show the "Osbournes". It is about Ozzy Osbourne and his family. Ozzy was the lead singer in 'Black Sabbath', a satanic worshipping rock group from the sixties. Now he is presented with his wife and two adolescent children with lots of money but he is also a drug crazy alcoholic who swears far too much and acts as a hopeless individual and parent. Total RC and it is successful. If the theory is right it should work for a while as people will find the RC appealing but it will become tiresome soon. So the Rebellious Child creative looks around and sees what everyone else is doing because they are complying to authority and then does the opposite. That will get lots of attention and of course that can be turned into 'success' but it should be short lived.

FC creativity has the potential to be far more long lived and this maybe how they could be combined. Do RC creativity first as it gets lots of attention and then this can lead to truly new thinking or ways of living or being (FC). The Beatles could be of this ilk.

Next

It seems that a creative individual is one who can think outside the box. I have mentioned RC creativity and that it would seem is fairly easy to explain and understand. One simply does the opposite of what authority wants them to do. This however is short lived as people will tend to tire of it. The FC type of creativity will be potentially much more long lived and may have much more impact over a long period of time. Rap music was RC in the beginning but has now become a much longer term proposition (FC). Perhaps some forms of fashion begin as RC as well - the outlandish and even the obnoxious such as punk rock and gothics could be an example. Now mainstream fashion has picked up on some of it and uses it in its clothing. This may be why teenagers are sometimes seen as a creative group. They go against authority (RC). A good example of that is their language which is constantly changing, along with their hair and their clothing and so on. Many an entrepreneur has come to realise the potential of that constantly changing aspect of teenage creativity. With change people need to acquire the new things and thus one has a permanently unsatisfied large group of people (Teenagers). If one can find the thing that will satisfy the current unsatisfied need then that has the potential to translate into a lucrative proposition, just don't expect it to last too long.

FC creativity could be said to have its downside though. There is a book titled something like - "Creativity, genius and madness" by Anthony Storr. Certainly creativity and madness can be linked in some people. The tormented artist is a classic example like the guy who cut his ear off (Vincent Van Gogh) and Salvador Dali - now there is a guy who thinks outside the box!. The 'mad' person certainly thinks outside the box, so there is a similarity there.

The other problem with creativity is it is not controlled, you can't have 'controlled creativity', it's an oxymoron. This means that sometimes creative people will do things that you do not like. Again teenage pop music, language and dress is sometimes found to be offensive by the wider society. It breaks the rules and sometimes we (non-teenagers) don't like the rules that it breaks. A good example of this is graffiti. That is teenage creativity in action, but some think it looks horrible, and our society has had trouble with it. So what does one do. We could invest large amounts of time and energy in stamping it out and that probably could be achieved, at least to a very large degree. But what are you doing there?. You are also stamping out creativity.

If you are going to have creative people in a society that means you cannot direct or control them. A controlled and directed person is by definition a non-creative person. So creative people (both RC & FC) will from time to time do things you do not like and what to stop. If one seeks to stop them in a serious way then the creativity will disappear as well. It would seem that balance would be the order of the day because on the one hand if you let the "creatives" just go

and do not control them to some extent, then that would quickly descend into anarchy. Whilst anarchy may be fun for a while it certainly has its downside for all concerned.

So perhaps there should be a book titled, "Creativity, genius, madness & rebellion". As I write I am becoming clearer on the role of rebellion in the creative mind. However I have not really addressed FC creativity in any depth. Teenagers grow up and that drive to rebel disappears but there are many adults who are creative. FC is not a person who is fighting authority, instead they just follow a different path than has not been trodden before and that can include some rule breaking, or at least getting around the rules some how. So the drive does not come as a reaction to an external source but from within.

More

One function of the Adult and Parent ego states is to contain the FC. The FC walks into a clothing store and says, "I like that jacket so I will have it". So the person puts it on and walks out of the shop. For most of us the Adult and Parent ego states stop us from doing that. This of course will tend to make the FC diminish over time. We call it the 'socialisation of children'. The FC creative individual some how manages to remain 'unsocialized' but yet with enough socialisation to be able to function in society and remain outside prison.

Perhaps one answer to this, or one type of FC creative person is the one who's Adult and Parent also supports the creative functions of the FC. One would assume that the successful 'creatives' have an Adult and Parent ego state that encourages or at least allows the FC to operate unhindered but without getting them into any serious trouble.

Sometimes I am amazed at how people get surprised about some of the creative types in our world. When it is disclosed how people like Bill Clinton are womanisers. Shock & horror they think!! What do they expect, people of this kind must be very driven and have highly operational FCs. This means they operate in ways which are not anti-rules (RC), but in ways that do not follow some of the rules when the rules get in between them and their goals (FC). This of course is going to extend to other areas of their lives - hence the things like womanising as rule breaking. Its like people want them to do the high FC things in their job but then vilify them when they they use the high FC in other areas of their lives that some deem inappropriate.

Finally

I have always said that the best and most creative ideas in Transactional Analysis came from when I marked the introductory 101 TA exam. The people who wrote that exam often got things 'wrong'. But what really happened is that they

viewed TA free from the rules because they did not understand what those rules were yet. So I piggy backed on some of their mistakes as they are really very creative ideas. The beginners mind as they say.

So we started with "Madness, genius & the creative mind" and ended up with "Creativity, genius, madness, rebellion and the beginners mind".

Madness, genius and creativity - Part 2.

July 5th, 2006

Rob van Tol (www.tastudent.org.uk) commented on my posting on my Blog "Madness, Genius and Creativity"

Rob states

"Trying to fit creativity into the Transactional Analysis model is interesting.

Reflecting only on my experience as a designer, the creative process is more of a rounded experience. Yes, you do want to access your Free Child and Rebellious Child as a rich hinterland for both developing unconstrained ideas. But you also need you Adult and Parent to filter these ideas to fulfil the design brief. It is a total psyche experience.

Without your Adult and Parent, design sessions would just degenerate into mucking about. Now sure, there can be quite a bit of mucking about in design meetings, but there can also be a lot of judging and evaluating - it's not all fun.

However, the main feature of the creative design process is that it is an emersion into a problem, rather than the logical process, which is very Adult and breaks problems down into a series of individual tasks.

When you prepare for a creative session, you surround yourself with everything you can find about the problem, including emotional and behavioural properties, as well as its logical features.

Once you're in this space, you can use all the resources of your psyche to dream up creative answers to a problem. And use your critical faculties to match the creative ideas with the design requirements you are trying to fulfil.

So, in my personal experience, the creative mind is autonomous, allowing a free flowing intrapsychic conversation to come up with something both original and appropriate."

Tony White responds

I agree and disagree with you Rob. It is largely a matter of degree of

creativity. It is possible to have a meeting that is a creative session. Where the Free Child is encouraged. When that happens there is more of a possibility that there will be some creative thought. I would also suggest that the more Adult and Parent ego state you have then there is going to be less creativity and the less Free Child. However, you can have all three together and what you will get is baby steps creativity, you will not get significant creative jumps of thought.

I have a suggestion for your next creative design meeting. When everyone has sat down tell them that there is now a new rule, no one is allowed out of their seats for 10 hours. As the hours tick by, slowly and surely the Adult and Parent will disappear and the Free Child ego state will come out more and more. Slowly and surely one by one they will urinate on themselves in their seat. When half way through tell them there is now a new rule and everyone can leave when the last person has urinated on themselves. So those who have already urinated on themselves will start to hate those who have not.

What you have created is an unpredictable and volatile situation. People are going to start to behave in an unpredictable fashion. You have created an environment where there is the possibility of significant creative thought and action. Of course there may be none at all. All you may get is anger and destruction. That is the nature of significant creativity, you can not predict it. It will happen when it happens and in what ever form it chooses. It is uncontrolled. You can't have controlled creativity and expect there to be significant creativity, what you will get is baby steps creativity.

Rob you state: "Now sure, there can be quite a bit of mucking about in design meetings, but there can also be a lot of judging and evaluating - it's not all fun."

I would respond by saying that creativity is rarely fun. Significant creativity usually comes out of a context that is ugly and painful. Vincent Van Gogh is a prime example of a very creative person who was in a good deal of pain. War often results in considerable creativity. People have to discover new ways of surviving or else they die - penicillin. The title of my Blog is, "Graffiti is the sign of a creative society". What we have is the youth of a society saying we are here and we are creative!. Graffiti is uncontrolled and it is creative. It is our youth doing their thing outside parental control. Often the youth doing it are alienated, angry and disenfranchised. Hardly happy and fun people.

Our governments have given us the injunction: "If its graffiti its ugly". So when ever we see it we automatically see it as ugly. I suggest you throw

that injunction away and have a look at graffiti with open eyes. Some of it is crap and some of it is very good art. Our creative youth are painting our cities with good art at their own expense. The tax payer does not even have to pay for it!

Madness, genius, creativity - Part 3

July 5th, 2006

Rob van Tol responds

Hi Tony

I can see where you are coming from. If I want to build sand castles (and I very much would) I certainly have to bring my Free Child along, otherwise playing wouldn't much fun. But my Free Child doesn't know a whole lot about medieval castle design. My Free Child has to access more Adult notions of what a castle is in order to create the sand castle. And no doubt, my Parent will have some cultural attitudes about what a "proper" sand castle should look like.

So how archaic the sand castle would look no doubt depends on how much freedom my Free Child had: would it be forced to build an Obsessively-Compulsive ultra realistic scale model, or a cliché Disney fantasy, or would have the latitude to do whatever it wanted? (Before your Rebellious Child kicked it down!)

But doing whatever you want is not the only form of creativity. You point to Vincent van Gough as an exemplar of unlicensed creative freedom. And his images are certainly startling creatively beautiful. But van Gough is noticeable for having had a lot of difficulty making his own way in the world: he sure had a lot of Free Child, but not a lot of Adult. If it weren't for the lifelong support of his brother, Robert, it is likely that Vincent simply wouldn't have been able to produce the art that he did. Vincent and his brother had, I suggest, had a symbiotic relationship that together enabled the creativity to flourish.

Moreover, the model of the tortured artistic genius is a very modern one, delightfully satirised by Tony Hancock in *The Rebel*.

An older model is one of Michelangelo. Aside from apparently carrying around a huge amount of Parent, in his arrogance to others and constant dissatisfaction with his own work, he also had to have other skills to succeed as an artist. He had to be a businessman, running his workshop with his apprentices, who needed to be lead, taught and recruited. He needed to be a salesperson, alive to the political nuisances of his benefactors. He needed a deep understanding of the iconic symbols of his culture: no Free Child alone could get a commission from a Pope to paint the Sistine Chapel.

Of course, having got the commission for the Sistine Chapel, some involvement of Free Child would have been necessary to produce such a striking (and vast) image. But his Free Child didn't paint the chapel alone. In fact, he didn't paint the chapel alone. At least as important was his Be Perfect driver. Not to mention his ability to project manage his staff. And to be a painter, sculpture, poet and architect requires a vast range of Adult skills.

I doubt denying Michelangelo toilet privileges would have done much to improve his creativity. And I suspect his Rebellious Child would have told you where to stuff your new rule long before any Free Child appears - leaving aside any urophilics.

More importantly, unpredictability is not necessarily the same as creativity. Creative people don't just throw themselves into something, and unpredictably end up somewhere totally unexpected. Well, OK, that can happen. But that is more in the way of your creative-self being like a young puppy, that suddenly tugs you off in an unexpected direction. But that's A leading to B and finding a short cut to F. Not just beginning with no idea where they are going. Many artists think long and hard before beginning the process, and the process can involve many sketches and practices before they judge to have found the piece that gives expression to their thoughts.

This doesn't sound like an angry or destructive process. Sure, some creative process can be both, but not necessarily so. We extol the romantic troubled genius today, but neglect the equally businesslike geniuses. We idealise Beethoven rather than Bach. But what they signify more than anything is a change in the socio-economic climate that artists work in. Whereas once they were convivial members of the court, whose output reflected well on the civilised nature of the Prince, now they are cultural Shock-Jocks feeding a restless media with novelty.

Finally - being creative is more like a feeling of oneness, or integration ... dare I say, autonomy. The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who studied creative people, labelled it "Flow" - the feeling of complete and energized focus in an activity, with a high level of enjoyment and fulfilment.

So sure, any creative activity must be able to access the playfulness of the Free Child. But if that creativity isn't going to look terribly childish, it'll need the techniques of the Adult and the judgements of the Parent in and integrated fashion to bring it to the grown up world.

PS: Haven't you noticed how much painted graffiti looks terribly samey all

across the world? Graffiti seems to me less about creativity, and more about a rather predictable Rebellious Child.

Tony responds:

I don't think we disagree but instead we may be looking at different parts of the same process. The successful (in society's terms) creative process could be defined as stage one - unconstrained FC and then stage 2 -using the Parent and Adult to mould it (or dare I say it, constrain it) so that it can be turned into something that people can see, use or even understand.

RVT: But my Free Child doesn't know a whole lot about medieval castle design.

TW: Then it doesn't build one, instead it builds something else that lets people live under the sea or on the moon. That is the FC is capable of coming up with the innovate concept to allow such new living design whereas the Parent and Adult are not. But if there is then not Parent and Adult from either the same person or from another close associate then it is forever doomed to remain a concept that is only sand.

RVT: But van Gough is noticeable for having had a lot of difficulty making his own way in the world: he sure had a lot of Free Child, but not a lot of Adult. If it weren't for the lifelong support of his brother, Robert, it is likely that Vincent simply wouldn't have been able to produce the art that he did.

TW: I agree that Vincent would have never been able to, and certainly his brother Robert never could have. One could say that Vincent was lucky (and so was the world as it can now savour such art). And I think you would agree that for every one Vincent there would be a hundred or another thousand "unlucky" Vincents who have died or never had their shit together enough produce such art. Hence they and the world have lost out. Perhaps there is no better example of this than Jimi Hendrix. If only he had had a brother who could look over him and saved him from choking to death on his own vomit. Imagine what we would have now if we had had 25 years of the musical creativity of Jimi Hendrix. But such FC creativity is a very fragile, unpredictable and unstable thing, that can easily 'die'. That is one of the reasons why it is creative in the first place!

RVT: I doubt denying Michelangelo toilet privileges would have done much to improve his creativity.

TW: I disagree with you on this one Rob. You put anyone in a stressful situation and then there is more possibility of creative thought occurring. Adult solutions in such situations don't work or the situation would not be

stressful in the first place. The more stressful (ugly and painful) and logically unresolvable a situation the more propensity for creative thought to occur is my proposition.

RVT: Many artists think long and hard before beginning the process, and the process can involve many sketches and practices before they judge to have found the piece that gives expression to their thoughts.

This doesn't sound like an angry or destructive process.

TW: Again I by and large do not agree with you, but perhaps we are disagreeing on the degree of creativity. I agree that creative thought and art can occur in an environment that is not angry or destructive. Again I would see that this is going to be more baby steps creativity. To get 'large jump' creativity, I think that has to occur in a painful and ugly environment. If the situation, or the person's own individual psyche is happy and harmonious then there is not the need or the motivation to be that creative.

Many and artist can practice relentlessly whilst they are tormented horribly inside or angry and destructive. Jimi Hendrix drank himself to death at a young age, he probably practised lots and yet that is not the sign of a contented individual. Bon Scott of AC/DC fame did exactly the same. He drank so much scotch he passed out in the back seat of a car and then also proceeded to choke to death on his own vomit, also at a young age. I suspect he practised relentlessly before the final creative product was produced. But he certainly was not a happy little vegemite.

Creativity, angst and human nature

July 5th, 2006

I state in previous postings that to get true (not baby steps) creative jumps one needs to have angst or be in pain of some kind. Some commentators have said that they do not agree. Perhaps I could rephrase my statement. If humans can take the easy path will they? Let me rephrase that again, will people be truly creative when they have no need to be. If one is travelling along in life well, things are going OK, one is feeling at least reasonably good, why would one do it different. Creativity takes effort. It involves doing something new, and that takes thought and effort. It is much easier to do it just the same as it has been done before as that takes little effort and one does not even need to think about it.

Will humans exert effort when they do not need to? My answer by and large is no, I do not think they will. They will only tend to do it when they have to. To look at it another way, or to rephrase yet again. In Australia one of our national sports is swimming. We do well at it. Of course the 'heros'!!! of

the swimming pool get lots of press. One hears stories of them doing years and years of training from the first light of day until the sun goes down each and every day. They swim endlessly up and down that pool looking at that black line on the bottom of the pool. I was a swimmer in my younger years so I know a bit what it is like. Why would someone do that? Why exert all that effort and for what? The answer is without deviation, "because they want the gold medal at the next olympics".

Is that the real reason? Hey fellow Bloggers I am a psychologist so of course it isn't. A cigar is never just a cigar to us. If such high achievers were to be brutally honest in the end they are doing all that work and effort for some other motive.

Maybe "If I win the gold medal then maybe mum will finally love me". Or "If I win the gold medal then finally dad will acknowledge that I am OK". In my opinion, high achievers are basically a 'wacko' bunch. No one would put in all that time and effort that takes years and years of swimming up and down a swimming pool just for a gold medal. People will take the easier path unless there is some other angst or drive that gnaws at their core.