

## TWO SHAPES OF CREATIVITY

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### 1 Creativity: the activity factor inherent to potentiality

As known, creativity is in Whitehead's scheme one of the 'ultimate notions' expressive of his basic intuition that all reality is ultimately characterized by activity, an underlying activity in virtue of which the many concretes into one. In that, the many does not disappear but is increased by one (PR 21-22), and thereby in its turn initiates a new unification: and this ever again in a never ending rhythm<sup>1</sup>.

We know that the many from which concrecence originates stands for the givenness of the actual entities. Whitehead calls this givenness of actual entities the 'actual world'<sup>2</sup> which is in itself actual and therefore determinate, but which in respect of a particular concrecing actual entity presents prehensible elements, and thus functions as real potentiality. This means that creativity may be called the inherent activity factor of the actual world and therefore of real potentiality, or, which comes down to the same, the inherent activity factor of the primary phase of concrecence.

Consider in this respect the following significant text: "The initial situation [of an occasion of experience] includes a factor of activity which is the reason for the origin of that occasion of experience. This factor of activity is what I have called 'Creativity'. The initial situation with its creativity can be termed the initial phase of the new occasion. It can equally well be termed the 'actual world' relative to that occasion. It has a certain unity of its own, expressive of its capacity for providing the objects requisite for a new occasion, and also expressive of its conjoint activity whereby it is essentially the primary phase of a new occasion. It can thus be termed a 'real potentiality'. The 'potentiality' refers to the passive capacity, the term 'real' refers to the creative activity .... This basic situation, this actual world, this primary phase, this real potentiality - however you characterise it - as a whole is active with its inherent creativity, but in details it provides the passive objects which derive their activity from the creativity of the whole. The creativity is the actualization of potentiality. Thus viewed in abstraction objects are passive, but viewed in conjunction they carry the creativity which drives the world" (AI 179).

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<sup>1</sup> This explains why Whitehead's 'creativity' is also rendered as 'ongoingness' (for instance in CLOOTS 1981, GARLAND 1983, WILCOX 1991).

<sup>2</sup> As it is well known, the notion of 'actual world' signifies the given actual entities, where the term 'given' involves a double connotation, viz. 'the original source before it is given' (say A) and 'as given to the receiver' (say B). Whitehead distinguishes these two sides of 'givenness' as 'initial data' and 'objective datum' (where, as always in Whitehead, 'objective' should be understood as 'objectified by the subject'). Whitehead also refers to the 'initial data' as the 'antecedent settled world' and to the 'objective datum' as the 'actual world'. Moreover, the difference between 'initial data' and 'objective datum' is due to the elimination involved by the objectification in the first phase of the concrecence (PR 340. Such elimination is necessary because all elements in the first phase of the concrecence (which together constitute the objectified given, the objective datum) must already be *compatible*, in accordance to 'The Category of Subjective Unity' (PR 26).

Thus, in this text, creativity is characterized among other things as an *inherent activity factor of the real potentiality*. Yet it is striking that *all* the distinctions that can be made regarding potentiality also occur in respect of creativity.

So, Whitehead not only links creativity to real potentiality, but also to pure potentiality. Quote: “The ‘boundless, abstract possibility’ means the creativity considered solely in reference to the possibilities of the intervention of eternal objects, and in abstraction from the objective intervention of actual entities belonging to any definite actual world” (PR 220)<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, just like the ‘actual world’ limits or conditions pure potentiality into real potentiality, Whitehead speaks of *the limitation or conditioning or qualifying of the creativity by the actual world*. He says for instance that creativity is ‘the pure notion of the activity conditioned by the objective immortality of the actual world’ (PR 31). And elsewhere he speaks of ‘satisfaction qualifying the transcendent creativity’ (PR 87)<sup>4</sup>.

The conclusion here to be drawn is, that there seems to be a close relationship between potentiality and creativity: creativity is the activity factor inherent to potentiality<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Two shapes of potentiality.

I come now nearer to my point of the two shapes of creativity: immanent creativity (the shape which is best seen by the scholars) and transcendent creativity. Those two shapes correspond with two shapes of potentiality, which are *not* explicitly mentioned by Whitehead, but which nevertheless are pregnantly detectable in Whitehead's thought.

So, I want to *introduce here a distinction between two meanings of ‘potentiality’* (which term will always be used here in the ontological sense). It is my considerate opinion that these two meanings very often are not differentiated, and thereby cause a lot of confusion in the difficult discussion of ‘the possible’.

Potentiality is primarily seen as *the contrary of actuality: potentiality as what is not (yet) actual*. For instance: a potential victor is not (yet) an actual victor.

Apart from this, potentiality also has a different relation to actuality. Indeed, potentiality may be seen as being *supported by actuality: potentiality which is offered by actuality*. For instance, an actual tree offers the possibility of an statue (or of a canoe, or of a bed etc. The number of possibilities offered by an actual tree is immense).

If we now consider more closely these two forms, then they appear to be related to two different relationships between actuality and possibility. In the first case, both possibility and actuality are related to the *same* property (‘victor’). In the second case, they are respectively related to two different properties (for instance ‘tree’ and ‘statue’). Here the possibility is offered *to or for something else*. I shall call these two forms, respectively: ‘potential secundum idem’ and ‘potentia ad aliud’, in short ‘potentia<sub>idem</sub>’ and ‘potentia<sub>aliud</sub>’.

We may therefore speak of a potentia (potentia<sub>idem</sub>) which is actualized (or which actualizes itself) into actuality, a process which occurs in time. And the actualization implies

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, this text does not even mention creativity as inherent to abstract potentiality, but simply states that the two are simply the same.

<sup>4</sup> See also for instance: PR 29, 43, 85, 164, 220, 222, 225, 237.

<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Ivor Leclerc stresses the point that Whitehead's ‘potentiality’ bears a strong similarity to the aspects of power and potency which are inherent to Aristotle's concept of dynamis: “‘Potentiality’ here is not to be conceived only in the secondary sense of the term, in its contrast with ‘actuality’, as a ‘latent capacity’, but in its primary etymological sense of ‘having or possessing power, potency’, *dynamis*” (LECLERC 1984, 131-132).

the cancelling of this form of potentiality.

There is however the other *potentia* (*potentia<sub>aliud</sub>*) which is a function of, or which rests upon realized actuality. This form of potentiality is not cancelled by but constituted by actualization. It involves in some way a change of perspective: one and the same given is *in and for itself* a well determinate actuality, and offers possibilities *for something else*.

If we ask whether this distinction is to be found in Whitehead, then obviously he understands 'potentiality' primarily in the sense of *potentia<sub>aliud</sub>*. Yet he also does use potentiality in the sense of *potentia<sub>idem</sub>*, albeit less explicitly. Certainly Whitehead seldom makes use of related expressions, such as 'potential x' (for instance, 'potential victor').

As we have seen in the preceding, real potentiality is described as yielded (or conditioned) by the actual world that has become (PR 150). Or, to express it more conveniently, real potentiality may be described as the actual world itself, but seen from a different perspective. "[R]eal' potentiality, ... is nothing else than the actual world itself in its character of a possibility for the process of being felt" (PR 65). Real potentiality is described here *in reference to the actuality which supports it*. Thus, according the terminology introduced above, potentiality is described here as *potentia<sub>aliud</sub>*. And, in Whitehead, this meaning of potentiality dominates the other one.

However, we can say that the concept of 'initial aim' in Whitehead functions as a kind of 'potentia<sub>idem</sub>', but with this restriction or qualification, that the initial aim not only represents a possibility for actualization but represents such a possibility as attractive.

It might be that precisely because the aspect of attractiveness plays such an essential role that Whitehead seldom speak of *potentia<sub>idem</sub>* in the neutral sense of potentiality, and favors expressions like 'initial aim'.

In order to get the distinction quite well in your mind, I use the following example: remember a kind of toys called 'lego', little plastic blocks with which you can build a house, or a train or what you like... Well you may have a huge collection of such little stones, providing 'the objects requisite for a new occasion', a new building. In this respect the blocks are potentials, potential elements for a new becoming. So this (real) potentiality is *potentia<sub>aliud</sub>*. But stones alone are not enough to build something. You must also have an idea what can be made out of these given blocks. An idea of a possible synthesis, a plan. This (vague) plan is also a potentiality, not a potentiality to be an element in the new building, but a potentiality with respect to the building, the synthesis itself. So the plan is a *potentia<sub>idem</sub>*. And the (vague) plan what *best* can be made out of the given materials is what Whitehead calls 'the initial aim', if we make the lapse from lego-toys to Whiteheadian metaphysics!

### 3. Two shapes of creativity

We said: creativity is the activity factor inherent to potentiality. In other words: it is the urge or the power of the potentiality to become realized. And as we saw two shapes of potentiality, likewise we see two shapes of creativity.

#### *Transcendent creativity (1)*

Let us start our consideration with the potentiality of the 'actual world'. This real potentiality is a *potentia<sub>aliud</sub>*, it provides a possible contribution to the new event to which it is relevant. The actual world provides the objects which can be included in a certain way into the new

synthesis. These objects can be seen 'passive potentiality', they *can be* included. However in *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead also stresses the active character of those possibilities. They lure for being felt. They provoke their inclusion. Whitehead: "An object is anything performing this function of a datum provoking some special activity of the occasion in question. Thus subject and object are relative terms. An occasion is a subject in respect to its special activity concerning an object; and anything is an object in respect to its provocation of some special activity within a subject" (AI 176).

This lure which provokes activity (viz. inclusion, prehension, synthesis) is *the inherent creativity of real potentiality* exercised in transition by the antecedent actual world. This provoking lure must therefore be considered as **transcendent creativity**, for in that creativity the functioning of the preceding entities in respect of the new entity is actively expressed.

Whitehead speaks in this context of 'transcendence of creativity' and 'transition' (PR 211, 277). Some quotes by way of illustration: "The process of concrescence terminates with the attainment of a fully determinate 'satisfaction'; and the creativity thereby passes over into the 'given' primary phase for the concrescence of other actual entities" (PR 85). And: "There is ... transcendence of creativity; and this transcendence effects determinate objectifications for the renewal of the process in the concrescence of actualities beyond that satisfied superject" (PR 87). Or: "... the superjective character, which is the pragmatic value of its specific satisfaction qualifying the transcendent creativity" (PR 87); and: "The creativity in virtue of which any relative complete actual world is, by the nature of things, the datum for a new concrescence is termed 'transition'" (PR 211).

What is going on in this transition? A multiplicity of possibilities with creativity as inherent activity factor is passed on from the actual world to the related occasion-in-becoming. Functioning in the new event as given, it functions as 'objective lure', that is to say, as possibilities which lure in order to be embraced in the ultimate satisfaction. As said, in *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead expresses this in a less passive way by describing the lure as 'provocation'. This luring and provoking activity has its source in the actual world, is a transcendent creativity. But the activity thus lured or provoked is the activity by which a selection from this 'objective lure' to which subjective activity is granted (the subjective aim) realizes itself into novel unity. This provoked activity is the immanent creativity.

#### *Immanent Creativity*

Whitehead focuses his attention primarily on this immanent creativity - the creativity of the concrescence. In *Process and Reality*, creativity is primarily this activity of self-creation. It is the activity by which the many concresces into unity. Each concrescence signifies a novel unity. This is why creativity is also called the principle of novelty. In his first discussion of the Category of the Ultimate, Whitehead abundantly stresses this novelty: "'Creativity' is the principle of *novelty*. An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies. Thus 'creativity' introduces novelty into the content of the many, which are the universe disjunctively. (...) The ultimate metaphysical principle is the advance from disjunction to conjunction, creating a novel entity other than the entities given in disjunction. (...) Thus the 'production of novel togetherness' is the ultimate notion embodied in the term 'concrescence'" (PR 21, Whitehead's italics).

In this primary immanent form, creativity too is clearly related to potentiality, but now to the *potentia<sub>idem</sub>* in the guise of the 'subjective aim'. For this form of creativity the following

quote applies: “creativity is the actualization of potentiality” (AI 179), with ‘actualization’ to be understood as ‘self-actualization’. It is the activity inherent in the ‘vague plan’, in the initial aim, the urge to realize itself.

The distinction between actuality and potentiality-in-the-sense-of-potentiality<sub>idem</sub>, which in classical thought is conceived as a very strong distinction - indeed, the two terms are mutually exclusive -, tends to dissipate itself in Whitehead's mode of conceptualization. For whenever there is self-realization, the self, even before it is realized, is active as subject. Whitehead calls this the inseparability of superject and subject. But this implies that the subject so understood, which is subject of its own realization, bears all the marks of a *creative*, viz. self-realizing, *potentiality*. In other words, subject and subjective aim coincide on account of this self-realization. This is strikingly obvious in the following text: “The ‘*subjective aim*’, which controls the becoming of a subject, is *that subject* feeling a proposition with the subjective form of purpose to realize it in that process of self-creation” (PR 25, my italics). But on the other hand, because for Whitehead self-realization is eminently the mark of actuality, such actuality is primarily predicated of the subject, while it is predicated in the past tense of the superject: “An actuality is self-realizing, and whatever is self-realizing is actuality. An actual entity is at once the subject of self-realization, and the superject which is self-realized” (PR 222). But, wondrous though the combination may sound, this means that the subject is as much *actuality* in the sense of self-realization, as it is *active potentiality* (viz. as self-realizing potentiality)<sup>6</sup>.

### *Transcendent creativity (2)*

Thus creativity manifests itself in two forms: it manifests itself clearly in the immanent form, but also in the transcendent form which often goes together with the passing on of creativity in transition, and involves the provoking activity of the objective lure.

However, the transcendent creativity involves far more than what has so far been said in relation to the ‘objective’ lure. I would like to clarify this in respect of two points.

1. Transcendent creativity means an activity of the one actual entity (say A) in respect of another actual entity (say B). Transcendent creativity discussed so far, which expressed itself in the provocative lure of given possibilities, occurs in the initial phase of B. But there is also an aspect of transcendent creativity which occurs in A and which is related to the nature of the subjective aim. According to the *Categorical Obligation* viii, *The Category of Subjective Intensity*, the subjective aim points not only to the intensity of satisfaction, but also to the intensity which, by virtue of that satisfaction, it enables for its future (PR 27). Or, as Whitehead puts it elsewhere: “In its self-creation the actual entity is guided by its ideal of itself as individual satisfaction and as transcendent creator” (PR 85). With respect to this double aim, Whitehead stresses that those two aspects should not be separated from each other: “For the definiteness of the relevant future, and the anticipatory feeling respecting provision for its grade of intensity, are elements affecting the immediate complex of feeling” (PR 27). In the words of Willibrord Welten: “These are not two independent aims, but the anticipating feeling

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<sup>6</sup> We also see this duality (viz. creativity as actuality/activity and as potentiality) in the ways Whitehead scholars compare creativity with some traditional conceptualization. Thus, Reto Luzius Fetz points to the analogy between Whitehead's ‘creativity’ and Aquinas' ‘esse’ in its primordial sense of ‘*actualitas absoluta*’ (FETZ 1986, 211). On the other hand Ivor Leclerc makes a comparison of Whitehead's ‘creativity’ with Spinoza's ‘*potency-in-act*’ (LECLERC [1960]1983, 59), and Harold Holz makes a very similar comparison with Schelling's ‘*Vermögen*’ as ‘*potentia activa*’ (HOLZ 1984, 410). Whitehead's own comparison of ‘creativity’ to Aristotle's ‘*matter*’ with the explicit explanation “But it is divested of the notion of passive receptivity” (PR 31) closely relates potentiality and activity.

of the relevant future contributes to the intensity of feeling in the present subject, and the presently realized aim is a step in the realization of the future aim"<sup>7</sup>.

2. As to the second point. Though Whitehead does not stress it, there are some texts that suggest that creativity generates a subsequent actual entity. Transcendent creativity is not conceived now as influencing *the nature or possible nature* of the subsequent entity, but as influencing *the fact of its becoming*. In the text also quoted in the beginning of this paper Whitehead writes: "The initial situation [of an occasion of experience] includes a factor of activity which is the reason for the origin of that occasion of experience. This factor of activity is what I have called 'Creativity'" (AI 179). In yet another passages also taken from *Adventures of Ideas*, we read: "For in the primary phase, the past is initiating the process in virtue of the energizing of its diverse individual occasions" (AI 281). And something similar may also be found in *Process and Reality*: "The 'creative advance' is the application of this ultimate principle of creativity to each novel situation which *it originates*" (PR 21, my italics). Whitehead states that, in 'transition', creativity passes on into the subsequent actual entities in concrescence: "The process of concrescence terminates with the attainment of a fully determinate 'satisfaction'; and the creativity thereby passes over into the 'given' primary phase for the concrescence of other actual entities. This transcendence is thereby established when there is attainment of determinate 'satisfaction' completing the antecedent entity" (PR 85). This text indicates that the satisfaction reached by the preceding actual entity makes creativity pass over to a subsequent actual entity, and in doing this the latter generates or originates (PR 21).

This also means that the 'transcendence of creativity' which has been discussed earlier, also, or precisely, has a really creative aspect. Thus, in this respect, transition must truly be considered as the moment of genuine transcendent creativity<sup>8</sup>.

#### 4 Rhythmic Alternation

Here, as on many other places, one may discern the sense of rhythm in Whitehead's vision. On the one hand, a new actual entity obtains the creativity and the conditions thereof handed down from the preceding actual entities upon obtaining their satisfaction. The activity provoked thereby is the immanent creativity of the self-realization. And this self-creation has in its turn again an aspect of transcendent creativity in respect of its future. "Each subject in its turn strives beyond its own satisfaction towards the intensity of feeling in its relevant future; and thus the creative process never comes to an end"<sup>9</sup>. Thus creativity in its twofold form, is the conceptualization of the 'ongoingness of time and the connectedness which obtains in the universe'<sup>10</sup>. Fetz calls this rhythmic alternation: 'the binary rhythm of self-creation and co-creation of the transcendent other'<sup>11</sup>. It is the rhythmic alternation of the two shapes of creativity.

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<sup>7</sup> WELTEN 1978, 52 (translated from Dutch).

<sup>8</sup> As here is spoken of 'genuine transcendent creativity' (apart from 'immanent creativity' and 'transcendence of creativity'), likewise Marjorie Suchocki speaks of 'a third form of creativity' (SUCHOCKI 1989, 66, cf. 1988, 83), and Nancy Frankenberry of 'the power of the past' (FRANKENBERRY 1983).

<sup>9</sup> WELTEN 1978, 53 (translated from Dutch).

<sup>10</sup> GARLAND 1983, 226.

<sup>11</sup> FETZ 1986, 217 (translated from German). Cf. PR 85.

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