

On the Value of Being Creative

Nerd Teacher

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I want to start this by openly stating that I'm not lamenting a long-lost past, where people were more creative than they are today. I'm not claiming that there is *no* creativity in anything that we do or that *no one* is being creative in how they solve issues or present information. But I am concerned about how *everything feels the same*, as if we can't find it in ourselves to value different methods to convey a range of messages.

I'm worried that we too often focus on certain formats and structures while denigrating others, opting to deal with things that are easier and *feel* like we're doing something more than we actually are. Though I enjoy a lot of the media that is produced by a variety of organisations and collectives, I occasionally fear that the creativity so many of them *openly claim* we need is being whittled away by their refusal to *engage* in and *actively support* initiatives that offer it.

In short, I feel like our collective failure to engage with a *range* of formats and structures in how we transmit and receive information is also negatively impacting our desire to engage with *difficult* ideas and *complex* issues that require *a lot* of nuance and don't fit neatly into a binary (which is, to say, *most issues*).

There's no *sound bite* or *summary* that can adequately sum up everything, making it possible for us to engage with *every* perspective. For whatever reason, many people don't want to engage with material that's *open-ended*; they feel frustrated by something that broadly critiques and highlights *problems* with how things are but doesn't offer concrete solutions or openly ends with someone saying they *don't know* what the right response is at that moment.

Worse yet is if a bunch of people to whom an issue is actually relevant hold different opinions from each other on *how* to implement or support it, as has been the case of Land Back and Black Nationalism. When this happens, white people often try to *play them against each other*, supporting whomever has opinions that are the least harmful to the status quo. (And, for the record, the opinions of white 'debate bro streamers' on what either of these concepts mean are as irrelevant as they are uninformed.)

But this is more than just a *media* problem.

It's really a *much larger* and broader problem of institutions, and it's one that continues to prop up things like schools and academia. It's one that continually, and wrongly, claims that *qualifications* are the only way to be an expert in something (unless you happen to be someone like Bill Gates, where it's *disgustingly excessive wealth* that enables you to be an expert on *whatever you claim to understand*). It's a problem that enables people to *openly ignore* the lived experiences

of so many while they simultaneously latch onto the supposed “truth” that has been constructed from *their* chosen system of (usually colonial) knowledge.

This is all done to the detriment of marginalised and vulnerable people everywhere who only *sometimes* get crumbs and *maybe* superficial changes, if they get anything at all.

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For so many of us, we’ve been indoctrinated into the belief that we need to have a *singular* answer that is *immediately* correct and functional and can be applied to *every* similar situation in order for change to happen. If it isn’t *any* of that, it’s *inefficient* or *ineffective*. And *good luck* if you willingly say that *you don’t know* what the answer is, that you just know there’s a problem we should address, because you will be hounded by people telling you that *you’re doing nothing*.

We falsely believe that there cannot be *multiple* responses or that some responses *might not work* for certain people or in certain places, even as they prove useful to someone else. We absurdly believe that we’re required to figure this shit out for ourselves and on our own, shrinking us into atomised enclaves of individuals who are unable to collaborate despite the loneliness and frustration we feel.

This doesn’t stop once you realise that it’s all nonsense or that someone else is engaging in those behaviours; it barely even stops once you recognise that *you* are also the one doing it because sometimes it’s hard to spot how your own behaviour and beliefs feed into harmful processes. It doesn’t stop because we’re all still required, to varying degrees, to work within systems that perpetuate these structures and punish us for acting outside of them whenever we try to do something *different*.

And I want to be clear here: This is not a problem of left versus right. This is a problem that exists across and throughout the *entire* political spectrum; this is a problem of having our lives so written out for us by the state (or by those who would seek to control us) that we only look for solutions within the narrow framework we’ve been allowed to access.

We’ve been punished from the very beginning, from the moment we *step into a school* and then throughout our entire life, for not being able to achieve the ‘correct’ answer or for not getting to the ‘correct’ answer through the ‘most efficient’ and prescribed methods. Even when we tried to find *workarounds* that would enable us to *continue participating in the system*, we have been excessively punished and excluded.

We have been taught from a very early age that *every problem* has an immediate and obvious solution and that *we* are failures if we cannot find it. We have been taught that, when we highlight a problem *without* providing a solution, it is nothing more than complaining for the sake of complaining.

Our whole lives, we have been punished for trying to collaborate, for trying to be creative.

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So I’m worried that we’re willingly *neglecting* and *losing* our capacity to be creative. It infuriates me that so many are happy to default to traditional methods of *learning* and *knowing*, those that many of us are familiar with because that’s what the state pushed us into, because there “is no other way to ensure everyone is educated.” (Except that’s a lie, and the entirety of human history prior to *schooling* shows otherwise.)

It’s nonsensical for people to pretend that they are *always* certain of what the answer should be to everything, mocking suggestions that appear “too utopian” or “too naive” without ever considering any part of them as viable.

It's beyond absurd how often these people refuse to listen to those of us who have, in a broad range of ways, been abused as we were put through violent systems. Honestly, it *really* bothers me that so many of us are relying on using the same strategies and tactics of those who would seek to harm us just to push for them to even "*acknowledge*" our humanity, and it's absolutely ridiculous that so many people continue to believe that they can enact *much needed* change that our world needs to see through the *same systems that seek to oppress us*.

That's *impossible*.

Yet, what really frightens me about losing our creativity is that so many people *across the political spectrum* think that coercion of *any sort* is okay, some of whom claim that *they* endured it and "turned out fine" (they didn't). It's beyond my own understanding as to how so many people are fine with maintaining such an atomised existence, how they see the systems we *have*, systems that *don't work*, and are only capable of the binary decision to either "reform them" or "keep them."

They can't be bothered to believe there are *so many more* solutions available to us, if only we'd give some of them a chance.

If only we were curious and creative enough to explore something *other* than what we currently know.

And if only we were more willing to reflect upon *ourselves*.

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