Report From the University: The Creative Process

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The word "creative" refers to any development beyond the established order. This may be a reorganization of the order, or consist of elements not included in it.

The creative process begins with an idea that is generated by and brought to a conclusion by the creators. This idea is triggered by the creators' dissatisfaction with the established order.

The method of the creative process varies with the individual but its cycle appears to have four distinct stages:

1. The preparation stage. This involves many years of training in order to gain a thorough knowledge of the field and the mechanical skills necessary to manipulate the material.

2. The problem stage. This stage appears when an inner conflict occurs within the individual who is hypersensitive to an existing order.

3. The solution stage. This stage has many ramifications and varies with the individual.

A. Search for truth. Victor Lundy, Architect, states, "I find answers sometimes in almost reverting to a childlike approach of purposely not paying any attention to what others are doing, of treating each problem as if it were the first, of trying to get to the fundamentals."

B. Conscious trial and error. Thomas Edison, inventor, said "I want to tell you that all I have ever tackled and solved has been done by hard logical thinking. I speak without exaggeration when I say that I have constructed three thousand different theories in connection with the electric light. Yet, in only two cases, did my experiments prove the truth of my theory."

C. Subconscious revelation. Jacques Hadamard, mathematician, records on being very abruptly awakened by an external noise, "A solution long searched for appeared to me at once without the slightest instant on my part in quite a different direction from any of those tried before." Spontaneous solution to problem is not rare.

D. Suggestion and re-association. Robert Mallary, painter, in discussing a recent painting, said, "An ink blot on a piece of paper suggested to me a design for a series of paintings."

4. The verification stage. In this stage all technical and explicit rules of practice are summoned into use and the possible exaggerations and overstatements of the solution stage are checked against external realities.

In teaching architecture, one can only expose the student to the cycle of the creative process and hope that he will have the inner drive to search for basic truths, the perseverance to investigate many ideas, and will be able to evaluate it within its intrinsic worth.