

**Creating Social Creativity
Integrative Transdisciplinarity and the Epistemology of Complexity**

Alfonso Montuori

amontuori@me.com

California Institute of Integral Studies

San Francisco, USA

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ABSTRACT

The increasing interest in “social creativity” over the last 20 years, has also led to a reflection on how “creativity” has itself been created by researchers. Different strategies in the study of creativity reflect different underlying assumptions about, among other things, the nature and role inquiry, the fundamental unit of analysis, the relationship between self and society, and the purpose of research. Two approaches are outlined in broad strokes, focusing on simplicity and complexity respectively. The former is inspired by the natural sciences and aims to abstract the essential feature of a phenomenon from unessential elements, with the laboratory as its gold standard. The more recent complex approach addresses context, relationships and connections as well as uncertainty and unpredictability. In order to address the complexity of connections, relationships, emergence, and factors that cannot be contained in one discipline, one of the central characteristics of a complex approach is its transdisciplinarity, and specifically Integrative Transdisciplinarity.

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.”

Alice and the Cheshire Cat in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

(Carroll, 1991, p.46)

Introduction

After 30 years of research on social creativity, the topic continues to fascinate me in always surprising ways. This is not just because of the excellent company of colleagues who share my interest (although not necessarily my views, which makes things livelier), but also because, Alice-like, the more I get into “social creativity,” the more it seems like a magic portal to a looking-glass world where everything is connected to everything else (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Carroll, 1981). More than the specifics of social creativity, or what I originally thought the specifics were, like creative collaborations, environments that support creativity, debunking the mythology of the lone genius, and so on (Montuori, 1989; Montuori & Purser, 1995), the exploration of social creativity opened doors for me that led to a reflection on knowledge, method, and complexity: in other words, a fundamentally epistemological reflection. I became interested in how we create our understanding of creativity, and how that understanding (both academic and in everyday life) in turn “creates” us, in a mutually causal process (Montuori & Donnelly, 2016).

I began my exploration of “social” creativity for two reasons, one musical and one political. The musical reason was that I grew up, listening to and playing in musical groups. In graduate school in the early 1980s I found to my surprise that there was hardly any research on creative groups or creative relationships. There was certainly no discussion of what perhaps excited me most, and the kind of music I most enjoyed playing, the collective improvisation found in jazz, and in more eclectic electric bands like *Weather Report* and *King Crimson*. Not surprisingly perhaps, there was also very little research on improvisation.

My puzzlement at what was and what was not researched, how these choices were made (mostly without the process being addressed), and the apparent blind spots, in turn led me to an exploration of the way we construct our understanding of *any* phenomenon, not just creativity. It led me to study distinctions and choices, the role of disciplinarity, of paradigms, how national cultures play a part in shaping our approach to and interpretation of a topic, and how the “construction” of our understanding is in fact itself the result of a creative process (Montuori, 2005a, 2013b, 2017; Montuori & Donnelly, 2016; Montuori & Purser, 1995, 1999a). It eventually led to the development of something I call Integrative Transdisciplinarity, inspired by the work of “transversal” thinkers Edgar Morin and Gregory Bateson (G Bateson, 1972; G. Bateson, 1991, 2002; Morin, 2008a, 2008b), in an effort to address both the disciplinary fragmentation and the gaps created by that fragmentation. Central to Integrative Transdisciplinarity is the role of complexity, of what is woven together, which means there is a focus on context and connection, not simplification and abstraction from context.

First steps into creativity and authoritarianism

The second reason for my interest in social creativity was political, the result of seeing the racism, prejudice, and stereotyping in Europe during the turbulent 70s and early 80s. I first came across creativity research while doing research on the authoritarian personality, attempting to understand the motivations for prejudice and racism, and the desire to dominate and control others. The classic study of authoritarianism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) is now once again the subject of discussion after being rather unfairly dismissed and spending some years in obscurity. It presented a compelling portrait of people who were, among other unpleasant characteristics, closed-minded, prejudiced, and dualistic. This psychological profile made me want to know why some people were *not* closed-minded, *not* prejudiced, *not* dualistic, *not* conformist, *not* simplistic thinkers. There seemed to be very little research on this topic, and as far as I could see it certainly didn’t constitute a systematic research agenda. Yet I found these open-minded people described in Frank Barron’s research on creative individuals, whose characteristics turned out to be the exact opposite of authoritarians. And indeed, in one of her chapters in the classic volume she co-authored, *The Authoritarian Personality*, Else Frenkel-Brunswik (Adorno et al., 1950) discussed the difference between prejudiced and non-prejudiced individuals (high scorers and low scorers respectively), writing that

(I)t is perhaps mainly the readiness to include, accept, and even love differences and diversities, as contrasted with the need to set off clear demarcation lines and to ascertain superiorities and inferiorities, which remains as the most basic distinguishing criterion of the two opposite patterns (pp. 485-486).

Most intriguing was her finding of the

generally more creative and imaginative approach of the low scorer both in the cognitive and in the emotional sphere, as compared with a more constricted, conventional, and stereotypical approach in the high scorer (p.475).

Many of the basic insights of *The Authoritarian Personality* have been supported, corrected, developed, and expanded by more recent research (Altemeyer, 1981; Brown, 2004; Jost & Sidanius, 2004; J. L. Martin, 2001; Roiser & Willig, 2002; Stone, Lederer, & Christie, 1993). Nevertheless, the connection between authoritarianism and creativity has not been pursued with anything like the alacrity I believe it deserves. If creative people tend not to be prejudiced, authoritarian, and racist, then this is surely something worth exploring (Montuori, 1989, 2005b, In Press). Frank Barron called his first major book *Creativity and Psychological Health* (Barron, 1963) and its revised edition *Creativity and Personal Freedom* (Barron, 1968), and Abraham Maslow, who had also researched authoritarianism (Maslow, 1943), held that the healthy, self-actualizing person and the creative person were in many ways one and the same (Maslow, 1993). The connections between creativity, psychological health, authoritarianism and prejudice had been hinted at, sometimes rather forcefully, but they had not been fully articulated, and definitely not systematically explored. It's also interesting to note that some of the "traits" of the creative personality are in fact drawn from social psychological studies of conformity and authoritarianism. The Asch conformity experiments, for instance, also identified a minority who were *not* conformists and showed Independence of Judgment, and the same applies to Tolerance of Ambiguity (Asch, 1956; Barron, 1953b; Block & Block, 1951; Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949; Lauriola, Foschi, & Marchegiani, 2015; Lauriola, Foschi, Mosca, & Weller, 2016). This should give pause for reflection about the way "individual" and "social" are intertwined.

The exposure to authoritarianism research made me approach creativity with a different perspective. Creativity research and the characteristics of creative persons offered an insight into a way of being in the world that seemed to be more open-minded, more cosmopolitan, more complex, more likely to find creative approaches to differences, indeed a way of being that thrived on difference. It was also a more *complex* way of being in the world, one that was perhaps not always even-keeled, not always stable and entirely "sensible," which made it the subject of some diffidence by psychologists who saw psychological health as psychic equilibrium (Barron, 1953a, 1995). But precisely because of that ability to go to extremes of feeling and ideation and then bring it all back thanks to their ego-strength (Barron, 1968, 1969), creative people seemed to have a richer experience of being human, and less prone to intrapsychic or political repression (Barron, 1968).

Beyond any achievement in the arts and sciences, creativity research offered the outline of *a way of being* that seems more suited for a complex, uncertain, pluralistic world. In other words,

creativity also involved a different way of *relating* to the world. Since creative individuals seemed to engage in a regular process of personal destabilization, at times exploring psychic extremes, and engaging in what Dabrowski called “positive disintegration” (Dabrowski, 1964, 1967), my questions were not just about how creative individuals relate to society, but about how society relates to creative individuals, or to the potential for creativity in people in general. It was very clear, from research as well as from personal experience, that most societies do not seem to support creativity, and that most schools and organizations actively suppress it. Even today, when creativity is viewed as central for economic growth, the engine of “disruptive innovation,” a “key competence” for leaders and managers, there’s research showing that while creativity is desired, it’s also rejected more often than not (Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2012).

Strategies of Simplicity and Complexity

Vlad Glăveanu has been central in promoting the importance of social creativity. He has made several important arguments for studying the underlying philosophical assumptions of creativity research, the articulation of phenomena involving more explicitly relational creativity, and the contribution of cultural psychology and more broadly of socio-cultural perspectives on creativity (Glăveanu, 2010, 2014a, 2016, 2017a, 2017b). He has also launched a fruitful challenge to creativity researchers by asking if there is currently a crisis in the field (Glăveanu, 2014b). The answer to that question, it seems, depends on who you ask, and what they see as the overarching task of creativity research now. One approach is to become more focused, more specialized, and attempt to eliminate what are perceived to be exogenous, unnecessary factors. This is the approach proposed by Runco and Weisberg (Runco, 2015; Weisberg, 2015). Weisberg has proposed a new definition of creativity that focuses only on *novelty* and *intention*, eliminating the traditional second part of the standard definition of creativity, *original and valuable*, because it involves social judgment. Weisberg argues that one reason for this change would be “for psychologists to regain control over the study of creativity” (p.119), suggesting at least that psychology has, in fact, lost control and is no longer what I would call the *Dominant Disciplinary Discourse* of creativity (Montuori, 2010), the discipline in which most of the research on creativity is conducted and which is most associated with creativity. It is certainly the case that psychology is no longer the only discipline where extensive creativity research is conducted.

Runco (2015) agrees with Weisberg that the definition of creativity needs to be changed from *original and valuable* (or a term to that effect) to *original and intentional*, so as not to bring in what he describes as the subjective social elements. Runco believes it is important to identify what is *necessary* for creativity, and distinguish it from what is *unnecessary*, or “mere influences” (epiphenomenal). These unnecessary mere influences, he states,

include personality, attitude, culture, development, and motivation. The theory of *parsimonious creativity* focuses on an actual mechanism and extricates correlates (i.e., mere influences and possible, but not guaranteed results). Also, it is nicely scientific in its emphasis on *parsimony*. This is in direct contrast to a social definition—and any definition that includes unnecessary influences or unnecessary effects. (pp. 25-26)

Runco and Weisberg have to be commended for making their approach, and their assumptions, so explicit. This kind of theoretical and methodological excavation and explication is increasingly necessary as we encounter a plurality of approaches to creativity research originating in a variety of disciplines. Weisberg's and Runco's contributions provide us with a good example of a *strategy of simplification* (Morin, 2008a, 2008b). The strategy of simplification involves reduction and disjunction: *reduction* to what is considered to be essential (the focus on an "actual mechanism," in Runco's case) and *disjunction*, or separation from the unnecessary influences or unnecessary effects, in this case particularly anything considered "social."

My own approach goes in the other direction of disciplinary specialization. It is a strategy of complexity that embraces transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity is an emerging approach to inquiry, and there are already emerging schools with quite different approaches (Augsburg, 2014; Klein, 2004; V. Martin, 2017), many of which involve tackling so-called "wicked problems" with research teams. I refer to my specific approach as *Integrative Transdisciplinarity* (Montuori, 2010, 2013a; Montuori & Donnelly, 2016), which focuses more on how researchers and practitioners, or scholar-practitioners (Donnelly, 2016), can make sense of the enormous amount of research scattered in different disciplines and sub-disciplines to address issues whose complexity cannot restrict them to one discipline. Integrative Transdisciplinarity does not reject disciplinary specialization but complements it. It seeks to connect and contextualize knowledge from a plurality of specialized sources pertinent to an issue at hand.

Along with scholars who specialize, we also need scholars who "weave together" what exists within disciplines, as well as related works in other disciplines, so that it can be applied to real world issues. Integrative Transdisciplinarity is therefore a form of "scholarship of integration" (Boyer, Moser, Ream, & Braxton, 2015). This weaving together also requires an exploration the underlying assumptions of the perspectives informing any research project, as well as the range of possible perspectives and frameworks with which any topic might be approached. I call this the "meta-paradigmatic" dimension of Integrative Transdisciplinarity. The strategy of simplification seeks to *extricate correlates*, as Runco puts it, whereas Integrative Transdisciplinarity sees creativity as a systemic, distributed, networked process and actively explores context and connections (Csikszentmihalyi, 2015; Glăveanu, 2014a, 2014b). This does not mean a rejection or a downplaying of the individual and a dismissing of genius and creativity for instance, in favor of a "social" view, where "social" is viewed as opposite and antagonistic to individual. It is rather an attempt to contextualize and connect creativity at all levels of inquiry, whether we are speaking of a network of ideas or of personality characteristics or relationships or the relation between all three (Montuori & Purser, 1999a).

I know from my own experience as a professional musician as well as from my research that the "mere influences" listed by Runco may be non-essential for a certain type of research and a certain kind of "purified" understanding of creativity, but they do constitute the warp and woof of reality for the professional musician. The strategy of simplification aspires to the traditional scientific ideal of variables isolated in the laboratory, unsullied by exogenous factors, for purposes of control and prediction (Ceruti, 2015). Integrative Transdisciplinarity draws on and

addresses the lived experience of practitioners in context, in an approach that is *inquiry-based*, grounded in specific events and experiences (Montuori, 2010, 2012b), rather than guided by the characteristics of a specific discipline (and thereby constrained and not able to address certain aspects of the actual phenomenon in question), and “in vivo” rather than “in vitro,” to use Nicolescu’s useful distinction (Nicolescu, 2008), drawing therefore on pertinent knowledge from research regardless of disciplinary origin (Morin, 2002). A complexity-based approach does not reject the need for prediction, but recognizes the inescapable uncertainty at the heart of emergent phenomena such as creativity, as well as in human knowledge more generally (Morin, 2008b).

In the mid to mid- to late 90s Ron Purser and I wrote a number of articles and edited two volumes about social creativity (Montuori, 1989; Montuori & Purser, 1995, 1996, 1999b; Purser & Montuori, 1999). We wrote about the need for a more contextual view of creativity, arguing among other things, for the importance of research on groups, relationships, and the creativity of women. We also debunked some of the excessive myths about “the lone genius” that dated back to Romantic ideas like “genius without learning” and “genius overcomes all obstacles.” These ideas seemed to us clearly wrong, and certainly not particularly helpful to anyone, but they nevertheless continued to show up in popular views of creativity and in the media (Montuori & Purser, 1995). To my surprise, some critics described us as sociological determinists, eager to throw out research on the individual in favor of groups and women (Greening, 1995; Hale, 1995), even though we made it very clear that we wanted to connect and integrate, not replace. Despite our best efforts to argue for “both/and,” meaning integrating, for instance, research on personality *and* groups or the larger zeitgeist (Simonton, 1999), our view was interpreted as “either/or.” Creativity is either individual, or “social.” This gave us an insight into how these historical oppositions also involved a particular zero-sum way of thinking, in which there were only two exclusionary options (Collins, 1998). Indeed, it was as if we had poked at one of the sensitive underlying pillars of a particular cognitive paradigm, tied up with issues of method, disciplinary identification, and even political, cultural and national identity (Sampson, 1977, 2008). I recall several conferences in the U.S. during which my exploration of social creativity was referred to as “socialist” or even “communist.” This would not have happened in Italy or Japan, for instance, where the self is conceived less individualistically, and the term socialist is not considered an insult. The role of national culture understanding the who, what, where, and how of creativity is a topic that deserves more research. Integrative Transdisciplinarity invites the integration of the inquirer in the research which means situating oneself as a research, becoming aware of one’s assumptions and using the research process as a way to constantly confront oneself with one’s assumptions (theoretical, methodological, personal, cultural, etc.), as well as limiting assumptions about one’s own creative capacities.

Systems and Complexity

A very basic and useful differentiation in systems theory is between open and closed systems (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Von Bertalanffy, 1976). From this perspective, Runco and Weisberg propose to treat the individual as a fundamentally closed system. This is a time-honored tradition found also, for instance, in the study of leadership by psychologist Howard Gardner, a familiar name for creativity researchers (Gardner, 1995). This closed-system approach holds that everything

outside the system in question (whether that is Runco's "mechanism" or Gardner's leader), is epiphenomenal. In other words, for all intents and purposes it is largely irrelevant. Interestingly, in this view some of the characteristics attributed to genius by the Romantics, such as "genius without learning" and "genius overcomes all odds and social obstacles," make more sense. The genius does not need to learn from others, and he will not be held back by anyone because others are fundamentally irrelevant, whether as sources of knowledge and inspiration or as constraints (Montuori & Purser, 1995). The opposite perspective is that of sociological determinism, where it's the individual who really doesn't matter (Simonton, 1999). In the philosophy of social science this is known as holism, the opposite of the individual focus, which is known as atomism (Fay, 1996). Holism is equally problematic since the homogenizing whole is closed to the complexity of the individual parts (Morin, 2008b). But if we choose to see the individual as an open system, the system's relations with its environment also become the subject of study. In a complex approach, the focus is not on parts or whole, but on the parts and the whole, and the relationship between the two (Morin, 1990, 2008b). This leads to studying processes and interactions, using a relational view, not starting off with static assumptions about agency. The decision to study a system as either open or closed is made by the researcher. In an increasingly pluralistic research environment, with creativity studied from many different perspectives, it's necessary to be more explicit about our assumptions and the choices we make when we make these distinctions.

Purser and I used a systems approach in our critique of the "lone genius" myths, arguing that the Romantic view of the genius is a closed system approach, with the negative view of the "other" in the self-other relationship so common in North-American individualist culture (Sampson, 2008). As Traber (Traber, 2007) writes about the United States, "one of the nation's ruling myths continues to be that the self-contained individual is unconstrained by society, culture, and history" (p.1). When Purser and I approached the topic of social creativity, one of our goals was to highlight the importance of environments that are supportive of creativity (Montuori & Purser, 1995). We showed how with an exclusive focus on the individual, less attention was paid to how to create environments that support creativity, both in research and in society. Paradoxically this focus on the individual meant that the historical difficulties of creative individuals in societies not attuned to creativity, and social contexts that were not supportive of creativity, were not studied and understood sufficiently. If one assumes that the environment plays no role in creativity, the concept of an environment that supports creativity doesn't make sense. Research on what Arieti called "creativogenic" environments (Arieti, 1976), has now emerged in the field of business innovation (Amabile, 1998; Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014; Erez & Nouri, 2010; George, 2007; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). Research on creative groups has emerged mostly in management and sociology (Bennis, 1998; Sawyer, 2008). With creativity research scattered in many different disciplines, the importance of integration across disciplines seems ever more necessary.

In sum, the strategies of simplification and of complexity represent different approaches to creativity. The strategy of simplification seeks the *sine qua non* of creativity. Everything else is unnecessary. The strategy of complexity takes the following statement by Barron seriously:

The psychology of the individual, the person, is the study of a world in itself. Yet, that world intersects and intermingles with the world of other individuals, so that very soon we must consider community, habitat, the intersection of the personal with cultural history, expectations of the future, and perhaps above all else in the human case, values and philosophy of life (Barron, 1995 p. 6)

The sociologist Howard Becker started his book *Art Worlds* by reminding us of the credits that follow a major motion picture (Becker, 2008). The list is long, usually takes several minutes to complete, and gives some sense of who and what it took to make the movie appear on our screen. Creativity here is more distributed (Glăveanu, 2014a). It cannot be reduced to a lone genius, even if for convenience or (cultural) habit we talk about a Martin Scorsese or Federico Fellini or Steven Spielberg film, in the same way we might talk about an Armani suit or a Stella McCartney gown. As Morin reminds us, complexity in this sense is not an answer, or a solution (Morin, 2008b). It is a challenge to approach the world in a way that does not “mutilate,” that doesn’t simplify to such an extent that we have a limited and limiting perspective which, for the sake of simplicity, removes so much from our subject that it is in some ways unrecognizable. It is a challenge that I believe will turn out to be especially fruitful in the case of creativity, because we can see the ways in which the exclusive, closed system focus on the individual gives us a limited view of creativity.

What individual? Whose society?

Disciplinary research tends to be *intra-paradigmatic* rather than *meta-paradigmatic*, meaning that it stays within the confines of one paradigm and mostly does not question its own deeper philosophical sources and foundations (Montuori, 2005a). This is most obvious perhaps in the way concept of the individual has been used in creativity research with the assumption that there is largely unquestioning agreement about what constitutes an individual, and the assumption that one can unproblematically differentiate between the individual and society, as if they were separate domains. As a result of this dichotomous split, “social” creativity is neatly distinguished from what it is not, namely individual creativity. But whose individual? What are the characteristics of this individual that can be completely separated and isolated from “the social”? How has the individual been constructed in the psychology of creativity? This is an important exploration directly related to the emergence of a more “social” perspective: What exactly is meant by “individual” and “society,” since these are by no means unambiguous, uncontested concepts (Elliott, 2007, 2015; Heller, Sosna, & Wellerby, 1986; Lindholm, 2007; Westen, 1985, 1992). By touching on these questions, creativity engages in dialogue with scholars in a variety of disciplines, and the necessity for *meta-paradigmatic* awareness can become an opportunity for dialogue. One obvious question is whether it is actually possible to be a self without also being “social.” Social psychologists Markus and Conner (Markus & Conner, 2014) offer an unambiguous answer, stating that “You can’t be a self – even an independent self – by yourself” (p. 44).

In psychology there are already many voices arguing for an understanding of the self that is more relational (Gergen, 1994, 2000, 2009; Glăveanu, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2016; Heller et al., 1986; Rogoff, 2003; Sampson, 2008; Vygotsky, 1980). Research has drawn our attention to the way women have been socialized to be more relational (Code, 1991; Doi, 1973; Gilligan, 1982; Hare-

Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Matlin, 2010). Sociologists have also presented a different understanding of the self, and critiqued the view of a solitary, self-sufficient self (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Elliott, 2015; Slater, 1990). The range of cross-cultural differences has been extensively studied and raises more questions about the importance of studying different “selves” (Markus & Conner, 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Marsella, DeVos, & Hsu, 1985). From a systems perspective, a key question, as we have seen, is whether we choose to approach the individual, or whatever system is the subject of our inquiry, as a closed or an open system. A sustained discussion of this plurality of approaches to the individual-society relation is much needed, and I suspect it may be helpful in breaking down the traditional polarization between self and other, individual and society (Montuori & Purser, 1996; Ogilvy, 1992).

Approaching some of the historically most intractable dichotomies in social science through the lens of creativity may be biting off a sizable chunk, but it can also be particularly generative (Donnelly, 2016; Fay, 1996; Glaveanu, 2012; Ogilvy, 1989; Ping, 2018). Creativity research points to human capacities and human possibilities, and as a result can lead to a rich reflection on what it means to be human. Examples can be drawn from eminent as well as everyday creativity, and our assumptions about creativity take us to some key terms like “creation,” “creator,” and “creature” (Barron, 1999; Fox, 2004; Montuori, 2017). These terms take us right back to the beginning of it all, and to core beliefs about self and world, as well as our conception of the very nature of the Universe, and God (Davies, 1989; Kaufman, 2004; F.D. Peat, 2000; F. D. Peat, 2002; F.D. Peat & Bohm, 1987; Swimme, 1985; Swimme & Berry, 1994; Swimme & Tucker, 2011). Barron showed how our understanding of creativity as lone genius can be traced back to God the lone creator and the seven days (Barron, 1999; Ward Jouve, 1998). This broader approach makes our inquiry into creativity spill over into a variety of disciplines, but it can provide an important entry point to key questions about existence and/as creativity.

Women and Creativity

Although a transdisciplinary approach is valuable in almost any context, the creativity of women is an example of a subject that lends itself particularly well to a transdisciplinary approach (Montuori & Donnelly, 2016). Here is the strictly disciplinary perspective of a leading psychologist’s view of creativity and gender: “Creativity, particularly at the highest level, is closely related to gender; almost without exception, genius is found only in males (for whatever reason!)” (Eysenck, 1995: 127). Without addressing history and the realities of the social, economic, and political environment, without taking into account the way women were, for the longest time, and in many cases still are, excluded from participation in the very domains in which one could be identified as a genius, one might in fact come to the conclusion that women are simply not creative—or at least not capable of genius-level creativity (Baer, 2012; Battersby, 1989; Eisler, Donnelly, & Montuori, 2016; Halstead, 2017). From an exclusively disciplinary, psychological perspective, the historical and social complexities that have stood in the way of women’s creativity cannot be accounted for, yet the result is a view of genius and gender is presented as a final statement on the issue rather than the limited perspective of one discipline based on its limiting assumptions and limited scope. Eysenck may add “for whatever reason,” but I’m probably not reading too much into it if I suggest that this is simply because he is not stating

explicitly his belief that women are just not as creative as men. We consequently have to ask ourselves some questions. To what extent do the findings from one discipline inappropriately claim to have the final say about a subject, with no reference to potentially contradictory or mitigating findings in other disciplines? Does the current view of creativity reflect a certain white, male-middle class Euro-American perspective? Does the way research abstracts creators from their context and fundamentally ignores social, political and economic conditions actively ignore the realities of women, people of color, and groups that have been marginalized by society (Code, 1991; Sampson, 2008)? And does it actually ignore the realities of most white men as well? If we add to this the Romantic conception of genius overcoming all social obstacles (which today might be expressed as “if you’re really good, you’ll be discovered/hired/successful”) we can see that the obstacles to women’s creativity, and the obstacles to understanding those obstacles, are considerable.

Ravenna Helson (Helson, 1990) argued that understanding creativity in women

requires attention to the social world, to individual differences in motivation and early object relations, and to changes in society and the individual over time. In fact, we believe that the study of creativity in general needs all of these directions of attention (p. 57).

Understanding creativity in women, from Helson’s perspective, requires explorations of multiple topics, and I would argue that they in turn need to be woven together to provide a sense of the complexity of the issue.

Networked society, networked self, networked “social” creativity?

About 10 years ago I began to notice that when asked to express their views about creativity, young people in the U.S. and Europe rarely mentioned “eminent” creatives, unlike the Picassos or Einsteins mentioned by their Baby Boomer predecessors (Montuori, 2011). These days Steve Jobs is the rare eminent name. It’s also interesting to note that for baby boomers, business people and parents (frequently mentioned by younger generations), would never have appeared in a “most creative” list. The younger generation referenced individuals who were often friends and family engaging together with others in “everyday creativity” (Richards, 2007; Runco & Richards, 1997), or more broadly, everyday, everyone, everywhere, relational creativity (Montuori, 2011).

It appears that individuals who have grown up in what has been called the networked society (Castells, 2009; Taylor, 2003) may think of and experience creativity differently than their Baby Boomers predecessors (Gardner & Davis, 2013; Montuori, 2011; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). I’ve found informally that even some Boomers appear to be changing their views as a result of the new social environment and its networking technologies. Whereas for Baby Boomers creativity is associated with “eminent creatives” such as Einstein, Van Gogh, or individual popular artists, in today’s “participatory” culture the focus is not so much “eminent creatives,” but on participatory, relational processes with peers and family, and the “makers” movement. Making is increasingly about connecting (Gauntlett, 2011; Jenkins, 2008, 2009).

One way to illustrate the generational difference between the two experiences of creativity is through two iconic events, Woodstock and Burning Man. In 1969, thousands of Boomers made their way to Woodstock to spend a few days enjoying their musical heroes in perhaps less than favorable circumstances. Burning Man, which started in 1986 and blossomed in the 90s and early 00s, offers a different picture, although in perhaps similarly challenging circumstances. At Burning Man everyone is participating in a collaborative creative project without capital S “stars.” At Burning Man, every participant is a “star,” dressed outrageously, and sometimes minimally, contributing to the creation of an environment that valorizes creative expression, as well as the creation of temporary temples, installations, events, and encampments. New “Burner” identities emerge and disappear, or at least become dormant upon returning home until the next “Burn.” The music of the Woodstock era was punctuated by classic guitar solos and more generally by displays of individual virtuosity (Hendrix, Clapton, Garcia, etc.), whereas the music of the Burning Man era replaces the guitar solo with sing-along chants (think Coldplay). Electronic Dance Music, popular at Burning Man, focuses on grooves for dancing and less on musical virtuosity and complexity. I am by no means suggesting that musically this is an improvement, of course. I believe it does tell us something about U.S. society and the changes brought about by the networked society which are leading to a more networked, less dualistic understanding of self and society (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). It points to a greater openness and a greater understanding of the relational dimensions of creativity, as well as a shift towards what Leadbeter called a relational, “we-think” society of mass innovation rather than mass production (Leadbeter, 2009). The way creativity manifests *in vivo* is very important, particularly in this age of considerable social transformation. The point here is not that sociologists should study the social and economic dimensions of creativity, but that it is possible to study the complex phenomenon of creativity in the 21st century using a multidimensional transdisciplinary approach.

Creativity everywhere?

Looking back on the last 30 years or so it’s clear that creativity has now become a hot topic, and it will remain so for the foreseeable future. I continue to applaud and encourage increasingly specialized and focused research, but there’s also no escaping the need to integrate and to make sense of what all the existing research is telling us, to connect different research strands, to open up dialogues between them, as well as with practitioners. With creativity becoming such an important global phenomenon, the source of technology and a driver of the economy, it becomes essential to ask what is meant by creativity not just in terms of its specific mechanisms, but also in terms of the ethical dimension, asking what and how we are creating, why, and for whom. In order to understand the complexity of creativity, scholars will need to collaborate and ourselves become skilled in social creativity. Transdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration will require that we challenge our own (as well as others’) assumptions, have tolerance for ambiguity, make connections, contextualize, critique, and create.

Creativity is the very fabric of society today. As an example, the sociologist Anthony Elliott, finds that “reinvention” is now a dominant feature of life (Elliott, 2013). Individuals engage in “self-creation,” exploring the “art of life” as they reinvent themselves through practices like yoga, meditation, therapy, and cosmetic surgery (Elliott, 2008). They negotiate career changes

(voluntary or involuntary), often in organizations that are reinventing themselves to become more adaptive and successful, to entire towns and cities looking to revitalize themselves, there is a desire to reinvent and re-create as old models (old selves, old identities) are failing and new ones are being sought. Who creates, how and why? Who benefits? What are the processes and criteria for creation, and how do we understand, experience, and apply the creativity in reinvention? What do we believe are the limits to what we can and should create, and what are the goals we pursue (e.g., bioethics)? This brings us into a complex set of ethical issues that may be less amenable to a traditional scientific approach, but that nevertheless need to be addressed—and once again cannot be fully reduced to the scope of a single discipline.

I believe taking social creativity seriously, certainly from the perspective of Integral Transdisciplinarity, involves entering the fray of the discourse and practices of creativity in the world. It means, among other things, exploring the way creativity is used and abused, exploring the implications of thinkers who, under the admittedly ill-fitting umbrella of postmodernism, have told us about “the death of the author” and “the death of the subject,” and the way creativity in the arts has increasingly become associated with sampling and bricolage (Kearney, 1988; Megill, 1985; Rosenau, 1992). Where does “creativity” fit into the larger social and intellectual trends? The term creativity has not been popular with cultural critics because of its Romantic associations with concepts like “originality” and “genius” which have been seriously attacked in a variety of contexts and for a variety of reasons (McMahon, 2012; Pope, 2005). At the same time, the term creativity is used with increasing frequency by physicists, biologists, as well as philosophers and theologians, which gives us a sense of its relevance these days and that it may be moving from a rare quality found in only a few unusual individuals to the very nature of what it means to be human, and of the Universe itself, (Bocchi & Ceruti, 2002; Bocchi, Cianci, Montuori, & Trigona, 2014; Fox, 2004; F.D. Peat & Bohm, 1987; Swimme, 1985, 1996; Swimme & Berry, 1994; Swimme & Tucker, 2011). To the extent that researchers in the psychology of creativity does not at least inform itself engage these social and intellectual developments, the field risks becoming increasingly marginalized. As I have already indicated, studies of creativity are now in full swing in disciplines such as management and sociology, not to mention the new kids on the block like Design and Social innovation, and of course, neuroscience (Brandt & Eagleman, 2017; Dietrich, 2015; Goldberg, 2018). References to research in the psychology of creativity are often quite scarce in these works.

Conclusion

The study of creativity has arguably never been more exciting. But, like so much else in the world, creativity is breaking down the very categories we have used to make sense of it. This is not an insubstantial part of the excitement, but also creates a degree of confusion. As a result, creativity is not what it used to be. It has certainly changed a lot since the days when I was constantly told that “social creativity” is an oxymoron, or, for that matter, that studying creativity was really a marginal activity. The who, what, where, when and how of creativity are being challenged, and new generations are growing up with a different understanding and experience of creativity. As creativity continues to become more important, creativity research can become, indeed arguably has an obligation to become more self-reflective and aware of its paradigmatic assumptions, and at the same time become more relevant, more engaged in the pressing global and local

challenges we are all facing. Creativity research can also become more open to a multiplicity of voices and a multiplicity of approaches—one need only think of new disciplines such as Design and Social Innovation that are deeply connected to creativity, but often seem to draw on organizational practices and popular creativity books more than current research in the psychology of creativity. Dialogues are important not just between scholars but between scholars and practitioners, to find ways to integrate, communicate, and apply research findings, and have the experience of practitioners inform scholars (Donnelly, 2016). In this difficult historical moment, I believe the pressing challenge is to engage and make a difference, both in discourse and practice.

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