

Notes on the concept *Creativity*. According to Steen Nepper Larsen, Espergærde, Sept. 2003

Intro

Creativity – see: *Creative accounting* (In the most simple Dictionary – *English-Danish*; a joke).

Everything around this word seems to lead back to the highly celebrated, powerful myth of Creation (*creatio ex nihilo* – even though its not to be found in the Bible itself). “The words *creatio ex nihilo* are intended, then, to deny the existence of any other Being co-eternal with God, or any world identical with God.” (see below, p.572). Emphasizing the omnipotent, omniscient, sovereign King (p.576). Tracing the origin of the origin (back to the first and unconditioned creation) is a profound metaphysical favourite discipline. Concrete expression of this: Still 6 days of creation – the 7th day as a take-off day.

Worth considering: “To the ancient Indian and Greek thinker the notion of *creatio* is unthinkable” (*Dictionary of The History of Ideas*, New York 1973, p.571).

And do not forget in the following that the manifold ideas of the creation of Man and the World all have served practical tasks in attempts to secure Man’s existence on planet Earth – not primarily theoretical reflections and thought puzzles (look down: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol.4, S.1389).

What we acknowledge through history – a diverse transformation of divine power (in)to the autonomous subjectivity – to the body, the rationality, the imagination, the brain (cognition) - and maybe to organisations – and further on and down the line: to collectives of leaders and artists? Since World War II especially U.S. psychologists and a number of psychometricians have attempted to develop tests that measure creative abilities. Since 1910: systematic IQ-tests. These facts and schools will not be traced, nor dealt with in this context. My elaboration and my travel will take other paths.

Self-creation/-ivity (in collective forms) was a task for man (Marx) and the hypostasis of man = God, has to be reversed again (Feuerbach). For Sartre: man is only, what he chooses to be...in a “situation créatrice”. (*L’existentialisme est une humanisme*). A complex phenomenon, I dare say. Creativity is also related to “The joy of creation – the signifying process, the ‘reign of freedom’ ...the process of creating true works, meaning and pleasure begins....(opening for, SL) sensual and sexual pleasure (Henry Lefebvre (HL): *The Production of Space*, Malden/Oxford 1974, p.137-138).

The concept creativity is a far-reaching complex, multidimensional and multifaceted term.

Everyday language

How do we normally use the word? The meaning of the word lies in its use (acc. to Ludwig Wittgenstein).

“When original thinking is desired, assumptions should be questioned and routines broken.” & “Originality is, after all, the most widely accepted dimension of creativity. Creative things are

always original.” (*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Amsterdam etc. 2001, p.2893 + 2894)

Creativity is “Möglichkeitssinn” - Potentiality: the given – goes through a transformation – the new is being born – the not-expected is being seen.

Quite often we knit the concept tight to the gifted free spirit (the genius is “schöpferisch” – his own creator, maybe even (the wild dream of being) his own father(?)). Creativity ventilates the maximum possible intensification of subjectivity (the free spirit, Nietzsche, p.125). According to Nietzsche: Valuing is creating; to create new values – new life forms – many gods – (*Also Sprach Zarathustra*, 1883-85). Smash the old values. The higher humans (the Supermen) fight against false values and create the world anew. The old idols must fall.

But creativity is also interpreted as a common democratic capacity: natality is a new start for everyone and for the world – each individual – a new beginning (stated in one of the most profound book in the field, the German sociologist’s Hans Joas’: *The Creativity of Action*, Cambridge 1996 (1992), p.141 – as a practical philosophical guy he is inspired by Hannah Arendt’s natality-and-birth-celebrating *vita activa* thoughts....).

“Some will have more potential than others; not everyone can be Mozart of Einstein. Everyone can, however, fulfil his or her potential for original and creative expression.” (*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Amsterdam etc. 2001, p.2900)

For humans – not for the mighty God above - creativity is always happening in space and time (Henri Lefebvre). “Nature creates and does not produce”...”nature does not labour”....”Humanity, which is to say social practice, creates works, and produces things.” (HL, p.70-71). Creativity seems to be made possible through profound ontological-anthropological conditions – but to be realized it demands more than these....

Please do not to forget: reservation towards the concept is also “parked in” everyday language: “krea-krea” (playthings, toys for babies – at least in Danish - something for kids; not serious; not theoretical; “creative subjects” in school are not “theoretical”, real import.). But normally: a positive valuated term

History of the Concept

I have been digging deep into the dictionaries. Here are some glimpses of what I found:

“Philologists have attributed the more extensive meaning of ‘make’ and ‘grow’ to the hypothetical root of ‘create’, the Indo-European okerdh- or the Sanskrit oker- or okre... . The proliferation of meanings of the word “create” in less hypothetical contexts have been extraordinary: ‘causing to grow’, ‘ability to produce’, ‘ability to call into existence, to construct, to give rise to, to constitute, to represent, to invest, to occasion, to form out of nothing.” (*Dictionary of The History of Ideas*, New York 1973, p.577) . Latin: creatio – Engl. creation – French: creation – Ital: creazione. In German(y) – Schöpfung – until 1950’s: Then....Kreativität, too..

“Kreativität (H,I,R,P,B,S); das Handlung H des Individuums I wird zum Produkt P führende Handlung H des Individuums I wird vom Beurteiler B im Hinblick auf ein System S von Erwartungen und Zwecken als kreativ eingestuft.“ (HWdP, S.1200) – an analytical formal-logical abbreviation-device-machine – useful – but maybe too restricted.

“**Creativity**, derived from eng., creative; from latin: creare – to create, to shape...” (written and stated all around; a common denominator for all encyclopedias....)

”**Kreativität** (lat.), ”Schöpferkraft”, Fähigkeit zu originärer schöpfer. Analyse u. Gestaltung der materiellen u. soz. Umwelt.“ (*Kröner’s Handbuch der Soziologie*, Stuttgart 1994)

”**Creativity** (*psychology*) that aspect of *intelligence* characterized by originality in thinking and problem solving. Creative ability involves the use of divergent thinking, with thoughts diverging towards solutions in a number of directions.” (*Collins Dictionary Sociology*, Glasgow 2000)

“**Kreativitet** evne til skabelse af noget nyt og originalt samt til at realisere det...” (*Psykologisk Pædagogisk ordbog*, Kbh. 1998)

”Cognitive theories of creativity focus on the intellectual structures and processes that leads to insights, solutions, and ideas that are original and useful.” (*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Amsterdam etc. 2001, p.2892)

“**Creativity**, the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form.” (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago et al. , 15th ed., p.721)

“Creativity is the result of the convergence of basic cognitive processes, core domain knowledge, and environmental, personal, and motivational factors which allow an individual to produce an object or behaviour that is considered both novel and appropriate in a particular context.” (*Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*, London 2003, p.862)

The theological dimensions of the concept can be presented I this way::

“The doctrine of the creation of the universe by God is common to the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; reflection on creation has been most extensively developed within the Christian tradition. Creation is by a single, supreme God, nor a group of deities, and is an ‘absolute’ creation (creation ex nihilo, ‘out of nothing’) rather than being either ‘making’ out of previously or an ‘emanation’ /outflow) from God’s own nature. Creation, furthermore, is a free act on God’s part; he has no ‘need’ to create but has done so out of love and generosity.” (*Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, London and New York 1998, p. 695)

In a broader perspective: We possess (or maybe: they (still) possess us!) two basic meta-myths: 1) Creatio ex nihilo (the mono-theistic God is existing in- and for him-self before time and space and the universe & man; no pre-existing stuff; everything is said to be dependant on the will and power of God). The universe was shaped in its perfect timeless roundness (fixed spheres, fixed stars; *The Divine Comedy* by Dante). God was living in eternal presence (present time; Wendorff, S.96) & 2)

The ancient greek demiurg (due to Plato in Timaeus) = a world-artisan; Cosmic maker and/or architect; creates order out of chaos; rearrange present material to form: hyle – form - eidos. No strict division between God's Cosmos-order - and the world in time. The Gods even inhabit the world – and there can be up to 55 of them. (Monotheism is a pale and boring, but powerful invention, I dare say). But the Greeks had “ein unhistorisches Bild von der Natur” (Wendorff, look down, S.65; a cyclical way of thinking).

Often people feel forced to choose between Christian transcendence or Greek immanence.

”Natur ist theologisch aufgefasst, der Titel für die Selbstverwirklichung Gottes im Unähnlichen.“ (Peter Sloterdijk: *Sphären I*, Frankfurt a/M 1998, S.37) – but later is this ”vital geometry” a branch for man's own expressions, coping with and (re-)making the existential life condition. Man stands for the second ongoing cration. The first nature gets cultivated and civilized into a second nature (as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Rüdiger Safranski etc. can tell us)

Critical voices have always been ready to stress that cosmological will (needs no “Schöpferkraft” to back it up (Arthur Schopenhauer) it's just there and a metaphysical unconditioned force beyond the spheres of man's power play and minor will). But the dominant occidental thought system since the Renaissance seems to maintain and to transform the concept of God's transcendence and supreme will into the anthropocentric human will and rationality. “Male and female created He them”, the Holy Scripture says. We are supposed to be the Crowns of Creation, created in God's image – and Adam is taking care of the second Genesis, giving the names to all living organisms on Earth. A vivid self-appraisal and proud feeling of high self-esteem seem to be married to the creativity concept. In modernity these figures get – not the least and powerfully - fleshed out into fields like: science and art & tend to become ideal types for socialisation, school system and upbringing in general.

Many other creation myths

Summarizing and bringing in new perspectives. Myths are dealing with and narrating the origin – the making/shaping/creating - of the world and of man. The highlight and prioritise different top-creators. We can find structural narratives like (check e.g. Mircea Eliade: *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen*, Hamburg 1957 & Rudolf Wendorff: *Zeit und Kultur*, Wiesbaden 1980):

- The supreme creator (God, an old wise man; a pneumatic blow; a force beyond our Knowledge, will and insight)
- The cosmogonic view, birth (man/woman – intercourse); symbolic reproduction...every year
- The primordial parents (sky and earth)
- The cosmic egg (yin-yang; the two halves rolling apart in Greek ancient thought etc.)
- The animal creators
- Enchanted natural forces/powers like earthquakes, vulcanos, seas, lightning etc.

We both find peaceful everlasting emanation or an ongoing fight (god and/or evil) & The seasonal natural based cosmology (to renew the year; agricultural based stories)

* “the deity's transcendence must also be related to its immanence of presence in the world...” (problem for Judaism, Christianity and Islam) (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago et al. , 15th ed., p.720)

Historical perspective

The creative mind can transform conceptual spaces. Arthur Koestler said back in 1964, that human creativity arises from “the sudden, interlocking of two previously unrelated skills or matrices of thought” (Steven Mithen: *The Prehistory of The Mind*, London 1996, p.58). We get an advantage from being conscious; greater flexibility, sensitivity and creativity. Early Humans did not lack consciousness altogether – but it was restricted. When language started acting 100.-150.000 years ago(?) it changed.

“The brain has co-evolved with respect to language, but languages have done most of the adapting.” (p.122). “...languages are entirely dependent on humans...”(p.112). “Language evolution is probably thousand of times more rapid than the brain evolution”...”The world’s languages evolved spontaneously. They were not designed.” (p.110) (Terrence Deacon: “The Symbolic Species”, 1997)

“For Descartes and the Cartesians, God never rested. Creation was continuous....For the Cartesians, God embodies a sort of transcendent unity of labour and nature. Human activity imitates divine creativity...” (HL, p.283-284)

Due to J.G. Herder God is no longer an active creating element in the world history. God is a passive God, once having created the world. This deistic position does not doubt that God has created the world (the natural laws bear witness of his power) – but now man’s rationality has more to say. Man’s rationality is always historical, individual and situated. Nature and history are the two great following comments to Gods original words. The abstract historical philosophical narrative is being negated – and the creativity of the sole individual and not the least the concrete nation get into focus (read: *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* , 1774)

To make a long an complicated story too short: For hundreds of years people have debated and fought around issues like:

- is the world eternal, does it have no beginning (Aristoteles; Catholicism; Medieval cosmology) in time and space – or does it have a beginning long time before 4004 B.C. (new natural science)? (see: *Routledge, HWdPh*, Wendorff, S.80 + 226f. etc.)
- is creation an unfinished process or something that has taken place once....?
- can God be perfect, good and supreme, when neither the world nor the human beings seem to be so, even though he created them (Man) in his own picture (the Theodicé problem)
- is God still a vital force in a monistic (Spinoza) or monadic (Leibniz) perspective?
- Does the word of God have to be found like a hidden alphabet in everything (deciphering codes) or is language “just” a nominalist(ic) field of labelling?

I will leave these creation-related question (today mostly seen to live on among American “creationists”, trying to block off evolutionary thoughts and Enlightenment in American schools...Check: “Creationism, Evolutionism, and Antievolutionism” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*)

Instead I will turn to the utmost interesting concept imagination, implying the ability/skill/power/force to imagine something not present or given; a picture-forming skill (imago)

Mark Johnson, the philosopher and cognitive semantic thinker (known from the productive co-works with linguistic researcher George Lakoff): “The Body in the Mind, 1987; brings in a close reading of Kant’s Third Critique: “Critique of Judgement” from 1790). He writes and claims:

“Without imagination, nothing in the world would be meaningful....” – without it: no making-sense, no rationality etc. (p.ix). Embodied and imaginative structure of understanding (p.xiii). Imagination grows out of bodily experience (p.xiv)

Johnson and Kant both tend to emphasize:

- The Creative Function of Imagination
- Reflective judgment – the creative act of reflecting (p.157)
- No pre-given concepts; no set of rules....
- The ability to generate new concepts
- Creating another nature (Kant in Paragraph 49 in KdU)

“...as creative, imaginations is a free, non-rule-governed activity, by which we achieve new structure in our experience and can remold existing patterns to generate novel meaning.“ (p.165)

“Moreover, creative imagination is nonalgorithmic and nonpropositional, insofar as it is not a process determined by concepts or rules.“ (p.166)

The main point is that rationality is always embedded.....”the novel connections come out of your experience”.....from the life we live, from the situated body in the world. Creativity is a fleshy business, so to speak.

Using metaphorical projections we give birth to creativity at all levels. Creativity is not just irrational. Johnson writes. “Our new ideas and connections do come from somewhere. They come from the imaginative structures that make up our present understanding, from the schemata that organize our experience....”

Kant, in Paragraph 49: “Die Einbildungskraft (als produktive Erkenntnisvermögen) ist nämlich sehr mächtig in Schaffung gleichsam einer andern Natur, aus dem Stoffe, den ihr die wirkliche gibt. (S.250).

Kant defines talent & genius in the paragraphs in KdU (S.254-255). Man is not destined to perform a copying existence. He is both autonomous and “schöpferisch”. Kant wrote in his early work *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (1755, S.334): „Die Schöpfung ist nicht das Werk von einem Augenblicke. Es werden Millionen und ganze Gebürge von Millionen Jahrhunderte verfließen, binnen welchen immer neue Welten und Weltordnungen nach einander/.../. Die Schöpfung ist nie vollendet. Sie hat zweimal angefangen, aber sie wird niemals aufhören...“ (see Wendorff, S.318). Important, modern dynamization of time and creation.

Realms & sciences

The best dictionary in the world, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (HWdP), sheds light on three utmost relevant issues: 1): The concept ‘creativity’ is not a precise scientific concept – it refers to three fields: persons, actions (process) and results (product), 2) There is a major difference

between problem-solving and problem-searching, & 3). There is no direct and necessary identity between intelligence and creativity.

Hans Joas connect creativity to three realms:

- evolution
- art, poets, science, mathematician
- everyday life, language

The strength of his approach is that creativity is always connected to certain concrete types of action (see up, p.116)

When it comes to ideal drawing of the creative person – we can look at one representative quote, based on empirical research:

“Studies indicate that the creative person is nonetheless an intellectual leader with a great sensitivity to problems. He exhibits a high degree of self-assurance and autonomy. He is dominant and relatively free of internal restraints and inhibitions. He has a great range of intellectual interests and shows a strong preference for complexity and challenge.” (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago et al., 15th ed., p.721)

Modern definitions

“Der kreative Mensch zeichnet sich durch weitgehende Selbständigkeit und Weltoffenheit aus, desgleichen durch geistige Flexibilität, unkonventionellen Denkstil und hohe Frustrationstoleranz.“ (*Meyers Grosses Universal Lexikon*, Mannheim 1983)

„The characteristics that have been identified as important to creativity are tolerance for ambiguity, openness, independence, positive sense of self, high energy, general curiosity, wide interest, as well as introversion, attraction to complexity, need for recognition, and a variety of others.“ (*Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*, London et al. 2003, p.867)

“**Kreativitet**,..., i daglig tale en løs betegnelse for menneskets evne til at skabe noget nyt, overraskende, hidtil uset.” (*Den Store Danske Encyklopædi*, vol.11, Kbh. 1998)

Often three “gifts” are stressed:

- incubation, temporal withdrawal
- sudden insight, realization of a problem solution “out of the blue”
- important to remember the statement from Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer – Creativity is hard work – “99 per cent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration” (IEoftS&BS, p.2895). It is not a bad thing to know the musical scales to be able to improvise...i.e.

Metaphors & Creativity in Art

Metaphors: *Expression* (Herder, inside – out, Hans Joas p.75; language as an expression of feelings;

man is not rational; expanded to collective and cultures, nor sovereign)
Production (Hegel, Marx....collective action)
Revolution (Marx, Lenin, Castoriadis))

A creative process is supposed to follow eight steps: 1) Conflict and fight; 2) Analysis of the problem; 3) Collection of information; 4) Systematical or unconsciousness formation of hypotheses; 5) Ideas, sudden thoughts like lightning; 6) Tests and thorough examination of the ideas, 7) Communication, 8) Realization; “Durchsetzung” (*Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, Mannheim 1990)

The Dominant analogies between God and the artist seem to be double-constructed:

- 1) God as Creator – the inspired artist, genius creating
- 2) God as the maker (imitator, technician) – to know techne & the “tight reason” as artist

From these areas different language forms get their flesh. And the words their poly-semantical meanings.

Tensions

1) The Classical tensions in & around the concepts creation/creativity are:

- Natura naturans and/or Natura naturata?
- Creation – once happened or continuous creation? (*Opslagsbog i Religion/Livsanskuelse*, Kbh. 1985)
- Vertical creativity (*Senkrecht vom oben*) or a horisontal exchange/mutual bonding of Gods and humans in the world?
- Ontology and/or metaphysics
- Transcendense and/or immanens (*The New Enc. Brit*)
- Creative creators and/or created creators (hierarchy; arche, dialectics)

2) The Modern tensions in & around the concepts creation/creativity are:

- * Pre-intentional/intentional?
- * Fundamental blind force (unconscious)/solving practical problems (wise)?
- * Rational, transparent capacity (the thinking self and the immaterial soul are separated from the world; Descartes etc.)/always-already situated (pragmatism hermeneutic, phenomenological thought; no fundamental anxiety/doubt like Descartes; always habits and problems and evolution; Peirce etc.)
- * Connected to life or non-situated, abstract intelligence?
- * Preconceptual/conceptual?
- * A pure cognition (a sole brain phenomenon/intelligence) or springing from the whole body (life)?
- * Subjective (mono)/intersubjective (due, stereo, multiple..)
- * Force of the event (intensity, stream) of related to decision, reflection, rational conscious act(ion)s?

* Intrinsically/extrinsically motivated (*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Amsterdam etc. 2001, p.2902)? (From within, personal, independent/pay, reward. Promises by others, contingencies....)

3) And to be taken into consideration, too:

- just a theological and philosophical concept – or a sociological action-related concept too (Acc. to Hans Joas highly underestimated until recently)
- *Creativity* of action/creativity of *action* (creativity given deeper than action?)
- beware of the historical, national differences (Joas, p.70, 73-74): In Germany it was used from the '50th and onwards for creative abilities (schöpferisches Vermögen).
- do we reserve the concept to macroscopic(al) processes (in nature, in the universe) or do we only use it for human action (as “our” *differentia specifica*)
- The dangerous creativity of the masses (irrationalism) has maybe always filled the thinkers with frights and aversions

Intermezzo

In meta-cognitive horizon....”we can exert a degree of control over our own thinking and direct our cognition to the generation of original and useful ideas, insights, and solutions. We can think creatively.” (*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Amsterdam etc. 2001, p.2895)

“Kendetegnende for dem - kunstnere og kreative forskere (SNL) – er sædvanligvis, at de er åbne for indtryk af enhver art, fleksible, nysgerrige, engagerede, højt motiverede, udholdende og målbevidste. Dertil kommer en høj grad af selvstændighed og jeg-styrke.” (*Den store danske Encyklopædi*, Kbh. 1998)

Post scriptum

Don't forget: An alternative explanation/interpretation could be: Men envy the women's ability to create new life and invented the myths to suppress, exploit and control them. All myths and narratives are related to this basic Story: Mother Earth, baby-universes, we come from closed spaces (wombs, uterus). Micro- & macro-cosmos etc. Mirroring – body and universe (God's, the King, man...). Organism-thought. Peter Sloterdijk is telling this story these years: *Sphärologien I-II-III* (last volume in print).

Another candidate: Big-Bang is the creative act par excellence. Everything was created in a very short time. The universe is still alive – expansion – contraction – light – energy – stellar activities – gravity etc.

Creativity speculations/wonderings (*thaumadzein* in Greek) have evolved around human phenomenological experiences: Where do I/we come from? (Who created me/us?) & What brings the world, the stars, the sun...into existence?

From thereon myths, God(s), rational explanations & views on imagination, cognition and bodily “skills” are being spread.... & contemporary and vivid hopes for future possible exchanges among *creative* leaders, artists and philosophers are being born.