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## Assessing Creativity. For a Relational Perspective of the Creative Attitude

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# Assessing Creativity. For a Relational Perspective of the Creative Attitude

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Abstract: Creativity is now a “hotspot”, an important agenda appointment: the phenomenon is unequivocally attested to by the growth of creative consulting agencies and departments for creativity in organizations, by the surge of books on “how to do it”, by the expansion of research on the subject, by the establishment of institutes for creativity and by its applications in the organizational field. Being creative today pays off. It remains true, however, that the value of the creative attitude, now back to being esteemed and sought after, goes far beyond the immediate usefulness of its instrumental applications. Creativity is a dynamic which has to do with the very expression of human action, with humanity’s identity, its values and its social and civil achievements. It therefore has to do with social relations and, in particular, with relationships that insist on the human dimension of interactions, particularly for those on which we need to rely. The article aims to highlight the social dimensions of creativity, effective strategies for its development, and possible ways and conditions for its evaluation within the perspective of the Relational Theory of Society.

Keywords, creativity, motivation, interaction, trust

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## **The social components of the creative gesture**

Between 1957 and 1958, at Michigan State University, several important interdisciplinary symposia were held. These led to the successful publication of 1959, *Creativity and its Cultivation*: psychologists, psychoanalysts, anthropologists, pedagogists and communicationists tried to take stock of the situation of the studies on the subject, not sparing each other very different or even opposing perspectives. We will use one point of divergence to clarify the perspective of our investigation.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead, to clarify her concept of creativity, used this expression: «I will use the term creativity to indicate the process that takes place in the individual, of which it can be said that he has carried out a creative act if he does, invents, thinks something that is new to him» (Mead, 1972, p. 270).

First, we emphasize the fact that the characteristic “novelty” is a fundamental element for all the definitions we encountered in our course of study: there is no creativity if something new does not happen. Everyone agrees on this.

What is more critical as an apodictic statement, or at least darker, is the clarification “to him”. On the one hand in this way the (sacrosanct) emphasis is placed on the fact that novelty must be evaluated by those who make a (creative) personal experience; on the other hand, it becomes difficult to say that the very possibility of making a creative experience and judgment can mature in solitude. Mead, aware of the centrality of the problem, does not retreat: indeed, she increases the dose: «From this point of view, the boy who in the twentieth century rediscovers that the sum of the squares built on the legs of a right triangle is equivalent to the square built on the hypotenuse, performs an act as creative as that of Archimedes, although the implications of the discovery are zero for the cultural tradition, since the enunciated proposition is already part of geometry» (ibidem).

Some observations: if Archimedes, millennia ago, made that leap, he did so by placing his feet on mathematics (on mathematicians) previous or contemporary to him. On this he was able to evaluate the novelty of his intuition: the evaluation is therefore a decisive element (as we shall see) and calls for clear criteria with which it can be realized.

An important aspect (and also on this we will have to return) is the association between creativity and naivety, the infantile condition: the child is the most creative of humans, and the most important challenge is how to preserve this sharp weapon of knowledge while resisting the contrary current of progressive sclerotization.

In the same symposium, however, a similar but richer definition was made explicit, this time by a psychologist, also American, Henry Murray.

For him one can speak of creativity only at the «occurrence of a new and at the same time valid composition» (Murray, 1972, p. 128). The addition of this simple adjective, “valid”, opens up more demanding and, at the same time, more challenging horizons.

As the author himself clarifies, «“new” will mean that the entity is characterized by a precise degree of innovation, or originality, as opposed to identity or replication, and “valid” will mean intrinsically or extrinsically valid as such for one or more people, or capable of generating compositions that are valid in the future (whether they generate them or not, it remains valid in itself)» (ibidem).

Let’s try to follow this path of progressive enlargement of the interpersonal relationships involved in the creative experience, starting from a “subjective” perspective and moving on to an “inter-subjective” one. We want to try to identify if it is possible to free this exhilarating personal expressiveness from the short-circuits of an illusory solipsism as well as from an instrumentality that is ultimately mortifying.

A study that appeared a few months ago in a scientific journal may be useful for drawing up a sort of “index” of social issues recently studied in depth by research specifically dedicated to creative action. The purpose of this study, in fact, was to carry out a systematic review of the factors associated with the improvement of or inhibition of adolescent creativity, using a sample of 65 studies recently published in the most important international scientific journals.

For convenience in exposition, supporting factors, or, conversely, inhibitors are classified into four categories: individual, parental, educational and social-contextual. Among the individual factors that support the development of adolescent creativity, openness to experience and intrinsic motivation are mentioned, while anxiety is considered the main inhibitory factor.

Supportive parenting factors, on the other hand, include parental support and self-motivation with maternal involvement. Among the educational factors supporting the development of adolescents’ creativity are the ability to balance freedom and guidance, to offer flexible and open activities, to support and encourage students’ ideas, and to ensure that an atmosphere of trust and respect is emphasized. Finally, supporting contextual-social factors include: «providing interactions that encourage expression or challenging of ideas; and the encouraging to view issues from multiple global and temporal perspectives» (van der Zanden et al., 2020, p. 1).

This framework (which can be further specified in different sub-categories) helps us to “see” from above a condition often neglected when we are preparing to analyze the countless forms of human action: even in the most intimate, subjective and creative expressive action, «the environment

is not only around us, but is an intrinsic part of ourselves» (Morin, 1990, p. 49).

### **Creativity and environment**

To adequately deal with a human resource such as that linked to creativity, it is necessary to hold firm a fundamental condition dangerously neglected because it is considered obvious: «Creative results cannot happen in a vacuum» (Shalley & Gilson, 2004, p. 35). Interesting, from this point of view, is the reflection of an American botanist who reminds us that, even in terms of biological differentiation: «most of the variety of all organic life is due to environmental variety. What is determined by a specific hereditary factor is not a particular characteristic of the body, function or behavior, but a particular response to a particular environment. A given genetic constitution does not determine a single quality, it determines a whole repertoire of reactions to a wide range of possible environmental stimuli. The norm or the goal may be different in each environment» (Sinnott, 1959, It. transl. 1972, p. 39).

We can therefore say that «most genes do not determine characteristics but potentials to respond to the environment according to how it presents itself» (Arbiser, 2004, p. 10).

These observations become even more interesting for us when, leaving the biological, genetic and even behavioral field, we come to deduce that from a psychological point of view, «our characteristics depend on the experience, events and social structures in which we participate» (ibidem) and that in the same way, even the imagination is strongly and inevitably subjected to the same process of external stimuli, influences and constraints. Even our “aspirations” (Appadurai, 2004) cannot escape this origin and this “social” destiny.

It is in consideration of this state of affairs that, in recent decades, the need to study the creative dynamics within the context in which they are activated has increasingly emerged.

For this reason, «while a fair amount is known about personality characteristics associated with creative individuals, there is an increasing need for a greater understanding of the contextual factors that may enhance or discourage creativity» (Shalley & Gilson, 2004, p. 34).

We realized, in summary, that «individual creative production is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by multiple individual-level variables as well as contextual and environmental variables» (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004, p. 56). This gave rise to a series of in-depth studies (also empirical and demonstrative) aimed at identifying in a more precise way «several individual and experiential variables that all pertain to individual adaptation to the social environment» (Mouchiroud & Bernoussi, 2008, p. 378).

### **The “internal group”**

Each environment “inhabited” by us has different dimensions, which can be manageable in a creative way at various degrees: in addition to those that we could define as “natural” (linked to biological processes) and “structural” (linked to the material constraints that concrete reality imposes on experience) we also have to deal with the “social” dimensions of our daily existence. As far as our investigation is concerned, it is useful to observe (in this third perspective) that «the creative capacity seems to have not only an individual dimension, but it seems to be above all a community value» (Federici, 2006, p. 15).

The “community” dimension of creativity was a fairly recent (conceptually speaking) conquest: when we talk about creativity we usually refer to the individual because «this is the only dimension that studies have taken into consideration» (Melucci, 1994, p. 24). This “reductionism” would be a consequence of two historical and cultural forces: the first is linked to the fact that the research available on the subject is mostly psychological (tendentially subjectivist). The second one is linked to the age-old tradition that culminates in Romanticism, for which the true creative dimension is that of the “genius”, associated exclusively with the extraordinary experience. On the contrary, an investigation into the links between the creative process and the social context forces us, «not only to abandon the romantic myth of the isolated, beautiful and damned genius, but also to question the idea of an “I” independent of “things” that he meets» (Neresini, 1994, p. 191).

Proceeding in this direction, studies related to the different human sciences have tried to put in the right proportions the idea of creativity as an experience that is done in solitude. This has happened not only by highlighting the amount of social relations necessary to make possible any innovative production and its evaluation, but also by going so far as to trace the “social” roots of the consciousness itself, and of the creative impulse proper of the single individual, even of the one defined as “genius”.

A new awareness of identity processes, made explicit above all in the psychological and psychoanalytic fields, has come to the aid of this daring methodological and disciplinary counter-offensive: the concept of “internal group” is very interesting also, above all for its applications and possible developments within research that is specifically sociological.

Let’s try to summarize the content of this concept: taking a cue from various statements contained in the work of Phicon-Rivière (Argentine psychiatrist), the concept of “internal group” comes to life from a broad reformulation of psychoanalytic theory.

It is significant, for the purposes of its application in a wider field of the human sciences, that, «the idea of an internal group recognizes its most

immediate influence in the contributions of Mead (1927-1930) and the Chicago Sociological School, thinkers who are recognized as having a decisive influence in overcoming the ancient individual-society dilemma (Tarde and Durkheim)» (Arbiser, 2004, p. 10).

This theory states, ultimately, that individual consciousness must be considered a «resultant of the encounter between the biological disposition and the socio-cultural imprint mediated through the main human groups. These structures [...] are incorporated during evolutionary development and, in a reflected way, reproduce the social and cultural world proper to each subject in his internal world» (ibidem, p. 1).

In other words, it is a question of «reversing the question about the origin of groups and society, traditionally seen as a mere sum of individuals, with the question of how the person becomes an individual starting from his inexorable group implication [...]. Just as, without being seen or smelled, the air shapes our vital environment, we likewise float in a semantic universe of values and contents of culture and social organization» (ibidem, pp. 9 and 14).

When we speak of creation as the realisation of “something new”, we cannot therefore do without referring to “something old” that precedes it: «The fact is that “innovation” supposes “innovative tradition”, just as “speaker” supposes “language” [...]. Consequently, it cannot be explained either in terms of a sudden rational illumination or in terms of randomness, since what is meaningless cannot be explained at all» (Garroni, p. 55). The “sense” is, in this case, the clearest indication of something that precedes the individual: only by relying on a “given” signification does the subject become capable, eventually, of changing it.

Human expressiveness, even the most intimate, will be the result of (the emergence of) an active social relationality: the important concept of “latency” is used to indicate this original dynamic. Latency is an “exclusively human” phenomenon, being considered the factor responsible for the gap that also separates us from our biological relatives, the superior animals: «In summary, the millennia of human cultural experience are assimilated over the course of a few years by each generation and latency plays a central, though not exclusive, role in this process» (ibidem, p. 18).

In other words, everything that has introduced us into the world, pointing out to us its meaning “in progress”, remains in our depths; that is, it remains at the origin of all our actions, at the bottom of human agency, even the most personal, creative act, constituting its starting humus. All this, we can already guess, is far from leading us to the easy syllogism of a social determinism that would eliminate any possibility of the individual’s original move: on the contrary, «the infinite variety of personal stories determines

the singularity with which each subject decodes and elaborates social universe and cultural heritage» (ibidem, p. 1).

The creative process is complex because it includes the salient elements of the context with which people interact: «It is at the intersection of these interactions that creative enterprise emerges» (McWilliam & Dawson, 2008, p. 637).

### **The “unresolved” gesture**

At this point, it is necessary to do a lunge onto a delicate topic which is rarely addressed in the literature I consulted. Are the dynamics of (social) recognition necessary for the definition of processes, relationships, self-affirmations? More precisely, is a creative gesture, not recognized by anyone other than the creator, creative?

Schubert’s Unfinished Symphony literally remained in a drawer for about forty years before it was performed publicly for the first time, and by then the composer had been long dead. The question is: was the Unfinished Symphony a masterpiece even before it was performed publicly for the first time? Does posthumous creativity become such only when it is publicly recognized? And by how many? We could widen the field of examples to non-specifically artistic sectors. Is a truth that has been intuited by an individual but never explicitly told or written less true? Is an affection perceived but never demonstrated less valid as a sentiment? Does an unshared discovery prevent it from being defined as such? Is an identity “for itself”, when not recognized by others, illusory?

I do not think I am able to respond in a demonstrative way to these questions. I can only state that this problem leads us perhaps to consider an even deeper aspect of the human structure and condition, which I believe to be the expectation, the ultimate hope of any conscious or unconscious gesture (which, by the way, rarely reaches the goal). I take a stand: is a solitary gesture creative? Yes. Because, as we shall see, it is the gesture of the child, for whom everything is new and also, I would venture, valid and appreciable.

So, from his point of view (from the point of view of his conscience) seeing a cow (let’s say) and marveling, the child is creative in trying to connect that new being to what he already knows, regardless of the social consequences of this personal conquest.

Now, however, I have to resume the statement to complete it: a solitary gesture can be creative, but it is always “unresolved”. It is a “creativity in search of an author” (in this I am perhaps approaching the psychoanalytic theories of “lack”), or rather in search of the fecundating presence of a recipient. Consciously or not, the creative act is an attempt to establish a strong, reassuring, sensible bond with the concrete and mysterious reality that sur-

rounds us, especially at the most mysterious level of its mysteriousness, that is, the human being.

I should therefore conclude that recognition is not just the “condition” for the attribution of the status of “creativity”: it is, rather and more precisely, the “aspiration” of every creative act, which cannot be reduced to a simple “progress” (if with this term we do not want to indicate an increase in the “quality” of relationships between people). To fully understand the meaning and deep aspiration of the creative drive (an energy that can be used in the face of any pro-vocation of reality) we need to make the logical leap not to stop at its (undisputed and necessary) instrumental functions: creativity (generation) underlies an ultimately relational urgency.

In artistic creation this appears more evident (even if you can make art by trying to disregard it): «Artwork recomposes an unanimity that re-welds the fragments of a divided humanity, not in an absurd and vague idea of man, but in a participation and a viable communication, in which our freedom can find its place. And, reciprocally, when he has composed a work, the artist seems to include himself in an invisible community. [...].

This fraternity which has become unrealizable takes the form of a creative and effective attitude, but as a nostalgia for a lost communion, as a forbidden dream, incessantly revived by an irrepressible desire for affective fusion» (Duvignaud, 1969, pp. 11 and 62).

What Duvignaud called “aesthetics of absolute communion”, as an attempt to fill a “violent need for unsatisfied participation”, is extendable, in my opinion, to any attempt at human creative action, well beyond the boundaries of artistic production.

At this point, if the one just proposed can be an acceptable “inclusive” definition of the origins and purposes of the creative drive, we can then ask ourselves with Lasswell: «What are the elements that facilitate certain innovations? And what elements hinder others?» (Lasswell, 1972, p. 255).

One last warning before proceeding to examine the factors that favor or, on the contrary, hinder the development of creativity: sociology has often allowed itself to become entangled in the false problem of the “dimensions” of the phenomena it studies, often considering only the events numerically significant, those with mass social repercussions. It is an understandable fault because sociologists are normally asked to provide information and indications on phenomena that affect the highest possible number of cases. The risk, however, is to overlook events that happen at a small scale and to consider them significant only when they eventually explode. (Think, to give an image, of the sociological importance of the garages of Jeff Bezos and Steve Jobs or of the Harvard dormitory room of Mark Zuckerberg). A creative gesture (following our previous statement) is “complete” when even a single recipient recognizes it as such. The esteem/evaluation of at least one

other subject (similar and different) allows the creative gesture to fulfill its mission, to avoid the condemnation of its being “unresolved”.

We will deal with this in the last step of our investigation. Now we need to dwell on the “pedagogical” implications inherent in the processes of creativity development.

### **Learn to create**

Let us now try to identify the social components of creativity, that is, that set of environmental conditions capable of favoring – or not – a creative approach to the problems of existence. If we use a chronological criterion, we must take note that most scholars indicate in our entry into the world (birth and childhood) the moment when also our propensity for creativity (as happens for all other propensities) receives a sort of ancestral mark that tends to remain stable for the rest of life: «Since (and even before) birth the physical and social environment participates in the cognitive, social and emotional development of the child: interactions with the social environment may promote or hinder socially creative development» (Mouchiroud & Bernoussi, 2008, p. 375).

For this reason, the contexts in which children work, play and live can encourage or discourage the full expression of creativity. The family plays a central role in making “normal” and therefore stable a general basic attitude towards the relationship with things and problems: that is, it «is a critically important influence on, and quite possibly the major force behind, the etiology of creative behavior» (Kemple & Nissenberg, 2000, p. 67). For this reason, many studies have been dedicated to “profiling” the educational and relational styles that characterize the different socialization contexts in which a young person begins to become aware of things and of himself.

Thus it was found, for example, that the context of the family can stimulate or hinder the progressive independence of the young, providing or not the freedom and psychological support necessary to explore, experiment and make decisions, take risks, express one’s ideas and feelings without censorship. Parents’ choices, their way of approaching reality and the requests or orders established towards their children, have a great influence on the future attitude of young people, especially in their availability towards what is defined as “risk taking”. This attitude is, it can be guessed, the starting condition for any creative move, since, if we have to discover something new (aiming at the future), the category of the “guarantee” can only rely on what is previous, old, past.

Among the numerous investigations (including empirical ones) carried out in recent decades aimed at finding these family educational variables favoring creativity, some even touch eccentricity (so much has the west-

ern “creative eagerness” grown): it has been shown, for example, that those born later (younger siblings) may be more prone to more creative forms of expression.

Unlike firstborn children, «later-borns are likely to experience more interactions with siblings during their developmental years; this difference may provide them with more opportunities to negotiate and behave creatively» (Mouchiroud & Bernoussi, 2008, p. 375).

Also along this line of investigation, it was possible to assess the influence of the imbalance of the “physical” relationship between siblings, concluding that the younger ones soon turn towards verbal (more creative?) rather than physical arguments in the resolution of conflicts.

Research focused on the family context and on cognitive development has then highlighted the importance of adequately considering the relationship between the educational/training style and the socio-economic status of the family, merging into a highly developed current of studies in the field of the sociology of education.

In this case, however, if it is true that the children of wealthy families can enjoy more “opportunities” for creative approaches (Theory of Cultural Deprivation), being able to draw on diversified and highly qualified sources, it is also true that the less well-off family contexts involve, in themselves, situations that “oblige” children to find solutions, thus affecting (mostly involuntarily) a fundamental factor for the drive to creativity: the “motivation”.

The “self-made man” ideal involves a “disadvantaged” departure, which he or she has overcome precisely thanks to the fortitude that finds ways out, solutions that, in the absence of problems, would not be sought.

«In order for creativity to occur, leadership needs to play an active role» (Shalley & Gilson, 2004, p. 35).

In the mid-1970s an article was published by three US psychologists (Jerome Bruner, David Wood and Gail Ross) who highlighted (with lots of empirical findings) that the most effective way to teach a child to solve problems (in that case it was a matter of “creatively” building a pyramid using small blocks of wood) is to “scaffold” his activity, up to the moment in which this operation is necessary. To scaffold precisely means supporting an operational situation (for example construction) by means of supports, which, once completed, must be disassembled. In the educational field, the English term has been understood as «a form of ‘vicarious consciousness’ provided by an adult for the benefit of a younger learner» (Littleton, 2013, p. 52).

The three psychologists, retracing the path previously traced by Lev Vygotsky, used the scaffolding metaphor exactly «to describe how educators can best provide assistance to learners within the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) to help them move forward to independence» (Smit, van Eerde & Bakker, 2012, p. 820).

«More often than not, it involves a kind of “scaffolding” process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted effort. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult “controlling” those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence» (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976, p. 90).

In summary, «well executed scaffolding begins by luring the child into actions that produce recognizable-for-him solutions. Once that is achieved, the tutor can interpret discrepancies to the child. Finally, the tutor stands in a confirmatory role until the tutee is checked out to fly on his own» (ibidem, p. 96).

The phase of “disappearance” is the fundamental element and the final stage of the scaffolding process since it highlights a very special way of using power and educational authority. The progressive decrease in teacher control, as soon as students highlight their understanding and ownership of the practices, is made possible through the “fading” and the “transfer of responsibility”.

In other words, all this means firmly supporting the primacy of the person over his products. Favoring creativity, in this sense, means «accepting the individual as an unconditional value. The teacher, parent, psychotherapist or anyone else who performs a caring function promotes creativity whenever he ultimately feels that the individual entrusted to his care represents a value in himself and in his development, regardless of what may be his current condition or behavior. Probably this attitude can be genuine only when the teacher, the parent or whoever perceives the potential of the individual and, consequently, is able to have unconditional trust in him, whatever the conditions of the moment» (May, 1972, p. 106).

During the recent International Conference on Trust at the Institute of Social Sciences in Tokyo, in which I had the opportunity to participate, Prof. Bart Nooteboom (Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Tilburg University, the Netherlands) made a very interesting reference to the new model of worker that is imposing itself in our production system, using the expression “isolated and fully monitored professionals”. At this point he asked himself: “Is there any need for trust left?” The answer, very interesting for our investigation, is linked exactly to the risks for creativity when trust fails: «No creativity without trust».

This “unconditional trust” is perhaps the most essential relational condition to support the weight of the dark side of any creative undertaking: risk.

«Creativity inherently involves risks. That is, to develop new and useful products or processes, individuals have to be willing to try and to possibly fail» (Shalley & Gilson, 2004, p. 36).

The well-known American basketball player, Michael Jordan, expressed this dimension of failure with an icastic phrase that surfs the net: «I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed».

Nobody can relieve the subject from the bottleneck of risk and possible failure, because, should it happen, the subject would no longer be creative. Interpersonal relationships guarantee that a human being has the psychological support not to give in to the temptation of withdrawing from the venture before even "trying".

### **The motivation**

Why dedicate a space to the theme of motivation within a piece of research on creativity? And above all, why place this in-depth study onto a path that deals with the social components of the creative attitude?

To answer the first question, it is sufficient to take a look at the existing interdisciplinary scientific literature: «Many scholars have argued that a high intrinsic motivation (i.e., the individual is excited about an activity and engages in it for the sake of the activity itself) is a necessary ingredient for creative achievement» (Baer, Oldham & Cummings, 2003, p. 569).

If the definition is rich and fascinating, and at the same time enigmatic (what does "sake of the activity itself" mean?), the critical point is the "management" of this necessary ingredient. On this there has even developed, in recent decades, the new and nebulous professional figure of the so-called "motivator", so fundamental is the presence of this energy in our days.

It is therefore a boost to creativity that can only be personal, but which is affected by the stimuli of the environment. We could therefore answer the second question by stating that the motivation is partly the result of an initiative of the subject and partly a consequence of the particular "cultural" influence of the social context in which one operates.

So, we ask ourselves: what culture is being produced today to achieve the development and continuity of this energy, fundamental for the increase of all human activity? We could introduce the response path with a general statement: the invitation to be creative today is based on reasons that can be generically defined as "instrumental" (primarily for economic purposes) and this, in the long run, inevitably ends up wearing down and drying out the most intimate sources of the creative move.

Essentially, it was psychology that highlighted some relational and contextual characteristics that favor a creative approach, especially, if not exclusively (the limit of many investigations), in the workplace. You can guess the reasons for this choice, but this situation already suggests that these will be

“sectoral” motivations, which pragmatically stimulate creativity in specific situations, without worrying about crossing the underlying, original motivation of the “treated” subject.

To encourage the development of these “feelings”, scholars of organizational processes have insisted a lot on the “type” of activity, implicitly stating that the creative attitude depends on the characteristics of “what you do”.

Hence it becomes reasonable to expect that «complex jobs (i.e. those characterized by high levels of autonomy, skill variety, identity, significance, and feedback) are expected to encourage higher levels of intrinsic motivation and creativity than jobs of a relatively simple and routine nature. When jobs are complex, individuals are likely to be excited and enthusiastic about the work activities and interested in performing them for the sake of the activity themselves – conditions conducive to creativity at work» (Baer, Oldham, & Cummings, 2003, p. 572).

Hence, logically, a rush to make work as non-routine as possible, to provide variety in tasks, etc.

Another stimulating strategy is that which is linked to the “objectives” of the individual operations: it is they that increase «attention and effort by providing clear targets towards which individuals can direct their energies. Goals regulate action directly by affecting what people pay attention to, how hard they work and how long they persist on the task. In addition, goals affect action indirectly by motivating people to discover and use task strategies that will facilitate goal achievement. Finally, goals are more likely to be attained when people are strongly committed to their goals and are given feedback concerning their progress in relation to their goals [...]. When employees did not know what management desired, because no clear goals were given, they felt that lower levels of creativity resulted» (Shalley & Gilson, 2004, p. 38).

Knowing that one’s actions “have a purpose that goes beyond them”: this would be the key to a pro-active and creative attitude. If we want to agree with this definition, we are also forced to ask ourselves: towards where or until when? Paradoxically, as today’s psychology teaches us, motivations of this type may sooner or later find themselves facing the impasse of the so-called overjustification effect: «It means that, in the case of a rewarding activity in itself, any external rewards end up weakening intrinsic motivation: they “externalize” it in the reward [...]. Therefore, concrete gratifications not only do not incentivize [...], but risk obtaining the opposite effect» (Tomasello, 2010, p. 26).

Therefore, an urgency that is different from the strictly instrumental gradually emerges, a perspective that operates regardless of the stated or conscious objectives, a thrust that arises from the need to express oneself

and that does not care primarily, or ultimately, about the effects of one's own commitment.

A few years ago, Richard Sennet paid a lot of attention to this *modus operandi* typical of the craftsman, the artisan man, an operational wealth that risks being lost: «The carpenter, the laboratory technician and the conductor are all craftsmen, in the sense that they care about the work well done for themselves. They carry out a practical activity, but their work is not simply a means to reach an end of another order [...]. The ethics of the work well done for the sake of doing it well proper to the craftsman is not rewarded or even noticed» (Sennett, 2009, pp. 27 and 43).

In conclusion, let us consider the centrality of what we are deepening within the processes of identity construction: « It is the nature of genuine interests and creative activities that one autonomously pursues them, so to speak, for their own sake (what Hunt, 1965, referred to as “intrinsic motivation”) rather than for some purpose external to them such as support and maintenance of ego functioning. The paradox is that if one pursues interests in order to seek ego support, they are no longer authentic interests. Only if one pursues interests for their own sake do they qualify as genuine interests and are they able to constitute ego supports» (Eagle, 2013, p. 23).

Culture has a huge influence in either favoring a well-done piece of work and its motivations or, conversely, favoring an unstable imitation of it. Today it seems that investment in the second strategy is more widespread, according to the consideration that it is more profitable than the first. It is therefore necessary to leave no room for possible individualistic interpretations of intrinsic motivation, interpretations that, in disguise, would paradoxically lead to the emergence of new forms of pure and radical instrumentality.

Creative acting, in fact, «challenges the separation between self and other» (Glăveanu, 2018, p. 299). While many have recognized intrinsic motivation as a precious source of creative energy, research has produced ambivalent results to date.

For this reason, some scholars argue that «the relationship between intrinsic motivation and creativity is enhanced by other-focused psychological processes. Perspective taking, as generated by prosocial motivation, encourages employees to develop ideas that are useful as well as novel» (Grant & Berry, 2011, p. 73).

The “prosocial” motivation (the desire to benefit others) is therefore considered complementary to the intrinsic one, coming to correct its possible distortions: it has been observed, in fact, that in certain cases, rather than provoking creativity, the productions of intrinsic motivation «might result from a greater enjoyment and satisfaction experienced by subjects who produce creative collages» (Amabile et. al., 1986, p. 21).

It has therefore been concluded that intrinsic motivation, while it is fundamental in the field of artistic creativity, writing and the solution of business problems, in other applications turns out instead to guide the production of ideas that are certainly new, but not necessarily useful. It is pointed out, for example, that «many intrinsically motivated architects had difficulty producing creative ideas because they were focused on the novelty of their designs» (Grant & Berry, 2011, p. 75).

Prosocial motivation (we could also say “relational motivation”) would therefore be able to improve the impact of intrinsic motivation on creativity by providing the stimulus to «effort based on the concern for helping or contributing to other people [...]. In doing so, our research presents a new relational view of creativity» (ibidem, pp. 77 and 91).

## **Evaluation**

Let us now return to a subject just sketched at the beginning of this work: to consider as creative an action or a production, it is necessary to agree in advance on the criteria of this evaluation. We have already established a first essential feature: the novelty. «An idea that is not novel, unusual or unique is not creative» (Hernández-Torrano & Ibrayeva, 2020, p. 2). We also observed, however, that it is necessary to decide how many other variables to make intervene in evaluating this novelty (“new for itself” vs “valid for one or more people”). Let us now try to continue along this path of clarifications and conditions.

The political scientist Harold D. Lasswell, known above all in the field of studies on persuasive communication and political propaganda, also took part in the American symposia of the 1950s that we have mentioned on several occasions: the basic concept from which his contribution began at the conference was that «creativity is the disposition to make and recognize appreciable innovations» (Lasswell, 1972, p. 247). There are, in this synthetic definition, two words that we could consider “symptomatic” of a position different from the previous ones.

First of all, the dimension (disposition or intention) of “recognizability” is here intrinsically linked to creativity; secondly, a creative production must be able to offer a shared “appreciability” of its claim. As you can guess, both characteristics presuppose the centrality of social interactions, so that a gesture can be presented as “creative” only when it is recognized as such through its interpersonal evaluation. All judgments about creativity «are historically located and there is no “view from nowhere”, an absolute statement about what is or is not creative» (Glăveanu 2010, p. 90).

Lasswell expresses this point of view by stating that «before we can identify a concluded instance of creativity, two complicated processes must crys-

tallize: one, essential, of innovation, which in turn must provoke the second, that is to say, a certain degree of recognition of the value of innovation» (ibidem, p. 250). A creative idea must be novel. Yet «novelty is not enough, because a novel idea may be ridiculous or nonsense; many dreams are novel but rarely have any impact on the world after breakfast. In addition to novelty, to be creative an idea must be appropriate, recognized as socially valuable in some way to some community» (Sawyer, 2003, p. 20).

In other words: if it is true, as we have said, that «creative outcomes cannot and do not occur in a vacuum» (Shalley & Gilson, 2004, p. 35), it is equally important to «understand that ideas are not being evaluated in a vacuum. When an idea is evaluated, some sort of yardstick to which the idea is compared is necessary» (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004, p. 69).

The two processes identified by Lasswell (innovation and recognition) take place only through the interaction between two real social roles: the “innovator” (the creative) who, in order to have this qualification recognized, needs the intervention of the second protagonist, the “recognizer.” Often the two individuals are already in contact with each other, sharing similar situations in terms of conditions in their social context or personality type. The fact that they belong to the same civilization, the same social class, and have the same interests certainly makes the operation of recognition easier. But if one intends to broaden the field, then things become more complex: the general public (and this is where the author’s specific interest in mass dynamics comes in) does not share all these aspects with the innovator and needs «the mediation of someone other than the innovator (i.e., one of the members of the first circle), in order to pay attention to the novelty (or a description of it)» (Lasswell, 1972, p. 252). Hence, the logical conclusion is that «the process in question includes, as the reader will have noticed, both communication and collaboration» (ibidem, p. 253).

Communication and collaboration: two social dynamics that, from those years onward, became the dominant (if not, at times, oppressive) perspective of every inquiry into human action and production, even the most properly intimate and personal.

In this new type of approach, the conditions for the existence of a creative phenomenon depend on the context, and no longer only as regards its starting phase: «They are also decisive in its final phase, when, that is, it is a matter of decreeing its success and of establishing the value of the reached results. From this point of view, the social context of reference is configured as the “with respect to what” the innovation inherent in the creative act is defined, as the parameter that allows to measure creativity, as the horizon of the known through which we can establish the actual originality of what aspires to the qualification of “creative”. It could be defined as the validator context of the creative process» (Neresini, 1994, p. 199).

It is for this reason, then, that «individual, often self-interested judgments that label something as creative» cannot be considered valid or sufficient: «Creativity is also intersubjectively formed, as a result of the interaction between the experiences of individual social actors» (Pedroni, 2005, p. 459).

This perspective arguably sets a meeting point between a millenarian tradition of a speculative nature with a more modern perspective of a pragmatic nature, attentive above all to the social (primarily economic) spill-overs of human creativity: in this sense, creativity can be assessed as «a result of an interactive process between coworkers and team members. [...], the opinions of others with regards to one's own work can influence how an employee perceives her job and organization» (Shalley & Gilson, 2004, p. 42). This, clearly, also brings with it inevitable unpalatable elements: «Whether the act is going to be recognized as creative or not depends on the outcome of the struggles within the field's network of power relations» (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2003, p. 189).

There is a very immediate aspect that makes us understand the reasonableness of a collective assessment of the value of a creative gesture: «If no specific instructions are given, individuals will compare their ideas with a yardstick generated by them based on previous personal experiences» (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004, p. 69). Clearly there is nothing to worry about in this situation; on the contrary, for the newborn every gesture is innovative precisely because of the poverty of previous personal experiences, and we should do everything we can to preserve this innate, naive ability. But how is that possible when previous experiences increase?

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that, in the absence of a rich social life, in a narrow circle, we risk considering new what others have already conceived and experienced for a long time. A second quality that we have established, in fact, is the “usefulness” of the creative gesture, which «relates to utility, appropriateness or fit. In other words, it must have some value for a group or a culture» (Hernández-Torrano & Ibrayeva, 2020, p. 2). Being creative «always means being creative for someone (person, group, society) at a particular time and place» (Glăveanu, 2010, p. 90).

Equally evident is the social origin of the “rule”, without which (composer Igor Stravinsky observed) it is impossible to produce and thus evaluate creative and artistic production. The irreducible nexus between creativity and rule has also been analysed by philosophy: «If and only if there is (one can speak of) legality, there is (it makes sense to speak of) creativity and, of course, vice versa. A “creativity” not connected to a “legality” is almost only a *flatus vocis*, the indeterminate indication of a need, somehow valid and sensible, but not explicit, not even explicable and therefore strictly meaningless» (Garroni, 2010, p. 133). Once again, “meaning” and “value” ground their founding criteria in a socio-cultural precedence.

In the end, Margareth Boden, in her article devoted specifically to the existing relationship between Artificial Intelligence and creativity, highlights one unresolved problem, relating to the irreducible difference between “novelty” and “value”. Even where something new happened, the resulting structures might have no interest or value and so such ideas would certainly be novel, but not creative.

In principle, says the London psychologist, future artificial intelligence models might even incorporate evaluation criteria powerful enough to enable the production of Big-C product: yet this operation would soon be found to prove inadequate given the “fickle” nature of human taste and urgings, which are constantly influenced by concrete social relations that are themselves ever-changing. One only has to observe the phenomenon of changing tastes and the speed of such processes, but at the same time the underlying and collective logic behind them, to harbor strong doubts that all this can continue through a delegation to imitative and calculative algorithmic randomness (if not at the price of humans’ ultimate subservience to the machines they create). Of this relational complexity machines are not (never will be?) capable:

«Identifying the criteria we use in our evaluations is hard enough. Justifying, or even (causally) explaining, our reliance on those criteria is more difficult still. For example, just why we like or dislike something will often have a lot to do with motivational and emotional factors-considerations about which current AI has almost nothing to say» (Boden, 1998, p. 354).

Computers, therefore, which are much faster and more prolific than the human mind, will be able to achieve great creative solutions. This can only happen, however, «if the computers are linked to a domain that provides questions interesting to humans, and to a field that can evaluate the computers’ conclusions» (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 190).

Future scenarios are clearly far beyond our wildest imaginations: for the time being, fortunately, we can assume that «the ultimate vindication of AI-creativity would be a program that generated novel ideas which initially perplexed or even repelled us, but which was able to persuade us that they were indeed valuable. We are a very long way from that» (Boden, 1998, p. 355).

### **Relational dimension of creativity**

At the end of our journey, I feel it is my duty to offer one last personal reflection on the socio-anthropological premises from which we started: talking today about creativity means, indirectly, touching on a subject that goes to the depths of the person and the construction of his or her identity. We would like to propose here a synthetic relational framework, as a key

to reading everything we have dealt with in the course of our investigation into creativity.

In order to do this, it is useful to establish a hermeneutic starting point that lies at the root of any investigative approach centered on social relations: the concept of “emergence” is fundamental to an adequate understanding of that of relationality. It «has its roots in nineteenth-century organicism: the theory that the organism is different from the sum of its parts and that it depends on the structural arrangement of the parts» (Sawyer, 2003, p. 14). In this perspective, every innovation, every change is the result of organism-environment interaction: thus, in a sense, «all creativity is an emergent process that involves a social group of individuals engaged in complex, unpredictable interactions» (ibidem, p. 19).

Starting from this general premise, «creative action is, at all times, relational. There is no form of human creativity that does not rely on direct, mediated, or implicit social interaction or exchanges. Even when working in solitude, we implicitly build on and respond to the views, knowledge, and expectations of other people [...]. The lifelong development of creativity cannot be conceived outside of self–other relations» (Glăveanu et. al., 2019, p. 742).

In order to document this “choice of field”, I will quote the reflections of three authors whose thought seems to me to adequately explicate a fundamental choice with which any scholar is forced to come to terms and, when he or she is able to do so, to take a position.

Let us start with the most recent scholar, the world-famous economist, Richard Florida, author of a substantial and widely-known volume, “The rise of the creative class”: his far-reaching analysis impeccably illustrates the characteristics, conditions and properties of the creativity that we could define as ‘winning’ and effective. Such characteristics, conditions and properties are characteristic of the rampant class, which was once the prerogative of western Europe (Italy first and foremost) and which has been monopolised in the last century by American culture, thanks to the deference paid to the three T’s (Technology, Talent, Tolerance). More or less explicitly, one breathes in its conception a framing of creativity as the essence of the individual’s fulfilment, as the fuel and at the same time the process of the path leading to personal ‘happiness’. In this perspective, the ‘relational’ dimension of creativity is consequently assigned a secondary position, a sort of compulsory and all-too-instrumental acceptance (the ‘creative community’). The optimal social ecology for the development of creative potential is consequently identified in operational contexts characterised as follows: «To the dense human web of the old neighbourhoods or the alienating and anonymous suburbs we prefer communities that have a well-defined character: communities characterised, that is, by the precariousness of relationships

and 'loose' ties, which allow us to live the almost anonymous existence that we like and not those imposed by others» (Florida, 2003, p. 37).

This is, as can be guessed, an essentially 'defensive' attitude towards relationships that are too solid, too 'cumbersome' relationships, which are demonstrably seen as obstacles to the integral development of creativity. This approach brings out the heart of the basic option, which presents itself to anyone wishing to address the various developments of the 'ultimate concerns' (as Margareth Archer would define them) that lie at the root of any human action: should creativity be considered an 'ultimate value' or is it itself justified by an objective that hierarchically precedes it? These are questions that clearly cannot be dissected through analytical methodologies, but which, perhaps precisely for this reason, presuppose a choice of field, whether explicit or implicit (the same applies to other strongly connotative terms, such as 'freedom', 'justice', 'good', etc.).

More or less consciously or explicitly, many creativity researchers now « focus on how individual and social factors combine during the creative process. This requires the researcher to decide on an appropriate level of analysis for the phenomenon. If both individual and social levels are involved, what is the nature of the relationships and causal connections between these levels?» (Sawyer, 2003, p. 50). Florida's frame is certainly opposed to Pierpaolo Donati's: one can arrive at the construction of a situation and even a social system in which each individual obtains his or her own result precisely on the strength of 'loosened' ties, but all this could happen «at the expense of human relations and with them happiness is at stake» (Donati, 2011, p. 210).

This brings us to a second author, Alfred Schütz, who, in the path that leads him to identify the 'bond' as the keystone of every cultural and anthropological process, proposes a perspective that is fundamentally alternative to Florida's, starting precisely from the side of the relationship-mother of creative action and, therefore, of its aims. Creativity, for Schütz, is a process that finds its springing point in what he calls 'orientation to the Other': «All experience of social reality is founded on the fundamental axiom positing the existence of other beings 'like me', whose constitution rests squarely on the thou-orientation» (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 61). This orientation, it should be pointed out, is conceived not as a spontaneous feeling or a moral inclination, but rather as a structural, anthropological element: «As long as man is born of woman, intersubjectivity and the we-relationship will be the foundation for all other categories of human existence. Precisely because of this everything in human life is founded on the primal experience of the we-relationship [...]. Since all other categories of human existence are founded on this primal experience of being born, intersubjectivity is the fundamental ontological category of human existence in the world and therefore of all philosophical anthropology» (Schütz, 1966, p. 82).

In the essay, “Scheler’s theory of intersubjectivity and the general thesis of the alter ego”, Schütz had pointed out that there is a taken-for-granted assumption that no one, not even the most sceptical, doubts even for a moment: «We are simply born into a world of others [...]. As long as human beings are not concocted like homunculi in retorts but are born and brought up by mothers, the sphere of the “We” will be naively presupposed» (Schütz, 1962, p. 168). What we all start from for the great leap towards otherness (intersubjectivity, communication) is the ‘naively presupposed’ (hence also unconscious) fact that we are born, and ‘born of woman’.

Richard Zaner is a former student of Schütz. His remarks take their cue from the relational dimensions of musical experience: «It is the primal experience of being (or having been) born that constitutes the crucial other side, if you will, of the central experience of growing old together [...]. I am indebted for my being to the Other (mother first of all), and responsible thence for proper recognition of that and of becoming myself, which is itself always a task and chore, and even when not always accomplished, done within the nexus of our growing old together» (Zaner, 2002, pp. 15 and 17). Yet, strangely, «philosophers have written and chatted, at times incessantly, about death, and said almost nothing about birth. Why is this?» (ibidem, p. 12).

In sociological reflection, the ‘social’ dimension of creativity often fails to go beyond a model of external influence, i.e. it fails «to see how creativity takes place within relations. In other words, the We-paradigm has to rightfully acknowledge the interdependence between Ego and Alter in the creative act [...]. There is no versus between the two and, even more, that these two “segments” are not isolated but elements that co-constitute each other» (Glăveanu, 2010, p. 84).

Creativity, in this perspective, can only be conceived as a “penultimate good”, whose accomplished goal is to re-establish an original relationality that is no longer guaranteed (as we have read in many of the reflections reported here).

The third and last author called upon is the philosopher/sociologist Martin Buber. He offers us a worthy ‘creative’ conclusion to this academic journey, a transcendental vision, an appropriate synthesis of an educational responsibility and of a profound as much as impervious aspiration of the human spirit: «The instinct of creativity, abandoned to itself, does not lead, cannot lead to two formations indispensable for the construction of a true human life: to participate in a cause and to access reciprocity. Single work and collective work are two quite different things. Building a thing is a pride of mortal being, but being conditioned to a common work, the unconscious humility of being a part, of taking part and having a part is the authentic nourishment of earthly immortality [...]. An education based only on the formation of the instinct of creativity would prepare a new, very painful

loneliness of man. This is something greater than the supporters of libido think they know: it is a desire for the world to become a person who makes herself present to us, who approaches us as we approach her, who chooses us and recognises us as we do her, who finds confirmation in us as we do in her» (Buber, 1993, pp. 165 and 166).

The prophetic tone of the German philosopher can be usefully translated in more exquisitely academic terms or in the urgency of new “cultural policies” to the point of suggesting the opportunity for a challenging «shift in our cultural project of dominating the environment to nurturing and engendering creative relationships within it. It is a reminder of our responsibility as community members to build spaces for dialogue and creativity for both self and others, of the fact that, living interconnected with other people, our creative expression could and should be able to fertilize the common soil of creativity around us [...]. For as long as psychologists find creativity instrumental for our adaptability, self-expression, and health, it will continue to attract the interest of both theorists and researchers. But we should remember that creativity also exists beyond psychology» (Glăveanu, 2010, p. 91).

Instrumentality is neither the conclusive nor the most adequate word to describe an energy that inexorably tends to overflow its narrow limits.

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