

Review of: "Why the Standard Definition of Creativity Fails to Capture the Creative Act"

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Anna Abraham offers a useful, clearly written and pithy review of the challenges faced in the identification of the essential features of creativity. By creativity here, I think it's fair to say, the author means creative ideation. And while the creative process is also mentioned (indeed the word 'process' is employed 30 times in the paper), process here refers to the cognitive/neural mechanisms that undergird ideation (of the creative kind). Thus, value, surprise and intentionality are all critically evaluated, and found wanting in varying degrees. The paper helps the reader appreciate the difference between an internal and external frame of reference. The internal frame of reference evaluates the creative quality of an idea from the perspective of the idea originator/creator, whereas the external frame of reference is the evaluative perspective of a generic interlocutor. Research findings that ignore how the creator feels or reacts to an idea that they generated, how *satisfied* they are with the idea, provide data that can't meaningfully inform a theory of the creative ideation process. Abraham writes: "(...) an idea that is judged to be novel by the receiving person may not be one that is judged to be novel by the creating person, and vice versa. If we seek to make claims about the minds of the creating person under such circumstances, we cannot use the recipient's view (an external frame of reference) as a substitute for the creator's view (an internal frame of reference). It is in fact illogical to make judgments about the information processing mechanisms or neurocognitive networks involved in the generation of highly original responses on the sole basis of how a recipient views it, and with no regard of whether the creator themselves regarded what they generated to be creative" (p. 8). From this compelling argument, the paper proceeds to identify how research can and should generate diagnostic data of the creative ideation process that reflect how the originator reacts to their ideas, how they evaluate them.

Abraham's contribution is very much about what I recently called 'ideation ground zero' (Vallée-Tourangeau, 2023). It's creativity research that invests heavily in ideas at their point of origin. As Abraham's paper demonstrates elegantly, the quality of this point of origin can't be evaluated without taking into account the originator's perspective. But, as Buchman (2021) notes, this a creationist, rather than a developmental perspective on creativity. The dialogicality between creator and the product they are working on (and through), the conversation with objects as it were—qua maquettes, sketches, drafts—suggests that initial hunches, ideas at their point of origin may offer a limited explanation of creativity as a process. And here I don't mean the cognitive mechanism that generates ideas, but rather the process, distributed in time and space, across people and things, that takes into account objects and the interactions they trigger. Buchman (pp. 31–32) writes "In almost every conversation I have had with artists and designers, the language used about process is not creationist, but much closer to that of natural selection. Most artists and designers don't experience the vision before the making. They speak of 'working through', 'drawing through', 'sketching through', 'improvising through', 'writing through',

‘sculpting through’ their ideas in the process of developing and making work. Some ideas produced along the way are strong some are not.” How ever a person feels about a new idea at any moment in time, that idea will likely be transformed through the contingent process of making something. To adapt an old saying, ideas rarely survive contact with reality.

References

Buchman, L. M. (2021). *Making to know: From space of uncertainty to creative discovery* Thames & Hudson.

Vallée-Tourangeau. F. (2023). *Systemic creative cognition: Bruno Latour for creativity researchers* Routledge.