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Investigation lines in persuasive communication

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Abstract

In creative communication, the common path is a part of humanity's desire to go forward, a vital and interiorised desire. It is the path tracked by intelligence, in which creativity is a trip and the destination is the encounter of truth and beauty. Because, precisely, what creativity intends is to harmonise search and encounter. A voyage through a new creating intelligence, which now appears in a starring role as dynamising the society of the future. This is no longer the society of knowledge, but the society of knowing knowledge: metacognition. An attractively confusing baggage in which there is a blend of psychology, epistemiology, hermeneutics, sociological observation and, of course, heuristics.

Creativity is present at this point, and its response to the requirements of a new social, economic, and technological model of decision-making and system investigation. Now more than ever creativity is a play of balances and harmonies, of this ever-renewed creative intelligence which is a blend of thought, intelligence, perception and intuition, logic and rationality, facts and feelings.

The fact that science and technology are constantly related when speaking of creativity or the creative process has given rise to a literature of popularisation rather than a systematic study on creativity as an experimental philosophy and the knowledge of it by means of heuristics as a science of discovery. Creativity is no longer a complement to other disciplines and has become the star of a new, interactive and synchronic, wild-card category, a category of categories.

For centuries, the creative process has been considered as a collection of anecdotes on surprising and stimulating discoveries, a chronology of infrequent but always stimulating happenings, or as an occasion for making an example of effort, tenacity, success or frustration, in people whose so-called genius has illustrated a certain way of writing the history of our civilisation.

In any case, as in other well-settled disciplines, a series of facts and methods ought to give rise to the appearance and development of a scientific theory of creativity. For the moment, however, studies on the creative process have been based on descriptive or comparative outlines. It thus seems time to advance towards interpretative and systemising theories.

Investigation into creativity centres on the creative process, its effects, its aptitudes and attitudes, techniques for devising and their learning process and use, investigation of how creativity promotes mutual understanding, and how society, by using it, improves the qualities of people who integrate it.

The synthesis of investigation on creativity inevitably leads to a multidimensional analysis of the human being considered as a whole from an individual personality, capable of developing imaginative and innovative aptitudes. This is a 20th century legacy, in which the concept of creativity has been used in its widest sense. The term denotes each human act which transcends simple reception: man is creative when not limited to affirming, repeating, imitating: when he gives something of himself.

Plato, Kant or Goethe described man as a being who gives form to what he comes in contact with. Heidegger and Koestler expressed the same holistic conviction of creativity, by means of which we unquestionably complete data received from outside ourselves in each of our activities, universally and inevitably. We can say that human beings are condemned to creativity. Without it, we would never learn anything and we could never do anything. Terms set out in creation ex nihilo are inverted: we have created God. At least we have created God in a different sense from which God created us: in a universalist sense of mental productivity and activity, limited only by human frailty. As Barron says, we are all both created and creators.

But time does not stop, and trying to apply social sciences techniques to the real problems set up by investigation in communications runs the risk of an excessively literal, frivolous application. In such a way that, perhaps, the real problem is not the difficulty of adapting techniques to the variety of situations set up by communications, but rather the tendency of these techniques to incorporate the same type of thinking in which they have developed. Thus, when using new techniques in the communications field, it becomes necessary to adapt them to the conceptual reference framework in which they are applied.

It is true that specific problems raised by creative communication need new approaches, often stimulated by new techniques. Traditional methodising procedures implied assumptions which are no longer validated by the social data nor the efficiency new communications demand. Thus, it seems convenient to ask ourselves what the new outlooks in the new communications order are. What should creativity's answer be to new communications stimuli and the changes in perceiving these stimuli.

The answer can only come from prudence, set out in terms of serious methodical work, well away from the always suspect genius and closer to promoting and encouraging characteristics of creative attitudes such as capacity for drawing conclusions from minimum evidence: intuition; problem-detection, foreseeing their solution even before they appear; suitable valuation of the constant search for originality based on concretion, simplicity and an ability for synthesis; and encouraging autonomy: that is, tolerance of ambiguity. These abilities of divergent or productive thinking based on fluidity, flexibility, and originality, first set out by J.P. Guilford, first in 1950 and then in 1967, are still valid, revised and endorsed as creative thinking dimensions by authors such as M. A. Runco (1991), J. Baer (1993), and, more recently, M. Csikszentmihalhyi (1998).

This complex network of abilities which have not lost an iota of validity, though so well-known, makes the nature of creativity, along with its consequences, one of those things which awaken a great attraction among experts and non-experts.

Towards a scientific notion of creativity

When a scientific idea is made popular, when it goes from a restricted group of specialists to the general public, there is a change from one intellectual, logical, scientific and individual thinking system to a global, social thinking. This transformational circumstance previously has gone through a complex assimilation and integration process. That is, every specific idea regularly follows a process of assimilation which makes it common, proper to a time and culture.

It is curious that the idea of creativity has made an inverse process, in which an idea, common in origin, has become a scientific idea for specialists. But its origins, its age-old sense, carry a stigma of banal dispersal which belongs to everyone and no-one. And

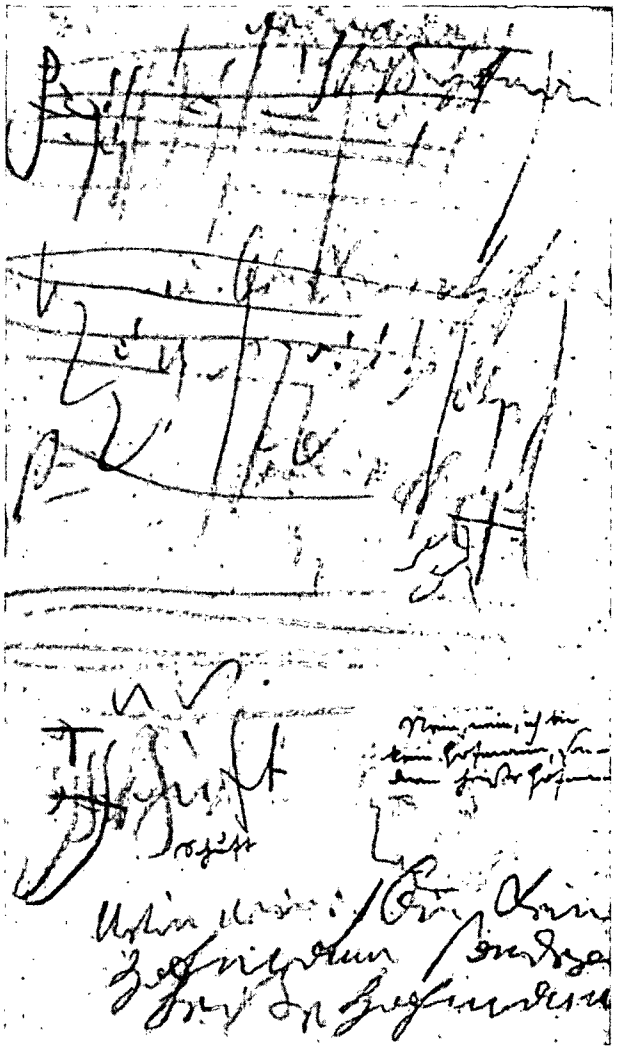
when we bring up the need for epistemological investigation, the result tends to be discouraging, if not confusing. This commonplace of the nature of creativity has not made its exploration any easier, but neither has it hindered an interest in the study of its origins.

Perhaps the key to this disfunction lies in the fact that ideas or products that deserve the label of creative rise from a synergy of many different sources, and not only from the mind of one isolated person. This is so true that it is easier to promote creativity by changing the circumstances of our surroundings than by trying to make people think more creatively.

Over the years, the relationship between the gods and humanity has changed. Now, men and women are the creators and the gods are products of their imagination. And this imagination, this creativity, cannot be understood without evaluating other people, competent people who reliably decide if someone's pretensions to creativity are valid or not. The systemic nature of the creative process evidences that the production of ideas is not born inside people's heads –not exclusively, at least– but rather in an interaction between a person's thoughts and a socio-cultural context (Csikszentmihalhyi, 1998). In similar terms and circumstances, Piaget expresses his idea of intelligence, describing it as an adaptation or interaction between the influence of the organism on the surroundings and the influence of the surroundings on the organism.

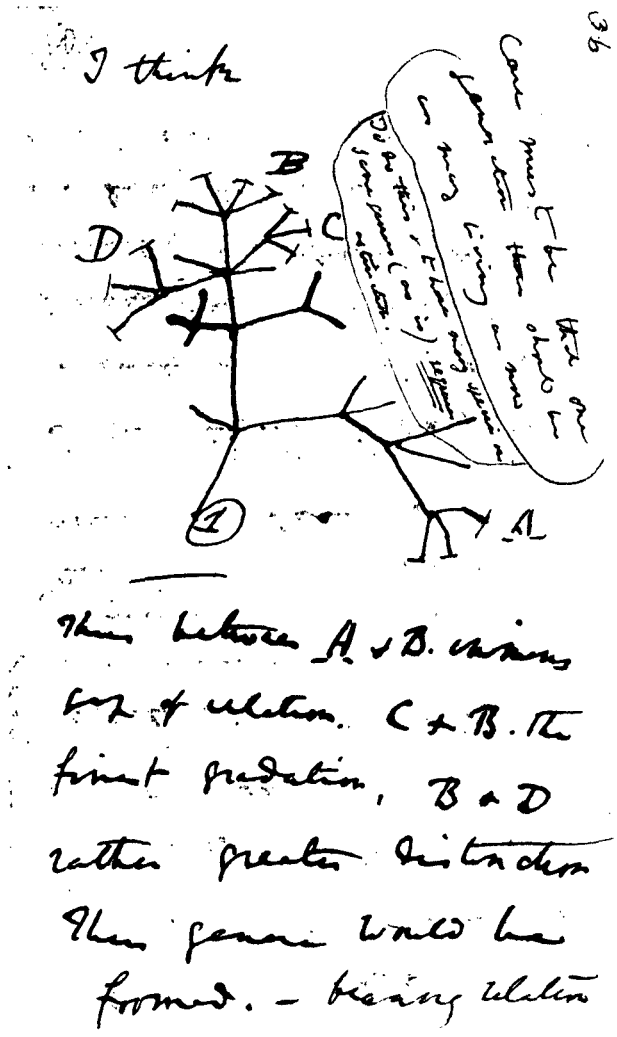
From this point of view, it seems evident that creativity is the result of the interaction of a system made up of three elements: a culture containing symbolic rules; a person contributing novelty to the symbolic field; and an ambit of experts who recognise and validate innovation. What we really have to look at is whether new technology will vary the symbolic field –as Bourdieu, among others, suspects–, whether new experts will appear to oversee entry into the field, and what changes this will produce -technological, social or cultural.

Creativity is the cultural equivalent of the process of genetic changes which gave biologic evolution, a process by which (below the threshold of consciousness) chance variations take place in our chromosome chemistry. But in cultural evolution there are no mechanisms equivalent to genes and chromosomes. Thus, a new idea or invention is not automatically transmitted to the next generation. As Csikszentmihalhyi says, instructions for the use of fire, the wheel, or atomic energy are not introduced into the nervous system of children born after these discoveries. Each child has to learn them all over again.

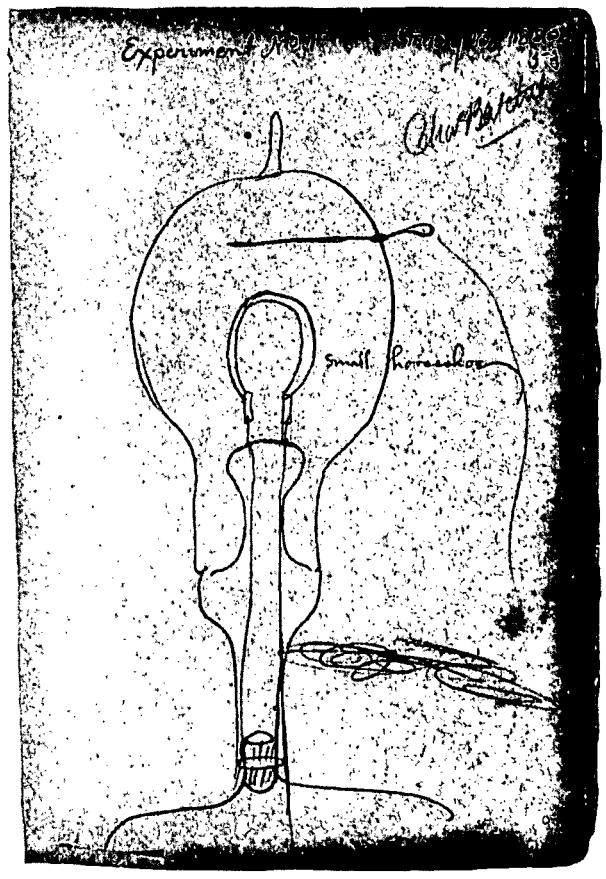


Beethoven. Page of the *Book of Conversation* (1819), which he used to communicate with his visitors.

This is a pedagogic reasoning not to be scorned when it is a question of developing a creative learning process in which –in Koestler's words (1983)– the teacher and the student are one and the same. A process in which creative capacity implies unlearning and relearning, undoing and redoing, until a new synthesis is arrived at. It is yet to be seen whether the use of new technology will bring a greater creative capacity; not technological, but rather intellectual. That is, if the



Charles Darwin. Drawing of the Evolution tree.



Thomas Edison. Drawing of a bulb from a notebook of 1880.

multimedia machine will increase or decrease our ideation capacity.

Creative suppositions of a new persuasive communication

Perception, imagination, and memory are the bases of our orientation towards the outside world. However, their activity –if it is purely mechanical– only gives us apprehension, accumulation, and reproduction of all that surrounds us; it is reproductive thinking which is based on the repetition of pre-exercised and pre-known (and, therefore, proven) mental acts by which knowledge is reproduced. And, in this sense, a machine –any sort of computing machine– is a splendid element of knowledge reproduction, as it operates with pre-acquired knowledge and, with incredible speed, obtains again combinations and conclusions.

On the other hand, if perception and imagination are useful for carrying out new combinations, with perceived stimuli we find productive thinking. Only by thinking are we able to elaborate material prepared by perception. This is the only possible way to abstract overall validity from our own perceptions. This is the only way to provide new knowledge from the combination of received conclusions. This is the only way to develop our creative or productive thinking, which Erwin Schrödinger, physicist, Nobel Prize winner, and developer of the theory of wave mechanics, defined with precision when he said that productive thinking is not so much seeing what no-one else has yet seen, but rather thinking what no-one has yet thought about what everyone sees. That is, inducing the arrival of the

unexpected, the unknown, inducing creativity: the surprising communication with the unconscious by means of intuition and imagination. That is, the attractive capacity for making the obvious surprising.

What we do believe timely is the introduction of a debate on new communication, in different terms from the usual, which revolves about new forms, new frontiers, new technological challenges. We believe that communication, along with rationality, competitivity, and, of course, creativity, is becoming –has become– 'another communication': persuasive communication.

So far, communication has been defined as the action and process of transmitting a message. According to these terms, the action, the process, the noise, the effects and their evaluation and, of course, incommunication, have been, among others, the items that have caused volumes to be written on that communication.

But there is another way to analyse the actions and processes of communication. Because we believe that there is another way to think about communication. Because functional, bureaucratic circuits are being changed by creative circuits. Because communication, to be processed, to be transmitted, must be thought out. And it must be thought out creatively. It must be thought of from the brilliant simplicity proposed by Schrödinger: thinking what no-one has yet thought about what everyone sees.

Because the efficiency of persuasive communication lies in the combination of specific factors. Among them, we will emphasise; transmission quality, along with the operation of the channel and the use of code, this latter being a field strictly linked to ability in rhetorical line of argument; the quality of the interpretation of the message, linked to the image of the transmitter but, above all, to the receiver's knowledge; the quality of the feedback which is a consequence of the two foregoing series: quality of transmission and quality of interpretation. An assortment of technical, scientific, and rhetorical factors, in search of persuasive efficiency.

When the science or the art of rhetoric mention creativity, the reference is to thought and cause-effect relation to intelligence, so that the capacity for thinking is subordinate to the intellectual capacity. Thus, the word intelligence, as well as the word thought, are used as if we knew their meaning, but they are really words which no-one has been capable of defining to everyone's taste. Therefore, what does behaving intelligently while thinking creatively mean? And, moreover, what do we mean by having the capacity to develop specific processes and techniques leading to creative discovery by using technology whose scope and development we are just beginning to know?

Both questions can only be answered –should only be answered– from a scientific perspective, from a methodisation of possibilities which our own intellective capacities give us as possible answers to the challenge of the age of information we are entering. Let us definitely take on the new alternatives: the change from machinery to technology; from Taylorism to globalisation; from competition to wisdom. There seems to be a general agreement that the new information society will make us think differently. But what is important is knowing whether technology will limit or reduce our capacity for thinking. Whether we will give more time to navigating than to thinking why we are navigating.

We all know that communicating well requires coherence and credibility. And, if I may say so, this new creative and interactive communication will be, in the first place, more flexible; that is, it will have to answer to the need for rapidly adaptating to new situations. Now, more than ever before, the only constant in creativity and communication will be change. In the second place, it will have to be more efficient; that is, it will provide more efficient ideas in the short run. It will also have to be more competitive. Organisations want and need results: reaching the market sooner, more efficiently, with products and services for the needs and expectations of receivers. And, finally, we will have to be very aware of individuals' creative values. We refer, among others, to the urge for getting something for oneself: feeling free, but not undifferentiate. To the fragility of the Earth and the respect to and for Human Rights. And to the need for self-assertion by means of difference from others; authenticity, individual autonomy, individualism as a rising value. Something, furthermore, which predominates in current advertising communication.

These could be some of the traits of the new way of 'thinking out' the digital revolution, new creativity, where words must hold, and images seduce. Nothing terribly new. Neither is the requirement for investigation, for permanent search. When a student at Princeton asked Albert Einstein how to begin the creative process, he answered unhesitatingly: insatiable curiosity. And he added, 'That is what sets investigation going'. A true answer, and a subtle form of linking science to intuition, logic to inspiration.

But there are still contradictions. For example, dehierarchisation of criteria and values, and a certain destructuring of knowledge, as Cebrián warns in *La Red* (1998): the danger and the anguish of excess. That is, you can go to so many places, you can see so many things, you can relate to so many people, that in the end you run the risk of getting nowhere, seeing nothing, and screen hypnosis can lead you to a sort of autism in which the interaction will not be among people navigating in the web but rather between the machine and you. A new placebo: what Ramonet calls the pathology of mediatic extroversion.

It is thus a question of overcoming the risks of the dehumanisation of thought. It is a question of keeping *techne* and *poiesis* united. Of keeping Aristotle and Plato from leaving us. Or, even better, of not leaving them. Quite definitely, of confirming that Art and Science aim at the same thing: making the existing world visible. And of accepting that ideas are those things people are made of. Because it is well known that if the history of humanity is the history of ideas, the history of ideas is the history of the communication of ideas.

From this point of view, there will be enough reasons to assure that studying the strategies used by persuasive communication which develop and promote the mental mechanisms of ideation –that is, creativity–, is the greatest challenge which communication will have to face in the next few years. It would be enough to mention the emergence of investigation projects under development, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, within the field of applied creativity clearly aimed at the scientific conviction that the creativity which modifies some aspect of culture is never present only in the mind of one single person.

If this were so –and, until the first half of this century, these layouts were decidedly 'personalistic'– it could not be admitted by definition as a case of cultural creativity. To have any effect, the creative idea must be expressed in terms which can be understood by others, must be accepted by experts in the field in which it must be recognised and, finally, it must be able to be included in the cultural field it belongs to. That is why the question that every student of creativity must ask is not, as Csikszentmihalhyi sets out, What is creativity? but rather, Where is creativity?

The answer closest to the logic of scientific knowledge would be admitting that creativity can only be observed in the interactions of a system made up of three parts or investigation lines towards which the candidate has a complete inclination. The first is the creative space, which consists of a succession of symbolic rules and procedures, placed in what we usually call symbolic culture or knowledge, shared by a specific society or by humanity considered as a whole.

The second investigation line is the creative environment which includes all people who act as guardians of the entrances giving access to the creative space. Their mission is to decide whether an idea or new products are to be included in the creative space. This is the environment which selects new works or ideas that deserve to be known, preserved, and remembered.

Finally, the third component of the creative system is the creative person taken individually. Creativity takes place when a person, using the symbols of a given space, has a new idea or discovers a new distribution, and when this novelty is selected by the corresponding environment and is definitely included in the proper space. The members of the next generation will find this creative discovery as part of the given creative space, and will continue with it, unless they are creative, in which case they, in their turn, will try to change it. In this way, the intercommunicating and re-creative process repeats its cycle.

Thus, what is now important is thinking/creating communication. As creating is thinking, it is a question of thinking/creating as a step previous to exercising abilities demanding the practice of creative processes and techniques needed for the development of creative communication. In such a way that no-one discusses that any creative activity is a dialectic process –or, if we prefer, an interactive one– in which there is a confluence of individual talent, work space and the environment in which the creative work is developed and judged. And a synergy in which what a creator discovers is useful to someone else as an inspiration, and everyone knows that it opens the way towards the unknown which is, exactly, their common objective and what keeps them synergically united.

This common objective is not the Hegelian spirit of the times, nor even the underlying structure which is the base of the nature of knowledge which Foucault speaks of, but rather the usual interaction of ideas, somewhere between intelligent and creative, which, while serving a new persuasive communication, try to make the obvious surprising.

In creative communication, the common way is part of humanity's desire for progress, an internalised and vital desire which is often confused with the ideal of

progress. It is the way outlined by intelligence, in which creativity is the journey and the aim is the meeting between truth and beauty. Because what creativity aims at, exactly, is a harmonisation of the search with the meeting. A route along a new creating intelligence, which appears in a main role as a mover of future society. Which is no longer the knowledge society, but the society of knowing how to know, the knowledge of metacognition. And an attractively confusing baggage in which psychology, epistemology, hermeneutics, sociological observation and, of course, heuristics are mixed.

Adjusting creativity to the structures, needs, and objectives of a new communications medium, we believe, resides in the expectations which creative intelligence awakens in the scientific community. This new way of understanding our surroundings, which we could define as the emotional capacity for processing information produced by our environment. We must not forget that science arises with the ever-valid question about the place humanity has in the world, searching for the answer in a better knowledge of the human mind and condition. The enquiring mind has fed on questions, but also on the curiosity which human beings have always felt about the universe in which they survive.

Creativity –the methodic and systemised study of productive thinking as conceived of by Bohm and Peat (1988)– proposes a greater intercommunication between the diverse branches of knowledge, emphasising ideas more than formulae, the whole more than the parts, feeling, more than machinery. Creativity and its answer to the requirements of a new social, economic, and technological model of decision-taking and system investigation is now at this point.

Now, more than ever, creativity is a balancing, a harmonising. Now, more than ever, (or perhaps, as always), constant observation, deep reflection and exact argument, which are heirs of the Illustration, are still the basic abilities for interpreting the nature of things, for aprehending it and interiorising it. It is, in the words of Derek Walcott, that joyous revelation of finding the melody of your own voice.

Because creativity speaks, above all, of the human being. And of that ever-renewed creative intelligence, a mixture of thought, intelligence, perception, intuition, logic and rationality, of facts and feeling. Of the way to find fulfilment of the human being as created and as creator.

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