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## Introduction to "Mobilizing Creativity, Part 1": A Humanities Perspective

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## Introduction to “Mobilizing Creativity, Part 1”

A Humanities Perspective

*Every inventive nature continuously  
produces one shape from another. Nothing in  
the entire universe ever perishes, believe me,  
but things vary and adopt a new form.*  
—Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

This double-issue special focus section of *the minnesota review* proposes and mobilizes a contemporary notion of creativity from a practice-based, responsive, and prospective positioning of the concept. Taken together, the articles in this issue, as well as in the next (Issue 101), develop updated conceptions of creativity. These conceptions are relevant for and responsive to the contemporary moment of algorithmic, environmental, and world-systemic dynamic processes that shape what we have in common as well as how we radically differ from each other today. Creativity is a power that is everywhere—in us, among us, and around us in individual and social and in biological as well as cultural processes. As such, creativity can exceed sociohistorical frameworks, utilitarian goals, and strategic aims. Bearing this in mind, we explore creativity in this special section as an open process and dynamic presence of ongoing transformation.

Our aim with this updated conception of creativity is, first of all, to break open the invisible cage—the dominant paradigm—within which we have been working to research creativity since the 1950s in various disciplines. Within this paradigm, creativity is normatively taken to be a capacity to produce the novel and useful (Guilford 1950; Cropley 1997). Even approaches apparently departing from this notion of creativity as the route to efficient problem solving—such as socially situated and distributed creativity—still conform to its basic presumption about the “novel” and “useful” in creative thinking (Amabile et al. 2005; Glăveanu 2014). This presumption has framed the ways in which scholars have investigated and promoted creative

thinking globally and interdisciplinarily in the past six decades or so. Yet, these frames are historically and socially situated. They were constructed right before and after World War II, when privileged, white Euro-American psychologists and businessmen were looking for ways to boost creative problem solving (Brillenburg Wurth 2022). Is it not time to look these constructs in the eye and see how they may be open to change? Why would creativity researchers today want to continue working with narrow conceptions dating from the Cold War era? Could creativity be unpacked anew? What would such an unpacking bring to the vibrant field of creativity studies?

This is the leading question for this special section: Can we think creativity otherwise? Can the frames used for creativity research be loosened up and diversified—can they be mobilized in a more inclusive way? As a starting point, this special section proposes to let go of any abstract, universal definition of creativity. Instead, we focus on case studies that mobilize very specific historically, culturally, socially, and materially situated modes. These modes may not have been able to come into (full) view in the dominant paradigm of creativity. For instance: Is tradition really the negative of innovation, or can we see an entanglement that precludes biased and, as we hold, unproductive binaries? Which forms, practices, and notions of creativity can be discerned (to be) “in the making” that are not necessarily engaged with innovation and profitability? How are companion species of the human creative in ways that may elude the dominant definition? What is the agency of “things” in creativity as a presence of ongoing transformation? How do we learn to deal with this presence as (post)humans? How has reworking and recycling—a (re)turn to what is already available—been an agent of difference in Western practices of art that we erroneously think of as pursuing the “new”?

The articles in the first issue of this special section, as you will see, explore the new and useful in a more open and diverse sense of ingenuity and meaningfulness to unpack creativity as a traveling rather than a universal concept (Bal 2002). Reconceptualized as a dynamic presence of ongoing transformation, creativity in this issue will be mobilized as a construct that revolves more around *difference*—in a constant shape-shifting—rather than *betterment* and *profitability*. Difference, the articles show in different ways, allows the “new” to be thought as folded in creativity but now as an openness to *what happens*: whatever comes along and is transforming in the process (Lyotard 1988).

The issue thus offers a collection of case studies that open up a variety of fields for creativity research for a critical transformation of

the term itself: from art to activism, science to spirituality, prisons to private enterprise. Together, these case studies yield a more flexible and dynamic idea of creativity providing a basis for further research that could come to carry the label of a “performative perspective on creativity.” This perspective has three elements that we present as a set of three cross-cutting axes represented by word clouds:

1. CREATIVITY IS PRACTICED  
(creativity is embodied, institutional, relational, and emergent—there is no use for a static, “universal” definition of creativity, because such a definition does not meet its expectations in practice)
2. CREATIVITY IS RESPONSIVE  
(creativity is engaged, reflexive, response-able, collaborative, and appreciative of difference—there is no place for preconceived notions of “good” or “bad” in creativity contexts because such notions are formed along the way)
3. CREATIVITY IS TRANSFORMATIVE  
(creativity moves through relational and responsive engagements toward transformation—the participant in, and researcher of, creative practice is changed in the [research] process)

It is clear that some articles speak more to one or two of the axes. For instance, Coco Kanters’s article speaks mostly to axis 1; D. N. Rodowick’s and William Uricchio and Katerina Cizek’s, to axis 2; Anna Poletti’s article speaks to axis 3; and Véronique Richard, Vlad Glăveanu, and Patrice Aubertin’s article speaks to axis 3. All the same, the main insights that can be gleaned from this collection of articles is that creativity may be an *agenda* that can be mobilized, indeed, in both creative and scholarly practice. To put it in the words of one of the lizards in Helen Palmer’s creative piece, featured in the first of this issue: “Signs are coming up.”

We wish you happy and liberating reading!

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