

CREATIVE INQUIRY: FROM INSTRUMENTAL KNOWING
TO LOVE OF KNOWLEDGE

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Introduction

In a recent discussion with my close friend John Lyons, strolling along the coast of the Monterey Peninsula, I found myself expressing my feelings of marginality in regard to the academic community, and also with respect to the general approach to knowledge itself in our time and culture. Even though some of my work has been received quite well, I felt that the issues that I am really interested in addressing somehow did not seem to resonate to the degree I had hoped. I thought that I had articulated the main thrust of my interest in my work, but the responses I received were generally not to my overarching intent, but to specific aspects of my discussions. What was it, I wondered, that led my colleagues and my audience to focus on selected statements or ideas, rather than on the larger issue I have attempted to address in all my intellectual “homes”?

As John and I spoke, I realized that I still need to clarify some of my own fundamental assumptions about what it is exactly that I am after. Recently I have put it this way: even though the issues I have addressed are of great interest to me, I am ultimately more concerned with the very way we approach particular issues, rather than the issues themselves. I have found that the fundamental nature of the discourse about these

issues, and indeed the way we think about them, is problematic. But this concern was not being communicated.

In this article, I would like to explore the extent to which this larger evolving passion can be expressed with the aid of the TSK vision, or at least the limited elements of the vision I have absorbed and integrated. Let me put it this way: My main interest is in exploring the way knowledge shapes, and in turn is shaped by, our understanding of the world. My sense (and this is what inspires me in the TSK vision) is that our whole understanding of knowledge, which presently is very much instrumental in nature, might be enriched by opening up to a more creative inquiry. To explore this possibility, I will look to a number of examples from my own personal experience. My aim is to use those to develop a more encompassing understanding of what knowledge is and might be.

Tools that Kill

Several years ago, my colleague Ron Purser and I consulted for a very large multinational, whose research division alone is made up of some 15,000 people all over the globe. Our area of expertise was creativity, and we had been called in because company management felt that their scientists were suffering from the “me-too” syndrome, always catching up with innovations by others instead of generating new ideas of their own. What role were we to play? The senior executive who hired us explained to us what he wanted: “Tools,” he said, “tools that kill!”

This incident has become a “defining moment” in my relationship with Ron. Nowadays we trot out the sentence “tools that kill” whenever we are faced with what we perceive

to be a painfully instrumental, restrictive, and even absurd view of the richness of knowledge. Knowledge reduced to a deadly weapon! How does one approach and embody knowledge as a deadly instrument? What kind of practices, what kind of thinking and inquiry flow from such a “position”? Is this really the way that some people in our culture conceive of creativity and its uses?

Since this episode, Ron and I have tried to articulate a view which begins with a “love of knowledge” and uses that as a starting point for inquiry. We contrast this to the more instrumental view that begins with a “given,” “objective” problem, and then raids a “knowledge-bank” in search of a solution.

One area where we have tried to do this is the field we call “social creativity.” While there is a sizable literature on individual genius and the characteristics of the creative individual, there has until recently been hardly any research on creative groups, communities, and interactions (Montuori & Purser, 1995). Ron and I have written about this extensively, and developed a very strong interest in this area, fueled by our own experience as organizational theorists, and, in my case, as a musician. As a musician, many of my most memorable experiences of creativity occurred working in and with a band, with our creativity emerging out of the interactions of collective improvisation, sharing ideas, inspiring each other on the bandstand and off. But this kind of generative interaction was nowhere addressed in the research literature I found.

Despite a desire to understand the specific factors which lead to a group being creative, my own particular interest has been in understanding why creativity has not been viewed as a potentially collaborative phenomenon; why, indeed, “social creativity” is even sometimes viewed as an oxymoron. Why has there been little if any research or public interest in social creativity, at least until a decade ago?¹ What does that say about

our culture, about academia, about our cultural research interests and strategies, about our thinking--about us? What can this blind-spot (in our culture and also in business) tell us about our knowledge and our potential?

Reflecting on these issues has led me to question my own motives and interests more deeply. In a discussion with some colleagues recently I was asked if I have a “model” for social creativity. Sheepishly, with some feelings of guilt, I replied that I did not. Why not, I wondered? Should I have a model? What’s so good about models? Models are certainly useful, and even intellectually appealing, but what is it about our society, and about social science, that leads us to think of models as the *summum bonum* of knowledge--or at least as a prerequisite for having anything to say as an “academic?” This set of questions challenged me to think about precisely what kind of “knowledge” our interest in social creativity offered or aimed at. What kind of knowledge were Ron and I generating in our own work? How did such knowledge match up with societal and academic expectations for “knowledge-production?”

Trotting Out Methods

At a job interview a few years ago, I was questioned about methods and methodology. The university where I was applying for a position is known for its “alternative” approach to methodology, drawing from continental philosophy, qualitative approaches, and the like. “If you were to study this institution (meaning the university in question),” I was asked, “what method would you use?” I knew the “right” answer was to trot out some methodology such as ethnography, or action research, or any of a number of other approaches. But when I opened my mouth, I realized that an answer along these lines would only replicate the very problem alternative approaches had

been designed to counteract; namely, the indiscriminate use of a method regardless of the context and of the “subject’s” nature.

I tried to explain why I thought the question itself was problematic. Admittedly I was not very clear, and certainly not very diplomatic. I did not get the job, but I did get a “job” out of the question itself, one which has kept me busy ever since. Why was I so reluctant to give my interviewers what they wanted?

If I had given the search committee an “appropriate” answer, it would have shown that I “know” some of the current methods and when to apply them, and that I can pass this knowledge on to students. But that to me is profoundly unsatisfactory. Suppose one sets out to study a system and considers what methodology to adopt. For starters, without knowing why one is studying the system, or what the system is about, or, for that matter, for whom one is doing the research, can one really legitimately claim to know “how” to study it? What are the criteria for choosing one of the many methods out there, or, more interestingly, for observing the system in a “pre-methodological” context? Simply to impose a method--which, despite protests to the contrary, most likely will end up being the method(s) one is trained in and familiar with and therefore crowns as “right” and “appropriate,”--means jumping the gun in a very dangerous way. And furthermore, how does one investigate the very thinking which leads one to choose a method above an other, the very question of competing paradigms? Is there a way of addressing the larger context in which the discourse of method itself is situated, the nature of our thinking, rather than merely situating the method in a larger discourse?

I believe our “methodolatry” is a symptom of a pervasive unreflective and instrumental approach to knowledge itself. In our society, information must be generated. Doing so

in accord with one of the accepted methods legitimates that information as correct, and therefore as “true,” or at least “error-free.” It makes the results arrived at defensible, while demonstrating the researcher’s competence. Once the information is deemed correct, it can be used. At that point we are justified in calling it knowledge.

In TSK terms, I would put this approach to knowledge under the general heading of “technological knowledge.” Tarthang Tulku illuminates its qualities and its limitations better than I could:

Technological knowledge, with its emphasis on the objective realm, assigns primacy to knowledge of the ‘already known’. The rule is put forward that knowledge must be based on the familiar: on labels, descriptions, and categories that are given in advance and serve as finite, discrete, and isolated ‘counters’ available for knowledge to manipulate. (1987, 43)

The limitations set up by the prevailing models turn knowledge into a ‘commodity’ and human beings into consumers rather than producers. The different systems of knowledge, each offering its own explanations and techniques, its interpretations and methods, leave open only the question of which system to adopt. (1987, 253)

The knowledge that this first-level ‘order’ supports is knowledge of the already known—knowledge as technology, reflecting the limitations of first-level time and space. Devoted to the need to cope, technological knowledge produces a steady stream of new facts, new theories, and new solutions. But it also perpetuates the patterns of need and not-knowing. Programmed mechanically in

advance, it can make no sense of the prospect for a new way of knowing (1990, 57–58)

Constructing the Creativity Toolbox

Today there is almost a fetish for generating information by applying currently accepted methods and models. Yet little attention is paid to the nature of information, and even less to the nature of knowledge itself--the knowledge of knowledge (Ceruti, 1994). There are different ways of conceiving knowledge, including new ways of knowing, but these tend to be ignored. The Laplacean belief still holds that with the “correct” way of knowing, based on existing criteria and schemata, we can have complete information, and so predict and control the world around us (Ceruti, 1994). In turn, this translates into an ongoing quest for instrumental knowledge--knowledge which can be immediately “put to work.” Knowledge is seen as an ordering and focusing function, allowing the self to “make sense” of the world, imposing a grid on experience that tells us what is going on and how to “handle” it, while at the same time eliminating uncertainty, confusion, and ambiguity.

I am not at all against “useful” knowledge. Our instrumental approach clearly has enormous applications, and has been very successful, in many ways. But I do feel that viewing knowledge *solely* as a tool has some very serious implications. These implications must be addressed, because they limit our approach to what we can know, and also limit what we can do.

The executive who wanted “tools that kill” provides a useful example of the dangers I have in mind. For this man, the issue of “innovation-deficit” was easily remedied by

giving his scientists creativity “tools” in the form of processes such as “lateral thinking” or “bisociation.” In this model, a scientist stuck for a new idea goes to the creativity “expert,” who provides him or her with a creativity “toolbox.” The scientists then rummage through the creativity “toolbox” and pulls out a creativity tool. The client “runs” the tool and comes up with the bright idea he or she needs.

Is this knowledge? Is this how creativity operates? More fundamentally, what kind of knowledge is it that makes us play out this model and accept this kind of thinking? What would happen if, rather than relying on the expert’s tools, the researchers were encouraged to inquiry into their own creative process, their assumptions about creativity, the actual nature of their practices, and so forth? These questions, which point at another level of knowledge, remain unquestioned.

The “toolbox mentality” that guides the ordinary approach to knowledge may be linked to the often-noted pragmatic bent in the American character (Stewart & Bennett, 1991). For decades the American “can do” attitude and no-nonsense practicality has been praised for its economic success. But the toolbox mentality that expresses this outlook is problematic, not necessarily because it is wrong, but because it is partial. For instance, today people tend to read books looking for practical advice on what they can do, preferably spelled out step by step. The “do-it-yourself,” painting-by-numbers mentality pioneered in such fields as home-improvement and Reader’s Digest art or medicine lessons (the classic “I am Joe’s pancreas” type article) has been transferred to a far wider domain that includes psychological and social improvement.

The “tools” that people want to learn how to use typically emerge as the final elaboration of a “model,” which in turn is often a framework that divides a process into certain specific stages. A classic example in the field of organizational theory is the

stages of group process that proceed through “forming, storming, norming and performing.” Specific tools can then be developed for every stage. Models, once the currency of social science, have now filtered down to popular culture, where they seem to pervade our society. Model-mania applies even to dealing with profound psychological issues (for instance, 12-step programs) or “enlightenment” (consider the progressive insights in the popular New Age bestseller, *The Celestine Prophecy*, or Ken Wilber’s (1980) more sophisticated structural-developmental model of the evolution of consciousness. Paradoxically, for our individualist culture, these books tell us how we can “do it ourselves” based on *somebody else’s* framework. We can “do it,” in other words, but we cannot “think about it,” inquiring into the very nature and experience of the phenomenon *for us*.

What most people, and certainly most managers, generally have little time for is the theory that underlies a model. Theory is viewed as *a priori* dry and abstract, removed from real-life. It is the province of eggheads isolated in their ivory towers. Yet this dismissive attitude cannot work. Every tool and every model is informed by a theory (loosely, a logically coherent set of descriptive and explanatory assumptions about the phenomenon in question). Theories can drift into scholasticism, but they can also lead to a different level of inquiry. Put differently, eschewing theory completely means leaving unchallenged the underlying assumptions of any particular tool, model, or course of action.

Whether we know it or not, our actions are informed by a theory of the situation we are in, and that theory in turn is immersed in a larger “worldview” or philosophy of life, with a strong cultural component. To offer our own model (!), we might speak of a nested hierarchy going from the “smallest” element (perhaps “tools”) through models, theories, paradigms (overarching frameworks for theories), and ultimately worldviews,

which bring the full weight of our culture and history to bear on a larger interpretive framework for life and meaning. Without being aware of this hierarchy, we will tend to shape our understanding of each new circumstance “as if” we were dealing with an objective situation. We will forget to check our assumptions about the world, testing them against our specific situation, and the way they shape what we act upon “as if” we were dealing with an objective situation. We will ignore the process of differentiation, of inclusion/exclusion, that frames each perception and the distinctions it depends on. We will lose the opportunity to discover that there are many possible frames at many different “focal settings,” each leading to very different understandings of “what is.” And we will also lose the opportunity to engage in our own, full inquiry into the issue.

As an example, let us look at the popular creativity tool called lateral thinking. Lateral thinking is based on an interesting model of creativity with roots in early research that settled on two aspects of thinking, labeled convergent and divergent. Here a tool originates in a model that is based in a theory that grows out of the application of a specific scientific paradigm that is supported and generated by a specific (Western, modern, industrial/scientific, predominantly male) worldview. If we lose sight of this hierarchy, we fail to see that there are many different ways of conceptualizing creativity. We have no way to realize that there will consequently be other ways of fostering creativity or “being creative.” Our understanding of creativity will be limited by somebody else’s fundamental assumptions, which we “buy into” unawares.

For instance, the lateral-thinking model leaves social processes and social context out of the picture completely. Theoretical assumptions are being made that define creativity as a cognitive process, one in which affect and interpersonal relationships play no role. An exclusive focus on one or more tools places the emphasis entirely on internal cognitive processes. Perhaps interests such as efficiency and speed are served in this way, and

perhaps the scientific research behind this approach is impeccable on its own terms. But what of the factors that are left out of account? For instance what of the working conditions under which managers, researchers, or other employees work?

Suppose we wanted to address the issue of creativity education by looking at personal interactions, social constraints and possibilities, the environment of the researchers or educators, dynamics of power, or motivation. Suppose, more radically, that we wanted to explore the suggestion that creativity depends on a spirit of inquiry stimulated by a particular attitude toward the world around us. As long as we focus exclusively on applications of the lateral thinking tool, we will have no way to do so. We will not even know how to ask the right questions, or that there are in fact broader questions about the relationship between creativity and our knowledge.

Limitations on what can be known are not always innocent. There are clear reasons why management would endorse and encourage the cognitive and psychological approaches to creativity implicit in the use of the lateral-thinking tool. They range from widely shared understandings (the cultural myth of the lone genius, our cultural individualism, the reductionism of social-science methodology) to the unwillingness to explore the link between creativity in the workplace and the social, political, and economic factors that determine how organizations are structured. A more wide-ranging inquiry into creativity might well require a rethinking of such staples of the present business environment as hierarchy, control and reward systems, the bureaucratic propensity for order versus disorder, and the social and market forces that encourage a stress on predictability.

There are broader issues at work here as well. Asking the scientists with whom our senior executive was concerned to whip out a tool when needed is a more reassuring

approach to creativity than choosing to foster the holistic development of “creative persons,” engaged in an ongoing, but potentially disruptive, process of creative inquiry. Our society is ambivalent toward creative individuals: the term “creative” has over- and under-tones of “flakiness,” unpredictability, disorder, and even madness (Whyte, 1957).

We can thus note a link between a preference for tool-based knowledge and what I would call “oppositional thinking.” A polarization is at work; in this case, the polarization between “conformity” and “creativity,” “ordinary” or “normal” and “wild,” “abnormal,” or “mad.” The greater the polarization, the greater the extent to which the differences are dramatized. When the choice is seen as either/or, to the exclusion of a middle ground, the belief system itself generates a systemic blind-spot, an issue the system has not explored.

Psycho-dynamically, we might call this an unconscious conflict. And where such a conflict is in operation, there will be a strong tendency to look away from the larger issues or domains in the hierarchy. The point in such a case becomes to offer individuals a tool while making sure that they can remain bound to the positive pole of the opposition that lurks in the background. Our scientists will remain “normal,” “conforming” people, who apply a specific tool or formula for being more creativity. In this way, we try to turn creativity itself into something that can be standardized, controlled, and predicted. As for the scientists, there is little risk that they will turn into potentially threatening “creative individuals.”

Knowledge Goes to War

The senior executive who called us in for a “creativity consult” asked us for “tools that kill.” The phrase implies that tools for creativity are in fact weapons. And whom are they designed to kill? The answer, of course, is that they target the company’s competition.

The corporate scientists become warriors in the corporate battlefield. Here, “underneath” the tools, models, and theories (to use a spatial metaphor) is a deeper metaphor of war. The executive who hired us had made certain choices and needs informed by this metaphor, which shaped his knowledge more clearly than the theories he had in mind to support his views. This is precisely why metaphors are illuminating: They make more apparent the affective component of thought. The theory remains, but the metaphor makes explicit implications of what is being understood that the theory itself might not illuminate.

The deadly creativity tool is also directed at the process of creation itself, since the tools are supposed to generate creativity. But the tools kill the knowledge they generate in order that it may be controlled: they “kill” creativity, so that it may be mastered, applied, controlled, measured, predictable. “Living” creativity may be too unpredictable and indeed frightening to behold in the corporate context.

Is this war metaphor “inappropriate,” even “wrong” or “bad?” At this point, I withhold judgment, although the reader has perhaps figured out my own proclivities by now. Yet I would certainly argue that the metaphor is limited and limiting. Just as was true of choosing to proceed by way of tools, when we proceed by way of metaphors, we limit ourselves to one particular approach, one attitude toward innovation and action that keeps other possibilities from emerging.

When we follow the war metaphor, we reduce creativity to a question of tactics—the speedy deployment of weapons to the troops. Time is of the essence in engaging the enemy, and the weapons must be dispatched immediately. A consultant dealing with a business executive guided by this metaphor will find it a real challenge to raise more strategic concerns. The constellation “war/tactics/weapons acquisition” accelerates the temporal dynamic, eliminating any possibility for certain kinds of creative education. In the heat of a battle-forged urgency, there is no chance to explore a wide range of options, to rethink the whole enterprise. Why would such an executive want to waste time getting caught up in theoretical discussions about language, metaphor, and theory?

The Space of Creativity

Whether it is due to the metaphor of “knowledge at war” or not, today we face a terrible acceleration of knowledge at every level. Information is being generated with greater speed, transmitted with greater speed, and demanded with greater speed. This has helped lead to the feeling Toffler (1973) described as “future-shock.” It has been addressed by those dealing with the “complexification” of the world in the “information age,” who point out that knowledge is being segmented into distinct spaces. The most obvious example of this is the phenomenon of interdisciplinary fragmentation, through which disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, politics, and economics slice the world up into so many different sections, generate ever more specialized ways of making sense of (and controlling) the world.

From this perspective, the situation that Purser and I encountered when we went out to consult on creativity can be traced to the “psychologization” of creativity. Both in academia and in popular culture, creativity is viewed as a fundamentally individual phenomenon, and the discourse of creativity naturally focuses on genius, personality, and madness. The sources of genius become inscrutable, or else random and fortuitous (based, perhaps, on personality traits, cognitive styles, or genetics). In a more romantic vein, they may be due to divine inspiration. Recent movies such as “Bird,” about the life of the great jazz artist Charlie Parker, “Amadeus,” about the composer Mozart, “Immortal Beloved,” about Beethoven, and “Shine,” about a tortured classical pianist, are all symptomatic of the association between creativity and the personal journey of a lone, misunderstood genius.

I sometimes lecture in public about social creativity, and when I do so I discuss the collaborative nature of musical performance and movie-making, among other fields. I note the social, political, historical and economic factors in the lives of writers and painters whose work we like to think is done “alone.” I raise the social constructionist argument or introduce the sociological perspective, discussing the role of “movements” in the arts or of laboratories in science. Inevitably, however, a large part of the audience will challenge me with the statement that “ultimately” creativity is the lone act of a single individual. “Ultimately,” in their view, none of the other “stuff” matters.

This hard-core belief, which in some circles would be described as a perfect example of the blind acceptance of “ideology,” has multiple social, political, and historical roots. (Montuori and Purser 1997). As an assumption about the nature of creativity, it not shared by most other cultures around the globe, and even in the West it has only become prevalent in the last 200 years or so. This does not make it necessarily wrong, but it does suggest that there is plenty of room for inquiry. What is the “focal setting”

that directs our inquiry into creativity into these channels? When we look for the sources of the creative act, in what space do we seek to locate it?

If we confine our inquiry to this country, we can note that the “core” beliefs about creativity are linked to American individualism, which arose in part as a reaction against collectivism and “old country” emphases on group and cultural norms. American individualism, as many scholars have pointed out, has developed what I would call an oppositional identity vis-a-vis groups and larger collectivities (Slater, 1991; Ogilvy, 1992).²

Similarly, the views of the humanistic psychology movement, which have strongly influenced the popular discourse of creativity, arose in reaction to behaviorism’s stress on environmental stimuli as producing predictable “responses.” Behaviorism’s deterministic view left no room for free will or human dignity (In B.F. Skinner’s (1971) words, it would lead us “beyond freedom and dignity.” At the same time, humanistic psychology, and psychology in general, has developed an “oppositional identity” vis-a-vis sociology, which has also stressed social rather than personal factors. To distinguish itself as a discipline, it has focused precisely on individuals and their cognitive and affective processes, as opposed to groups and social factors.³

Since the focus of this article lies elsewhere, I will not try to state other factors involved in the prevailing view of creativity. Suffice it to say that the focal setting at work here is “fixed” on the individual. Anything perceived as “outside” the boundaries of this particular concept of the individual, what Alan Watts (1966) called the “skin-encapsulated ego,” is considered “epiphenomenal,” or even as a hindrance to the “project of the ego.” It follows that the space of creativity occurs inside the head (or, in

the case of humanistic psychology, the heart) of a single person--and that's that. As Tarthang Tulku (1987) suggests, a focal setting leads to a fixed position. To deviate from that position would clash with too many staunchly--and largely unconsciously--held assumptions.

Now, one response to this circumstance is to develop an alternative focal setting. Some of my colleagues argue that this is exactly what I should do with regard to the issue of social creativity. Show us how to do it, is their argument; develop a model for what constitutes a socially creative setting, and those who find it of interest will pursue it and reach their own conclusions. I can appreciate this position, and in fact I believe that this strategy would be successful. I am sure that within a few years there will be more "models" of social creativity than you can shake a stick at, all very useful, to be sure.

Yet my interest lies elsewhere. I am not trying to convince people that creativity is social as opposed to "personal" or private, occurring between the ears of a lone genius. I am not attempting a postmodern, "deflationary" account of creativity which holds that the lone genius is a fiction; that instead of plunging into the depths of our soul to extract the nectar of creative genius, we necessarily engage in "bricolage," assembling found objects in a new but culturally determined way. All this may be so, but as I see it, the effort to elaborate such a position will only direct our attention in a new way, only point us toward a new space.

What interests me is the possibility of developing a different kind of discourse, a different form of inquiry into the whole process of creativity, one that can be transferred to other subjects as well. It is here that I find myself turning toward the TSK vision.

The Discourse of Knowledge in Space and Time

In the discussion so far, I have already been using fundamental concepts from TSK. I will continue with some basic points from *Love of Knowledge*:

The restrictions on knowledge, which seem so absolute and final from the conventional perspective, can be analyzed in terms of 'positions' and 'conditions'. In the space-centered view of 'objective' reality, limitations on knowing are the consequence of positions. The self (to which the conventional view refers all knowing) occupies a place 'here' and lacks knowledge regarding something located 'there'. This lack sets up a basic tension, which generates momentum 'outward', activating the flow of linear temporality that perpetuates the self and its constructs. From the time-centered view of the self, the same lack emerges as conditioning. Born into a particular setting and subject to a specific order, the self is shaped in its being and knowing. Its limited knowledge is the inevitable outcome of its circumstances, which define the self in its person and its potential. (1987, 263)

'Position' comes into play through 'opposition', active as the basis for identification and discrimination. It is dichotomies that define what is real. (265)

Each pole is a potential 'position' for the 'bystander' to adopt, and the known world comes into being through the progressive marking out and 'owning' of such polar oppositions. (266)

As *Knowledge of Time and Space* points out, knowledge is frozen into "positions," and positions create "oppositions:"

The first level 'order' unfolds through polar concepts that are mutually interdependent. Language appears to give each member of the polarity a separate identity, encouraging us to give one side or the other greater value or importance, but the two sides are inseparable. When we choose happiness, we are choosing sadness, when we choose knowledge we are choosing ignorance. Each 'opposition' reflects a more fundamental and encompassing 'position'; when we let the 'order' communicated by language guide us toward choosing one side of each polarity, ignoring or rejecting the other, our choice will be incomplete and frustrating. (1990, 52-53)

Positions, then, are defended in an adversarial style because the positions are the spaces occupied by the self--the self *is* its positions. Any challenge to those positions is viewed as an opposition (another self's 'position') and a threat to the self's very integrity and existence. The characteristic mode of discourse for this understanding is debate. University debating teams aim solely to present one set of positions and oppose—ultimately, to destroy—the positions of others. The highest form of discourse, our finest hour in the world of knowledge, involves not a collective inquiry into a phenomenon, but the defense of already existing positions, and the attack of any other discourse. Positions become impositions.

To be sure, positions may be altered as the result of a debate, but this tends to happen only on relatively minor points. As Thomas Kuhn (1970) famously demonstrated, fundamental paradigm shifts occur, not only through reasoned discourse, but because eventually the old-paradigm guard literally, physically dies out. There is too much invested in the initial position, academically, economically, in terms of prestige, even in terms of self-identity, for changes to be made by those who have invested lifetime in a

position. As Tarthang Tulku writes (1984, 69): “While we see ourselves as using knowledge, it may be more accurate to say that what we know is using us: We are drawn into responding to all that occurs around us.”

When discourse and inquiry are confined in this unfortunate way, it leads to the frustration I have tried to describe above. For me to present a new model of social creativity or a critique of an individualist/reductionist model, to establish a new metaphor or create a new tool, does nothing to alter the fundamental mode of discourse. I would like to invite others to view creativity through a different focal setting, exploring the time, space and knowledge of creativity. But this is a fundamentally different enterprise than entering the debate arena. I have learned that what I would like to present as an invitation is generally viewed through the adversarial lens of positions and oppositions. It becomes a challenge to the existing position, an attempt to displace it with my view and invalidate the existing view. And that is to miss the point.

Dialogic Alternatives

With this underlying concern out in the open, let me describe the ways in which my colleague, Ron Purser, and I have been trying to invite a different understanding of creativity, one which does not depend on opposition. Without attempting to get at the underlying issues raised by the TSK discourse, but using the TSK language of “oppositions” we have sought to do by presenting alternatives to the standard opposition between “individual” and “social” views of creativity.

This approach starts by accepting that, as many proponents of the romantic version of the individualist position argue, many a genius has been misunderstood, perhaps

reviled, forced to toil and struggle in a materialistic world which only praises money, fame, and vulgarity, and so forth. One does not have to be a misunderstood genius to appreciate that society can sometimes create obstacles in our path, and that it can create very large obstacles for those presenting radically new ideas.

Yet this is still another partial truth, a position based on an opposition. Geniuses—and “ordinary people” too—have also *benefited* from social intercourse, and the world around them does not have to be viewed as their enemy. Artists and scientists work in an existing field, whether physics or painting or music. They use the available tools, and have colleagues, friends, teachers and others with whom they exchange ideas, have arguments, and so on.

After all, for anything to be considered new or creative, it must stand out as “different” in the context of a tradition. This relation between genius and tradition is complex. Even if the genius “breaks” with tradition, it is that very tradition which has allowed her to do so, by creating the “field” in which to operate, providing the context, the materials, even the inspiration. The romantic discourse of creativity, in tending to view tradition as nothing more than an obstacle for the true genius, has missed this complexity.

The French philosopher Edgar Morin (1994) has coined the term “disjunctive thought” to describe this oppositional way of thinking, which he finds to be “simple,” rather than “complex.” Simple, disjunctive thought is unable to conceive of “dialogical” relations such as the one I have just described, where a creative person is nourished by the tradition and at the same time breaks with tradition. Not only is this “simple” or oppositional view of “what is,” partial, but it also closes off possibilities for “what could be”; for instance, working on creating a more generative, supportive, and

“creativogenic” environment. The more complex dialogical alternative replaces the mutually exclusive positions and oppositions created by technological knowing with a more generous understanding, one which recognizes that the dialogical dynamic that holds the two terms allows them to be not simply antagonistic, but also concurrent and complementary. For instance, the social forces of economics, politics, trends, etc., can be antagonistic to, complementary with, and also concurrent with, an artist’s production.

So what I am arguing for is the need to broaden our thinking with an approach that is *dialogical*, rather than disjunctive. Such an approach recognizes causal loops and mutual interrelation between terms such as individual and society. We are in society and society is in us. Individual human beings cannot exist without society, and society cannot exist without individuals. If we attempt to “think” one without the other, believing this might lead to a vicious circle, we will inevitably face frustrations and the opposition of positions, as Tarthang Tulku stated above. If, on the other hand, we view the dialogical process as leading to a potentially virtuous, if complex, circle, we can embrace both terms inasmuch as they define each other.

Another step involves the recognition of a *plurality of epistemologies* or positions, each expressing knowledge in different times and space, each in different ways. Each epistemology entails a certain focal setting, each presenting certain possibilities for knowledge and closing off other possibilities--for instance, genetic, personality, cognitive, social-psychological approaches to creativity.

As Ceruti (1994, p. 86) states:

In the classical epistemological perspective, which until very recently dominated the entire scientific-epistemological context...concepts were always defined in

reference to a privileged observation point to which it was believed all the various points of view could be reduced. The rejection of a fundamental point is exactly what characterizes the epistemological turning-point we are examining. What appears fundamental is not a single point of observation, but the narrative composed of various relationships. This narrative is continually defined and redefined between an irreducible multiplicity of observation and explanation points. Nature and the function of concepts such as information, chance, organization, etc., appear ever more clearly as being relative and intrinsic to the relationship among the system or domain considered, the methodological perspectives through which it is constituted, and the point of view, level, and subject of observation.

Such a pluralistic, dialogical, *complex* knowledge can express itself in *dialogue* rather than merely in debate: in open, creative inquiry rather than in restrictive attempt at finding one right and true position to impose on the world. It invites us to entertain an idea, explore its edges, explore the very knowledge which makes it possible.

Creative Inquiry

In all this, our more fundamental goal is to promote a different spirit of inquiry entirely. We would like to encourage a way of going into the phenomenon itself, one which is more open to the different spaces and times, and the different knowledge, of creativity.

For instance, must we adopt or accept the popular focal setting that leads us to view creativity as a phenomenon which occurs in a lightning flash (time) inside the brain of a single person (space)? Or can we take into account the history of the person's inquiry into the subject, and the role of interactions, friendships, arguments, etc.? Can we view

our American, late-twentieth century view of creativity as the result of a specific interaction of knowledge in time and space, with the possibility that different time/space/knowledge interactions in different times and different cultures could lead to different discourses and practices of creativity? Here too I see our efforts as linked to the TSK vision. As Tarthang Tulku states,

Reflecting on the vast array of knowledge that has already unfolded in history awakens an appreciation for what knowledge has to offer humanity. Our current way of knowing, rich and vivid as it is, may reflect only a single narrow wavelength of the full spectrum of knowledge.

The shifting flow of knowledge throughout history attracts little interest in contemporary culture, where the rapid rate of change makes past knowledge seem irrelevant. The resultant lack of historical perspective exacts a price. A narrow view of the past limits our understanding of the present and restricts our ability to foresee the future. (1987, p.13)

Indeed, as we broaden our knowledge of creativity as a phenomenon in time and space by drawing on understandings of creativity that have emerged in other spaces (Japan, Africa) and other times (pre-modern, modern, etc.), we can be challenged to explore both the possibilities and the constraints created by our own discourse and practices, and we can seek to expand those significantly. We can broaden our spectrum of knowledge.

My real question is this: As we conduct such explorations, can we engage in a collective dialogue, a collaborative inquiry that does not involve holding on to oppositional positions and developing oppositional identities, but allows us instead to entertain

different positions and explore the very structure of oppositions? Having taken one position, can we then take other positions and see how they shed a different light on the phenomenon? Can we let go of our attachment to being “right,” and explore what’s left? Even if we do not agree with others, can we go beyond the desire to impose our position, and “entertain” other views?

What is necessary here is a process of inquiry which involves the constant questioning of our own assumptions as well as those of others, which suspends immediate judgment, the obliteration of differences, and hierarchical classification. In the TSK mode, our aim is to approach all positions lightly and playfully, with an openness which permits ambiguities, complexities, uncertainties, and the widest possible range of ideas to arise. For it is these very uncertainties, these ambiguities that are pounced upon as weaknesses in adversarial discourse, that are the source of creativity.

As Morin (1994) has pointed out, complex thought is thought that does not reject, eliminate, or homogenize differences, ambiguities, uncertainties, and noise, but feeds on them, viewing limits to knowledge as possibilities rather than obstacles. Inquiry itself should itself be able to foster creativity, precisely by embracing the unknown. Yet if one already knows the positions one wants to defend, this will not be so, and the unknown will be seen as a fundamental threat to the rightness of our position. Surely in that case nothing new can come in, and no innovation is possible, apart from the kind of instrumental innovation which emerges as we find a new way of defending our position or challenging those of others. This is the path of inquiry as war, and Tarthang Tulku has pointed to its consequences:

[F]rom among the various criticisms made of ordinary knowledge, the most objectionable feature of the ‘minding’ and ‘belief structure’ trend [is that] it does

not allow a meaningful and positive critique of itself to be made. Therefore, *it does not readily allow new perspectives to shine through*. Although there may be nothing wrong with beliefs and concepts in themselves, if they constitute the only way we know of being, they become a trap. They proliferate and interlock until no alternative to them is even visible. They amount to massive solicitations of our attention, keeping us ‘tuned in’ in a very constrictive way. (1977, 233 [emphasis in original])

The TSK vision suggests a different approach to positions, conditions, and opposition:

The labels and ideas that structure experience will naturally also shape and guide our questioning. But recognized as labels and ideas, they lose their power to confine the range of inquiry, and instead become elements available for investigation. Proceeding with care and dedication to keep such awareness active in our questions, we can learn to treat words and thoughts as pointers towards knowledge, rather than boundaries for what can be known. . . .

For inquiry to operate freely, it cannot be bound by the ‘positions’ that the ‘bystander’ adopts. This does not necessarily mean, however, that those positions must be rejected. Indeed, it is not clear that it would be possible to reject one set of positions without adopting another. Inquiry is free only if it allows for a way of knowing more fundamental than ‘rejection’.

A position is the outcome of an act of positioning, which unfolds in time through discrete acts of distinguishing, knowing, and so forth. Seen in this light, positions are expressions of knowledge, rather than structures that limit it. Instead of accepting the viewpoint of the ‘bystander’, which insists on its fixed positions

situated at a point off-center from an imagined origin, we could see in positioning the manifestation of a knowing that is not itself situated or specified. (1987, 271–272)

The spirit of inquiry TSK invites is quite different from--and indeed shocking to--the predominant view of knowledge as instrumental:

Inquiry can also proceed from an intention that has nothing to do with the 'needs' and 'concerns' of 'the one who questions'. The questions 'we' ask can arise out of wonder and the love of knowledge. (1987, 306)

Intrinsic to this understanding is the recognition that

The attitudes we adopt in carrying out our investigation shape the attributes we find in the world we investigate. (1987, 307)

TSK invites a different understanding, based on a fundamentally different way of approaching knowledge:

Suppose that problems were understood as part of a global 'read-out' that expressed the result of a certain kind of knowing being in effect. Whatever its 'contents', as a read-out it would reveal this fundamental knowing as the source of a remarkable creativity. (1990, 262)

Knowing limits as limits, we know them also as knowledge. Aware of the mind as the one that affirms limits, we can ask whether mind too is knowledge. If so, knowledge becomes freely available in a previously unsuspected way. Self-

sufficient, self-reliant, and dynamic, the mind expresses knowledge not as content but as capacity. (1990, p.327)

What does it mean to view knowledge as a capacity? Or, for that matter, as content? Let us begin with the latter approach, since it is more familiar.

Knowledge as content comes in a variety of forms. It can be information, data, or facts and figures. In these various guises, knowledge is the “meat and potatoes” of our educational system. When we aim at this kind of knowledge, we wind up with what Paulo Freire (1973) has called the “banking” metaphor of education. Knowledge in the form of useful facts and so forth, is “stored” in learners, who then make a “withdrawal” whenever they need to use this information to perform a particular task. As we can see, this is not unlike the “tool” approach.

But knowledge as content is also knowledge as models, maps, and theories. At this level, the content of knowledge “shapes” the choice and use of knowledge. And it does so especially by insisting that knowledge is confined to content. Knowledge that knows knowledge in this way leads to a demand for knowledge that is pre-packaged and “ready-to-use.” In the end, it gives knowledge as a tool, with all the limits we have explored above.

Now let us look at knowledge as capacity. Knowledge seen in this light is freely available as the very essence of inquiry. When knowledge expresses capacity, we gain more knowledge through the ongoing inquiry into the very nature of the knowledge we are “using.” As part of this process of inquiry, we can explore the way our knowing is shaped into content, with conditions, positions, oppositions, and impositions. Yet we do not have to invest in those positions; do not have to “bank” on them.

Tarhang Tulku speaks of such a knowledge in terms of the love of knowledge. He invites a knowing in which different understandings and positions are all viewed as expressions of knowledge, rather than as either “correct” or “incorrect” reflections of reality. Each such position involves certain constraints and certain possibilities--opening up a certain “focal setting,” bringing certain kinds of knowing into focus while obscuring others. Notions of “correct” and “incorrect,” “true” and “false” and “error” all take on different meanings. Instead of facing challenges, victories, and defeats, instead of deviating from our position or maintaining it, we find that each new situation becomes a source of knowledge.

Viewing knowledge as a capacity allows us to recognize our own capacity for knowing and inquiry without immediately having to reach for a model, tool, or theory. To use a musical metaphor, we no longer have to search for the right score, the right composition to play, the right model or theory to fit the object in front of us. Instead, we can improvise. When we are always inquiring into the time and space of knowledge, subject and object unite in the performance. We can embrace each scale, all possible harmonics. They all become “licks.” By taking our models and theories and tools “as if” they were “real,” we can let go of them. Now we are free to explore them without attachment. In time we recognize that even when we thought we were following the score religiously, we were already improvising, but doing so unawares.

Improvising knowledge leads naturally toward collaboration as well. We steadily create possibilities for and with our colleagues, which in turn leads to choices which generate further possibilities, and also new constraints. Yet as we choose to go down one road rather than another, each new constraint can be the source of new inquiry, once more generating new possibilities as we explore its edges and the knowledge it embodies in

space and time. In this way, an ongoing process of creative inquiry can be developed. Positions can be “entertained” together, explored and investigated in the knowledge that they are indeed positions, recognizing their oppositions as a further source of knowledge rather than an impediment to be removed. Creating a generative context for new possibilities, we express the challenge of a love of knowledge.

Perhaps I have come closer to put into words this basic goal and project. How can we foster a love of knowledge, and the conditions for love of knowledge? What might the generative context be like that allows love of knowledge to shine through? How might an inquiry into social creativity itself be an example of social creativity? Perhaps I could develop a model for doing so, but after all this, that is not what I will end with. Instead, let me suggest that the inquiry itself involves a plurality of narratives, and that these narratives are created in the telling, in the exchange created by listening, learning, and participation in the love of knowledge.

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¹ Brainstorming, the closest thing we have to a social creativity "technique," involves keeping quiet while others are speaking, and not judging or critiquing their suggestions. The implication here is that in a group, we can be creative not through the interaction, but if anything by eliminating interaction.

² This kind of oppositional thinking can become so extreme that it turns into what it hates, in what Jung called "enantiodromia." [cite] A humorous example is a recent advertisement for Coors beer which proclaims the drinker to be a "true individual," and then adds that 7 out of 10 drinkers who expressed a preference choose Coors. We end up with a situation where one can be an "individual" just like everybody else--indeed, precisely because one is like everybody else.

³ "Oppositional" identity defines itself in opposition to that which it is historically trying to differentiate itself from, and moves further and further away from the "position" of the "opposition." Any attempt at a reconciliation--such as taking into account both personality factors and social factors-- is viewed as an opposition to the established position. Thus, when Purser and I published a piece on some of these issues in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, we were immediately criticized for being "social determinists," despite our great efforts to state otherwise.