

ZOETICS INSTITUTE PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT: Fundamental Creativity in Life and Society



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INTRODUCTION: This article is designed to situate work at the Zoetics Institute in a broad cultural and historic framework - specifically the recent history of social ideas about 'creativity' and its role in the lives of individuals and groups. It is also designed to introduce some of the key ideas found in Zoetics and provide people with extra information to do with the underlying principles behind our public presentations, courses and coaching/mentoring packages. Finally, the first part of the select bibliography at the end is designed to introduce readers to some of the major contributors to the field of creativity research – though we feel we take a different approach to many of the theorists listed.

1. Zoetics – A Brief Description

Zoetics is the art and (new) science of using creative activities and creative thinking to assist the life force in individuals and groups. It also seeks to use creative processes to promote inter-relational integrity.

Zoetics holds that higher level (cultural) communication systems replicate biological (e.g. cellular, molecular, sub-atomic etc.) communication systems. Traditional creative activities (art, music, creative thinking, writing etc.) are thus derivatives of (and adjuncts to) deeper creative forces fundamental to life itself and perhaps even fundamental to the behaviour of matter in the multiverse.

Zoetics encourages any expressions of creativity that may assist people wishing to live lives devoted to 'fundamental creativity'.

Origins: The term 'Zoesis' comes from the ancient Greek term for 'life energy'. In this form the concept was eventually linked to early Gnostic cosmologies that saw 'Zoe' as a creative female saviour figure sent down to earth to assist humans on behalf of Sophia (a kind of transcendent

creator being). In some Gnostic texts 'Zoe' reworks mainstream monotheistic descriptions of 'Eve'.

These ancient archetypal associations to the term suggest that creativity is closely linked to the workings of the life force. This appeals to us in a general way, but Zoetics as we use the term is more properly grounded in recent developments in: 1) the so called 'New Sciences' (especially Quantum Mechanics, Biosemiotics, Contemporary Cosmologies and various quantum influenced Information Theories); 2) contemporary Transpersonal and Relational-Cultural psychologies and 3) Recent thinking about the nature and role of creativity in individuals, society and organic life generally. Zoetics promotes an expansive, non-mechanistic and anti-oppressive approach to creativity that we believe may be of relevance to individuals seeking to be creative in our post-post-modern world.

2. MAJOR TRENDS IN THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF CREATIVITY

Since the Enlightenment the concept of 'creativity' in Western societies has been given certain (to some extent historically specific) attributes:

1. Its higher order manifestations have tended to be associated, almost exclusively, with a small 'creative community' in the cultural arts and sciences - a community conscious of 'gatekeepers' and under pressure as a result of fall-out from broad social changes related to industrialization, e.g. consumer capitalism, specialization, secularization, and urbanization. In the 19th century, specialisation and secularization are of most interest to the understanding of creativity to be outlined here. By the mid-20th century 'hyper capitalist' developments, mediatisation and the cult of fame/celebrity become most relevant.
2. In the face of these developments some of these creative communities embraced critiques of mainstream society that led to: a) the development of *avant gardist*/alternative/Bohemian lifestyles; b) the idealization of aspects of life judged as 'pathological' by industrialized society, e.g. '*flaneur* directionlessness, experimentation with mind altering substances, the cultivation of 'extreme' psychic states and personality traits, and a belief in sexual experimentation as a form of existential liberation.¹
3. These creative minorities also, on the whole, developed (and then defended) various models of what we are here calling 'fundamental creativity', against what they saw as

¹ When advocated in the 19th century by the likes of Rimbaud and early Modernist groups like the Decadents these approaches formalized an impulse toward liberation - from bourgeois moral norms, from industrial mechanization, from urban alienation etc - experienced by millions of people, making them appropriate to some extent to that era. Although we acknowledge an important place for creative (particularly 'Dionysian') critiques of conformist notions of pathology/health in society, we feel that the commodification of 'creative' pathology that occurred in the 20th century asks today's artists/writers etc. to stringently question the internalisation of these Dionysian forms of 'rebellion' as primary in our era. Consumer capitalism feeds on trivia, celebrity gossip, popularized psychoanalysis, grotesque spectacle etc. as a means to obscure the all-pervasive 'hyper-object' status of its economic and bureaucratic systems - systems that increasingly lack 'relational integrity'. To be complicit with this process of obscuration is to our mind a problem for contemporary creatives. The ancient 'uncertainty', 'unpredictability', 'playfulness', 'rebelliousness', 'liminality', 'tricksterism', 'chaos', etc. associated with 'creativity archetypes' world-wide is honoured by the Zoetics approach to creativity, however, we introduce the concept of 'affirmative destructuring' to allow us to better discern between life-enhancing versions of Dionysian creative expression and destructive/life-negating versions (e.g. as per in the service of contemporary hyper-capitalism. [For a description of what we mean by the term 'affirmative destructuring' see later in this text].

'oppressive', 'life-negating', 'conformist' and 'functionalist' definitions of 'creativity'. In practice this led to critiques of mass entertainment (in the cultural sphere), as well as bourgeois society's tendency to call anything new in any domain of human activity 'creative' - regardless of social context and consequences.²

Taken collectively these developments had unfortunate consequences for the historical relationship between ordinary people and their beliefs about creativity - i.e. how they understood it and how they decided to express their own creativity. Let's list some of the consequences:

- a) Specialisation and fame culture acted to disempower ordinary citizens from creative activities due to feelings of worthlessness in the face of 'expert creatives'.
- b) Ordinary citizens increasingly came to view creative activities as 'goal directed' activities. Unfortunately the following goals came to be seen as the most praiseworthy: individualist pursuit of recognition/fame, individualist pursuit of 'spectacular existence/experiences' and individualist pursuit of economic gain within the hyper-capitalist system (i.e. artistic success became identified with entertainment industry creative archetypes, e.g. super rich rock stars, movie stars and popular novelists).
- c) Ordinary citizens came to feel that many creative minorities idealized personally pathological and socially destructive lifestyles in their pursuit of the above goals. Creativity led to excess rather than balanced living. As popular notions of creativity became associated with oversensitivity and madness - as per the Romantic cultural stage - and alienation, degeneration, excess etc. as per the Modernist phase the end result was a widening gap between the general public and society's creative minorities. Worryingly, this trend coincided with the advent of an industry of mass entertainment heavily mediated by technological innovations that made musicians, film stars, published story-tellers, etc. seem ever-more 'superhuman'. As a direct result of this development millions of ordinary people turned away from regular healthy expressions of creativity in their own lives. This trend also had relational consequences since in pre-industrial societies creative expressiveness - e.g. through song, dance, story-telling, theatre etc. - was primarily an *interpersonal experience*. By the mid-20th century tens of millions of people in Western societies were opting for passive consumption of other people's creative output e.g. via radio, films and, later, television.
- d) After slipping into passive consumption of mass culture and rejecting their own creative-expressive essence, ordinary citizens, simultaneously lost touch with notions of 'fundamental creativity' as espoused in various forms by Modernist creative minorities. These same citizens then fell victim to highly centralized hyper-capitalist and technocratic views of 'creativity' in the West. In the communist states the situation was possibly worse with authoritarian politicians acting to define both proper creative conduct and definitions of 'creativity' (e.g. 'social realism') that were highly repressive. Not surprisingly, confusion reigned among ordinary people - at least among those who

² Interestingly, many of these creative communities only grudgingly accepted notions that developments in the 'sciences' might involve fundamental forms of 'creativity'.

even asked themselves serious questions about the relationship of creativity to life and society.

- e) This period saw pre-Modern local and communal (as against globalised and individualist) understandings and expressions of creativity attacked and dismantled at an alarming rate - especially for those still living in traditional societies. This trend resulted from both economic globalization (an offshoot of colonialism) and Western cultural globalization - i.e. the mass media developments associated with hyper-capitalism . However, it must also be acknowledged that innovative Modernist ideas about creativity (and ways of expressing creativity) were also implicated in this dismantling - even if in many instances the artists and writers in question were, at some level, critiquing aspects of Western-style Modernity (as in Kafka's fiction, Eliot's poetry, Mann's novels etc.). These social, cultural and economic developments together led to a thoroughly individualist, and - importantly for our purposes - increasingly 'anti-relational' understanding of creativity. The 'relational integrity' fostered by localised traditional definitions and group experiences of creativity was often undermined - at great expense to both creative minorities (especially in the hyper-competitive mass entertainment 'industries') and the general public.³
- f) The previously discussed social, scientific and economic developments also collectively led to ordinary people losing any notion of what I will here term 'creative living'. Sever citizens from deeper participatory understandings (and expressions) of creativity and you also sever them from important resources necessary for deep and ethical living. The most dangerous development here was a broad tendency (by the general public, governments, the corporate sector etc.) to ignore the importance of 'fundamental' forms of creativity to the psycho-spiritual and even psycho-physical wellbeing of individuals and as a consequence entire societies. Here the rise of mechanistic scientific views of life (i.e. we are all sleek Darwinian beasts) and excessively competitive and production-oriented economic views of life (e.g. von Hayek's version of the older '*homo economicus*' - economic man - idea) were used as theoretical frameworks to justify the irrelevance of creativity to *real* life. In schools and universities Humanities and Creative Arts courses and programs were either neoliberalised, rationalized or completely cut.

3. THE NEED FOR NEW LIFE-ENHANCING UNDERSTANDINGS OF CREATIVITY: INTRODUCING THE IDEA OF 'FUNDAMENTAL CREATIVITY'

These developments, we hold, are not healthy - either for individuals or for societies. New understandings of 'creativity' that encompass well-thought out ideas about the place of 'fundamental creativity' in life and in social relations need to be developed or reawakened and defended in order for us to face the species challenges we now confront. We believe these new

³ Even the much heralded 'inter-relational' dimension to the internet (at first glance a communication technology ideal for re-democratizing 'creativity' and replacing the 'passive consumption' model associated with much 20th century mass media) represents, in truth, a thoroughly disembodied and globalised (non-local) model for creative exchanges/expressions. Watching legions of office workers ignore those around them as they chatter into mobile devices on the way to work in the morning illustrates the point perfectly.

or revived understandings of fundamental creativity will need to focus on the idea of 'relational integrity' in all cultural, social and economic spheres.

Luckily, developments in the sciences and in relational and transpersonal psychology now help us to effectively challenge outdated, negative understandings of creativity. Such developments, point toward a more life-affirming and positive role for 'fundamental creativity' - both in individual lives and in social relations.

In simple terms Zoetics emphasizes:

- 1) ... the centrality of creativity to all organic (and perhaps inorganic) matter. Creativity is an adjunct to the life force generally and as such for humans it represents a fundamental cosmological principle necessary to the survival of all life forms and perhaps to the creative development of the entire uni(multi)verse.
- 2) ... the central role of creativity in moment to moment decision making in the lives of ordinary people. To live creatively is to live in the moment, also in an expansive/imaginative, empathetic, balanced, fearless way. Creative living, we hold, is the right of all human beings and should be nurtured in children from the earliest moments of their lives.
- 3) ... the central role of creativity in disarming individual life-negating habits and world-views and undoing life-negating ideologies that promote oppression and environmental destruction
- 4) --- the fact that any understanding of creativity that assists in blocking the nurturance of 'fundamental creativity', as well as the pursuit of 'creative living', in individuals and among social groups, is not a form of 'fundamental creativity' itself since it betrays the 'inter-relational integrity' associated with forms of fundamental creativity.
- 5) ... the idea that introducing 'fundamental creativity' into one's life, and promoting it in a nation's social institutions and social relations, can be viewed as a form of 'creative living' of great value to most people and to entire societies.

4. ON THE ROAD TO 'CREATIVE LIVING': THE CONCEPT OF 'AFFIRMATIVE DESTRUCTURING'

The term 'affirmative destructuring' needs to be introduced at this point since the concept and the processes it describes are implicit to expressions of what we are terming 'fundamental creativity'. The processes associated with 'affirmative destructuring' ...

- a) make visible social and cultural contexts impacting on individuals and groups that tend to be ignored, discounted, repressed, etc. by a range of sociopolitical elites;
- b) question and seek to disarm life-negating personal belief systems and habits, as well as oppressive social and cultural paradigms by way of energized, imaginative, empathic, playful, i.e. 'creative' actions and activities;
- c) use a range of creative activities and strategies to assist people to pursue 'creative living' via deeper relational connectedness/integrity, ongoing psycho-spiritual growth and personal authenticity;

d) assist individuals seeking to free themselves from the 'automated futures' they feel condemned to. i.e. they assist people to *visualize and manifest more positive futures - beneficial alternative worlds* - by helping them overcome feelings of powerless and an inability to change life situations, world-views etc. for the better.

e) are, on the whole, quickened by experiences of: nurturing/safety, empathy, friendship, physical well-being/health, freedom to play/experiment, feelings of connectedness to others/community/nature and expressive freedom. These represent pre-conditions for maximum progress since life energies and creative energies in a sense merge, thus providing the creative person with personal resources capable of triggering healing responses and positive change (key outcomes associated with affirmative deconstructing).

5. FUNDAMENTAL CREATIVITY AND SHADOW

Although we hold to a profoundly positive role for creativity in the lives of individuals and in relation to the cohesive functioning of social groups we do not want to give readers the impression that Zoetics is based on the kind of New Science/New Age populism frequently found in apolitical self-help books. Indeed, we hold to creativity's positive purpose precisely because we feel that the pursuit of 'fundamental creativity' implies a *transformative process* that often begins, like Jung's adaptation of spiritual alchemy to modern psychology, in the Nigredo (or *massa confusa* [L]) stage. Creativity is essential to individuals and communities because it has the capacity to free up and enliven stagnant, frozen or repressed psychic energy through the mobilisation of emotion, play, catharsis, symbolism, reflection, narrative, imaginative trying on of possible worlds/futures/pasts, etc. The creative process acknowledges shadow, trauma, repressed emotion etc. and then sets about transforming it.

This is a life-enhancing process if successful, but we need to remember that true creativity may come into its own precisely in the midst of trauma, limitation, oppression, inauthenticity, in a word: 'suffering'. The world *as is* no longer serves the needs of an individual or a group; something new needs to be birthed if people are to attain fullness of being. The liminal nature of creativity is due to its function of confronting this exhausted state - this potentially terminal state - and like the proverbial phoenix it makes something out of mere ashes - rides the air waves of anxiety, frustration, despair, stress, suffering, etc. until a breakthrough, something radically new/different, comes into the world. This is to say that 'fundamental creativity' often blossoms in a field of death, ruin or defeat, and is therefore easily blamed for, or confused with, the pre-existing suffering it seeks to address and ultimately transform.

In some cases the creative transformative process may fail - such is the nature of the world, in real life overcoming adversity is never guaranteed. The Zoetics approach to creativity accepts that sometimes even creativity cannot find a way through a personal or social block or problem etc. on the way to a new paradigm, perspective or way of being etc.

6. ZOETICS AND SPIRITUAL SYSTEMS, RELIGIONS, IDEOLOGIES AND LIFE PHILOSOPHIES

Zoetics and the concept of 'creative living' uncover energies at the very heart of our day to decision making/choices about how we live our lives. In this sense they clearly imply a philosophy of life. Unlike many philosophies, ideologies and religions, however, Zoetics sees spirit of exploration, acceptance of uncertainty, and love of novelty (key aspects of genuine creativity) etc. as central to creative responses to life challenges, problems/issues, etc. This approach represents one defence against authoritarian certainty, inflexibility and ideological rigidity. Our other main defence against dogmatic inflexibility, but also against novelty for novelty's sake, is the principle of 'relational integrity' - a concept based upon modern research into the differences between oppressive and life affirming relationships. These twin defences attempt to ensure that Zoetics remains non-prescriptive and anti-dogmatic, since in principle Zoetics suggests tools by which we try to select positive futures (i.e. futures that maximise relational integrity) whilst living fully in the moment. This approach means that Zoetics can accommodate any ideologies, life philosophies, spiritual systems and religious perspectives that promote relational integrity, freedom from oppression and creative living. In short: each person to their own path within these minimalist constraints.

REFERENCES AND SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

RECENT BOOKS ON CREATIVIYY, INSPIRATION, ETC.

The following books about creativity in life and in relation to cultural and scientific domains may be of interest to readers of this article. Please note we don't necessarily agree (partially or fully) with any of the views about creativity expressed in the following works - we do however feel that each of the thinkers listed below have added something to the field and have something worthwhile to say.

- Abraham, Ralph; McKenna, Terence; Sheldrake, Rupert; *Chaos, Creativity, and Cosmic Consciousness*
- Alexander, Victoria, N; *The Biologist's Mistress: Rethinking Self-Organisation in Art and Literature*
- Bergson, Henri; *The Life: Creative Evolution*
- Berk, Tjeu van den; *Jung on Art: The Autonomy of the Creative Drive*
- Berlin, Richard M; *Poets on Prozac: Mental Illness, Treatment, and the Creative Process*
- Brophy, Kevin; *Creativity: Psychoanalysis, Surrealism and Creative Writing*
- Cameron, Julia; *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*
- Cameron, Julia; *The Artist's Way for Parents: Raising Creative Children*
- Chavis, Geri Giebel; *Poetry and Story Therapy: The Healing Power of Creative Expression (Writing for Therapy or Personal Development)*
- Csikszentmihaly, Mihaly; *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*
- Csikszentmihaly, Mihaly; *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*
- Davies, Paul (editor) & Gregersen, Niels Henrik (editor); *Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics* (contributors: E McMullin, P Clayton, S Lloyd, H Stapp, J M Smith, T - W Deacon, B Koppers, J Hoffmeyer, H Rolston III, A Peacocke, K Ward, J F Haught & M Welker).
- Elias, Scott; *Origins of Human Innovation and Creativity*
- Esolen, Anthony; *Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child*
- Fletcher, Sally; *Music: Healing and Harmony*
- Forster, Julia; *Muses: Revealing the Nature of Inspiration*
- Hanson, Britt W; *Epigenetic Evolution: A Theory of Cultural Evolution Through Directed Creativity*
- Hershman, D. Jablow; *Manic Depression and Creativity*
- Jamison, Kay Redfield; *Touched With Fire: Manic Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*
- Jeffrey, Scott; *Creativity Revealed: Discovering the Source of Inspiration*
- Kaufman, James C. & Sternberg Robert J; *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (2010)

- Kaufman, James C. & Sternberg Robert J; *The International Handbook of Creativity* (2006)
- Lunn, Cheri; *Muse Power: How Recreational Music Making Heals Depression and Other symptoms of Modern Culture*
- Aisel, Eric; *Mastering Creative Anxiety: 24 Lessons*
- Marschark, Marc (Series Editor); *Creativity and Development*, OUP, 2003 (includes contributions by Sawyer, John-Steiner, Moran, Sternberg, Feldman, Nakamura & Csikszentmihaly).
- Matthews, Caitlin & Matthews, John; 'Druids and Vision Poets' especially pp. 203-37. Found in *Encyclopaedia of Celtic Wisdom*
- Mazza, Nicholas & Gladding, Samuel T; *Poetry Therapy: Theory and Practice*
- McAdoo, Patricia; *Writing for Wellbeing: Recovery and Self-Discovery*
- McCormack, Jon & d'Inverno, Mark; *Computers and Creativity*
- McNiff, Shaun; *Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul*
- Mithen, Steven; *Creativity in Human Evolution and Prehistory*
- Neumann, Erich; *Art and the Creative Unconscious (Four Essays)*
- Nettle, Daniel; *Strong Imagination: Madness, Creativity and Human Nature*
- Nussbaum, Bruce; *Creative Intelligence: Harnessing the Power to Create, Connect and Inspire*
- Pearce, Lucy H; *The Rainbow Way: Cultivating Creativity in the Midst of Motherhood*
- Perlin, Elliott; *Breaking Addictions with Biblio/Poetry Therapy*
- Power, Rachel; *The Divided Heart: Art and Motherhood*
- Raff, Jeffrey; *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination*
- Robinson, Ken; *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*
- Shlain, Leonard; *Art and Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time, and Light*
- Strehle, Susan; *Fiction in the Quantum Universe*
- Tharp, Twyla; *The Creative Habit: Learn it and Use it for Life*
- Thomas, Bonnie; *Creative Expression Activities for Teens: Exploring Identity through Art, Craft and Journaling*
- Ulanov, Ann & Ulanov, Barry; *The Healing Imagination*
- Ulanov, Ann; *Madness and Creativity*
- Weisberg, Robert W; *Creativity: Understanding Innovation in Problem Solving, Science, Invention, and the Arts*.

CLASSIC TEXTS, MANIFESTOS AND STUDIES ANNOUNCING MAJOR CREATIVE PARADIGM SHIFTS

The following list of select texts aims to give readers of this article and clients of the Zoetics Institute a reasonable grounding of the major 'paradigm shifts' in the arts and literature over the past 200 or so years. Discussion of major 'paradigm shifts' and personal assessment of where the individual artist/writer etc. stands in relation to these broad cultural developmetns belongs to Stage 3 (in particular) of the mentoring process - though even at Stage 2 some of this material will be relevant.

- Andrews, Bruce & Bernstein, Charles; (Editors); *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*
- Apollonio, Umbro (Editor); *Futurist Manifestos*
- Bachelard, Gaston; *The Right to Dream*
- Bachelard, Gaston; *The Poetics of Reverie*
- Bachelard, Gaston; *The Poetics of Space*
- Baudrillard, Jean; *The Conspiracy of Art*
- Bernstein, Charles; *The Politics of Poetic Form*
- Boorstin, Daniel J; *The Creators: A History of Heroes of the Imagination*
- Bove, Paul A (editor); *Early Postmodernism: Foundational Essays*
- Brennan, Bernadette; *Just Words?: Australian Authors Writing for Justice*
- Breton, Andre; *Manifestos of Surrealism*
- Brothie, Alastair & Matthews, Harry (Editors); *Oulipo Compendium*
- Current-Garcia, Eugene & Patrick, Walton, R; *Realism and Romanticism in Fiction*
- Dobrez, L A C; *The Existential and its Exits*

- Dube, Wolf-Dieter; *The Expressionists*
- Esslin, Martin; *The Theatre of the Absurd (3rd Edition)*
- Goldsmith, Kenneth; *Uncreative Writing*
- Graves, Robert; *The White Goddess*
- Graves, Robert; *The Black Goddess and Mammon*
- Green, Martin; *Prophets of the New Age: The Politics of Hope from the 18th through to the 21st Centuries*
- Hamilton, Hamish; *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*
- Hayes, N. Katherine; *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*
- Hedges, Chris; *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*
- Hedges, Chris; *Death of the Liberal Class*
- Knabb, Ken (Editor); *Situationist International Anthology*
- Motte, Warren F. Jr.; *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*
- Nowak, Mark; 'Notes Toward an Anti-capitalist Poetics II' & 'Radical Documentary Praxis (Redux)' in *American Poets in the 21st Century: The New Poetics*
- Perloff, Marjorie; *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*
- Perloff, Marjorie; *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*
- Richardson, Joanna; *The Bohemians: La vie de Boheme in Paris 1830-1914*
- Rothenberg, Jerome & Jorris, Pierre; *Poems for the Millennium* (Three Volumes - Vol 1: 'Fin-de-siecle to Negritude'; Vol 2: 'Postwar to Millennium'; & Vol 3: 'Romantic and Postromantic Poetry' [Rothenberg and Robinson, Jeffrey C Editors]). [Note: these three volumes contain Poetics statements from most of the major 'poetics' innovators since the 1790s].
- Stromberg, Roland N (editor); *Realism, Naturalism and Symbolism: Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, 1848-1914.*
- Tarnas, Richard; *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped Our World View*
- West, Shearer; *Fin de Siecle: Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty*
- Wilson, Colin; *The Outsider*