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Perspectives on Creativity

Johan Verbeke, Valentina Signore

Creativity is a word which we use a lot and which seems to have lots of positive connotations. While management schools have courses on creativity, the so called creative disciplines –schools of art, design and architecture– mostly do not teach specific courses on creativity. Artists, designers and architects are commonly considered to be creative people by definition: somehow, while being not taught about creativity, they become “creative”. The studio work is certainly the didactic format that in the most diverse faculties and schools of arts, design and architecture, helps developing a creative attitude directly engaging in the practice within a specific field.

Creativity is defined as “the ability to produce original and unusual ideas, or to make something new or imaginative”¹, “the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form”² or “the use of the imagination or original ideas, especially in the production of an artistic work”³.

Many books have been published on Creativity. Methods have been developed to stimulate creative thinking and processes. Guidebooks have been made which include methods and their specific qualities and when to use them. Although very valuable, the books seldom include testimonies from creative people themselves. And this is exactly what this book tries to do, bring together insights and experiences from creative people, how they deal with creative processes; how they experience it; what is needed to stimulate them; what helps to make creative leaps in their thinking; and how they find a creative solution after getting stuck; etc.

Ranulph Glanville was one of the prominent scholars which admired the unusual and the explorative. He was very much engaged in creative processes and in helping people to look for positive and surprising findings in all his conversations and explorations.

Already in 2000 Ranulph Glanville⁴ stated:

*“However, there are benefits in the loss of control: and these benefits strengthen our ability to believe in the centrality of our humanity. Some of these benefits are:
The requirement that we take responsibility for our (inter)*

*actions, including our own meanings and their making.
The requirement that we accept that there are possibilities beyond those we can imagine.
Therefore, the requirement that we may be surprised.
And that this surprise may lead to opportunities we did not imagine, enhancing our creativity by increasing the variety available to us. (We borrow from others.)
And the requirement that we keep an open mind.
And the requirement to keep an open eye for whatever opportunities may present themselves.
The requirement that we are generous (in our acceptance of the differences and surprises we receive through conversation in an unmanageable situation).
Therefore the requirement that we do not (unnecessarily) restrict possibilities, do not act as censors.
The requirement that we increase what is possible, and the choices that go with this.
Finally, the requirement that we accept error, and accept its occurrence as inevitable.
These are stated as requirements, but they are also opportunities and they give freedoms.
It is in these requirements that there lies a source for enhancing our creativity.”⁵*

Furthermore, in 2002 he wrote:

“Not to be in control can expand the options available to us, that is, allows us to be more creative. Yet our culture seems to value and promote control to the point where control can be extraordinarily destructive. In this article, I show that there are clear limits to what we can control, and great dangers when these limits are exceeded: that control is often misapplied so that it takes the form of restriction rather than effective management: and that there are advantages in reformulating how we understand the value of control to allow us often to benefit from being out of control.”⁶

These and many other of his ideas and understandings fed into the development of creative practice research at RMIT as well as the

1 Cambridge Dictionary: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/creativity>

2 Encyclopaedia Britannica <https://global.britannica.com/topic/creativity>

3 English Oxford Living Dictionaries <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/creativity>

4 Ranulph Glanville (1946-2014) was a scholar, cybernetician, design researcher, theorist, educator and multi-platform artist/designer/performer.

5 Glanville, R. (2000). The value of being unmanageable: Variety and creativity in cyberspace. In *The Black Box: Vol. I. Cybernetic circles* (pp. 521-531). Vienna: Edition Echoraum.

6 Glanville, R. (2002) On being out of control. http://www.mom.arq.ufmg.br/mom/arq_interface/3a_aula/on_being_out_of_control.pdf

research which developed at Sint-Lucas School of Architecture (now Faculty of Architecture, KU Leuven) since 2000. He also mentioned the work by Leon van Schaik at RMIT to the author which triggered him to visit Melbourne. Among the many things Ranulph did, he put one of the authors in contact for the first time with Leon van Schaik and with his pioneering work at RMIT: from there on started a fruitful collaboration whose impacts are manifold and still visible in the ADAPT-r project. It was the start of the collaboration between RMIT and Sint-Lucas.

The ADAPT-r way of developing research and creative practice simultaneously and inclusively, worked with practitioners who were active in a wide range of disciplines: architecture, design, arts, dance, fashion, music... It established a platform for sharing ideas and experiences; to learn from each other and the stimulate colleagues to go beyond the evident. It helped participants to find their voice: the PhD journey as a way to go a step further than just being creative.

Practitioners, supervisors and postdoctoral researchers involved in such a pioneering project are the authors of this book. Through their “practice based state of mind” the volume offers a wonderful view on creative processes and people, conditions for creativity, constraints, and interconnections. Next to this, the book displays an interesting array of different possible ways to look into the subject of Creativity.

Each of the seven Partner Institution invited some authors to contribute to their section. Each chapter mirrors a specific strategy: in some cases a common thematic was decided and explored through several perspectives on (i.e. the workplace by Aarhus School of Architecture) or a methodology (interviews with creative practitioners in KU Leuven’s chapter). The authors were left completely free to choose their entrance into the theme of creativity. This preface is a post-operam overarching chapter aiming at tracing back some files rouges. It reflects the ADAPT-r way to look at creative practice research from a meta-perspective: don’t impose any themes, category or restraint to the practitioners, but just look at what they actually, freely, do in order to trace out some of the possible connections, eventual recurrences and coincidences.

The overarching storyline for this book can be summarized as follows. Testimonies and experiences by creative individuals are the evidence (data) on which any insight and understanding of creativity should be build. Creative processes happen at a specific place in a specific context. These places act as traces of designers’ mental space and as triggers for creativity. Hence it is worth discussing

them and exploring their specificities. Furthermore, creativity is mostly limited by critical condition. They limit options or give a certain direction to thoughts. Furthermore, creativity seems not so much to happen on an island or ivory tower, it rather shows to happen in a responsive space between different entities. Creativity is in constant dialogue with its contextual framework. It is stimulated by creative triggers that come from public behaviours. It is evident that we need to develop and refine a specific language to discuss creativity: this is the enormous challenge tackled in the Glossary.

Chapter 1, Learning from a musician, a fashion designer, an architect and a dancer was developed at KU Leuven. The research group did choose the interview as a strategy to dig into the worlds of four creative people: a musician, a fashion designer, an architect and a dancer. These interviews highlight specific needs and attitudes of these venturous practitioners towards their creativity. The ideas and findings are valuable beyond the different disciplines, nationalities and personalities.

Chapter 2, Spaces of Creativity, was developed in Aarhus School of Architecture. The authors explore the workplaces both as traces of designers’ mental spaces and as triggers for creativity. The chapter tackles also the role of the broader spatial and cultural context, how they influence or challenge interactions between designers, collaborators, and clients. Three different approaches compose the picture of the chapter. The experienced researcher (ER) Anna Holder explores theories from Social Science and Humanities as reflected in Creative Practice Research; the doctoral fellow Siv Helene Stangeland (ESR) presents two drawings of hers and explores how the spatial contexts have influenced her relational design; finally a short photographic essay of workplaces of academic faculty members at the school by Claus Peder Pedersen lets the reader imagine the relation between the depicted working space and the creative process.

Chapter 3, Conditions for Creativity / Creative Practice was developed at University of Westminster. The group focuses on three main conditions for creativity and for Creative Practice. Katharine Heron focuses on the clients and the economy of Creative Industries, Maria Veltcheva reports on the restraints given by the commissions, using as a case study the Biennale di Venezia 2015, and finally Kester Rattenbury discusses the how Crits tacitly form an understanding of architectural design, of some fundamental yet mostly unspoken processes and principles at its base.

Chapter 4, Creativity in Practice: Practicing Creativity/ Conditions and Sentiments: contexts for creativity was developed at

the Glasgow School of Arts. The four heterogeneous contributions from the Glasgow School of Arts seem to place creativity in a responsive space between different entities: Laura Gonzales between the creative reader and a text, Robert Mantho between his own academic world and that of his collaborator Michael Wenrich, a practicing architect; Jo Croth and Ross Birrell explain the birth of their creative collaboration as a shared reaction to the fire which occurred at the Glasgow School of Art, finally the conversation between the architects Miranda Cameron and Robin Webster lets the reader grasp the nature of a fresh exchange of ideas, inputs, drawings.

Chapter 5, Politics for, in and through creative practice emerged from the Estonian Academy of Arts. The composite Estonian contribution places creativity in its constant dialogue with its contextual framework. Veronika Valk focuses on the challenges of Creative Practice Research in the regulatory context of the EAA; Michael Corr explores how his own practice has been influenced by the broader economic social and political context; the interviews with the artist Rosanne Van Klaveren and the architect-cybernetician-composer Ranulph Glanville explore respectively how through art/creativity one can relate and challenge the reality out there. Finally Karli Luik's exploration of his practice shows how to directly and creatively engage with a framework, starting with language.

Chapter 6, Public behaviours as triggers to creative practice research, was developed at University of Ljubljana. The chapter looks from three different standpoints at creative triggers that come from public behaviours in creative practice research. Tadeja Zupančič discusses regional research traditions, cultural differences, communication as triggers in creative practice research. Eli Hatleskog focusses on multiple and socially constructed knowledge in the ADAPT-r network; the PhD fellow Gitte Juul discusses how her nomadic model of practice actively engages with the diverse cultural and societal values of the different contexts in which she operates.

Chapter 7, Creative Practice Research Glossary, is authored by Richard Blythe and Marcelo Stamm from RMIT. It offers in six terms a condensed deposit of Creative Practice Research. Case Studies, Communities of Practice, Explanation of Methods, Public Behaviours, Tacit Knowledge, Transformative Triggers. The in-progress Creative Practice Research Glossary is a stratification of accumulated knowledge in 20 years of Creative Practice Research. Organically originated from the observation of Creative

Practice Research these terms were re-defined for the purposes of the ADAPT-r grant, have subsequently been further investigated by the post-doctoral researchers and continue to keep an open status. They are not normative but generative terms: their aim is to disclose possibilities within the singularities of the creative practices.

Authors approach the mysterious matter of creativity with very different methods: many choose to give voice to the creative practitioners themselves: either through the device of the interviews or with the direct accounts of their own creative work. Some bring visual traces of the creative process: photos, sketches, drawings and portraits. Some of those could be seen as performative demonstrations of creative actions.

Throughout the book we meet recurrent themes: such as *conditions for creativity*, (workplaces, spaces, tools, collaborations, contextual factors, such as social, economical and, political context). They are sometimes *constraints* that are turned into opportunities and *triggers* for the creative activity. We come back to the importance of interconnections, (with the network of human and non human entities with the creative community, the site, the landscape and human resources); We meet several references to attitudes: opportunistic *attitude* toward circumstances (Crotch, Birrell), a philosophy of life existential (Signore), honesty (Jo), the influence of personality traits (Zupancic). Sometimes the contribution directly contest some *false myths* about creativity: such as the creative hero genius (Holder), the creative space as a matter of office décor or space planning (Holder), the magic of inspiration (Heron), the gift of having a talent. Two of the interviewed people Ranulph Glanville and Akira Kasai, while they both struggle to be labelled under a creative profession, warn their interlocutor about the risk of reflecting and writing about creativity: they bring back the reader to the ungraspable nature of the creative act.