

# Literature Review As Creative Inquiry

## Reframing Scholarship As a Creative Process

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*In this article it is proposed that approached in the right way, literature reviews can be an opportunity for creative inquiry. The process of the literature review is framed as a participation in a community, a dialogue with those who are part of the community now and with one's "ancestors." The literature review can also explore the deeper underlying assumptions of the larger community or communities of inquiry one is joining and one's own beliefs, assumptions, and attachments. Three levels are proposed that each provide a different perspective on the construction of knowledge. The article concludes with a brief overview of the way inquiry, specifically in the context of the literature review, can also be an opportunity for self-inquiry.*

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The *attitudes* we adopt in carrying out our investigation shape the *attributes* we find in the world we investigate. (Tulku, 1987, pp. 63-64)

It has been my experience over the last 20 years or so that many students do not view literature reviews as one of the most exciting aspects of their academic work. In my experience, these students approach the literature review with what I call an attitude of "reproductive inquiry." Reproductive inquiry originates in an internalization of a certain kind of educational approach sometimes loosely referred to as "memorization and regurgitation." Some aspects of scholarship in particular lend themselves to be framed in this way, even if it is not explicitly requested by the faculty that this be the case. The literature review is an obvious

choice because it can be thought of as a simple enumeration of “who said what,” a regurgitation of names and ideas. This reproductive approach leads to reviews that are generally as deadly to read as they are to write.

One alternative way of framing the literature review, as a subset of the larger process of academic scholarship and inquiry, is through what I like to call “creative inquiry” (Montuori, 1998). A literature review can be framed as a creative process, one in which the knower is an active participant constructing an interpretation of the community and its discourse, rather than a mere bystander who attempts to reproduce, as best she or he can, the relevant authors and works. Creative inquiry also challenges the (largely implicit) epistemological assumption that it is actually possible to present a list of relevant authors and ideas without in some way leaving the reviewer’s imprint on that project. It views the literature review as a construction and a creation that emerges out of the dialogue between the reviewer and the field. As Maturana said, everything that is said, is said by *somebody* (Maturana & Varela, 1987), so we might as well come clean, fess up to it, take responsibility for what we’re doing, and be creative with it.

In this article I therefore want to propose a way of framing literature reviews that sees inquiry as a creative process that can take us increasingly deeply into the relationship between knowledge, self, and world. My approach will be to sketch several different aspects of the literature review, from participation in a community to interpretation of that community to inquiry as self-inquiry, and present them as dimensions of an overarching frame that is potentially more inviting to future reviewers—and their readers. For reasons of space I cannot give exhaustive treatments of all these different dimensions of a literature review, nor am I suggesting by any means that they should all be included in one single literature review. My hope is that, taken as a whole, these sketches will combine to offer a different way of framing literature reviews and that one or more of them may be used as an entry point into creative inquiry.

## Community Participation

A literature review is many things, but most obviously perhaps it is a surveying of the land in which we have chosen to travel and an acknowledgement of the major landmarks, such as key players and theoretical movements. It is also an entry point into our participation in this community of discourse (Huff, 1999). It tells the reader what our assessment of the discourse is, where we situate ourselves in that community, and, to some extent, who we are.

My experience has been that students approaching a literature review from the perspective of reproductive inquiry tend to see the authors and views being reviewed as “out there,” as disembodied works and positions, rather than as a living community with a history, motivations, passions, conflicts, alliances, errors, dead ends, and creative outbursts. If we see the literature review as participation in a community, then we can ask ourselves, who are these people who share the same

interests we have? What motivates them? And what motivates us in joining them? What is this inquiry that we are engaged in, seen through the broader scope of the history of this community? Why does this stuff matter—to me or to anyone?

Students, in my experience, have found it very useful to begin the literature review with a reflection on why they themselves are reviewing this literature. This can sometimes take the form of a personal intellectual history that addresses the motivations, the questions, and the passions that brought them to this point, and which can all too often get lost in what seem to be academic minutiae. I am also preparing an edited volume of autobiographical essays by leading thinkers in the area of systems thinking and have found that reading these essays can be quite inspirational for students who often have no idea about the lives and experiences of the people whose work they read, quote, and internalize.

We begin with an interest that may have been sparked, for instance, by our own personal experience intersecting with our reading of the work of one member of this community of inquiry. As we begin to explore one view, we come into contact with other members of the community. Soon enough, we find that like any community, or any family, there are alliances, friendships, arguments, long-standing feuds, and so on. Some of the members of our community may have views we believe to be deeply misguided, whereas some we may be in complete agreement with. It is worth keeping in mind the inspirational potential of views we disagree with. Sometimes it is precisely an author whose work we detest and are in complete and utter disagreement with who may motivate us to go deeper into an issue, write an article, challenge a position, and so on. We might view the literature review as our description of, and entry point into, our community, the beginning of our dialogue with “our people.” This is how we see and describe them and how we describe ourselves and our participation in this community.

## The Construction of Knowledge

Objectivity: the properties of the observer shall not enter into the description of his observations. Post-objectivity: the description of the observations shall reveal the properties of the observer. (Von Foerster, 1983, p. xviii)

Creative inquiry begins with the epistemological assumption that writing a literature review is a process that involves an active construction of knowledge by the reviewer. It is not just a passive listing of who said what when. Reviews that are written in that way actually mask a constructive and creative process.

A literature review involves a survey of the field and as such is an interpretation of that field by the reviewer. The reviewer decides what authors and theoretical positions to address, how much time to spend on a certain author or a certain theoretical perspective, what to include, and what to leave out of the review based on criteria of relevance. The review cannot be exhaustive: It is a map of the terrain not the terrain itself. A map is selective, highlighting some areas at the ex-

pense of others. There is only so much space available, and therefore decisions have to be made about what is and is not essential, in the context of the specific subject of the literature review itself.

The literature review therefore involves an active process of selection on the part of the reviewer that can literally be quantified in terms of how many pages or lines are spent on *X* and how many on *Y* and who is left out completely. This gives us an idea of how the reviewer frames the field. This framing is based on an interpretation of the field that affects, and is affected by, an interpretation of the individual authors. In the same way that the overall review involves a process of selection and distinction and inclusion and omission, based on the reviewer's implicit and explicit criteria, the discussion of individual authors also involves an interpretation. The reviewer is always presenting us with an interpretation of the authors in question, and this interpretation tells us as much about the reviewer as it does about the author being reviewed.

An awareness of the inherently creative potential in the process can create a real shift in perspective—it can make the literature come alive because it stops being a “thing” and transforms into a creative relationship. At this point, one also sees that one cannot escape being in dialogue with one's new community. If one assumes that one is not simply summarizing the work of others but is interpreting it, situating it in the context of the field, and that the audience for the work is that very community of inquiry, then one's perspective is quite different, and this is reflected in the students' work.

A literature review must also be seen in the context of its audience, which should preferably not be confined to the instructor. Assuming that the authors being discussed are also the *audience* of the literature review can contribute to making the process of actually writing the review more meaningful, livelier, and less of an academic exercise. It makes the literature review a dialogue, rather than an exercise in satisfying an instructor, which has to be the dullest frame for both parties involved. The literature review should be directed at “our” community or communities. It should address our ancestors, those who came before us and created the community of discourse, and those who engage it today. This, I believe, is a key difference between a reproductive and a creative approach to the literature review. In the former we are standing outside of the discourse, merely as somewhat disengaged observers, as bystanders describing the events and then reporting them to our faculty parole officer. In the context of creative inquiry, we are actively participating in the community; we are in the discourse and engaging in inquiry in that context. Both epistemologically and motivationally, this seems to me to be a far more satisfying approach.

No matter who actually ends up reading the work, it is important to always frame it as a document that will be read by the same authors we are discussing. Many if not all of the students I have come across who initially hold a reproductive view are also writing only for the instructor. They do not see their work reaching a broader audience, and their work is therefore limited and appears dutiful but never exciting. The literature review is not viewed as a “real” participa-

tion but merely a weak simulation for the purposes of satisfying a requirement. When their work is contextualized in the larger community, the nature of their assessments is infused with greater passion and insight, because it potentially becomes a direct communication with the authors being discussed.

Once students begin to see themselves in a dialogue with a community, I also encourage them to start thinking about publication as a means of direct participation in the discourse. This can be done through book reviews, which can emerge easily from reading some of the more recent publications and usually requires no more than a couple of pages. Articles drawn from the literature are also usually quite successful. Seeing one's work in print—and even responded to—establishes a positive feedback loop that motivates most students to move further into the direction of participation and publication.

## Going Deeper

Our way of knowing and acting in our world, continually reinforced by our cultural conditioning, has established a complex interlocking system. Everything—language, educational systems, economies, commerce, politics, and social institutions—is dependent upon everything else. Underlying this great superstructure are our concepts, beliefs, assumptions, values, and attitudes, which are linked together like an underground network of pipelines connecting across a vast continent. (Tulku, 1984, p. 66)

As we go deeper into our community, as we explore the literature further and begin to get the lay of the land, we can go also deeper into its roots. We can begin to explore the underlying assumptions of the various perspectives we encounter, go beyond an assessment of who said what to an exploration of the construction of knowledge, and become aware of the great underlying superstructure where “our concepts, beliefs, assumptions, values, and attitudes . . . are linked together like an underground network of pipelines connecting across a vast continent” (Tulku, 1984, p. 66).

For the sake of convenience I have differentiated three different levels of this “underground network.” The first level I want to address is the *disciplinary* perspective, where boundaries are set by the (sub-)disciplinary nature of knowledge. As an example, in very broad strokes, psychology—defined in loosely in dictionaries as the study of the human mind—has different underlying assumptions than sociology, generally described as the study of human societies. Psychologists generally assume that the individual is the unit of analysis, and sociologists in general assume that society is the unit of analysis. Within psychology, there are in turn subdisciplines. Phenomenological psychology has different assumptions than social psychology, for instance, all of which affects how they approach the study of creativity (Montuori & Purser, 1999).

The second level is the *cultural* level, pertaining to the different ways in which the subject in question is addressed across cultures. Social research in the United

States, Northern and Southern Europe, and Japan, for example, originates in different cultural contexts that leave their mark on the underlying assumptions of the researchers, and this shows up in interesting and informative ways (Hamptden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Comparing and contrasting these different cultural perspectives and approaches can shed light on our own way of doing things. As Adler (1975, p. 14) stated, "Transitional experiences, in which the individual moves from one environment or experience to another, tend to bring cultural predispositions into perception and conflict."

The third is the *paradigmatic* level, or the underlying organizational logic through which knowledge is constructed (Morin, 1991). The creation of separate disciplines that often do not communicate with each other is an example of the way knowledge has been organized at the institutional level. It reflects, or is isomorphic with, a certain way of thinking that is reductive and disjunctive (Montuori, in press). I will use my own research into the social dimensions of creativity to illustrate these three levels and to indicate how a literature review can be a starting point for an ongoing creative inquiry that opens up an increasing number of avenues for research.

Many years ago my interest in political psychology led me to review the literature on creativity. As I delved deeper into that body of knowledge, I was so excited to find this body of knowledge that I would eventually spend the next several decades exploring it and contributing to it. But I also soon realized something was missing. I had spent years as a professional musician, and my experience had naturally included a huge component of collaborative, group creativity, particularly because the music I played, and the music I liked, involved a lot of collective improvisation. But in the early to mid-1980s, the literature on creativity focused almost entirely on "person, process, and product" and did not seem to address group creativity or social factors at all (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Montuori, 1989; Montuori & Purser, 1995). The literature simply did not reflect my personal experience or the reality of collaborative creativity in music (e.g., jazz) or movie making, for instance, and focused instead on writers, painters, individual scientists, and others who worked alone. A reflection on the literature based on my own personal experience therefore allowed me to spot a gap in the research. I mention this to stress the importance of seeing the literature from the perspective of one's lived experience, rather than as a body of knowledge that is "out there" and fundamentally extraneous to our real life concerns. One can engage the literature as a "thing" out there that needs to be digested and regurgitated at the appropriate time or as a living dialogue in which one can bring all of one's lived experience, questions, and creativity.

What became even more interesting as I pursued my inquiry was that there existed this hole in the research at all. Why had there been so little study of creative collaboration and creativity in groups in the literature I was coming across, particularly given that many if not most of the creative processes society valued—from music making to movies to scientific laboratories—now involved collaborative activities? The fact that this was simply not addressed in psychology led me

to go beyond psychology, the dominant creativity literature; review the literature in a number of related areas; and eventually explore disciplinary, cultural, and paradigmatic factors (Montuori & Purser, 1999).

#### DISCIPLINARY FRAGMENTATION

The literature review on the subject of our inquiry may be addressed in a plurality of disciplines and subdisciplines. We can choose to stay within a discipline or subdiscipline or recognize this plurality of perspectives. In the latter case, we can use our exploration as an opportunity for investigation into the different ways in which these different (sub-)disciplines frame, conceptualize, and address our subject matter. The latter choice brings us into the field of cross-disciplinary or even transdisciplinary research and therefore presents its own unique challenges (Montuori, in press). Nevertheless, the rewards of such a gamble can be considerable.

When I began my inquiry, there were already many different subdisciplinary approaches to creativity within psychology, including phenomenological psychology, cognitive psychology, neuropsychology, social psychology, personality psychology, and experimental psychology (Montuori & Purser, 1995; Runco & Pritzker, 1999; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Each had a distinctive approach to creativity and its own community of inquiry and discourse. Even under the larger umbrella of psychology, it was unusual to see much contact between these different approaches to creativity.

Nevertheless, with some exceptions (Barron, 1999), for psychologists the individual was the fundamental unit of analysis (Sampson, 1977, 1988, 1989, 2000). Any approaches that did not focus on the individual would be seen by the discipline as essentially nonpsychological or even antipsychological. The power of these underlying disciplinary assumptions cannot be underestimated. In 1988 the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi, at that time already a major figure in creativity research, presented a systems model of creativity that emphasized the importance of social judgment. He pointed out that whether something or someone is creative or not is based on a judgment, and that judgment is made by somebody. In the arts and sciences, there are generally accepted arbiters of creativity—peers, reviewers, critics, and so on. In other words, Csikszentmihalyi argued, it was not enough to just study the creative person and the process going on between the creative person's ears. The social context where evaluations and judgments are made should also be included in a broader, more comprehensive view of creativity, focusing specifically on the domain (music, engineering, dance) and the field, or the gatekeepers who make the judgments regarding what is and what isn't creative.

Csikszentmihalyi was very aware of the extent to which this view was going against some of the fundamental assumptions of his discipline, and he was quick to add that this was not a "betrayal" of psychology in favor of sociology (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Disciplinary boundaries literally create boundaries to inquiry itself: What is not within the boundaries of the discipline is not a legitimate

area of inquiry. The disciplinary boundaries define what may or may not be studied. Clearly, some subjects, such as the social dimensions of creativity, can fall through the cracks and disappear in a no man's land of inattention in such a situation, because it's not clear that they "belong" in any particular discipline. What falls between the cracks can literally become a "blind spot."

A multidisciplinary perspective can help students see the many different ways in which a subject can be explored and can open up the inquiry for them by breaking down what might have become fixed disciplinary lenses. Although the dominant academic cultural discourse on creativity in the United States was in the field of psychology, a number of other disciplines had addressed the issue, ranging from anthropology to sociology to philosophy and even physics and biology. At times they used different terminology to refer to what was arguably the same phenomenon in different contexts and perspectives. In some cases, the term creativity was not even used. In philosophy, similar questions to the ones addressed by psychologists were being studied in the discourse on imagination. In business, creativity and innovation were key terms, whereas in sociology terms like change would often be indicators of creativity-relevant discussions. Different disciplines approached "creativity" from different perspectives and with different terminology (Montuori & Purser, 1999). Interestingly, there was again very little cross-referencing here. One could read a book on the history of creativity and imagination in philosophy and not come across a single reference from the considerable literature in psychology (Kearney, 1988)—and vice versa (Runco & Albert, 1990).

All the different approaches to creativity were informed by different underlying assumptions. They provided insights and findings, some of which could appear quite contradictory (Montuori & Purser, 1999). The real challenge then is to assess the various claims, explore if they can be integrated, and determine what their implications are—viewed as a whole and compared and contrasted. Expanding the literature review beyond a single discipline is a potentially important move that allows us to compare and contrast different approaches to the same subject—and indeed different interpretations of what that subject actually "is." It also forces us to move to what I have called a "meta-paradigmatic" level of inquiry, which explores the underlying assumptions of the different disciplinary approaches to a subject and the way those differing approaches interact (Montuori, in press).

#### CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Cultural factors play a role in how knowledge is constructed in any particular discipline. The participants of communities of inquiry contribute to the bodies of knowledge of the communities in which they participate. Communities tend to have their own specialized journals and conferences, which most members of the community are aware of. We have already seen how different disciplinary worlds exist, often with fairly rigid boundaries. The cultural level addresses the differences at the national level, affected by different cultural backgrounds and by



language. Different countries have different journals, conferences, and bodies of knowledge, and although in some cases the journals and conferences in English, which is now the lingua franca of academia, ensure that there is some shared consensus on key issues, players, and movements, there are in fact any number of country-specific and language-specific authors and discourses that remain in that country because of the vagaries of what gets and what does not get translated into English. We must therefore remember that a literature review is never exhaustive and is never “total.” It is always relative to what is available for us to read in the languages we have mastered.

Culture undoubtedly influences research orientations and approaches. Cross-cultural psychologists have shown that different countries have different approaches to explanation and justification, what constitutes effective inquiry, reasoning, and a good argument (Hall, 1976; Nisbett, 2003; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). In other words, cultural background has an impact on how we think, how we approach problems, and also what issues we address. In the United States, the view that the individual is central to the study of creativity and that everything else—social factors, for instance—is “epiphenomenal” is part and parcel of both psychology, the dominant discipline in the study of creativity, and American culture, where the individual is viewed as the quantum of society. Here the review of the literature led me to study cultural differences in the study of creativity.

American culture and American individualism stress the individual as the unit of analysis (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Sampson, 1977; Slater, 1991; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). A cultural tendency to reinforce the value of the individual also downplayed the role of groups and sociohistorical conditions. Because much of the creativity research in English was conducted by Americans, it is not surprising that their research orientation reflected dominant cultural values. Culture clearly plays a role in shaping how we approach a particular subject, and cross-cultural comparisons can be very useful in helping us to see precisely those assumptions we take most for granted and may therefore remain unquestioned.

An overview of cross-cultural literature shows that in Europe and Japan, cultures with much less pronounced individualism or, in the case of Japan, collectivism (Hampden-Turner, 1995; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2001), historically much more attention has been paid to creativity in groups and to cultural context (Lubart, 1990; Ludwig, 1992). We also find that the individual is by no means always the unit of analysis. In both France and Italy it is actually sociologists like Latour, Alter, De Masi, and Melucci who have made some extremely interesting contributions to the field (Alter, 2003; De Masi, 2003; Latour, 1996; Melucci, 1994). Tatsuno has reviewed Japanese discourse and practices of creativity and shown that they are, not surprisingly, far more focused on collaboration and group efforts (Tatsuno, 1990). It is also interesting to note that in the United States, psychology is much more prominent as a discipline than sociology, whereas in France and Italy, sociology is quite prominent. Comparing the literature on creativity cross-culturally shows important differences in the way cre-

activity is conceptualized. An awareness of these different perspectives opens up the possibility for new avenues of research and indeed highlights some of the cultural blind spots in research. Again, the question arises on several levels whether it is possible to reconcile the positions, what differences may mean, what an integration might mean, and so forth.

The cultural level also allows us to reflect on our own culture, to explore the degree to which we ourselves are a product of our culture, and to address our attitude toward other cultures. The attitudes can range broadly from a feeling of Western superiority, to an idealization of a “mystical east” seemingly imbued with everything the West is lacking, to a hatred of modernity—all opportunities to inquire and dialogue about beliefs, assumptions, and alternatives.

#### THE (META-)PARADIGMATIC LEVEL

So far our plunge into the literature review has taken us to a plurality of disciplinary perspectives, each with its own underlying assumptions, and an awareness of how different cultures embrace different issues and approaches. Now we are faced with a plurality of approaches, definitions, and research programs, each with its own underlying “paradigm” or set of assumptions. How does one make sense of the complexity of this multidisciplinary, multicultural pluralism?

Morin has argued that in the West, the underlying logic with which knowledge is organized has been reductive and disjunctive (Morin, 1990, 1991, 2005). In the case of creativity research, we can see this in the way that various disciplinary approaches have gone deeper and deeper into specialized “silos.” They have generally excluded other perspectives, frameworks, and discourses from their work. In other words, disciplines and subdisciplines have focused increasingly on questions within their domains, without explicitly connecting to other research literatures, thereby separating themselves from other disciplines and subdisciplines to promote their own unique identities (Thompson Klein, 1990; Wilshire, 1990). In the case of creativity we can see subdisciplines focused one level of analysis, whether it be hemispheric lateralization or personality or cognitive or motivational factors, and so on, at the exclusion of others.

Disciplinary fragmentation has created a series of closed systems in which researchers pursue their part of the puzzle largely in isolation of other work (Morin, 2001; Thompson Klein, 1990; Wilshire, 1990), as my review of the literatures on creativity demonstrated (Montuori, 1989). This is true even in subdisciplines of psychology and becomes more glaringly obvious when we are addressing sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and so on. Along with this reductive tendency, there is also the tendency toward disjunctive or oppositional thinking.

Simonton showed how in the West there have been two predominant approaches to creativity: the lone genius and the zeitgeist (or “spirit of the times”) (Simonton, 1999). The lone genius approach holds the individual to be the unit of analysis, whereas the zeitgeist approach sees society as the unit of analysis. For the former, society is epiphenomenal, and the important thing is the nature of the

individual genius. For the latter, the individual is epiphenomenal, and society is key: The individuals are just contingent vehicles through which the zeitgeist manifests. These two positions represent, in broad strokes, psychological and sociological, atomistic and holistic positions, and they have a long tradition of opposition in the history of ideas (Fay, 1996).

Atomism and holism are two ways of thinking about the fundamental unit of analysis in society, two ways in which person–other relationship manifests in societies, in the form of individualism and collectivism (Sampson, 2000) and also two different ontologies. As Fay showed, these two positions have been polarized in a way that reflects oppositional or disjunctive thinking (Fay, 1996). Essentially this means that the historical debates have been between proponents of one view or the other, fueled by an either/or, oppositional logic.

At the paradigmatic level, therefore, we're moving from *what* is being thought and written about to *how* we're thinking about it and how the relationship between different and often conflicting positions is envisioned and organized. Here we address not just the fundamental assumptions underlying various perspectives on, in this case, creativity, such as atomism and holism, but how we understand the relationship between those perspectives, and how they interact. With a disjunctive logic, we see that these perspectives are usually seen in opposition to each other, and it becomes hard to “think them together.”

For purposes of our literature review, we see how the different research strands, the different positions that have emerged over time, have interacted. What is the nature of the relationship between the different views we are encountering? What are the organization principles of the collective field? We also see how, in the case of my interest in the group and social dimensions of creativity, the oppositional nature of the two main camps (individual vs. society, atomism vs. holism) and the disciplinary dominance of one camp (the psychological/atomistic) supported by the cultural tendency to valorize individual agency over collective agency led to the obscuration of group and social factors in creativity.

The (meta-)paradigmatic level has led us deeper into the history of ideas and the way that contrasting views have interacted over time. It leads us to time-honored questions that form the heart of philosophy, such as the relationship between the individual and society, to the underlying way in which we think and organize knowledge and the effect these key issues have on us today. It has in fact been my contention that some of the main reasons why the social aspects of creativity, including group creativity, have not been the subject of much research in the United States is precisely because of disciplinary fragmentation and boundaries, cultural assumptions regarding the primacy of the individual, and the paradigmatic issues such reduction and disjunction, which in the United States manifest as the polarization of individual and group and individual and society (Montuori & Purser, 1995).

Addressing this (meta-)paradigmatic level also offers us the opportunity to explore alternative ways of addressing these age-old oppositions, such as the indi-

vidual/society opposition outlined by Simonton. Different ways of conceptualizing and thinking about the relationship of such traditional oppositions as individual/society and part/whole at the (meta-)paradigmatic level offer the possibility of creating new approaches to specific issues. The paradigmatic level of the literature review, therefore, gives us an insight into some of the deeper underlying or metaphysical assumptions that are made in the various perspectives on a subject and provides us with the opportunity to explore the implications of different frameworks, including recent efforts to go beyond the dichotomization between self and society. In the case of creativity, systems approaches have been used, for instance, to suggest ways of going beyond the individual/society dichotomies (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Montuori & Purser, 1999).

I am not suggesting that every literature review should necessarily dig this deeply into the underlying assumption of the field(s) being addressed. But even if we do not choose to dive deeply into the disciplinary, cultural, and (meta-)paradigmatic levels of our inquiry, I think it is important to stress that they are there and that the literature we are reviewing is potentially far more than a series of "who did what when." My point is to invite a view of the literature review as an opportunity to explore a tremendously rich and interconnected network of people, ideas, works, and events and potentially begin an ongoing inquiry into the assumptions that underlie the fields we are researching where if anything we run the risk of falling down a rabbit hole rather than being bored. Where this inquiry will lead us is unknown—and that is precisely what makes the process exciting. As Tarthang Tulku stated:

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. (Tulku, 1987, p. 271)

## Implicit Theories

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. (Tulku, 1984, p. 69)

An attitude of reproductive inquiry toward the literature review can itself offer a wonderful opportunity for exploring implicit assumptions about scholarship, identity, and creativity. What does our attitude to the literature review tell us about the way we approach knowledge and innovation and our beliefs about scholarship and creativity? What does it tell us about our role, participation, and contribution in our community of inquiry? In the beginning, I was simply frustrated when I came across students who questioned the value of the literature re-

view. Now I'm beginning to see it as an opportunity to dialogue about the student's views on knowledge, originality, scholarship; about the threat of anti-intellectualism (Hofstadter, 1966); and about the larger question of the way scholarship is understood and practiced, leading in fact to this essay, an attempt to broaden the discourse on the subject.

### CREATIVITY AND ORIGINALITY IN INQUIRY

The goal of the doctoral dissertation is ostensibly to make an original contribution to the field. Even if one is not engaged in doctoral studies, creative inquiry stresses the potential for originality and creativity in the very process of academic scholarship itself. Interestingly, the nature and process of academic originality and creativity are not often the subject of discussion in academic contexts (Guetzkow, Lamont, & Mallard, 2004). The literature review plays a particularly interesting role vis-à-vis originality and creativity. The "mythology" of creativity and originality in the West, and particularly in the United States, is deeply infused with the notion of "genius without learning" (Wittkower, 1973), which proposed the notion of the "natural genius" who does not need study, exposure to the works of others, or craftsmanship. "A star is born," after all, not made. I have often encountered students who are concerned that an immersion in the works of others will somehow hinder or block their creativity. The fear is that they will somehow lose their original ideas when exposed to the work of others.

This reaction to the literature review itself offers an opportunity to explore the student's "implicit theories" of creativity, where they come from, how they manifest, and how they may manifest larger societal and cultural myths about creativity. What kinds of "knowledge" are these implicit theories? Where do these beliefs originate? How are they reflected in our experience, and what does research tell us about them? At what times is it appropriate to step back and nurture our own ideas, and when is it necessary to immerse oneself in the work of others?

I am always surprised by how often students admit to me that they do not feel like they are creative. They also feel that the expression of creativity is ultimately confined to the arts, and the occasional scientist, but generally not "academic" inquiry. Although I don't want to encourage a shallow "everything is beautiful in its own way" view of creative ability and production, a reflection on the nature of the creative process offers students the opportunity to develop and express their own creative potential in a realistic way and within the context of thoughtful, passionate, and scholarly inquiry.

Exploring implicit theories of scholarship and originality also allows us to study alternative views that have emerged through the more than 5 decades of research on creativity. In jazz, for example, commonly considered to be one of the "freest" or least constrained art forms, great innovators like Charlie Parker learned the solos of Lester Young and other notable predecessors by heart. Parker was able to learn from and integrate the work of earlier players to come up with his own unique style. In his early recordings, Ray Charles, later possessed of one of the most unique and instantly recognizable voices in soul music if not 20th

century music, sounded like a cross between Nat King Cole and Charles Brown, two artists he admired tremendously. Originality in this case emerged from a process that included imitation. A reflection on our own development in the context of the extensive research on creativity can lead us to a much more complex picture of the origin of originality and the nature of creativity and can address students' (potentially limiting) beliefs and assumptions on the subject. It also allows us to study the creative process of members of our community through biographies and studies from the creativity literature.

The traditional elimination of the inquirer from the process of inquiry in favor of objectivity, laws, and rationality has led to a somewhat sanitized view of science and inquiry. Social science and philosophy have clearly differentiated between the process of discovery, with all its contingent, fuzzy, creative, intuitive, ambiguous work, and the justification of the position that emerges as a result of that process of discovery (Kaplan, 1964; Popper, 2002). In the process of scientific discovery, the creative act was held to involve no logical method and as such was best left alone—or rather relegated to psychologists. What was really important and could be subjected to logical analysis was the testing of any new idea. This also reflects the bias now prevalent in much of education: We learn about theories and movements, we learn about X's theory and Y's theory, but we hear about them as finished theories, as complete works. We are rarely given insights into the creative process of the people whose works we are reading and theories we are studying. We don't hear about the emotions, the passions, the values, the flashes of inspiration, not to mention the politicking, the competitiveness, and the occasional outsized egos. All of that remains obscured, and sometimes it seems as if the science of genetics and the double helix and the fierce intellectual and interpersonal struggles and competitiveness of Crick and Watson are two separate worlds rather than part of one larger system of human activity. This interpersonal messiness is not the province of scientific inquiry, or at least so we are led to believe until we witness our first faculty meeting (Wilshire, 1990). We never really hear about the people, their lives, their contexts, and their struggles. This is something for biographies, typically written by journalists, not academics. And yet just as the political and interpersonal dimension is clearly a part of the reality of joining any academic community, so is the creative process, arguably the most exciting aspect of science (Mitroff, 1974).

This splitting of discovery and justification has paralleled an unfortunate polarization of imagination and intellect. If the philosophy of science rejected the unruly imagination, the other side of the coin has been a rejection of the intellect by some well-meaning champions of the imaginative, culminating perhaps in the "left-brain/right-brain" craze of the 1970s and 1980s, when apparently it was widely believed that creativity somehow "lived" in the right brain and could be fostered through a handy commissurotomy.

In the traditional parthenogenic view, knowledge emerges through an objective, logical, theoretical, factual, and universalizing process. This admittedly broad and somewhat caricatured overview of key characteristics that founded the

bedrock of academic standards until the emergence of postmodern approaches (Rosenau, 1992) does give us an insight into some of the factors that contribute to the perspective shared by some students that traditional academic inquiry is a particularly sterile and dispassionate process. They are not wrong, in the sense that a concerted effort has been made to present inquiry as exactly that—sterile and dispassionate. It is not surprising then that students feel their accounts of inquiry in the literature review should be equally dispassionate and boring.

For those interested in a more complex view of inquiry, there is a remarkable challenge ahead, not least of which is reintegrating the creative process, with all its passion and serendipity and subjectivity and transgressiveness, into academic inquiry. A literature review offers us the opportunity to truly immerse ourselves in the reality of the creative process, the experience of the individuals (to the extent that there is available information, of course), their social context, and the interaction of individuals, ideas, movements, social and political trends, and so on—what Barron called the ecology of creativity (Barron, 1995).

The literature review therefore offers an opportunity to address the issue of originality in academic inquiry and the complex relationship between innovation and tradition, originality and grounding, in the field and in our own practice of scholarship. If we are to develop an original voice in academia, in terms of both form and content, then it seems essential to know who we are and what we want to say. Developing one's voice is a creative process and as such gives us another reason to immerse ourselves in the creativity of inquiry and into the nature of the creativity.

#### DIALOGUING AS/AND SELF-INQUIRY

A literature review is, among other things, an opportunity for dialogue with others who share our interests. Through this dialogue we can learn about others and their views and also about who we are; about our own beliefs, assumptions, values, and preferences; and about who we are in the context of the community we have chosen to participate in. Where do we situate ourselves in this community? Who am "I," in this context?

When we begin our exploration we can see how our implicit, naïve theories about a subject may well situate us squarely in one of the many camps in the literature. We may find that our views correspond quite closely to one of the major or minor streams of thought we review. But exposure to other, perhaps contradictory strands of research can increase the complexity of our view. We are then exposed to critiques of the theories that are the formal, academic version of our implicit views. We can see how our views may be critiqued and/or expanded in the context of the larger historical debates. The view we identify with or feel closest to will, in all likelihood, have been the subject of criticism and controversy. Certain aspects of the position may have changed over time, integrating criticisms or hardening as a result, increasingly defining themselves in opposition to the critics or to the opposing position (Diesing, 1992; Morin, 1991).

Many students come to see that there are some interesting contradictions in their perspectives. One very familiar contradiction is a view of the world as systematically interconnected and interdependent, coupled with a very atomistic, “lone genius” view of creativity where the social environment is if anything a hindrance to the individual creative. Initially students struggle to reconcile the two views and then see the opportunity for more complex, ecological perspectives that do not privilege the individual at the expense of the social or vice versa but see the two as dynamically interconnected levels of a larger phenomenon (Baron, 1995; Bateson, 2002; Hampden-Turner, 1999).

The recognition of this pluralism may lead to a more complex view that recognizes a plurality of perspectives that in some cases may be very different from ours (Perry, 1998). We can learn from these critiques: They may lead us to abandon our view if we agree with them, or we may simply strengthen our argument either by rebutting them or by incorporating their arguments and developing a more solid view that addresses the weaknesses of our original naïve view. And of course, even with exposure to different perspectives, we may find that on reflection, we still wish to stick to our guns. The crucial difference is that now we’ve had a chance to reflect on our view and are not holding it uncritically.

## Psychodynamics of Inquiry

The object in being known reflects the interpretive structure that knows it; the subject in knowing the object is modified by the object it knows. (Tulku, 1987, pp. 423-424)

A literature review is an opportunity for self-observation and self-inquiry. Our approach to the inquiry itself, our conceptualizations of inquiry and creativity and their effect on our self-understanding, our selection of authors, the extent to which we privilege one author or position over an author—all these aspects of a literature review offer opportunities for understanding ourselves better and for a deeper understanding of how the self is implicated in the process of inquiry.

Our emotional reactions to authors and approaches can lead to interesting insights into the inquiring self. We find that some authors appeal to us greatly, whereas others may be boring or irritating or even may arouse our anger. We can observe and investigate our reactions to the readings and use them as opportunities for self-inquiry, to understand why in some cases we do experience strong reactions—or “weak” reactions such as nodding off. Why do we disagree with one author, no matter how outrageous his or her views, remaining relatively unperturbed, and yet find another one who drives us crazy for no apparent reason? What are the dynamics of projection, introjection, and so on that emerge in our interaction with authors, positions, and methodologies? What do they tell us about ourselves, our biases, and our beliefs? How do personal issues, unrelated to the specific book we are addressing, come into play?



The larger point is that sometimes we have disproportionate reactions (not just irritation but anger, boredom, annoyance) with some works for personal reasons, because they trigger reactions in us that can, if noted and followed, lead us into new, personal explorations and transformations. Our own triggers may have little or nothing to do with the actual content of the work or can sometimes be a product of the way the work is presented or the author's voice. Psychodynamic approaches to inquiry provide a rich source of tools for self-reflection and self-inquiry and are one way to open the door for psychological insight and transformation in the context of academic work (Bachelard, 2002; Devereux, 1968; Maslow, 1969).

A broader, more philosophical issue emerges with the introduction of the knower into the inquiry. Once we recognize all inquiry as an opportunity for self-inquiry, we come to the question, what is the nature of the self I am inquiring into? Do we recognize an emotional, a spiritual dimension beyond the traditional rational self of *homo academicus*? If so, what are the implications? What are the spiritual dimensions of inquiry? Who is the "I" that is inquiring? To what extent is the knowledge we are presenting functioning to maintain the self's story of self-identity? How is the "acquired" knowledge used? Does it serve mainly as a way to strengthen my ego, to engage in battle with others? Does it challenge our own personal assumptions, beliefs, and deeply held views of the world—and of ourselves? How is our identity tied into our quest for knowledge—our focus on knowing (Tulku, 1987)? If inquiry is a central aspect of at least some major approaches to self-understanding and spiritual development, then academic inquiry can be viewed as a subset of this larger inquiry, one that can provide us with plenty of grist for the mill.

## Conclusion

Historically there has been a tension and even an opposition between movements stressing the importance of rigorous scholarship and academic foundations and more humanistic approaches that stress the individuality, creativity, and transformation of the learner. My belief is that this is an unnecessary opposition. Particularly pernicious is the view—often held in both camps—that the basic foundations of scholarship, including the dreaded literature review, are the spinach of the academic world, creating an unfortunate attitude of "it's good for you, so get on with it and look forward to dessert." Academic scholarship, and even those aspects that seem to be most pedestrian, can be framed in a way that recognizes the creativity of the inquirer, of the inquiry process, and of the subject being investigated.

My intention in this article has been to show that, approached in the right way, literature reviews can be an opportunity for creative inquiry. I have framed the process as a participation in a community and as a dialogue with those who are part of the community now and those whom we can consider our "ancestors."

The literature review can also explore deeper underlying assumptions of the larger community or communities of inquiry we are joining, and I have proposed three levels that each provide a different perspective on the construction of knowledge. I concluded with a brief overview of the way inquiry, specifically in the context of the literature review, can also be an opportunity for self-inquiry.

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