Creative Flows: Constructions of Meaning Between Binary Oppositions, Paradoxes and Common Sense

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Abstract

Is it possible to construct a stable discursive field of the term 'creativity'? Does the construction of its meaning follow a conventional route, as with other words, or does it constitute an exception? Do creativity professionals construct meanings close to or far from common sense? What are the relationships between the term creativity and the terms freedom, constraint, routine, and innovation?

Starting from the above questions, this empirical research examines the construction of meaning of the term 'creativity' in an attempt to capture aspects "that people tend to share and take for granted, generating both recurrent patterns and variations" (Spillman, 2022, p. 24). By analysing interviews with 27 professionals working in creative and/or innovative fields, the research identifies stereotypes, rituals, binary oppositions, and paradoxical expressions present in the discursive fields of the interviewees.

While scholars of the subject classify the term 'creativity' by means of stable and consistent definitions, professionals actually working in the creative fields come up with ambiguous, contradictory, and paradoxical definitions. With a few exceptions, the definitions recorded during the interviews are similar to common sense phrases found in the collective imagination. Creative practitioners use the same repertoires and discursive fields as everyone else and augment the rhetorical narrative of the term. Paradoxes, oscillations between polarities and ambiguous definitions given by professionals working in the creative fields show "the emerging properties that relate symbols, phenomena, contexts and people" (Donati, 2022, p. 317).

Keywords: ambiguity, creativity, binary opposition, paradox, common sense, stereotype.

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1. Introduction: research questions, methodology and interview outline

Cognitive processes related to learning, sense-making, perception, and attention are peculiar to human beings. Cultural sociologists (DiMaggio, 1977; Santoro and Sassatelli, 2009), psychologists (Simonton, 1999) and neuroscientists (Larson, 2010) agree that these processes are based on "systems of categories and classifications oriented by binary oppositions or dichotomies" (Spillman, 2022, p. 41)

After all, general linguistics has also based its analysis on dichotomous pairs such as diachrony-synchrony, syntagma-paradigm (Lepschy, 1992).

In the sociological field, Durkheim (1912) anticipated the perspective of dichotomous classification[1], considering the classification system as an essentially social process.

The systematic classification of concepts, processes, and objects on the one hand implies belonging to a specific order, and on the other "includes the rejection of extraneous elements" (Douglas, 1993, p. 77). For example, if the concept of 'purity' implies juxtapositions with words such as 'whiteness', 'goodness' and 'transparency', at the same time it is opposed to the words 'dirty', 'perverse' and 'bastard'. Contemporary sociologists specializing in the analysis of discourse, identify the presence of 'persistent binary codes' that constitute the structural bases of the meaning construction of discursive fields (Bourdieu, 1979; Wuthnow, 1989; Alexander and Smith, 1993).

However, there are terms that are perceived by social actors as exceptions to categories and conventions (Becker, 1982).

We speak, in this case, of the term 'creativity'. Melucci (1994) defines creativity as an ambiguous container of social, organizational, and psychological dimensions: "in societies that make change their reason for existence and that produce innovation at rates incomparable to any previous human culture, creativity seems to take shape not as a circumscribed scientific object, but as a cultural container (...) with boundaries that are not always defined" (Melucci, 1994, p. 13). Whenever this term is used to justify an individual action, it not only formats the social, but also provides a second-order description of how social worlds should be formatted (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991).

On the one hand, the term 'creativity' is defined based on binary codes; on the other hand, it is defined by the professional practices that produce creative acts, objects, and behaviours.

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[1] He anticipates some observations that Ferdinand De Seaussure systematizes in his 1916 work "Course in General Linguistics".

In the specific case of the word creativity, subjects elaborate meanings from the dichotomous pairs of diachrony-synchrony (i.e., between meanings that are stable over time and meanings that change according to historical context or contingent trends) and syntagma-paradigm (in the former case, subjects construct repertoires of meaning by seeking denotations that resemble each other; in the latter case, they construct associations and metaphorical chains of meaning that enrich the term under consideration with additional connotations).

The definitions given theoretically by scholars of the subject seem stable, albeit with due distinctions with respect to the paradigms of reference. In fact, examining the best-known theoretical definitions of the creative process at the basis of important strands of research in sociology and psychology, we find:

- *Creativity as a social dimension.* La Rosa (1977) emphasised the potential of collective spontaneity as a spark of social creativity. Lewis Feuer (1969), Alfonso Montuori and Ronald Purser (1997) focused on the economic and cultural variables that allow some eras to be more creative than others. De Masi (2003) considers creativity an emergent process in collaborative organisational structures based on teamwork. In *L' Emozione e la Regola* (1989), he presents examples of creative groups: from the Thonet House to the Bauhaus; from the Bloomsbury intellectuals to the Vienna Philosophical Circle; from the Pasteur Institute to the Via Panisperna group. The author shows how functional the group is to the creative process, to a greater extent than the individual dimension.

- *Creativity as a set of characteristics of a personality.* Personality psychologists identify the characteristics that a person should have in order to be called a creative person. Such studies develop models that enable creative people to be distinguished from non-creative ones. Author such as Guilford (1950) belongs to this strand.

- *Creativity as a set of steps that trigger it.* Authors such as Osborn, inventor of brainstorming, (Osborn, 1953), De Bono, inventor of the six-hat method (1991) and Munari (1977) elaborate models, phases, and techniques necessary to trigger creativity that enable an explorative, generative, or transformative pathway (Klein, 2022).

- *Creativity as social persuasion.* According to Simonton (1999), an individual is considered creative when he or she is able to impress others. The creative person can be compared to a leader who has authority but needs consensus to assert his ideas.

- *Creativity as a contrast to conformity.* Creativity is defined as the antithesis to normality (Crutchfield, 1962).

- *Creativity as truth, generalization, and surprise.* Bartlett (1958) argues for the necessity of these three characteristics in order to be able to speak of creative contribution.

In contrast to previous theoretical definitions, the constructions of meaning given by professionals are more confusing and ambiguous. In my academic journey, I examined the creative process from multiple perspectives by identifying theories, models and techniques developed by scholars from different disciplines[2]. But this path lacked definitions of professionals who actually work in creative and/or innovative environments.

This empirical research fills this gap by investigating the process of constructing meaning of the term creativity with such interlocutors, trying to capture the aspects "that people tend to share and take for granted, generating both recurrent patterns and variations" (Spillman 2022, p. 24).

This empirical research examines the process of constructing the meaning of the term 'creativity' on the basis of three questions:

- Is it possible to construct a stable discursive field of the term 'creativity'?
- Does the construction of the meaning of this word follow a conventional route as with other terms or does it constitute an exception?
- Do creativity professionals construct meanings close to or far from common sense?

Through interviews with twenty-seven professionals working in creative and innovative fields, we want to investigate the stereotypes, rituals, binary oppositions and contradictory or paradoxical semantic dimensions generated by the interlocutors. The intention is to show that the term 'creativity' is not an exception. Categories of meaning operate through implicit conventions.

The very definition of creativity as an 'exception' represents a definition of common sense; and it is precisely behind this 'official designation of common sense' (Bourdieu 1979) that the consolidated symbolic power of dichotomous

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[2] S. D'Alessandro: *Towards a Sociology of Innovation Ecosystems: Decision-Making under Uncertainty between Social Construction and Bounded Rationality,* Italian Sociological Review Vol. 12 (3), 2022; S. D'Alessandro: *Creative Action and Organisation. Towards a Reflexive Sociology of Serendipity.* Cambridge Scholar Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne (2021); S. D'Alessandro: *Creatività nei sistemi locali,* in Spedicato Iengo E., Travaglini F., Di Stefano O. (a cura di), *Ripensare il territorio. Percorsi e strategie per la rivalutazione dei beni collettivi locali,* Franco Angeli, Milano, 2016; S. D'Alessandro: *The Systemic Value of Creativity* in Nuova Atlantide, Rivista di Scienze della Natura, Umane e della Complessità n. 1, XXVII (2012); S. D'Alessandro: *Creatività: normalissima improbabilità? Per un dialogo sociologico tra problema e soluzione,* Aracne, Roma, 2010.

codes that use words as an instrument of social, cultural, and linguistic 'distinction' is concealed.

Although relationships between dichotomies are examined in the research, the chosen methodology excludes an essentialist perspective typical of naturalistic approaches, but also the binary perspective of Luhmann's systemics. Dichotomies represent polar categories that contain discursive constructions and repertoires that oscillate between clear and fuzzy or ambiguous definitions, (Griswold, 2020; Spillman, 2022).

The interviews were submitted to twenty-seven individuals with professional experience in creative and/or innovative organisations: a) publishers and editors; b) artists (writers, painters, actors, scriptwriters, directors); c) communication professionals (copywriters, art-directors, PR and press office managers, marketing managers); d) scientists; e) researchers; f) inventors.

The interviewees were selected according to the following criteria: 1) role held; 2) coherence of the curriculum with respect to the subject of the research; 3) creative value of the organization in which the interviewee works.

The selection of profiles was based on a path that would allow for the possibility of making connections between subjects working in different fields. The first element that unites all the interviewees is their power to make decisions and influence the opinions of the group.

Each of them operates in organizational contexts where they make decisions or can influence the decisions of other subjects, posing as direct (e.g., editors and of editorial directors) or indirect (writers, artists, inventors, and p.r.) opinion leaders. In other words, each holds an apex and/or charismatic role.

Selected communication experts and managers also lead processes by suggesting strategies and content to their clients.

None of them propose a passive or merely executive attitude when faced with the opportunity to suggest new ideas or solve problems with alternative solutions to standards.

None of the individuals examined acts as a mere 'intermediary' but claims to be one of the 'mediators' of the processes (Latour, 2022).

From this point of view, we did not look at the employment contract between these individuals and their reference structure, but at the actual power exercised by them and the degree of autonomy with respect to creative decisions. All those interviewed have full responsibility for the problem they must solve or the working group they have to lead or the individual artefact and/or paper and/or invention they have to complete. With respect to the research questions, this choice was made in order to reduce the field of analysis to the constructions of meaning of those with power of action.

This allowed us to clearly distinguish the considerations of practitioners from the definitions of those who study the creative phenomenon. Creativity scholars have been investigated by the researcher in previous essays.

The second nexus, related to the coherence of the curriculum with respect to the subject under examination, focused on the actual ability, self-certified by the subjects themselves, to have gained competences, skills and experience involving: rapid changes in perspectives and points of view, strong decisions in situations of uncertainty or reversals of organisational habits. We favoured those who have the ability to self-describe in unconventional ways while following a format (CV, video CV, showreel, cover letter, client book and portfolio, references and credits from clients and employers). In this case, CVs that deviated from the standards were selected.

As for the third criterion adopted as profiling, we included the creative reputation of the working context. In this case, we selected those who collaborate with organisations that are perceived as creative or innovative: advertising agencies, research centres, art galleries, publishing houses, start-ups.

But among these, we also chose those that have distinguished themselves by having awards certifying their value.

All selected subjects met the first profiling criterion. 15 of them satisfied the second profiling criterion; the remaining 12 satisfied the third profiling criterion. In the selection process, we therefore preferred to focus on those profiles that the sociological literature defines as out of the ordinary (Becker, 1982; De Masi, 2003).

This selection was made to check whether even extraordinarily creative people fall into the traps of clichés and stereotypes. If they confirm the definitions and clichés of the term, it means that we can generalise the opposing dichotomies and the stability of certain cultural meanings of the term, i.e.: the repertoires.

Shared repertoires are context independent. During the research and in the conclusions, we will highlight definitions that could be considered 'acceptable' beyond historical changes (synchronic dimension), definitions that are conditioned by the time in which we live (diachronic dimension), definitions that are close to the term of reference from a denotative point of view (syntagmatic dimension), definitions that introduce new metaphors and connotations (paradigmatic dimension).

The interview outline (tested and post-tested) aimed to understand the different relationships of the creative process with the following categories of meaning: individual/group; rational/irrational; autonomy/procedure; change/habit; incremental/radical innovation.

The questions were sorted into thematic groups. Redundant questions were included: formulated in such a way as to reiterate, in varied forms, the

same concepts in order to test the attention and contradictions of the interviewee (Abbott, 2004). Below is the interview outline:

- Group A. Questions aimed at understanding the different interpretations of the term creativity through the categories: individual/ group and rational/ irrational.
  - What does it mean, in your opinion, to be creative?
  - How would you define yourself?
  - In your opinion, are creative processes the result of individualistic talent or rather the result of group interaction?
  - In your opinion, is the creative process a tendentially rational or irrational phenomenon?
  - Do you think that there are unique natural gifts at the basis of creativity? (Redundant question)
  - Can one be a creativity professional?
  - What concepts or words would you associate with the term 'creative'? (Redundant question)
- Group B. Questions aimed at understanding the relationship between the creative process and the creative subject operating in the organization, through the polarities: autonomy of the individual/ procedure of the organization.
  - In your experience, are there valid methods for inducing or stimulating creativity?
  - Is there a manual in your organization that standardizes the techniques to be used to be more creative?
  - In your opinion, can creativity be broken down into a set of rules? (Redundant question)
  - Do you use standard techniques, or have you developed your own method?
  - Can you tell me which steps of the technique are used in the organization you work in? (Redundant question)
  - Are these steps followed in a systematic way?
- Group C. Questions aimed at understanding the relationship between creativity and organization through the polarities: change/ habit.
  - Did the introduction of a technique lead to irrelevant or relevant, positive, or negative changes? Can you tell us which ones?
  - Are creative methods changed in your organization? If so, how often?
  - Is it possible to make activities routine?

- • Is there a risk of settling on a technique? (Redundant question)
- - Group D. Questions aimed at understanding the relationship between creativity and the degree of innovation through the polarities: radical innovation / incremental innovation.
- • In your opinion, does creativity mean innovation?
- • Radical innovation is a revolutionary leap that changes the connotations of an era, while incremental innovation is related to the improvement of an existing innovative product. In other words, the invention of the printing press and the computer are radical innovations, while the transition from classic to high-definition TV is defined as incremental innovation. Do you think that being creative means generating radical innovations or incremental innovations?

2. The paradox of common sense: the stereotype of the brilliant and deviant individual

From the questions in 'group A', definitions emerged that followed commonplaces or quotations from well-known works. Respondents, regardless of their role and profession, used hyperbolic definitions and tended to define creativity as a process dealing with: "the new", "originality", "genius", "the fantastic", "the limitless", "transversality", "being eclectic", "being curious", "being able to solve problems", "being talented", "being critical", "being outside the box", "being a bit crazy", "being able to take apart and reassemble in new ways", "thinking differently from others", "being complex and endowed with insight", "combining culture with intuition and genius", "being generative", "being eccentric"; "being endowed with an artistic sense", "having wit and insight", "having imagination and fantasy", "having the ability to shape ideas".

Recurring are quotations from authors such as: Osborn (1953), Munari (1977), Becker (1982), De Bono (1991), De Masi (2003). The interviewees quote authors they know but confuse the quotations or twist the meanings to bring the concepts of scholars closer to their own ideas.

The interviewees also emphasize the concepts of the individual, irrationality, deviance, and subjectivity. Martina, a press officer, and communications consultant with twenty years' experience in the advertising industry, states that creativity is: "knowing how to tell (...) in the most diverse forms possible (...), capturing an aspect that is not the most obvious".

Valeria, an editor, proofreader, and journalist with ten years of professional experience, argues that creativity consists in having: "one's own approach to everything (...) a particular skill and also a critical sense for what is around us, to take everything apart". Monica, a designer, and media relations consultant, asserts that being creative means combining: "originality, resourcefulness, imagination and concreteness as De Masi says".

Michele, founder of an advertising agency, says: "Creativity means the application of techniques combined with genius mixed with curiosity for things in the world and these things put together in an original way. This, perhaps, can be a definition of creativity, a fuzzy definition as creativity must be fuzzy". Franco, an entrepreneur, and agronomist, considers creativity: "thinking without constraints, without limits (...) mental freedom".

Oscar, editorial director of a publishing house, emphasizes that: "Creativity is conveying a concept to others, through non-canonical forms of expression, through original yet simple forms of expression".

Giuseppe, a human resources expert, says: "the attitude to (...) seek new combinations, without setting oneself limits". Piero, an inventor, and expert in industrial plant engineering, sees creativity as an indispensable skill for any type of work, but at the same time rare, because it involves: "having a lot of imagination and being able to give a concrete form and substance to new products". Mattia, professor of computer engineering states that creativity is: "getting out of the ordinary".

Ilaria, scientist, says: "to be borderline between cerebrality and genius (...) to follow a non-standard approach". Francesco, a screenwriter, speaks of: "ability to make visible and concrete ideas and concepts that others cannot see or imagine". Luca, organizer of cultural events, states that it is necessary to: "look at things from different perspectives and work out solutions".

Stefania, researcher, talks about: "being flexible, anticipating events". Gabriele, journalist, lobbyist and trainer, states: "being curious about knowledge". John, professor, uses a usual slogan expression: "thinking in new ways". Silvia, architect, photographer, and designer, quoting Munari says: "imagination and practical sense". It is clear from the interviews that definitions close to common sense tend to confine creativity within a dimension of originality and freedom. Moreover, all interviewees perceive themselves as creative in that they are endowed with something that is "outside the box".

This way of thinking is the result of a self-directed, but also hetero-directed perception.

In other words, creative professionals perceive themselves and are perceived by other systems, social and/or professional, as eccentric actors. This double perception, self and hetero directed, guides the experiences of the interviewees who polarize the meanings of the word 'creative'. The most

articulate and counter-intuitive definitions do not come from people working in the art world, but from those working in the world of scientific research.

Vittorio, a researcher in theoretical physics, believes that: "creativity is the ability to produce representations of the world, of emotions, putting together oneself, others, and the surrounding world. This meaning of creativity makes it possible to incorporate the activity of the scientist, who creates models (i.e., abstractions) of reality, with that of the artist, who represents his perception of being (...) This meaning of creativity requires, therefore, the ability to unite (...) instances from inside and outside the self (...) Creativity is link, reduction, metaphor, and jump. Link = the idea of connecting concepts/signs in a new way. Reduction = creativity associated with a scaled representation. Metaphor = shifting the point of view from one abstraction to another. Jump = overcoming an old image with a new representation". Romulus, a geologist, adds: "Freeing the mind from the constraints of modern society that seeks to schematize personal contributions".

Arthur, internationally renowned professor, states that: "Being creative means putting subjectivity first. It also means being able to work with the materials at hand. That is why creativity is distinguished from innovation". Massimiliano, a cognitive psychologist, says: "not to stop at the starting data (...) to invent from nothing (...) to be able to change point of view".

Fabrizio, researcher, entrepreneur, and inventor states that: "the ability to solve problems using not linear/deductive thinking, but lateral and/or inductive and/or analogical thinking. In other words, it is the ability to (...) restructure the problem in a way that makes it otherwise solvable".

Researchers and scientists introduce less rhetorical concepts.

However, at some point in the discourse they too reiterate certain stereotypes such as the juxtaposition of creative ability and the transcendental ability to create from nothing.

Frequent definitions are open to multiple aesthetic, emotional and cultural considerations. For example, there is Rita's definition of creativity as "the opposite of concreteness". There is the romantic definition of Andrea, a professional actor: "creativity means following one's instinct".

There is the evocative definition of Gianluca, copywriter, and journalist: "to pull back the curtain and let some light through". There is film maker Dino's self-referential definition: "creativity is having a personal opinion". For most interviewees, there is an immediate relationship between the term creativity and the concepts of irrationality, individuality, subjectivity, spontaneity, deviance, exception, genius. People misperceive these terms as synonyms, showing their value orientation.

In the course of the interview, however, the interviewees contradict themselves by giving paradoxical definitions and/or oscillating between two

polarities. So, Martina goes on to say that creativity is: "perhaps more irrational, at least in the first approach", but also "...then perhaps in making it understandable and shareable by others there is certainly a rationality component (...) individual, then certainly working with others (...) a phenomenon that needs an irrational part at the beginning (...) schematizing is bridling (...) talent is instinct".

For Valeria: "it can be individual and group, but maybe it starts from an individual sense, maybe someone should put something at the centre, and then you can discuss it with others (...) for me creativity can start from an irrational thing (...) but to realise it you need rationality".

Michele says: "talent is that fertile ground on which teamwork, techniques and style take root (...) in my opinion creativity can be cultivated (...) The inspiration always derives from irrationality, but then you have to lead that irrational inspiration back to a rational message (...) genius and culture (...) culture must be as broad as possible for someone who does communication, I mean the broadest and not the deepest". Franco declares: "there is no such thing as group creativity" then corrects himself: "my consultant oenologist, Beniamino, is fantastic because he can understand the type of wine I want. Starting from an emotion I want to give the wine he manages to interpret me from a chemical point of view".

Franco also oscillates when he speaks of the rational and irrational categories: "at first glance one might say that a rational person is not creative, but I'm not convinced because... I have to tell you my behaviour... I think I analyse scientifically, rationally with a rigorous use of logic and then... I decide in a passionate and irrational way". Even researchers cannot clearly disentangle the relationship between the rational and irrational polarities. Paradoxical answers such as Romulus' are frequent: "It is rationally irrational or, if you like, irrationally rational".

Oscar states that the creative process starts with an individual and that a feeling can produce something if it is accompanied by cultural preparation: "I think creativity is an individual process in which natural predisposition counts, but preparation counts more. I think that one does not invent anything in front of a blank sheet of paper (...) the maximum creativity can be expressed when there are precise rules (...) I think it is a process that is expressed in an irrational way, but that is constructed in a rational way (...) the narrower the road to travel, the greater the possibility of being original (...) the creative moment in itself is an individual moment, the development of that moment is collective".

Even a scientist like Vittorio, who is accustomed to teamwork, starts from an individualist trigger: "the creative act is the result of the individual, the prerequisites for the creative act are the result of interaction with the outside world". Furthermore, he is firmly convinced that the creative act is rational: "In

my opinion, the creative process is a rational process, even if it is linked to mental processes that are not easily traceable to voluntary processes (...) The idea that creativity is irrational or linked to chance seems absurd to me. A process of high cognition cannot be irrational; creativity can negate a certain logical act by replacing it with another logical act".

Romulus insists on the superiority of individual creativity insofar as it is free from counterproductive patterns: "Creativity comes from competition that can be applied to an individual or to a group. The group, however, is constrained by the existence of only two paths: friction between the members or disputes between the group and the group leader (...). The individual is also free from these constraints: if he creates, he emerges, otherwise he sinks". Most of those interviewed decreed an explicitly individual dimension to the creative process, confirming the stereotype of the genius without rules.

Only Dino, a director, distinguished individual creativity from group creativity, reasoning by professional fields: "It depends on the object. A painting, a photo, a book (…) they are almost always a personal expression. An advertising campaign or a film are almost always the result of a group".

The following aspects emerge from these statements:

a) The interviewees, all Westerners, have developed a strongly individual-centred conception of the creative process. In other cultures, where the sense of community identity is stronger than the sense of individual identity, we would have had different answers.

b) The interviewees oscillate between antinomies in a sort of reconciliation of oppositions.

c) All respondents offer definitions of the term that relate to the synchronic and syntagmatic dimensions.

d) Researchers and inventors are more evidently moving away from the standard definitions by proposing metaphorical chains and connotations that move away from clichés (paradigmatic dimension).

d) Professionals working in the fields of communication and marketing use expressions linked to current trends (diachronic dimension).

e) The artists emphasize particularly evocative expressions.

The term creative determines one of the assumptions of this research: the impossibility of breaking out of socially shared stereotypes. We could call it: 'the paradox of common sense'.

3. Freedom and constraint, change and habit: words that oppose each other or are removed

Regarding the 'Group B' questions, the interviews reveal the removal or rejection of the terms as 'habit', 'routine' and 'procedure'. Martina states: "you cannot be creative by following routine. You only have to create the habit of confrontation". Valeria states: "Actions can be routine in the sense of approach, but not in the sense of the routine that traces everything".

Again, contradictions emerge when asking redundant questions. Valeria, for example, oscillates between automatism and lack of automatism, between external influence and internal inspiration: "On the one hand, perhaps, routine is the opposite of creativity in the sense that it is an automatism that crushes thought (...) but if we understand routine in the sense of being accustomed to dismantling and questioning everything, then creativity can also become a habit (...) there can be a habit of transgressing the rules". Oscar says: "It happened to me that the most beautiful thoughts I wrote came to me (...) without much thought and without relying on rituals or habits (...) Then on the basis of the sudden flow I methodically constructed the project. This flow exists. But it is a process that lasts very little, around that I can reconstruct'. For Monica, techniques, habits, the external environment, and interaction with the other are considered additional, but not indispensable, aspects".

This leads back to the culture of individualism. Respondents frequently link the words habit, automatism, and routine with 'banal thinking'. On the one hand, respondents praise the de-specialization of genius and the absence of constraints (economic, temporal, emotional, spatial, cultural, etc.).

On the other, reversing the discourse, they emphasize knowledge and limitations. A contrast between imagination and knowledge also emerges from the interviews, where for Einstein's[3] admirers the power of imagination prevails, while for Loos[4] admirers the concept of deep knowledge always prevails. While Franco states that: "...there is a need for a person who has talent and is unconstrained...", Oscar retorts: "creativity (...) has to be supported with basic culture, study and constraint (...) I am most effective when I have little time, when I know that I am just a short time away from the realization of a

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[3] Famous scientist's aphorism: "imagination is more important than knowledge".

[4] Adolf Loos, Mitteleuropean architect and intellectual, linked to avant-garde artists such as Schoenberg, Kokoschka, Berg, and Krauss. Founder of the well-known magazine Das Andere, but above all famous for his collection of essays entitled Parole nel Vuoto (Words in the Void), first published in Italy by Adelphi in 1972 and subsequently reprinted several times. Loos was a firm believer in the 'prolific bond', i.e., harbinger of creativity.

book (...) I almost force myself to have little time to be productive". Oscar, Silvia, Vittorio, and Fabrizio insist on method and culture. Other interviewees deny the close link between in-depth knowledge and creativity. Romolo states: "The fact that I am not a designer does not mean that I cannot become one (...) not having experience I could offer a different and, perhaps, innovative vision".

During the interview, Romolo reverses the argument, talking about the importance of constraints and expertise: "Napoleon needed a road network for his military conquests and needed many bridges, which were built in steel (...) builders at that time knew how to build in wood, but were free to solve the new problem without relying on previous models. However, when the construction technique of steel bridges was refined, construction methods were developed that became standardized, perhaps even keeping in mind the old methods of wooden bridges...". Between freedom and necessity, the discourse becomes complicated. For everyone, there are no clear boundaries between inclination and knowledge, between reflection and action, between artistic inspiration and the procedure generating new ideas. Oscar says: "when I was at architecture university, there were two schools of thought. The first claimed: but how can a first-year student design a bridge if he doesn't know the laws of statics; while the second school of thought claimed: but if one were to know the rules of statics one would design a bridge after he graduated. How can these two visions be reconciled?". Oscar continues: "all the great personalities in the world of design and architecture, (...) have brought great innovations starting from the recognition of what existed before (...) Adolf Loos, who wrote *Words in a Vacuum*, said that a master saddler who does not know the horse and has never ridden a horse cannot design a saddle, because he would make a product that is not good for the horse or for the rider". The discursive fields of the interviewees oscillate between antinomies. All subjects reject the concept of routine, except in some cases they readmit it if this word is renegotiated. This group of questions also confirms the tendency to favor words of 'common sense' and based on an individualistic value.

The discursive fields of the interviewees oscillate between antinomies and dichotomies.

All subjects reject the concept of 'routine', except in some cases they readmit it if this word is renegotiated. This group of questions also confirms the respondents' tendency to favour words of 'common sense' and centred on an individualistic approach.

In this case between the dimensions (synchrony vs diachrony and syntagma vs paradigm) there is an ambivalent oscillation on the part of all subjects.

4. From the rejection of technique to the culture of improvisation that is a technique

New paradoxes emerge from the third grouping of questions (group C) which is related to the knowledge of creativity stimulation techniques. The literature on the subject is vast. The techniques invented since the 1920s number in the hundreds. Asked the neutral question: "Do you know any techniques that can stimulate creativity?", all respondents mentioned brainstorming (also known as thought shower). Twenty-four out of twenty-seven limited themselves to mentioning this technique without describing it or mentioning other techniques. Three respondents also mentioned other techniques such as: 'Focus', 'Associations of ideas', 'Seguelà method', 'de Bono's six hats', 'Young's reversal' (Young, 1995). Michele was the only one to go into depth: "playing with the mind, with oppositions, with contraries, with similarities (...) we often play the game of 'if it were a car, what would it be?' (...) De Bono and the technique of colored hats is also useful (...) there is no such thing as one technique better than another (...) creative methods are not questioned, but the moment when the method is missing is questioned (...) without a method, creative people produce nothing".

On the one hand, those who defend the concept of expressive freedom admit that they know the techniques that can stimulate creativity. On the other hand, the followers of constraint and method, while citing techniques, claim not to use them. This is the most obvious paradox found in the survey. All the interviewees claim that if you abuse techniques, you paralyze your thinking.

Luca, a writer, says: "if you use techniques, you will enter a comfort zone, it is human...", Gabriel says: "Neither standard techniques, nor a method of my own...I write, I read, I erase, I rewrite, I reread...language is the symbolic order of my reality, like water for the fish. But unlike the fish, I go out of the water into the realm, as Joyce said, in which word and thought are identical...".

The more the interviewees attempt to move away from the usual definitions, the more they return to them. In some cases, the interview schedule stimulates interesting language games.

Maximilian says: "Methods depend a lot on the context in which they are applied. Unfortunately, these methods try to organize a process that is unpredictable. It is like when they tell you: 'be spontaneous!'. If we understand creativity as a process, that is possible. But if we mean by creativity a function, no: this function is not decomposable, because at its basis there are mechanisms that have nothing to do with rules, but with freedom".

Many respondents state that the creative function is neither decomposable nor predictable but at the same time state that creativity can be organized. How can these two statements be reconciled? Scientists like Vittorio fall into similar

traps: "The world of research is creative in itself. Its creativity lies in the goal it sets itself, not in the methodology it uses. The scientific method is the set of rules that govern the evaluation of the results of the creative process".

In this case, the paradox that arises is the following: if creativity has nothing in common with method (but rather with purpose), how can one assess the degree of creativity of an idea, given that one must have a method to assess it?

Once again, the 'repertoires' get confused. The interlocutors reject the prison of the method but recognize the goodness of the bond. In their definitions they try to get away from rhetoric, but they return to the stereotype.

5. The complex relationship between creativity and innovation

With the last group of questions (group D) aimed at understanding the relationship between creativity and the degree of innovation, we conclude the qualitative survey. Here we have several theses.

There are those who argue that creativity is a necessary and sufficient precondition for innovation. There are, on the other hand, those who argue that there is a simple relationship of implication: the presence of creativity is a necessary precondition for innovation, while it is not necessary to be creative in order to innovate. In this regard, Massimiliano's observation is pertinent: "Innovating is the search for what is new, creating is the search for what works. They do not always coincide, especially if innovation is an organizational necessity. Often being creative means innovating in some way, but the opposite is not always true". This definition coincides with that of scholars who have written specific monographs on creativity (Amabile 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013).

Maximilian continues: "To innovate is an evolutionary process that is bound to its time, creativity is timeless: to be creative is to make radical innovation".

Maximilian's last statement is not logically argued: why should creativity be timeless and linked to radical innovation? Forty years ago, organic farming would have been considered a mediocre idea copied from the way of our ancestors.

Today, the organic sector is perceived as a creative breakthrough in sustainable development. Moreover, many creative innovations are not radical: think of industrial design, for example.

A third group of interviewees states that an act can be creative without leading to innovation. In this regard, Michele observes: "Innovation is about devices in the product, materials, and technologies, but innovation can also be

in the organization. Innovation is not linked to creativity (…) creativity is not innovative".

Franco says: "one who is creative has a great ability to solve concrete problems (...) but this is not necessarily innovative (...) there can be a radical creative (...) and there can be the creative who knows how to improve things that already exist". Annarita speaks of: "symbiosis between the two processes", especially when talking about radical innovations such as the invention of the computer or printing.

Martina speaks of: "innovation as a subset present within the creative process".

Valeria says: "In my opinion creativity is much more than innovation; it contains innovation within". Dino distinguishes the functions of these two phenomena by areas and objectives: "The relationship between creativity and innovation is perceived as problematic, depending on time, space, and social expectations". Vittorio observes: "The creative act enables the introduction of an innovative worldview (...) This does not always mean more suitable. In this sense, the representation of the creative act can reveal a new aspect of a particular object and allow perception from a different point of view".

Gabriele distinguishes between creativity as invention and innovation as regeneration, treating innovation as incremental and leaving radical revolution to the world of creative people, approaching Massimiliano's thesis: "No, these are not synonyms. It is one thing to make new things, another to make things new...to regenerate them like adding chocolate pralines on a cone (...) Creativity is an ingredient of the innovation system. That is why organizations that passively undergo change stifle people's creativity".

Gabriele points out, as does Vittorio, that the actual evaluation of an innovative process is, almost always, subsequent to the act of creation, but is not relevant for those who seek new frontiers: "An accounting of innovations is written by historians, therefore a posteriori. Creative people do not pose such problems".

A final thesis is argued by Romulus, who establishes a circular relationship between creativity, incremental innovation, and radical innovation: "I call this kind of variation 'the theory of punctuated equilibria (...) small changes are necessary to improve existing products but only the generational leap makes them big. For three centuries, the world's best mathematicians have tried to study theories on the behaviour of condensed structures by following the usual paths (...) In 1918, a young and eccentric English engineer, Griffith, studied the behaviour of glass rods, trying a different way. His superiors tolerated him but did not support him (...) when Griffith presented Fracture Mechanics in 1923, his studies left no trace. But when many Comet planes crashed in 1954, someone remembered those studies that were able to explain the problem".

The latter observation shows how the radicality of an invention depends on earlier incremental innovations. In some cases, the excess of variations determines a fertile humus for the preparation of revolution. The redundancy of a system is, therefore, not only functional to its maintenance, but also to its subversion.

We note a demarcation between two ways of conceiving progress that follow the perennial quarrel between neo-positivists on the one hand and historicist-hermeneutics on the other: a way of considering progress as inevitably linear, continuous, and cumulative which is opposed to a way of conceiving knowledge through non-linear paradigm revolutions, discontinuity, and unpredictability.

6. Conclusions

As we have shown in the previous sections, every definition of creativity has to face counterclaims on the hermeneutic level. Creativity professionals come up with ambiguous, contradictory, and paradoxical definitions that falsify the rigidity of binary oppositions.

With regard to the questions in group A, the following aspects emerge:

- For most respondents, there is an immediate relationship between the term creativity and the concepts of irrationality, individuality, subjectivity, spontaneity, deviance, exception, genius. People misperceive these terms as synonyms, showing their value orientation. At the same time, subjects oscillate between binary oppositions, in a kind of reconciliation of oppositions.

- The interviewees have an individual-centered conception of the creative process and confirm the stereotype of the 'unbridled genius' that is peculiar to Western culture.

- Most of the definitions recorded during the interviews are similar to the common-sense definitions given in everyday life by 'non-professionals'.

- The most articulate, counter-intuitive, and far from common sense definitions do not come from those working in the world of art and/or communication, but from those working in the world of scientific research.

- Creative professionals perceive themselves and are perceived by other systems, social and/or professional, as eccentric, and original actors. This double perception, self and hetero directed, guides the

experiences of the interviewees who polarize the meanings of the word.

With regard to the questions in group B, the following aspects emerge:

- The discursive fields oscillate between the following antinomies: prior knowledge/tabula rasa, freedom/necessity.

- Polar oscillations are a concrete testimony of what happens in reality when professionals try to describe the process that leads them to create something creative. The contradictions and frequent changes of opinion show what happens in a real work environment where new ideas, working contexts and people involved enter into relationships. From the interviews, the process of differentiation and reconnection of all the factors that determine the emerging effect of concrete creativity is evident.

- All the subjects reject the concept of routine, but they readmit it if this word is renegotiated with the definition of 'personal ritual', since this expression possesses irrational connotations that refer back to the observations of the first group (A) of questions, confirming the tendency on the part of the interviewees to favour the concept of individual talent over a concept of collective genius.

With regard to the questions in group C, the following aspects emerge:

- On the one hand, those who defend the concept of expressive freedom admit that they nevertheless know techniques that can stimulate creativity. On the other hand, the followers of constraint and method, although they mention the techniques, claim not to use them. This is the most obvious paradox found during the survey.

- The interlocutors reject the prison of method but recognize the prolific nature of constraint. In their definitions, they attempt to move away from rhetoric, but elaborate sentences full of stereotypes, confirming what was found in group A and group B.

- Many respondents declare that the creative function is neither decomposable nor predictable but at the same time state that creativity can be organized. It becomes paradoxical to reconcile these two statements.

With regard to the questions in group D, the following aspects emerge:

- The creative process in its relational dynamics is normally considered inevitable. The construction of meanings linked to the creative process generates hybrid dynamics: new ideas can be created through deviance or consonance; a banal idea becomes brilliant depending on the favourable context, consensus and charismatic capacity of the

person proposing the idea. The following relationships between creativity and innovation arise from the last group of questions (D):

Table 1. The Relationship between Creativity and Innovation

1st term	Degree of relationship with	2nd term
Creativity	Includes	Innovation
Creativity	Sufficient and necessary for	Innovation
Creativity	Absolutely distinct from	Innovation
Creativity	Necessary, but not sufficient for	Innovation
Creativity	Opposed to	Innovation
Creativity	Generates only	Incremental Innovation
Creativity	Also generates	Radical Innovation
Creativity	Identical to	Innovation
Creativity	Dipends on	Innovation

In conclusion, we can state that the interviewees offer common sense and typified definitions (Schütz, 2018) which mainly relate to the synchronic and syntagmatic dimension.

Researchers, scientists, and inventors move away from standard definitions, proposing metaphorical chains and connotations far from clichés, opting for the paradigmatic dimension.

Communication and marketing professionals use expressions related to current trends, favouring the diachronic dimension. The artists elaborate evocative but stereotyped definitions.

This difference is probably due to the dynamics of each context.

Researchers, scientists, and inventors are committed to analytically justifying their discoveries and/or inventions. This allows them to falsify common sense opinions and beliefs.

Communication professionals follow current trends that are accepted by their clients. The latter, in fact, look for socially accepted innovations.

The artists talk about their 'being extraordinary or eccentric'. They perceive themselves as outsiders and deviants. They use aphorisms that emphasize this distinctive dimension, in order to increase the value of their works; however, to convince a large audience they use common sense terms related to the synchronic dimension.

As regards the discursive fields that relate the term 'creativity' to the terms 'constraint', 'freedom' and 'routine', we note a series of paradoxes and oscillations between the synchronic and diachronic, syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions.

Finally, as regards the relationship between creativity and innovation, we see the clear demarcation between two ways of conceiving progress: a) those

who consider progress linear, continuous, progressive, and cumulative; b) those who consider progress characterized by discontinuity, non-linearity, evolutionary and involutional cycles.

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