

Creativity/Anthropology



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Kublai Khan but also on the vast plateau once ruled by Genghis Khan and the Golden Horde. A distant glimpse of that fabled past can be found in *Mongol Costumes*.

Creativity/Anthropology. *Smadar Lavie, Kirin Narayan, and Renato Rosaldo, eds.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. 348 pp.

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The creative impulse is universal. Everyone knows that. However, despite the numerous theories about creativity—the characterizations of it as language or political function, the scientific paradigms modeling its shapes and designs, and the thick descriptions interpreting its contexts—what and how its forms and effects mean continues to elude us. Within the social sciences, all too often artistic creation is construed as artifice rather than artifact, something apart from day-to-day life and from larger questions of meaning as Kantian aesthetics would suggest. This prejudice, coupled with the prevalent notion that only some cultural artifacts can be classified as creative—that is, as “art”—has discouraged most anthropologists from taking the study of the arts and, more generally, creativity seriously. There is emerging on the horizon a new anthropology of art that includes creativity in discussions of culture, placing it alongside—even above—more privileged inquiries within the field. By recognizing the centrality of creativity to cultural production these authors assert that anthropologists can no longer afford to marginalize the creative impulse from their academic discourses. *Creativity/Anthropology*, a volume of 13 chapters by some of the best writers in the discipline, makes a significant contribution to this exciting area of inquiry.

Creativity/Anthropology is divided into three sections. The first, “Creative Individuals in Cultural Context,” profiles five individuals living and creating their “arts” in diverse corners of the world. These portraits are followed by a second section, “The Creation of Ethnography from Experience,” which explores innovations in ethnographic writing and the implications such creative processes engender. Four final chapters contemplate both ritualistic and secular spaces of “Collective Creativity.” Despite the eulogistic introduction to Victor Turner, most of the chapters depart from Turner’s earlier work in significant ways. One departure is made in the

switch from generalities and objects of study to specificities and subjects of study. As Edward Bruner notes in his epilogue, the reader is presented with life histories, not case studies, of individual persons, not just personas. The second is the recognition that marginality is not the sole possessor of the creative impulse. While the authors agree with Turner that creativity provides a frame for critical reflection on communicative processes that has a great deal to offer theories of culture and social change, they feel that creativity and social change can occur equally as well within the prosaic and everyday as within the poetic and extraordinary. By this simple inclusion, the authors tacitly suggest that the study of artistic/creative behavior must discard the hierarchical conventions that categorize some activities as creative and others as not. In addition, they avoid the anthropological deobjectification of creativity that has occurred in the 20th century as a result of both the insistence of its practitioners on “context” and “function” and the theoretical and conceptual reliance on linguistic and literary models.

In many ways James Fernandez’s chapter, which opens the book, crystallizes these new directions and sets the tone for the entire volume. Describing Ceferino Suárez, an Asturian farmer and poet, Fernandez notes that the poet, through his poetic language, commented on, critiqued, and impassioned his life and his fellow villagers by containing in his poetry “that complex . . . interplay of . . . men and women ‘going hence’ and ‘coming hither’ . . . that makes up the human experience of ripeness” (p. 27). In the spirit of Toni Flores’s empirical humanism, Fernandez concludes, “I can hardly imagine a more authentic document on which to base an anthropological poetics” (p. 29). Kirin Narayan’s profile of Hindu Guru Swamiji; Marjorie Shostak’s re-creation of the lives of three creative !Kung individuals: Jimmy, a musician, N!ukha, a healer, and Hwan//a, a bead weaver; and Barbara Babcock’s and Anna Tsing’s profiles of two women—Helen Cordero, a Pueblo potter, and Induan Hiling, an Indonesian woman shaman, follow Fernandez’s opening chapter.

With a focus on authorial presence, traditional texts and palimpsests, and the possibilities of re-creating individual and group identities, the second set of chapters by Smadar Lavie, Donald Handelman, José Limón, and Barbara Meyerhoff not only expands the parameters of the study of creativity by including ethnography as a creative process but it

expands the boundaries that have comfortably existed between the creative products and processes of "others" and the "scientific" texts about them. The third section, composed of chapters by Edith Turner, Edward Schieffelin, Renato Rosaldo, and Richard Schechner, addresses "collective" creativity by, among other things, focusing on individual subjective experience within the collective.

To end the volume with Schechner's broadly defined interdisciplinary approach seems simultaneously appropriate and problematic. While a broad range of questions—in need of a broad range of scholarly points of view—are easily generated when creativity is the subject of inquiry, this chapter stands in contrast to the others in its androcentric orientation. Willfully dismissing feminist theory appears as an ironic gesture on his part given the exemplary model for interdisciplinary research feminist scholarship provides.

Communitas and other Turnerian concepts oriented anthropological analysis in novel and creative ways, but they limited the possibility of understanding—even acknowledging—difference, indeterminate boundaries, multiple allegiances. Due to the centrality of the individual in contemporary research, it is impossible to avoid diversity—no two individuals are alike—and impossible to overlook the asymmetry of that diversity—all individuals are not equal. For this reason, when we read in Geertz's often-quoted essay, "Art as Cultural System" (*Local Knowledge*, Norton, 1984) that artistic productions "materialize a way of experiencing, bring a particular cast of mind out into the world of objects, where men can look at it," we must remember this diversity and asymmetry and begin to ask: "Whose cast of mind?" and "Did any women and others look at it?" Of all the authors in the volume under review, perhaps it is Tsing and Babcock who most expand the Turnerian model to not only include the experiences of the excluded, forgotten, or subsumed but also challenge the dominant theoretical paradigms of creativity in the process. In sum, creativity is an event—all the authors in the book under review agree—but it is one that is as thoroughly political as it is epistemological and experiential. *Creativity/Anthropology* makes a wonderful contribution to our understanding of this complex activity—its processes and products—we call "creativity." To read it is to embark on a journey that explores these domains in contemporary and provocative ways.

The Kingdom of Individuals: An Essay on Self-Respect and Social Obligation. F. G. Bailey. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. 231 pp. index.

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Witty, insightful, urbane, *The Kingdom of Individuals* addresses other books—and what book cannot in this postmodern, circular world—but it also addresses (heavens!) experience, and furthermore, the author's own experience of growing up in British schools and coming of age in the British military during World War II. Consequently, *The Kingdom of Individuals* is less an analysis of particular organizations and more, as the subtitle says, an essay. In other words, it exhibits those gentle, if not genteel, qualities that the conventional social scientist among us would dismiss as nonscientific. In fact, in bidding us to be wary of true believers of whatever hue, it contains those questioning, skeptical virtues that epitomize the scientific attitude.

But what is this kingdom of individuals? Is it a place where "Every Man Is a King"? No, that's more Louisiana than the United Kingdom, or even California, where Bailey, having long departed from Manchester, now teaches. And the hero, the king among kings, in Baileydom is not a demagogue. Nor is the hero the generic individual that Boasians were so fond of and whom they pitted against the coercive force of culture. The hero is Svejik, the disengager. This heroic model derived from a novel by Jaroslav Hasek, *The Good Soldier Svejik*, about a soldier in World War I who manipulated the military for his own purpose even when he played the idiot.

Svejik aspires to throw off neither the chains of conventionality that Rousseau said we need nor the chains of exploitation that Marx said demean us. His weapon is cunning, his style a subsurface irony that the powerful suspect but cannot see, or see but cannot prove. "Svejik is no leader, and he does not create order; usually he sabotages it" (p. 13). He is an offhanded Robin Hood, out to protect himself, but not at the expense of his comrades.

Bailey's basic argument is: Ideas of selfhood emerge out of our experience. Our experience, in turn, grows out of our tasks, which vary according to the organization of society. Since experience shapes us and the collectivities shape—or aspire to shape—ex-