The Invention of Creativity: The Emergence of a Discourse
Camilla Nelson

ABSTRACT

Creativity is increasingly cited as the key to social and economic change in the twenty-first century. It is also a very modern concept—making its first appearance as an English noun in 1875. This essay investigates the cultural construction of creativity in the context of the history of ideas. It understands creativity not as an innate human instinct or ability, but as an idea that emerges out of specific historical moments, shaped by the discourses of politics, science, commerce, and nation. It shifts the ground of analysis away from the naturalised models that have traditionally dominated the field of creative practice research, in order to highlight the historicity of a concept that is more commonly deemed to be without history.

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In L’Invention des Formes, Alain Boutot views chaos, catastrophe theory, fractal geometry, and the study of dissipative structures as members of a set of discourses on formal invention. And even as Boutot recounts how the emergence of form is described in mathematical models or encoded in algorithms, he maintains that these discourses mark a turn in science away from reductionism and quantitative theory toward a more speculative, even “contemplative” description of forms. Boutot believes that the description of form shifts scientific theory onto the level of the real-back into t Creativity is increasingly cited as the key to social and economic change in the twenty-first century. It is also a very modern concept—making its first appearance as an English noun in 1875. This essay investigates the cultural construction of creativity... This essay investigates the cultural construction of creativity in the context of the history of ideas. It understands creativity not as an innate human instinct or ability, but as an idea that emerges out of specific historical moments, shaped by the discourses of politics, science, commerce, and nation. It shifts the ground of analysis away from the naturalised models that have traditionally dominated the field of creative practice research, in order to highlight the historicity of a concept that is more commonly deemed to be without history. The emergence of Creativity Studies in American psychology in the 1950s-60s. Drs. Guilford, Osborn, Torrance and others set out to study creativity, but to do so they had to invent it, even devising tests by which it could be measured. Camilla Nelson has expanded and amended Williams' history, Camilla Nelson, "The Invention of Creativity: The Emergence of a Discourse," Cultural Studies Review, Vol. 16, No. 2 (September 2010), 49. Others have taken up the project of describing the discursive construction of “creativity” in specific sectors. Mark Readman, What’s in a Word?: The Discursive Construction of ‘Creativity’, PhD Thesis, Bournemouth University, 2010.