

Creativity as opening toward new beginnings

Steen Halling

is a professor emeritus at Seattle University where he has taught since 1976. Born in Denmark, he received his PhD in psychology from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, USA. He is editor of the International Human Science Research Conference Newsletter, and co-editor, with Ronald S. Valle of Existential-Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology (Plenum, NY. 1989), and author of Intimacy, Transcendence, and Psychology (Palgrave, NY. 2008).

Finn Thorbjørn Hansen

is a Full Professor in Philosophical and Dialogical Practice from Centre of Dialogue and Organization, Department of Communication, University of Aalborg. He is head of the research unit Wonder Lab, which works with philosophical counseling, the phenomenology of wonder, and different forms of wonder-based innovation and dialogue forms in professional development and higher education.

Background and motivation for this issue of Academic Quarter

We are happy, as invited guest editors, to present this special issue of *Academic Quarter* on creativity and creative approaches in human science. About forty human scientists from all over the world have contributed to this issue, and we are very grateful to them.

The initiative to organize an issue on this subject originates from our participation in the 32th International Human Science Research Conference (IHSRC), which took place at the University of Aalborg in the Northern Denmark in August 2013. Here the overall theme of the conference was 'Creativity in Human Science Research, Methodology and Theory'.

More than 150 human scientists from all over the world participated in the conference in Denmark. According to the conference flyer:

All human sciences exist in a tension between tradition and renewal. At the conference, we hope that participants will discuss how to renew the human sciences creatively, and also to present ideas about what creativity is as a basic human phenomenon. How can phenomenological, hermeneutic and other human science traditions be respected and yet renewed in creative directions? How – and how much – should human scientists experiment with creative methodological practices when researching human phenomena? What role can the arts play? Are there limits to creativity? Can human beings become too creative – in life as well as in research? And what can human scientists actually contribute with to the current creativity discourse?

Many of those who have contributed to the present issue attended the conference.

Since 1982 the International Human Science Research Conference has been a place for phenomenologists, hermeneuticists, and other human scientists to meet around important research issues in health care, qualitative research, and education or other professional areas. Methods of qualitative research, phenomenology and hermeneutics and other kinds of 'heuristic' research approaches have been discussed in the area of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. But this time the focus was explicitly on creativity both as a path to more thorough inquiries and as the object of study for the researcher.

The mystery of creativity and the creative dimensions in human science

This issue raises a fundamental question that must be of importance for every human scientist: What is creativity really? And how can and why should a more 'creative' approach in human science be understood and defended? In what ways can phenomenology and hermeneutics become more open to insights into the nature of creativity and how should we talk about creative ways of *doing* phenomenology, hermeneutics, and human science as such? Before we give the words to the authors of this issue, we would like shortly to mention some possible comments and answers that respectively

Hans-Georg Gadamer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty give to these questions. In an interview with Alfons Grieder on the subject 'On phenomenology,' Gadamer says:

I would say that there has been too much talk about phenomenology, and not enough phenomenological work. One does not always have to insist that what one is doing is phenomenology, but one ought to work phenomenologically, that is, descriptive, creatively – intuitively, and in a concretizing manner. Instead of simply applying concepts to all sorts of things, concepts ought to come forward in movements of thoughts springing from the spirit of language and the power of intuition.
(Gadamer, quoted from Palmer, 2001, p. 113)

Intuition and creativity, though, seems to be paramount when working as a human scientist and especially in what could be called hermeneutic phenomenology.

But Gadamer also made it clear (in the third edition to the afterword of *Truth and Method* in 1972), that philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutic-phenomenological approaches that follow this *philosophical* approach are not at all *against* scientific methods. Philosophical hermeneutics recognize and respect the methodological rigor of modern science. The human scientist should indeed learn to work with rigor and precision in his or her scientific approaches and methods. However, if this scientific rigor is not driven and stirred by an ethos or 'spirit', that goes *beyond* what can be reached through the scientific methodology and epistemology, then the researcher will lose touch with the subject matter and 'truth experience'. As Gadamer writes:

...No productive scientist can really doubt that methodical purity is indispensable in science, but what constitutes the essence of research is much less merely applying the usual methods than discovering new ones – and underlying that, the creative imagination of the scientist ["die schöpferische Phantasie des Forschers"]. This is not true only in the so-called *Geistwissenschaften* [human science]. (Gadamer, 2006 [1960], p. 555)

How then can we as human scientists today be inspired by this 'creative imagination' and the more personal intuitive and existential dimension of the researcher's work? What is at stake in those creative and intuitive, and maybe even artistic and improvising moments, where the researcher moves into the un-known, in a kind of 'touched not-knowing' or deep wonderment, where we are touched by something, we don't know yet what is, and yet – when we are brought to silence by wonder – it seems to speak to us.

Is it especially that because we, as human scientists, are working with *human* relations and with existential life phenomena that spring from within human interaction and living, we must also be sensitive to that in human life and life as such which scientific rigor, technical words, concepts and theorizing *cannot* capture?

Are creativity and intuition and artful and philosophical wonderment exactly what are needed for the human scientist to work *through* because of the limitations of scientific language and methodology?

Gadamer seems to think so, and so does the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology and especially the 'phenomenological reduction' as a special slowly inspired form of philosophical and lyrical wonderment, a way of careful listening to and receiving 'something', which may be described as a kind of silent but saturated meaningfulness. And words, concepts, and thoughts can only be in resonance with this kind of saturated silence if the words spoken or written are in some way indirectly pointing toward what *cannot* be expressed in the form of representative and proportional knowledge and cannot be made visible through scientific empirical methods. It is a kind of 'pointing act' and attuned speech that, as Yeo (1987) formulated it, "...does not simply break the silence but expresses it" (p. 257).

To be creative in this phenomenological sense is to be invited to a return to the ground of this speech, or to the invisible 'wild Being' before it coagulates into civilized and constructed expressions of being.

The existential phenomenologist wants to 'be there' in the very moment when the phenomenon is still alive and not yet solidified or 'gestalted' or 'Gebildet' in psychological and social constructions and 'meaning-making'-movements from within a language

game or life form. For that reason existential phenomenology also is described as a return to beginnings (Sallis, 2003), and philosophy and the philosophical movements of wonder within our thoughts and inspirations can – like art – be seen as doorways to these kinds of ever new beginnings.

Or as Merleau-Ponty writes in *The Visible and Invisible* (1968, p. 197):

Philosophy – precisely as ‘Being speaking within us,’ expression of the mute experience by itself – is creation. A creation that is at the same time a reintegration of Being: for it is not a creation in the sense of one of the commonplace Gebilde that history fabricates: it knows itself to be a Gebilde and wishes to surpass itself as pure Gebilde, to find again its origin. It is hence a creation in the radical sense: a creation that is at the same time an adequation, the only way to obtain an adequation. Being is what requires creation of us for us to experience it.

Or said in another way: Maybe the metaphor of the jazz musician captures what is going on when a human scientist learns to let go of his or her rigorous scientific methods and technologies in order better to hear ‘something’ (Husserl, Gadamer, and Heidegger call it *die Sagen Selbst* or the phenomena in itself), which has not yet appeared but seems to seek an appearance in an articulation or manifestation.

The jazz saxophonists will have to be very skilled and practiced in specific musical techniques, methods and a handcraft in order to play the saxophone. To follow the master by imitating him or her to the very last detail and be immersed into the unique ‘Gestalt’ of this master’s way of perceiving and embodying and expressing the music is a very important part of becoming an artist and to get a sense of the ‘materiality’ of the practice and handcraft of making music.

But the apprentices will only find their own voice and become jazz *masters* and the music will only become an art and reaches a unique moment of improvisation and novelty, *if* the jazz musicians in that moment are also present on a very *personal and existential* level.

There seems to be a more personal and existential dimension that transcends the psychological and socio-cultural and socio-material dimensions of the creative and artistic processes. In these moments of inspiration and transcendence the musicians seem to be connected to on the one hand *what* they are playing, the concrete tones and rhythms, and yet, in the mist of this presence to themselves being *in* the music and relations with the other musicians, they will on the other hand and at the same time hear and react and get into a dialogue with 'something' in the music (or maybe behind the music which wants to be expressed by the music), which is secretly or imperceptibly calling at them beyond the knowledge, skills, crafts, and lived experience of playing the concrete jazz tones.

And it is in this experience of calling and transcendence that they may experience new 'breakthrough meanings' or 'inspirations-from-nowhere', which the jazz musicians in the improvising moments tries to connect to or get closer to.

We wonder whether the human researcher also has to learn to improvise, to stand in the open and 'play' intuitively and with creative imagination in order to hear what does not yet exist (empirically) but is about to unfold. When Gadamer (1989) talks about the ontological 'event of understanding' and 'the spirit in language' and about having an 'inner ear' for the 'inner word,' and when Merleau-Ponty (1968) writes about 'the ontological cipher' in the empirical experience and the invisible in the visible, we believe that they are pointing to hidden or secret phenomena in their origin before they coagulate into appearance in a concrete culture and language or psyche. Like the jazz musicians, the hermeneutic phenomenologists strive to keep themselves as well as the writing situation open for the call of being in a similar way as they may hope for a miraculous and creative adequation with the phenomena itself through their writings and wonderments. These are moments of clarity and improvisation, which cannot be calculated beforehand. Or as Merleau-Ponty describes the researcher's situation as he sets out to write:

This book [*Phenomenology of Perception*], once begun, is not a certain set of ideas; it constitutes for me an open situation, for which I could not possibly provide any

complex formula, and in which I struggle blindly on until, miraculously, thoughts and words become organized by themselves.”(Merleau-Ponty, 2007 [1945], p. 429)

Three themes on creativity and creative human science in the current issue

The above considerations and wonderments are ideas and ideals which we think capture some of the important themes in dealing with creativity and creative human science. The work of the French existential philosopher and phenomenologist Gabriel Marcel comes to mind here. He uses the word ‘creative fidelity’ in order to catch what is going on in the moments when we are trying to open ourselves for the call of being, and when we philosophize in giving a creative and personal answer to this calling (Marcel, 2002 [1964]). And this, we will conclude, also calls for a special kind of readiness (or *Bildung*) for ‘standing in the openness’ in a wondrous, open-ended and evocative receptiveness in the hope of that “...miraculously, thoughts and words become organized by themselves”. The question now then is how can we make room or create practices for this kind of *Bildung* and wondrous creativity in human science?

In the current issue you will find many different answers to what creativity is and what a creative human science approach could look like, and how to practice it.

We have organized the content of this issue (28 articles) under four main themes:

- Promoting Creativity
- Creativity and Research Methods
- Educational Approaches and Methods
- Design, Aesthetics and Creativity

What follows is a brief and, we hope, evocative overview of selected key features of the articles under each of these four themes. For the sake of brevity we identify the article author or authors but not title.

Promoting Creativity

One of the basic questions about creativity is how it can best be assessed. The first set of authors, Tanggard and Gläveneau, propose that the current emphasis on divergent thinking to the exclusion of

idea creation is a problem; instead they propose a dynamic developmental approach to assessment that is closely tied to collaborative activity in such a way that it can actually foster creativity rather than just measuring it. In line with the emphasis on collaborative work, Thorsted shows how a more playful approach that she has developed (known by the acronym FIE), helps students working together to become more creative, open-minded and engaged compared to some of their earlier learning experiences in the context of a Problem-based Learning Process (PBL). And what about artists, the people whom we regard as the par excellence example of creativity? This is the topic that Chemi and Jensen take up through an interview study. They want to find out how artists create and learn and how, in turn, educators can learn from them. The sixth article focuses on creative collaboration in the virtual realm: Thessa Jensen studies the process (fanfiction) where authors post their stories on websites and their readers provide suggestions and input. Finally, Swiatek raises questions about the rewards and accolades, given to scientists and other scholars, that are based primarily on an individualistic notion of creativity even though much of groundbreaking research arises from collaborative activity.

Creativity and Research Methods

This section, starts with an article by Teglhuis Kauffmann, in which she presents an innovative approach to interviewing, namely what she calls a reflexive participatory observation strategy. This approach allows for an open-ended and flexible structured discussion between interviewee and interviewer so that both become active participants in a shared creation of meaning while drawing upon a broad range of knowledge and theory. The next article deals with interpretation, drawing upon Ricoeur's approach to hermeneutics, as Dau offers a deep and philosophically anchored understanding of processes that go on in many interpretative and reflective research processes. She illuminates crucial dimensions of interpretation, exemplified by an analysis and interpretation of a Danish case study of blended learning.

Falck Saghaug addresses the concerns of small business owners who want to balance personal values with economic ones. She uses a case study approach to demonstrate the relevance of the theologian Paul Tillich's notion of revelation for helping business owners

to find, through an intuitive path, what gives meaning to the heart. In a related vein, Hast argues for the creative value of including emotions, the sublime, and subliminal in academic research. She uses examples from a study of violence and compassion in Chechnya and presents emotions and open-mindedness as means to tap into something deeper than what the intellectualist model of thinking encourages. Emotions can certainly be related to research but so can music, according to Verhoeven and her colleagues. Their study explores how data about historical live music gigs can be analysed, extended and re-presented to create new insights. Using a unique process called 'songification,' they demonstrate, among other things, how enhanced auditory data design can provide a medium for aural intuition. If music has application to research, surely poetry has as well. Mandic draws upon the Hölderlin's poem "Remembrance" to look at the existential significance of being a researcher and the experience of undertaking research, especially with regard to the phenomena of familiarity, disorientation, and illumination. In the next article, Nielsen examines children's drawings, arguing that the researcher's active sensory awareness, observance, and description of sensory perceptions can fruitfully be included to throw light upon the world of children. Finally, Ellefsen presents a dynamic representation of the creativity involved in the qualitative research context. The goal of this representation is to make it easier for teachers to support students in the development of their own individual creative process.

Educational Approaches and Methods

Fostering Creativity

As Bengtsen and Mathiasen point out, the presence of innovative technology in education poses significant challenges for qualitative researchers. Looking specifically at the use of digital media in supervisory dialogues they propose, drawing on phenomenology and systems theory, that digital tools be viewed as autonomous things in themselves, possessing an ontological creativity of their own rather than as poor substitutions for face-to-face contact. In contrast, James takes a critical look at the use of a simulator in educating nurses: Noelle™ is created in the image of a pregnant woman who gives birth, talks and can haemorrhage on demand but surely, she suggests, this is quite different from developing a personal at-

tunement to a living, breathing woman in labour. In the context of Problem-Based Learning involving university students, Zhou examines, through multiple methods, the idea or metaphor that, metaphorically speaking, a student project is like “an extra group member,” and discusses what the practical, theoretical, and methodological significance of such an approach might be. So far the articles have simply assumed that creativity is a good thing, but Mølholm raised some questions about the possible downside of the relentless emphasis on promoting creativity within the European Union, including Denmark. Based on the work of Michel Foucault, his article explores how the late-modern human being is incited to become a creative individual. In a different vein, Morris takes up the neglected theme of embodiment and creativity, with a focus on the actual process of writing teachers. To illuminate this topic, she carried out a phenomenological study of movement meditation and the activity of these teachers. This theme of embodiment is also developed by Tanaka as he analyses how meaningful communication is generated from embodied interactions between the self and the other. As part of his approach, he draws upon Merleau-Ponty’s notion of intercorporeality, understood as the reciprocal perception-action loop between the self and the other.

Design, Aesthetics, and Creativity

Of course, there is a large world outside of education, including the world of design. Bolvig Poulsen and Strand focus on the capacity of creative methods to nurture meaning-making and reframing during design processes. They demonstrate how the method, “Object theatre,” can be applied as a meaning-making activity and can effectively support the novel development and refinement of both problem formulation and future solutions. And then there is the realm of engineering design where Coxon describes the use of hermeneutic phenomenology in a broad spectrum of projects for understanding everyday human experience. He and his colleagues have experimented with and explored creative ways to ‘get into’ the lives of participants within areas as diverse as the health, pharmaceuticals, education, manufacturing and local government sectors. In the context of inquiry into problem spaces, Vistisen discusses and categorizes the ways designers use a kind of innovative sketching to test and challenge assumptions about both current and

possible future states of the environment, and suggests that sketching should be understood as broader than a mere set of techniques. The next article, by Seamon, draws upon André Kertész's photograph of a Paris suburb to point toward a phenomenology of aesthetic encounter. Making use of the progressively-intensive designations of philosopher Henri Bortoft, he highlights a spectrum of aesthetic experience that extends from limited assimilation to a more comprehensive and engaged participatory understanding. That phenomenology is also highly relevant to the field of nursing education is demonstrated by Sørensen as she argues that narratives (i.e., autobiographies) and creative approaches (i.e., arts) should be part of future practice in educating health care professionals. She suggests this is especially the case as there is a new official requirement that professionals be able to communicate about existential and spiritual topics with patients as well as with their families. Next is an article that is similarly about innovation in education, but with focus on the university classroom. Nosek and her colleagues describe an on-going project where they bring formerly incarcerated adults into the classroom to share their experiences of incarceration and illness with graduate nursing and public health students. They focus on the experience of one formerly incarcerated adult, Earthy, as they consider his transformative process from participant to teacher of Heideggerian concepts of a person within the context a 'community of wonder.' Then Skov and Pedersen present a Jungian based integrative model of therapeutic change using art therapy methods as practical tools, with the aim of improving quality of life and in the prevention of depression. In their research study, the participants worked with painting, clay work and drumming and imagination and personal dialogues were linked to the artwork. It seems especially fitting that the last article in this edition deals with sublime moments, in this case in nursing practice. Globe and Cameron, using Jean-Luc Nancy's understanding of the sublime, consider how the experience of a patient's breath can be existentially revelatory of nursing practice and how, in such a moment, one may be brought close to what normally remains at a distance.

Conclusion

As we mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Gadamer has called for more phenomenological work and less talk about phenomenol-

ogy. These articles, we are pleased to say, exemplify the practice of phenomenology, broadly defined. What is so encouraging here is that these researchers' have been willing to go against the grain, in terms of method and theory and practice, that they have taken risks and stepped into the unknown. We assume that in many instances they did not at the outset know whether their creativity and imaginative perspective would bear fruit, their critiques and novel perspectives appreciated or even understood, and their patience rewarded. From a common sense point of view, one that many practitioners within the social science related disciplines adhere to, one should be focused on getting results and proceeding in a systematic and pragmatic way, upholding scientific rigor and following tradition. Obviously this viewpoint is of value and it is also, as we have indicated, the point of departure for creativity. Jazz musicians, in the example we used, must be skilled before improvisation becomes possible, just as psychotherapists must have a basis in a sense of personal security and knowledge based on practice, before they can step into the "unknown" with their clients. What these articles have shown is that this stepping into the new or the unknown is in the most fundamental way of value and of use, in applied areas, such as developing business solutions, effective approaches to psychotherapy, or innovative design in engineering. It would be an interesting project to talk at length to some of our contributors and ask them to talk about their creative process and the ups and downs of such their creative endeavors. However, in place of this project, we would like to theorize that in this process something akin to what Marcel calls "creative fidelity" shows up. This entails an opening up, at least in moments, to the call of being and responding deeply to what emerges. It might well be, as Derrida, Levinas, Buber and others have suggested that these moments are characterized by a radical receptivity within which one receives something that is surprising, startling, wondrous and even unsettling. Then, of course, one has to take what has been received and give shape and words to it, and with that there is a certain kind of categorizing and fixing in place. But then, later, the process starts all over again, and one returns to wonder and the possibility of a new beginning. As a reader you bring these insights and studies to life, approaching them with your own interests, agenda, and histories, and, we hope, finding yourself encouraged to find paths to creativity and wonder in your

own research and discipline. As editors we have learned a great deal from studying these articles and dialoguing with these authors and have been inspired by their spirit of adventure and the thoughtfulness of their approach.

References:

- Gadamer, H.-G. (2006 [1960]). *Truth and method*. London: Continuum. (2nd. revised edition, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall)
- Marcel, G. (2002 [1964]). *Creative Fidelity*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marcel, G. (1973 [1968]). "What Can Be Expected of Philosophy?", In: *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, Gabriel Marcel. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2007 [1945]). *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). *Signs*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968 [1964]). *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Palmer, R. (2001). *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*. Hans-Georg Gadamer. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sallis, J. (1973). *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Yeo, M. T. (1987). *Creative Adequation: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Philosophy*. McMaster University (DigitalCommons@McMaster (Open Acces Dissertations, Paper 3828)