

Like all phenomena of nature, creativity lives and dies within an ecology. There are creatogenic ecologies, but there are also creatopathic ones; the former are favorable to creativity, generative, while the latter are pathological and destructive. In all ecologies, periods of relative stability alternate with instabilities—sometimes shattering disequilibria that alter the ecological niche and change the landscape of the creative surround. Whether stable or unstable, heterogeneous or homogeneous, a creative human ecology is made up of a multiplicity of natural phenomena, people, experiences, and actions.

The specifically creative ecology may extend backward in time as well as laterally in space. We may find inspiration in the work of our predecessors from other ages, or colleagues in other locations. The Renaissance drew heavily on the golden age of Greece, and we still draw heavily on both. Modern art has roots in the work of artists in other cultures, from Africa to Asia. The creative ecology is both here and now, and long ago and far away.

Friendships are an important part of creative human ecologies. Think how many artistic and intellectual movements have begun in cafes, with friends pondering problems, outlining constraints and possibilities, and embarking on a collective journey of exploration. The symposia described by Plato, the source of Western philosophy, were lively events with considerable eating and quite heroic drinking (to loosen the discussion), ending in the wee hours of the morning. There went Socrates, there went Alcibiades, there went Anaxagoras, a veritable creative ecology in the golden age of Greece.

Almost all creation is a collaboration. Many of the most creative activities that have blossomed in this century, whether moviemaking or musical performance in jazz and pop bands, the development of business ventures, or new social movements, required constant collaboration. The great research and development laboratories of our century have witnessed an outpouring of group creativity, of work conducted with others under the auspices (and usually with the financial backing) of others.

The big corporations are now recognizing the need for creative teams, for people who can work together cooperatively and creatively to produce those things that a single person simply cannot make alone.

As in all creative phenomena, the relationship between the creative person, the creative product, and the environment is full of seeming paradox. Creative persons benefit from support, from encouragement, from even a lone voice backing them in the face of adversity. Many creative persons have

benefited from mentors, role models who guide them along the way to developing their own uniqueness. And yet the creative mind also needs a degree of solitude to match its immersion in the world, a time to mull things over and get down to the work of composing, painting, or writing alone. In that solitude we are perhaps never totally alone, wrestling as we are with ideas, debates, beliefs, and the notions of others. But in that solitude we can shape them, reorganize them, work with them, digest them, and make them our own.

So here again we find the constantly paradoxical nature of creativity, for as they internalize the work of others—their mentors, colleagues, friends, and enemies—creative persons are also developing their individual view of the world. They must! Yet the more unique and autonomous they become, the more dependent they become on their ecology. By alternating immersion and isolation, openness and closure, creative persons and creative environments co-evolve.