

Gottlieb Guntern (2010)

The Spirit of Creativity.

Basic Mechanisms of Creative Achievements.

Lanham (University Press of America).

486 pages, 56,36€,

ISBN 978-0-7618-5052-6

The Spirit of Creativity is a well researched and elegantly written investigation of the creative process that helps find original solutions to the problems of individuals, couples, families, teams and organizations. The in-depth study offers a wealth of inspiring and motivating examples which encourage the reader to find her or his own creative ways of reaching desired goals. The book is currently available in English; a German translation is in project.

From 1978 to 1989 the author, Gottlieb Guntern, headed the Psychiatric Center of Upper Valais (Switzerland), an in-patient and out-patient facility he had founded. This pilot center produced a number of remarkable innovations, among others the integration of the center into a general hospital; the establishment of open units for in-patients; and a rigorous focus on systems therapy. During this time Guntern developed, practiced and taught system concepts and methods of systems therapy. From 1981 to 2006 Gottlieb Guntern and his wife, visual artist Greta Guntern-Gallati, organized numerous international symposia on a variety of topics ranging from systems science and systems therapy to creativity and leadership. In the course of twenty-five years twenty International CREANDO Symposia on Creativity in Economics, Arts and Science boasted renown creative leaders – many of them Nobel laureates in literature, science and economics – from various professional domains as speakers. From 1990 onwards the author mainly focused on scientific research on the nature and basic mechanisms of creativity and leadership. The Spirit of Creativity is his most comprehensive publication on the topic.

A quotation from Goethe's Faust precedes the book's introduction as its adage: "We sit at the fleeting loom of time and weave the shimmering dress for the gods divine." What a wonderful metaphor for the mysterious nature of human creativity!

One of the major assets of this comprehensive study is a precise definition of basic terms such as leadership, creativity, inspiration, illumination, cultural selection.

The author presents the nature and the basic mechanisms of creativity concisely and in easily understandable language. The book describes and explains the interplay of chaos and order, the seven phases of the creative process, the cultural selection separating the wheat from the chaff, and the cultural evolution of creative achievements following the process of cultural selection.

Whoever wishes to choose a direct approach to the topic of creativity may begin with the study of the seven phases of a creative process as analyzed by Guntern: germination, inspiration, preparation, incubation, illumination, elaboration and evaluation.



Like a piece of jewelry, the book is inlaid with many captivating stories about some great creators and how they came up with some of their masterpieces. The tale of Bob Dylan's hit song "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" for instance, illustrates how losing his girlfriend put Bob into a state of frenzy during which he proved to be highly prolific in songwriting.

The chapter on the cultural selection of creative achievements embarks the reader on a fascinating journey and the encounter of creative personalities and their accomplishments, whether accepted or rejected by society. In just a few pages there is a lot to be learned of the personality and the creative work of outstanding individuals such as rock musician Bob Dylan, writer Ernest Hemmingway, mathematician S. Chandrasekhar, inventor Thomas Edison, film director Billy Wilder, actress Marlene Dietrich, jazz artist Thelonius Monk or architect Le Corbusier.

The book portrays a great number of exceptional creative realizations in the spheres of art, business and science. With a fine feeling for the essential, it elucidates the delicate web of relationships connecting a person's creative gift, his personality, with the social environment. Guntern always approaches the creative human being with a sense of profound respect and appreciation.

Especially during his years as chairman of the International CREANDO Symposia on Creativity, he had the unique opportunity to meet and discuss with many of them personally. His numerous face to face encounters include writer Gabriel García Márquez, ethologist Jane Goodall, mathematician Anatol Rapaport – a highly creative mentor of systems theory – to name but these three.

A multitude of surprising and unusual insights unfold in the chapter on Muslim and Mongol influence on cultural evolution. It highlights the importance of the Silk Road for the intercultural exchange of ideas, religious convictions, scientific discoveries, works of art, merchandise, myths and legends as well as strategically important military and diplomatic information. Guntern reports crucial historic events of the Asian and European Middle Ages and discusses their constructive or destructive impact on creative individuals and teams, processes and achievements. He puts forth convincing arguments for interpreting the creative performance of the Mongol and Muslim Golden Ages as a chief precondition for the "crown jewel of European history," namely the Renaissance (ca. 1300-1600). Guntern bases his arguments, in part, on Michael Hamilton Morgan, author of both fiction and non-fiction works, and his groundbreaking book "Lost History: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Scientists, Thinkers and Artists (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2007).

The Spirit of Creativity successfully combines a sophisticated systems approach to the description and explanation of the creative process with a colorful depiction of the fate of creative human beings and their achievements in the Golden and Dark Ages, from Bagdad to Cordoba, and from Samarkand to Florence.

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