

### Essay III (5 pages)

#### Timeline

- Proposal due in class Tuesday 11/9
- 1<sup>st</sup> Draft to be posted to your workshop group by 9:00 am Tuesday, 11/16; hard copy due in class Tuesday 11/16.
- Revision due Tuesday 11/23 my office by 4:00.
- Final revised version to be turned in with Portfolio

Essay III is an *analytical* essay. In it you will still explore, or develop, your own idea. But in the course of exploration, you'll analyze, or critique, one or more of the theories of creativity we read. Theories are tools for thinking; thus, rather than trying to prove that a theory is true you may want instead to consider what ways it is and isn't useful.

This essay gives you practice in writing about other writers' ideas. It also gives you a chance to write about the ideas you have found most intriguing this semester, and to explore them in more depth than in our class discussions.

Unlike our first two essay assignments, for Essay III I am providing you with specific topics. You may, however, propose your own topic along the lines of the topics listed below. **Note that while the topic is specified by me, you are determining the idea (thesis) that structures your essay.** The prompts suggest ways in which you might test the theories about creativity we've read against other theories and/or the biographical material we've read and watched, as well as against your own observations and thinking. Whichever prompt you respond to, your essay must make significant use of ideas from at least three texts we have read this term. You may substitute *Dancemaker* or *Maya Lin: A Strong, Clear Vision* for one of these three texts (= 2 texts & 1 documentary). You may, of course, refer to more than three texts; and you may also bring references to other essays and articles, novels, stories, poems, songs, or movies into your discussion. You should use personal experience and observation to motivate your discussion and, possibly, in the course of your argument or exploration of your idea.

NOTE: Although you are exploring and making arguments about ideas, you should not attempt to write in a more "abstract" way—on the contrary: ideas are best illustrated and understood by means of vivid, specific examples. Nor is the tone of this essay constrained: you may find a humorous, ironic, or playful approach works best for you; your approach may be purely exploratory, or you may find you want to write a persuasive essay.

#### Prompts

- 1) May, Koestler and Boden all offer definitions of creativity. Compare and contrast two or all three—what are their definitions good for? What do they leave out?
- 2) "Language can act as a screen between the thinker and reality. Creativity often starts where language ends, by regressing to preverbal levels, to more fluid and uncommitted forms of mental activity" (Koestler 14).
  - a) Write a letter to a friend in which you explore Koestler's ideas on the three domains of creativity, OR

- b) his ideas (as in the quote above) on regression to “extraconscious” and nonverbal forms of mental activity.
- 3) Koestler considers comedy one of the three principal domains of creative thought. Does that seem surprising? Does it help you understand something new about creativity, or about comedy? Write an essay that explores Koestler’s ideas about comedy and creativity.
- 4) Use Koestler’s ideas on the “Ah” reaction and Art and Self-Transcendence to deepen your own and readers’ understanding of the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer as he is described in Kennedy Fraser’s “The Poet of Everyday Life.” You may want to do a little additional research and to spend some time looking at Vermeer’s pictures.

Try this link:

[http://essentialvermeer.20m.com/timelines/timeline\\_european\\_painters.htm](http://essentialvermeer.20m.com/timelines/timeline_european_painters.htm)

This is a brilliant website that offers a treasure trove of layered information and images. You can also, of course, look for books in the library. Keep in mind that this isn’t a research paper on Vermeer, but an exploration of Koestler’s ideas about art and the reactions it evokes for artists and observers. You may choose to write this essay using a different artist, choreographer, or poet to exemplify Koestler’s ideas, and may want to bring in ideas by Rollo May and other writers to clarify Koestler’s ideas.

- 5) Write an essay that explains and explores Boden’s three forms of creativity, using examples from other class readings and your own experience.
- 6) Write an appreciation of Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” using Rollo May’s ideas from *The Courage To Create* to deepen readers’ understanding of Walker’s ideas and method.
- 7) Is it possible to extrapolate a theory about creativity or imagination from Hawthorne’s “Artist of the Beautiful”? If this notion intrigues you, you might try:
- comparing Rollo May’s ideas and the quilters of Gee’s Bend on “utility” to patterns you find in Hawthorne’s story, and
  - working with Boden’s insight re: values: “Because creativity by definition involves not only novelty but value, and because values are highly variable, it follows that many arguments about creativity are rooted in disagreements in value” (10).
  - You may also, of course, find your own way to approach this task, drawing on other writers we’ve read to clarify Hawthorne’s meaning in this story.
- 8) Hirschberg (ch. 10) believes that involvement and information are the two key fuels for creativity. Explain what he means by this idea, using examples from his book, other writers such as May and Boden, and your own experience. Assume your audience comprises readers who want to know how to increase their own creativity.
- 9) In the Preface to *The Courage To Create* Rollo May says “We express our being by creating. Creativity is a necessary sequel to being (8).”
- a) Write a letter to a friend explaining and reflecting on this idea.
  - b) Write an essay whose purpose is to persuade readers that May’s ideas are true and useful to keep in mind.

- 10) Write an essay that explains and reflects on May's idea of encounter.
- 11) May says, "We cannot really see an object unless we have some emotional involvement with it" (49). What does he mean? How does this work? What are some consequences, if he's right?
- 12) Several of our readings talk about the unconscious (also "imagination" (May) and "intuition" (Hirschberg).) Write an essay that reflects on the role of the unconscious in creative process. You may want to start by asking a question that you want to explore and letting readers know why it matters to answer this question.
- 13) Hirschberg, Gladwell and McAuliffe all address the role of organizational structure in fostering creativity. Write an essay that compares and comments on their insights (Hirschberg should be the central character in your essay, as he is the one who theorizes on this topic most extensively), drawing also on your own work experience if you can.
- 14) A university is an institution that exists to instill learning—knowledge and skills—that contribute to students' ability to solve problems, what Boden calls "P-creativity." Write an essay that reflects on the ways you see education at MIT successfully fostering your ability (and that of your classmates?) in problem solving and ways in which it does not seem to be successful. Although a university is not the same kind of organization as a manufacturing company, you may find some of Hirschberg's ideas applicable. You may also want to use May as a yardstick for the kinds of problems your education seems to be training you to solve.

**Citation:**

You may use formal (MLA style) or informal (magazine article style) citation for Essay I. Remember, though, regardless of the style of citation you use, **it is imperative that the reader can tell which ideas are yours and which ideas belong to other writers.** A reader's pleasure in an essay such as this one is the pleasure of following a conversation among people with interesting minds. Therefore, the reader has to be able to distinguish voices and ideas.

**Proposals:**

Paste one of the topics listed, or write your own, at the top of your proposal. Then write one paragraph that explains why you've chosen this topic and which of our texts and/or documentaries you expect to use in your essay.