



THE CREATIVIST MANIFESTO:
Consumer or Creativist?

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I believe that the most significant choice that we can make in today's society is what to be—a Consumer or a Creativist.

Consumer is the default position. That is the position that our current society wants us to adopt—to be consumers in order to provide a market for all the mass-produced goods that our economy is geared up to produce. Being a consumer means accepting a passive role in our life, one in which we seek fulfillment through the accumulation of stuff, whether it be material goods, a high status job, or even in terms of our relationships. This has implications not only for us as individuals, but for the planet that we are dependent on and, in our consuming hunger, are depleting and damaging.

This default way of being is now so entrenched that “consumers” is now a default label for people. And in terms of public services, which are provided by the taxes that we pay, we are just “service users” consuming services.

So what's the alternative? To be a Creativist: To reclaim the right to our individual identities; To play an active role in shaping and in creating our lives from the inside out; To fulfill our need to create which is part of all of us. And, once we are reconnected to our own identities, we can connect with and be part of our communities and act collectively.

I deliberately use the word “Creativist” rather than “Creator.” A Creator is an individual who creates. A Creativist is an individual who creates as part of the collective.

The distinction is clear. Consume versus create. And the forces of consume versus create contain within them a series of choices that we make everyday in our lives—in our relationships, at work and in our communities.

Consume:	Create:
Have	Be
Alone	Together
Fear	Faith
Certainty	Uncertainty
Movement	Stillness
Decide	Choose
Political	Personal
Answers	Questions

I am not saying that one side is all bad and the other side is all good. My argument is that we are out of balance, and we need to restore the balance—for the sake of ourselves, our society and our planet.

I am going to take a look at each of the choices above that we can make, and in doing so invite you to choose—Creativist or Consumer?

1 | Consume vs. Create

“Man—man and woman—can create by planting seeds, by producing material objects, by creating art, by creating ideas, by loving one another. In the act of creation man transcends himself as a creature, raises himself beyond the passivity and accidentalness of his existence into the realm of purposefulness and freedom ... To create presupposes activity and care. It presupposes love for that which one creates. How then does man solve the problem of transcending himself, if he is not capable of creating, if he cannot love? *There is an answer to this need for transcendence: if I cannot create life, I destroy it. To destroy life makes me also transcend it ... Thus the ultimate choice for man, inasmuch as he is driven to transcend himself, is to create or destroy, to love or to hate.*”
—Erich Fromm

Erich Fromm, the psychoanalyst and social philosopher, writing in his book *The Sane Society*, captured this struggle between create and consume, and how it is at the heart of our identity as human beings. “Consume” is a more polite word than “destroy” —but unabated consumption does lead to destruction.

If you have ever baked a cake from scratch, you will know the sense of satisfaction that you feel—deciding what to make, gathering together the ingredients, mixing it all together, putting it in the oven, waiting for the magic to happen and the cake to emerge, all the while filling the kitchen with a tantalizing smell. And maybe you’ve had a child helping you, or you remember being that child, standing on a chair to carefully stir the mixture, knowing that your reward will come at the end when you are allowed to lick the spoon.

Why are people so impressed when something is homemade? I think that it is because they recognize the time, the effort and the care—in short, the love—that has gone into making it. You have not just walked into a supermarket, pulled it off the shelf or out of the freezer, heard the barcode ping as it goes through the checkout and decanted it from box to plate.

There is something of what William Morris called “The Beauty of Life” within the homemade cake, some of that energy being passed from one individual to another. In production and consumption mode, there is no room for this passing on, of sharing of human energy. It is a one-way, linear street. It is not organic.

If we choose to be Creativists then we are choosing to accept responsibility for our own lives—while also choosing to value and be part of the life all around us.

2 | Have vs. Be

Two years ago, I had four sessions with a life coach. One of the first exercises that she asked me to do was to list out ten things that I either wanted to be, to do or to have.

I considered the question carefully, and then wrote my list of ten on a scrap piece of paper in pencil on the tube on the way home. I still have the list. All of the items on my list were something to be:

Be creative
Be love
Be peace
Be adventure
Be abundant
Be thankful
Be energy
Be present
Be joy
Be wide-eyed

At the next session, I explained my list to Cheryl, my coach. I said to her that I thought if that I was “being” all of things on the list, then all of things that I wanted to do and have would flow from there. I couldn’t see any other way to approach it.

Perhaps my focus on “being” was a realisation that I wasn’t being authentic to myself at the time—that I needed to get back to basics, to build new foundations before moving on to construct a whole new life. There was no point saying that I wanted to have a fabulous house in the country, for example, if I couldn’t first be me.

Although I didn't express it in these terms at the time, deep down inside me I realised that I needed to connect with myself first of all. I needed to be living my values.

Unconsciously, I recognised that I needed to give shape to myself inside, to define and then express what I looked like inside, before I could then define myself outwardly, by what I do and have.

As Creativists, to “be” who we are is most important, so that we are in a position where we are able to create—and not be defined by the “have” of the Consumer.

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3 | Alone vs. Together

In the '80s and '90s, individualism became the norm—it was every man for himself. And I think that this is one area in which there has been visible shift in recent years towards recognizing that we are, in fact, better together. This shift has been facilitated by the advent and popularization of technologies that enable collaboration online. You only have to look at the success of Open Source technologies such as Linux and collaborative projects such as Wikipedia to see people's desire to contribute their creativity to a common cause for the common good—and the power of the results that can be achieved.

Yet, such openness hasn't pervaded all parts of society, and that is the next challenge—to take the spirit of collaboration and creativity that has worked so well in the online world and translate it into society at large, including government. It is not just about working as one individual versus working as a group of individuals—it is a mentality, an attitude. Many groups, including in some cases governments, have the attitude that “we are in this alone,” no one understands us—and because we are alone, we have to fight harder to defend our corner. An alternative approach would be to find out what we have in common with other people, and work together to achieve shared goals. Working together will be more effective in the long run than going it alone. To me, it seems that the choice is whether we can choose to create together or consume alone.

4 | Fear vs. Faith

Fear is rampant in our society. You only have to open the pages of a newspaper or turn on the nightly news to see stories full of fear—crime, terrorism, the economy. There is a frequent lament, "Where are the good news stories?"

The pervasiveness of fear affects us both as individuals and as a society. Just over a year ago, I was made redundant from my job in a design agency, hit like so many others by the recession. I was in the fortunate position to be able to take some time off as I didn't have dependents, but fear could so easily have derailed me. I could have chosen not to go to Bali for a month, and I might not have started writing again. I could have chosen not to go to work in a ski resort, and I wouldn't have pushed at what my definition of freedom was. I am grateful to have been supported by friends who helped me to see my fears as hollow, and who encouraged me to have my faith in myself.

**It is natural to have fear, it is natural to be scared,
it is not wrong to be fearful.**

One example of fear versus faith in society can be seen in the different attitudes towards climate change. There are environmental campaigners who campaign on the basis of doom and gloom, that the end of the world is coming—which only serves to paralyze people with fear at the hugeness of the problem. Another approach, characterized by movements such as Transition Towns, are based on faith—faith that together we can meet the challenges and, indeed, achieve a better quality of life in the process. One of the key elements of this approach is creating a positive vision to move towards. With a positive vision in mind and a practical framework to achieve it, faith enables action.

The choice is to create with faith—or consume in fear.

5 | Certainty vs. Uncertainty

Bertrand Russell, in his introduction to his *History of Western Philosophy*, wrote: **“To teach how to live without certainty, and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can still do for those who study it.”**

I read these words earlier this year as I was travelling to France on my way to being a chalet chef. During my time in France, I was asked numerous times, “So, what are you going to do next?” I would reply with something along the lines of, “I don’t know. If I’ve learnt anything in the past few months it is that it doesn’t do to plan too far ahead.” If I was feeling so inclined and/or I thought my audience would be sympathetic, I would add (I paraphrase) “It is important to have a big vision that you are working towards, but not be prescriptive about the how. The how will work itself out if you believe in your vision and act in accordance with it.”

Uncertainty allows us the space to experiment, to create something new and different. If we stick with certainty, then we can only have more of what we’ve already got.

Nonetheless, whilst believing this on an intellectual level, I didn’t really believe it in my bones. I continued to struggle with embracing uncertainty, particularly when I returned home from France six weeks early with my leg in a cast, the result of a broken ankle. What would I do now?

How would I earn my living? Our society conditions us for certainty. I began to think that I needed to get a permanent job. A permanent job would give me certainty. Why did I think that? I had recently been made redundant at a so-called “permanent” job. I began to ask myself instead, “What does it feel like to embrace uncertainty?” And when I learned to do so, I opened the door to a new, more peaceful relationship with life—one in which I did not have to have everything planned out before I took the first step. I was happy to be open to invitations and explore what happened next, whilst keeping a clear sight of who I am and what my end goal is.

I believe that being able to live with more uncertainty would be beneficial to society too. Given the uncertainty of the times that we live in, this might seem like a counter-intuitive thing to say. But at the moment, our governments are focused on getting back to a state of “certainty” as quickly as possible. What if, instead, governments embraced uncertainty as an opportunity for change, to find a new way of approaching issues, of creating solutions?

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6 | Movement vs. Stillness

Our lives are full of movement. In Western, urban society, we are constantly on the go. iPhones and Blackberries mean that we are continually in touch. Our lives are full—or we fill our lives. There is never enough time. Even when we sit still, we crave movement around us—movement in the form of pictures on the TV or music on the stereo.

But we need to sit still. To think. To be. To be at peace.

And then we will be ready to really move again. Not in a headless chicken dance, but in a controlled, powerful, deliberate, free-flowing dance.

I now try to meditate twice a day for twenty minutes—and to carry this stillness with me into the rest of the day, in the core of me, no matter what I am doing. With stillness, I am in a place where I can be open to connect with other people and make creative connections. I love to move too—to run, to cycle, to swim—and as I do so, ideas and lines of poetry sometimes drift into my head from my unconscious. Movement has become its own meditation.

It's a hard choice to make, yet one of the easiest. To bring the balance of stillness into our lives. To give ourselves the stillness to create.

7 | Decide vs. Choose

I didn't use to make much distinction between the words "choose" and "decide." Then I came across the etymology of "decide." Decide comes from the Latin "decidere," which literally means "to cut off." It also happens to have in it the root "-cide," as in homicide, suicide. This led me to think "What is it that we are killing off when we decide?" For a person such as me, who used to be prone to indecision, this could be seen as a neat get-out clause from having to make a decision.

However, in the place of "deciding," I have opted to choose. To choose comes from the Old English "ceosan," meaning "to choose, taste, try" and comes from the same family tree as the word "gusto". So which would you prefer to do? Decide, which has in-built connotations of violence, or choose, which is about giving things a go, enjoying it? In the moment of choosing, you are not killing off any options, you are just selecting a particular path to explore.

Next time you have to make a decision, first think about what you are going to choose. To choose is to make a positive choice about a road that you are going to try out. It may be a seemingly small point, the difference between two words, but the words that we use when talking—to ourselves and to others—create our story.

Decide to consume? Choose to create? It's your choice—or decision.

This default way of being is now so entrenched that “consumers” is now a default label for people.

8 | Political vs. Personal

On the journey of developing my ideas and seeking to express them in writing, I have kept coming across one fundamental dilemma: Should I write about my experiences from a personal perspective or a political perspective? They seem to me so inextricably intertwined. In the end, I have chosen to combine the two (or at least seek to). **“The personal is political”** as a friend reminded me. Hearing the phrase again, I realized that I didn’t know where it originated from. Research revealed that it originated in the feminist movement in the 1960s. A paper written by Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” was published in 1969 and was part of popularizing the phrase. The paper states that **“personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution.”**

The Creativist belief is rooted in actively shaping and creating our futures. In political terms, this takes the form of a community working together, advocating a positive vision for the future and moving towards that, rather than adversarial mud-slinging and grumbling about what is wrong. It is about putting our human needs at the heart of what we do, human needs from a psychological perspective, not just a material one. Erich Fromm summarized these needs as: **“the need for relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, the need for a sense of identity and the need for a frame of orientation and devotion.”** These human needs have been largely ignored in the prevailing political system, in which the needs of feeding the consumption machine have been put first.

Many people are choosing to ignore the political because they think it has nothing to do with them. How about if we choose, once again, to make the personal political?

9 | Answers vs. Questions

“Lead with questions not answers.” So says Jim Collins in his book, *Good to Great*, in the context of organizational leadership. I believe that it applies as much to shaping our own lives. If we lead our lives with answers, then we have a fixed view in mind, which can cause us to be blinkered and miss opportunities. If we lead our lives with questions, we are setting the framework that we wish to explore. The promise of certainty, of answers that we can consume, is what we are led to expect. This begins at school where, for the most part, we are fed answers and not taught to ask questions. There is an example of a school in Chicago taking a different approach, in which whole lessons are set aside for the pupils to ask questions that determine the structure of the lesson.

“Lead with questions not answers.” — Jim Collins

The questions that we ask can shape the structure of our very lives. About three years ago, I came across Gandhi’s saying: **“It is not that our problems are too big. It is that they are not big enough.”** This resonated with me, putting my small problems into perspective, and leading me to the question, **“What is the big problem that I am going to take on in the world?”** This question got me thinking and exploring, until I gradually began living the answer. As the poet, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote:

“Do not search now for the answers which cannot be given you because you could not live them. It is a matter of living everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, one distant day, live right into the answer.”

A Consumer seeks the finiteness of answers; a Creativist revels in the infiniteness of questions.

Consumer or Creativist?

In the above examples, I have touched on how I am using these pairs to take control of my life, and to lead a more authentic life, one that is driven from the inside rather than led from the outside.

On a cold winter morning at the beginning of last year, I happened to glance at my bookshelf and see a slim volume by George Orwell, entitled *Why I Write*. I had been thinking about this question, and so I took the book out from where it had been nestling. On the first page where these words:

“From a very early age, perhaps the age of five or six, I knew that when I grew up I should be a writer. Between the ages of about seventeen and twenty-four I tried to abandon this idea, but I did so with the consciousness that I was outraging my true nature and that sooner or later I should have to settle down and write books.”

The phrase “outraging my true nature” really struck me in the gut. This is what I had been doing by not allowing this part of myself to be. And, maybe, that is what we are doing on a wider basis, as a society—outraging our true nature by putting consumption above creativity.

Thomas Berry, the ecologist and cultural historian, said in his book, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, **“What is needed is something beyond existing traditions to bring us back to the most fundamental aspect of the human: giving shape to ourselves.”** I know that I am at the beginning of a journey, and I know it to be an exciting one. I am learning what the choices that we make are, knowingly or unknowingly, that determine the course of our lives—and how we give shape to ourselves, and in turn, shape the world around us. I invite you to consider what being Creativist could mean to you in your life, and to share your journey with others. 📖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Olivia Sprinkel is a creative writer and thinker. She began to explore the ideas which led to the *Creativist Manifesto* whilst taking time out over the last year, including travelling in Bali and working as a chalet chef in Meribel, France. Olivia is now self-employed as a consultant. Olivia is half-Finnish, half-American and British by upbringing and is currently living in east London. For more information, and to share your ideas and feedback, please visit sprinkel.co.uk. You can also find Olivia on [Twitter](#).

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