



THREE MODELS OF CREATIVITY: INDIVIDUALITY WITHOUT INDIVIDUALISM

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GENDER AND GENIUS



- TYPICAL GENIUS HAS MALE BODY & PATTERN OF LIFE.
- HAS ALSO “FEMININE” CHARACTERISTICS = EMOTION, EMPATHY, IMAGINATION, SENSITIVITY & INTUITION.
- WILL BE LOOKING TODAY AT MODELS OF CREATIVITY.

ADAM LENT: ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS

3 senses of creativity:

- (i) narrow = associated only + the arts;
 - (ii) medium = associated + what Richard Florida calls “the creative class” → architects, designers, the advertising, IT, video-gaming industries etc.;
 - (iii) broad = “an act that is unique to an individual’s own capacities or vision”. Egs: setting up a charity, blogging, building a house. What all have in common = “the unique, pro-active and self-determined nature of the activity”.
- (Blog 5 January 2014)

ADAM LENT: ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS

Creativity is the most important political concept for the 21st Century:

- (i) best use of freedom & therefore good for us;
- (ii) without it modern capitalism would decline;
- (iii) the only solution to long-term austerity;
- (iv) creativity is under threat by Government, the public services & the school system. We need to act to protect it.

(Blog 5 January 2014)

4 POINTS IN RESPONSE TO LENT

- 1) slipperiness of the term “creativity”.
- 2) seems descriptive, but strong evaluative element. Lent’s claim relies on assumption that creativity always good.
- 3) L. equates “creativity” + self-expression. Does not consider *what* is expressed, rather than on the simple **act** of authentically *choosing* oneself. But a **dark side** to creativity.
- 4) L. links creativity to individualism & the autonomous, authentic & choosing self: what he calls “the unique, proactive and self-determined nature of the activity”.
Problematic. Look back at history to explore.

TWO TRADITIONS OF THEORISING CREATIVITY

- I) CREATOR AS BEING LIKE AN ARCHITECT WHO IMPOSES “FORM”—I.E. A DISTINCTIVE AND FORMAL PATTERN OR STRUCTURE—ON UNFORMED AND CHAOTIC MATERIAL (OR *HYLE*). GRECO-ROMAN TRADITION.
- II) CREATION OF SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING. JUDAIC-CHRISTIAN TRADITION.

THEORY-TYPE 1

Creation like shaping a sculpture or a pot from pre-existent material.

Involves formative force = LOGOS.

Often translated as “word”, BUT linked to ancient Greek understandings of reproduction = shaping of pre-existent matter.

Matter (hyle) chaotic and heterogeneous until unified & rendered harmonious by its relationship to the defining formula (the logos) in the male seed.

MORE ON THEORY-TYPE 1

- In ancient Greece NO specific term for creativity.
- Art = a form of discovery or of ordering & not creation.
- Closest ancient Greek term = “*poiein*” (“to make”), primarily restricted to *poiesis* (poetry) & *poietes* (poet).
- In the New Testament there is another Greek term: *ktizō*, from *ktizis* — sometimes translated as “create”.
- BUT “*ktizō*” means the foundation of a place, a city, or a colony. “To make habitable to people, a place, region [or] Island”. NOT creation out of nothing.

THEORY-TYPE 2

- *Creation of something out of nothing* = creating the material & its structures.
- Hebrew word *bara*: to create something out of nothing, but applied only to Yahweh/God or the “I AM that I AM” of Exodus 3:13–14 = creator of universe & also himself.
- Coleridge (1817): “The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.”
- Took hold during early modern period (17th C - 18th C).

MORE ON THEORY-TYPE 1

- 1) Tends to view art as a mirror.
- 2) Neoclassicism (from Renaissance to mid-18th C.) treats great artist as providing an idealised copy of the world or of the underlying truths, essences or “universals”.
- 3) Self-expression not valued highly. Value placed on “ease”, craft & skill.
- 4) Great artist ideally passive, although the copying (*mimesis*) relied on Reason more than passion or imagination, as skill meant distinguishing between universals & accidental qualities.

M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror & the Lamp*.

MORE ON THEORY-TYPE 2

- Creator compared to lamp or lighthouse; illuminates world in a unique & individualised way. Romantic view of Artist/Genius.
- New emphasis on originality: uniqueness of genius's "I am" reflected throughout his creations.
- Great work of art "grows"/"bursts forth": not a product of rational design, but an overflow of burgeoning energy.
- New emphasis on mental & psychological "work" exerted on unstructured or unruly material: chaotic dreams, fantasies, instincts, drives, longings etc.

ORGANIC ACCOUNT OF CREATION

- **Lamp/expressivist** view of art emphasises the organic + real novelty; art grows & develops as if from a seed:
- (i) Invention below conscious awareness, rooted in the “I”.
- (ii) Develops towards an end that is inherent in its organic structure: it develops *as if* it were designed.
- (iii) In growing, it assimilates into itself alien & diverse elements, “whatever does not kill me makes me stronger”.
- (iv) A limited role for design & choice, but the underlying “evolution” is self-directed, pre-conscious & spontaneous.
- (v) The great artwork or poem = an organic unity = the whole is more than the sum of its parts, & each part is integral to an appreciation the whole.

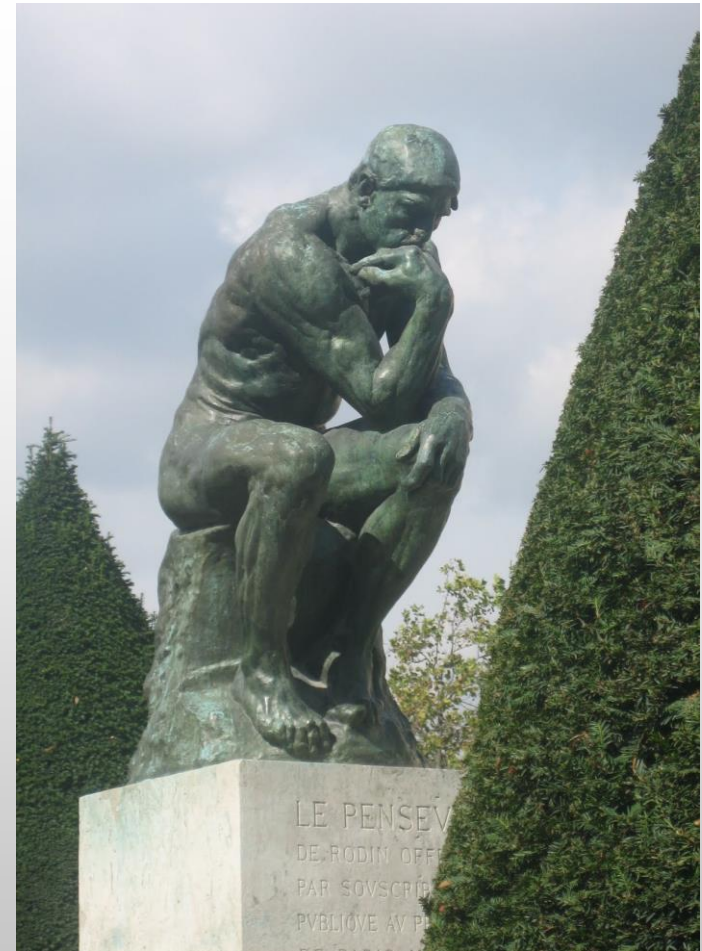
INDIVIDUALISM V. RELATIONAL VIEWS

- For Lent: creativity involves “an act that is unique to an individual’s own capacities or vision”; praises “the unique, pro-active and self-determined nature of the activity”.
- Lent drawing primarily on the Romantic — the “something-out-of-nothing” — model of creativity, but is leaving out the *relational* elements which means that the part cannot be separated from the whole — & from the network of relations — within which the organism exists.

AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT

- Creative individuals are NOT atomistic and isolated units.
- Creativity is social & interactive, involves situations & complex histories in which other human beings participate.
- The individual cannot function creatively without a dynamic relation to others who interact with her or him.
- Creativity is the product of different shaping forces:
 - (1) the individual;
 - (2) the community = the interests, skills, goals, knowledge and shared histories that emerge out of specific communities;
 - (3) the interactions between the individuals & the social, technical & environmental niche which individuals (and also communities) inhabit.

“In many arguments & writings, Rodin’s sculpture *The Thinker* dominates our collective imagination as the purest form of human inquiry: the lone, stoic thinker. Most perceptions of creativity have focused on this image of the solitary process. The analysis of creative people & creative objects, however, has demonstrated that most scientific & artistic innovations emerge from joint thinking, passionate conversations, & shared struggles among different people, emphasizing the importance of the social dimension of creativity.”



G. Fischer et al., “Beyond Binary Choices”,
International Journal of Human-Computer Studies (IJHCS) Special Issue on Creativity (2005).

3RD MODEL OF CREATIVITY

- MITATE
- A TECHNIQUE USED IN JAPANESE WOODBLOCKS, GARDENING, PAINTING, NOH-THEATRE, ARCHITECTURE, POETRY, ETC.
- MANY LAYERS OF SYMBOLISM & IMAGERY LAYERED ON TOP OF ONE ANOTHER, OFTEN TO HUMOROUS EFFECT.
- REFERENCES TO HISTORICAL OR FICTIONAL EVENTS OR PERSONAGES, OR IDEAS, ARE EMBEDDED INTO IMAGES.
- SOMETIMES TRANSLATED AS “PARODY”, BUT IN TERMS OF THE WESTERN ART TRADITIONS “PALIMPSEST” WOULD PROBABLY BE BETTER.

MORE ABOUT MODEL 3

- *MITATE* BELONGS WITH JAPANESE CONCEPT OF *MA*.
- “*MA*” CAN BE TRANSLATED AS SPACE, SPACING, INTERVAL, GAP, BLANK, ROOM, PAUSE, REST, TIME, TIMING OR OPENING.
- IN JAPANESE AESTHETICS IT’S THE EMPTY SPACES THAT EXIST BETWEEN OBJECTS OR MOVEMENTS OR PEOPLE THAT ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE OBJECTS THAT ARE PLACED WITHIN THE SPACE.

YET MORE ABOUT MODEL 3

- “I THINK OF MA AS POTENTIAL: POTENTIAL PRESENCE, POTENTIAL SOUND, POTENTIAL ACTION. I PERSONALLY DESCRIBE IT AS A DROP OF WATER HANGING OFF THE END OF A FAUCET; YOU KNOW IT IS GOING TO DROP, BUT YOU DON’T KNOW WHEN. THE DROP OF WATER IS IMMINENTLY WATCHABLE BECAUSE YOU KNOW SOMETHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN. EVEN IN THE STILLNESS AND SILENCE, THE TENSION IS THERE BECAUSE THE DROP WILL EVENTUALLY FALL. WHEN THE DROP FALLS, THERE IS A MOMENT OF RELIEF. THEN ANOTHER DROP OF WATER FORMS AND YOU WATCH AND WAIT, WHILE PERHAPS NOT QUITE BREATHING NORMALLY.
- THIS TENSION IS MA.”
- COLLEEN LANKI, “間: AN AESTHETIC OF SPACE-TIME” (2013)

CONCLUSION

- MANY PROBLEMS + LENT'S INDIVIDUALIST, AUTONOMOUS & PROTO-CAPITALIST MODEL.
- QU. *POLITICALLY* IMPORTANT, BUT NOT IN WAY THAT LENT SUGGESTS.
- CREATIVITY REQUIRES AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS SOCIAL, COLLECTIVELY SUPPORTIVE & ENVIRONMENTALLY RICH.
- NON-WESTERN TRADITIONS + THINKING ABOUT FEMALE SUBJECT POSITION HELP TO MODEL CREATIVITY IN A LESS INDIVIDUALISTIC WAY.