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# Creativity between Art and Philosophy

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The idea that art is related to a process of creation is a modern one. Through a complex history in the 20th century, which is not without contradictions, the connection between art and creativity was debated in different fields – psychology, epistemology, cognitive science, etc. – and became the target of attacks from marxism and (post-)structuralism. Still, the notion of creativity seems to have conserved its force not only in everyday practices but also in media discourses. In diverse areas – from art theory to epistemology, from action theory to economics, from computer science to psychology (to give only a few examples) – it has regained the attention of scholars as well, as is made clear by the number of recent publications on the topic. However, questions remain as to whether and how the notion of creativity can be used and what kind of conceptual work it can do.

These are difficult, yet important, philosophical matters, considering that, from theology to art, the notion of creativity has already undergone a series of profound transformations during modernity; most notably it ceased to mean a production *ex nihilo* and began to indicate a kind of making, which entails novelty, originality and exemplarity. From a philosophical point of view, this evolution concerns the very meaning of the creative act. A genetic approach, reducing creativity to a set of determined causes and grounds, finds a corrective in those thinkers who stress its normative significance and its performative dimension. The terms of this debate see the issue of creativity as involving general questions about our ways of acting and understanding or about exclusively, or particularly, or at least characteristically, some fields of human experience, such as the arts, and not others.

*Trópos* dedicated a call for papers to this topic. Selected papers are published in two special issues. The present one includes essays offering theoretical investigations on creativity. They do this under different, even contrasting, perspectives, with different aims and with different outcomes. Yet, the light they throw on the question at issue provides readers with important,

often *creative*, insights. Through them, readers are invited to think creatively, as well as critically, on creativity and its connections with the arts and aesthetics.

In the opening essay, Judith Siegmund discusses and criticizes different explanations of creativity in order to find ways to answer to the key question, *Is There a Quintessential Meaning for the Concept of Creativity?* She contrasts theories that consider creativity as a general feature of human action, theories that regard creativity as compatible with rationality and art creativity as exemplary of creativity as such, and other views that criticize the very concept of 'creativity' as an ideological notion: a notion used in our capitalistic society as a means of promoting efficiency in terms of increasing profit and adapting individual taste to mass culture. According to those conceptions, the notion of creativity, detached from the connotations of genius and inspiration and absorbed into the economic system, is 'domesticated' to the extent that it covers every human activity. This is, Siegmund argues, one of the reasons why artists nowadays reject both creativity as a paradigm for art and art as a paradigm for creativity.

In his paper *Naturalizzare la creatività* (*Naturalizing Creativity*), Gianluca Consoli suggests another way of avoiding the risk of an ideological use of the concept of creativity: its naturalization. 'Naturalization' does not simply seek to explain away the concept; it hopes instead to understand the mental processes at stake in creative actions. Hence, Consoli explores the notions of *insight* and of *aesthetic pleasure*. They should be combined in order to get a proper view of creativity under the perspective both of its production as well as of its reception. Nonetheless, Consoli argues, this naturalization must be integrated by a more comprehensive hermeneutical understanding that takes into account the historical dimension of creativity.

One may also be tempted to distinguish various kinds of creativity that should be explained differently. Following this path, Chris Dowling (*The Value of Ingenuity*) focuses his attention on a subclass of creative problem solving: *ingenuity*. If a 'creative' resolution to a problem is the combination of ideas "in a way that is original, valuable, and skilful," ingenuity is, according to Dowling, the capacity to recognize problems, whose creative solution is frugal as well as riskier, quicker and more economical than the solutions to other problems in the same "conceptual space," "but whose payoff is of sufficient value to warrant creatively engaging with this problem" (p. 61). An investigation of ingenuity can provide important insights about a kind of creativity that seems to be particularly relevant in our competitive world.

A different, yet related, issue concerns *artistic* creativity. Erkki Huovinen (*On Attributing Artistic Creativity*) maintains that the artistic medium is key

for understanding artistic creativity, which cannot be viewed solely in terms of conceptual restructuring or as problem-solving. For reducing artistic creativity to "a cognitive process that is wholly under the artist's control" means "to overlook the constitutive role of the medium both in shaping the creative products and in giving impulses to the artists that fundamentally ground our attributions of creativity to them and their works" (p. 79). The medium is hardly to be considered as a transparent tool. Rather, artists experience tensions and surprises in response to their own works. Hence, Huovinen argues, the uncontrollability of the medium, "far from being a defect in the artist's competence, is actually at the heart of what is expected of artistic creativity" (p. 68).

The fact that authentic, personal artists experienced "tensions, surprises, and revelations" in response to their works, seems to give artistic creativity an improvisational *touch*. This is one of the reasons why it is interesting to investigate creativity in relation to improvisation. Cesare Natoli's paper *Improvvisazione musicale e complessità* (*Musical Improvisation and Complexity*) is devoted to this task and explores some of the features of collective improvisation. In a collective improvisation, order and disorder, planning and chaos are inseparable. In this sense, according to Natoli, it can be framed analogously to biologically and physically complex systems, where the context is continuously transformed and re-created, and the self-regulating balance between order and chaos is achieved through the mutual relation of the parts. The epistemology of complexity provides aesthetic investigations with an understanding of the importance of the unforeseen as well as an understanding of how to bridge the divide between science and artistic production.

Still, what are the implications of creativity for the ontology of artworks and for their definition? In his paper *Questa è arte, quella non è arte. Le conseguenze ontologiche della creatività* (*This is Art, that is not Art: Ontological Consequences of Creativity*), Enrico Terrone argues that creativity is primarily ascribed to acts and events, not to things or objects. Against structuralism and contextualism, Terrone defends performativism, and he maintains that artworks are acts in which the artist plays a crucial role, although he/she exercises no absolute control over them. Moreover, the evaluation of artworks depends very much on their creative achievements. At the end of the paper, this view is exemplified by considering the special case of films.

Yet, there could also be good reasons for defending some improved versions of contextualism. According to Jerrold Levinson (*Indication, Abstraction, and Individuation*), contextualism holds true, if some of its weaknesses are overcome. The view of artworks as types, embraced by Levinson himself

in the past, must be abandoned, because works of art have aesthetic and artistic properties "that they could not have were they pure structures existing atemporally" (p. 122). So, according to Levinson, artworks are not pure abstract structures: they are rather impure, individual structures, which are created by the artist, who, by 'indicating' artworks, provides them with aesthetic, expressive and semantic properties. Hence, the idea of artworks as 'indicated structures' can be defended by understanding artistic indications as singular psychological acts that christen artworks in definite historical contexts.

The papers that have been summarized offer multifaceted theoretical accounts of creativity. The next issue of *Trópos* will tackle the topic from a different perspective by exploring the history for creativity and examining the ways in which individual philosophers and artists have approached the topic.

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