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# Introduction

## *The Creation of Art: Issues and Perspectives*

Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston

### 1. THE OCCLUSION OF CREATION

Although the creation of art is a topic that should be a central one for aesthetics, it has been comparatively neglected in recent philosophical writings about art. In one basic usage, the creation of art is simply its making, and all artworks, however derivative or uninspired, are created. There is also a richer, evaluative sense of "creation," in which mere making does not suffice for the creation of something. A manager of a factory who, showing a visitor around, announced proudly, not that "here we make plastic spoons," but "here we *create* plastic spoons," would sound risibly pretentious. Creation in this richer, evaluative usage is a special kind of making, a making that involves a significant degree of creativity, and is contrasted with the kind of routinized making that mass production exemplifies.

In respect of the making aspect of creation, there has been, ever since the rise of formalism and then of (post-)structuralism, a powerful current that has dismissed attention to the processes of making as irrelevant to philosophical aesthetics, theories of criticism, and criticism itself. There has also been a counter-current that has argued that this inattention is a deep mistake, and proponents of such theories as intentionalism have argued for the necessity of construing the artwork as the product of the artist's actions. But even this tradition, as some of the essays in this volume imply, has not always scrutinized artworks with that attention to the details of their



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making which adequate answers to these philosophical issues would demand.

Although the subject of the making of art has not achieved the full degree of attention it merits, it is in respect of the creativity aspect of our topic that the neglect is particularly striking. Creativity was, from Plato onwards, a recognised issue for investigation in philosophy, and its investigation has at times played an important role in aesthetics; but it has in recent times been underemphasized. Our point here is not that nothing has been written on the topic in the last few years – indeed, we will review some of this recent work in the next section. Yet compared to the vast amount of work that has been done on such subjects in aesthetics as the definition, interpretation, and evaluation of art; the features specific to different arts; and even on specialized subjects such as fakes, tragedy, the paradox of fiction, gender, genre and so on; creativity has been neglected. And when it has been discussed, it has often been in terms of creativity in general, embracing the sciences as well as the arts, so that its importance for aesthetics has not always been brought out.

This situation is strikingly odd, in respect of both aspects of our topic. Works of art, unlike natural objects, are after all *works*, the products of makings; and art is often supposed to be a paradigm of creative making, the human practice that most clearly exemplifies the creativity that is more obscurely at home in other fields. There is in fact a long tradition of analogising the artist to God the creator: indeed, Milton C. Nahm has argued that it is the "great analogy" that has influenced thinking about art since classical times.[1] Though clearly not all or even the majority of artworks are creative, the view that there is a special connection between art and creativity is independent of this claim, and merits philosophical investigation as to its truth and import. And further impetus for a philosophical investigation is imparted by the observation that a central term in the evaluation of artworks is "creative." There are, in fact, a host of important and interesting questions that can be, and intermittently have been, asked about the role that creative making should play in our understanding and evaluation of art, as the next section will illustrate in some detail. The neglect or obscuring of these questions can only impoverish aesthetics.

These observations raise the question of why the issues surrounding the creation of art have suffered this relative neglect in philosophical

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aesthetics. We suggest that a central reason lies in the influence, to which we have already alluded, of formalist, structuralist, and post-structuralist currents during large parts of the last century.[2] The neglect was not confined to philosophy; indeed, the situation in philosophy was influenced by powerful currents within criticism and literary theory. The turn away from research into the making of art had a variety of motivations and rationales, only some of which involved the real and perceived foibles of the "life and works" biographical approach that many critics were eager to supplant. In the New Criticism's break with both common-sense biographical criticism and those versions of biographical criticism based on existentialism, hermeneutics, and phenomenology, a leading idea was that an appropriate form of aesthetic appreciation requires the critic to focus entirely on the finished text's or other artistic structure's inherent, artistically relevant features. (Typically, no distinction was drawn between the text or structure and the work of art.) Facts about the text's provenance were to be set aside, especially whenever such facts were a matter of the "private" psychology of the creator, held to be unknowable or irrelevant. A salient example is W. C. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's criticism of John Livingston Lowes' painstaking attempt to reconstruct Samuel Coleridge's creation of "Kubla Khan," which attempt had been partly motivated by the poet's own strikingly mystifying account of the poem's origins.[3] The anti-intentionalists claim that although Lowes presents us with a "glittering parade" of information about Coleridge's sources and imagination, this sort of critical discourse leads us away from "the poem itself" and so is critically irrelevant.

Structuralist and post-structuralist theorists and critics were sharply critical of many aspects of New Criticism, beginning with the emphasis on aesthetic appreciation and the so-called autonomy of art, but they reiterated the attack on biographical criticism's assumption that the artist's activities and experience were a privileged critical topic. Roland Barthes hyperbolically evokes a liberating mode of reading in which the text "is read without the father's signature" – where the father in question was thought to be the repressive concept of the author-proprietor of the work, wrongly projected onto the text by non-progressive readers.[4] Ironically, these anti-humanist critical trends, which by the 1980s had become hegemonic, did not in fact

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fully free criticism from the notions and values that had been associated with creativity at least since Romanticism. Instead, interest in creativity reappeared, sometimes with a vengeance, in the context of reflections on the critic's own achievements: Geoffrey H. Hartman's Derrida-inspired book, *Criticism in the Wilderness,* is an influential example of a case in which a prominent professor of literature proclaimed that the critic's own artistic ambitions should replace the scholar's more traditional epistemic aims.[5] Within the post-structuralist movement, critics or communities thereof were said to play the active role of endowing texts with meaning and value, thereby constituting those "signifying practices" of which a culture is composed. In some of the bolder speculations, it was the reader and not the author who was thought to do the job of endowing a text with its very status as literature. Thus Barthes wrote that "only the critic *executes* the work."[6] And as Stanley Fish put it, "it is not that the presence of poetic qualities compels a certain kind of attention but that the paying of a certain kind of attention results in the emergence of poetic qualities."[7] Any "piece of language" can become a member of the class of literary texts provided that some sufficiently influential group of readers provides the requisite poetical attention. And anecdotal self-reference became a veritable mannerism in the vein of criticism marketed as the New Historicism. Having rightly castigated biographical critics for seeking to explain what happens in fictions by identifying anecdotal sources in the author's childhood and fantasies, the post-structuralist critic comes full circle by inserting the story of her own private life into "readings" of the work of art.[8]

The influence of these tendencies in criticism helps explain the neglect of the topic of the creation of art within philosophical aesthetics. New Criticism revitalised formalism within philosophy, Beardsley playing a prominent role here. The belief in the autonomy of art and the anti-intentionalist stance inevitably made inquiry into creation and the creative process seem aesthetically irrelevant. Philosophers had previously often discussed the creative process in art as central to the process of understanding art, R. G. Collingwood's theory of art as expression being perhaps the most influential of these twentieth-century theories.[9] In a paper on the creation of art, Beardsley attacked Collingwood's theory, but more importantly, having developed his own thoughts on the process of artistic creation, concluded that such

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theories have no bearing at all on understanding or evaluating artworks. Creativity is, rather, a property of the art-object, and the only kind of aesthetically relevant creation occurs in the audience's response to the work: "In the experience of a melody, creation occurs before our very ears."[10] Although formalism concentrated on the nature of the art object, already in Beardsley's invocation of the audience we see an indication of a tendency that Richard Wollheim identified as the "principal target" of his 1968 book, *Art and Its Objects*: "the tendency to conceive of aesthetics as primarily the study of the spectator and his role: that is to say, his responses, his interests, his attitudes, and the characteristic tasks he set himself."[11] Other instances of that tendency are not hard to find: the Institutional Theory of Art, for instance, held that what makes an object an artwork is having conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person acting on behalf of the artworld.[12] Such persons might be artists, but they could also be dealers, curators, journalists, spectators, and so on. As in post-structuralism, creation was divorced from any necessary relation to the artist.

The situation in philosophy has, however, been materially different from that in criticism in one respect, since reflection on the importance of the making of art has never been as neglected as it has been at times in criticism. Indeed, the importance of the idea that artworks are made has received strong support in the recent work of intentionalists of various kinds, as well as from supporters of historical definitions of art, and theorists who hold that works are action-types. But despite this resurgence of interest in artworks as made objects or as intentional actions or performances, the issues surrounding creation, particularly in respect of creativity, have not enjoyed that prominence which they deserve once the importance of the activity of creating artworks is acknowledged.

## 2. Artistic Creation: The State of the Debate

To set the scene for the papers in this collection, we now review some of the philosophical work that has previously been done on the issues concerning creation, in the evaluative sense that includes creativity. The following is not, however, intended to be a comprehensive survey either of the topics discussed or of what has been written on

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them by philosophers. In the course of it, we also draw on some of the voluminous psychological writings on creativity, where they help to fill out or illuminate the philosophical discussion. As Robert S. Albert and Mark A. Runco observe in a recent survey of the history of psychological research on creativity, nearly every major twentieth-century psychologist has explored the topic, and at present "the field can only be described as explosive."[13] We examine six topics, and we also briefly indicate where the papers in the volume engage with these issues; the papers will be summarized separately in the next section.

### (a) The Making of Art

An aspect of the creation of art, in the basic sense of the making of art, has been discussed in the context of a debate about what is involved in correctly interpreting art. Anti-intentionalists, such as formalists, hold that the intentions involved in the making of art are irrelevant or peripheral to correctly interpreting art. So details of the act of creating a work, though possibly of interest in themselves, have no bearing on the correct interpretation of the work. The anti-intentionalist holds that mere scrutiny of the art-object independently of knowledge of its generative conditions suffices to interpret it. This position has been attacked on numerous grounds. It has, for instance, been argued by Kendall Walton that the categories under which we perceive art are in part fixed by the generative conditions, including intentions, of the work. And Guy Sircello has argued that there is a conceptual relation between a work expressing something, and the artistic acts performed in the work.[14] The anti-formalist thesis that in looking at art we are looking at artistic actions is pursued by Patrick Maynard in the present volume.

Intentionalists, unlike formalists, hold that reference to intentions is essential in fixing the correct interpretation of works. Since intentions figure in the process of making the work, to understand a work must for the intentionalist be in part to reconstruct the process of its making. Wollheim holds that "The task of criticism is the reconstruction of the creative process, where the creative process must in turn be thought of as something not stopping short of, but terminating on, the work of art itself."[15] Within the intentionalist camp, there is an important

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distinction. Actual intentionalists, such as Richard Wollheim, Gary Iseminger, Noël Carroll, William Irwin, and E. D. Hirsch, hold that it is the historically real intentions of the actual artist that determine correct interpretation of works.[16] They differ on how wide the notion of an intention is to be drawn (for instance, Wollheim understands it broadly, to include any mental state that causally generates a work of art); but they agree that it is the actual mental states of the artist that matter for the interpretative task.[17] Proponents of different versions of hypothetical and fictionalist intentionalisms, such as Jerrold Levinson, William Tolhurst, and Alexander Nehamas, on the other hand, hold that it is the hypothesized or imagined intentions of the artist as a critical construct (variously called the "implied," "postulated," or "constructed" author) that determine correct interpretations. These hypothesized or imagined intentions may differ from what are known to be the real intentions of an author, because certain evidence about real intentions is excluded in principle – for instance, information drawn from private diaries may be ruled out.[18] The two kinds of intentionalists have different views about the creative process: actual intentionalists think of the process as the actual historical events that terminated in the production of the work; hypothetical intentionalists, in contrast, regard the creative process, insofar as it bears on the issue of interpretation, as itself a hypothetical construct. One issue concerning the creation of art, then, concerns how relevant the details of the actual creative process are to determining the correct interpretation of works. Paisley Livingston discusses this issue in the present collection.

A second respect in which issues about the making of art have entered into philosophical discussion concerns ontology, the question of what kind of thing an artwork is. A central debate here surrounds the status of those artistic structures (such as musical compositions and literary texts) which, as kinds or types, may be held to be universals and hence timeless – and therefore not the sort of thing that can be created by someone at a particular time and place. Yet this view stands in apparent contradiction to the common opinion that artworks are, in fact, created in particular socio-historical contexts. Various strategies for attempting to resolve this paradox are explored in the literature. Some writers attempt to defend a nominalist conception of artworks. Others accept Platonist tenets while denying that the commonplace

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about works being created expresses any genuine insight. Peter Kivy, for example, doubts that there are widespread, informative intuitions linking great music and creation, and holds that artistic achievement is better explicated in terms of discovery and selection – which may or may not be called "creative" in the sense of worthwhile and innovative. A composer can plausibly be said to discover or select – but not to create – a previously existing musical Form.[19] Another strategy is to accept both premisses of the paradox of artistic creation and conclude that what gets created – a work of art – must be more than an artistic structure, a move which Stefano Predelli usefully labels the "Argument from Creation."[20] An example is Jerrold Levinson's contention that musical works are initiated types, that is, they are sound structures (or more precisely sound/performing-means structures) that are indicated by a composer at a time or in a specific cultural context.[21] There is little agreement, however, as to whether such a position genuinely allows for artistic creation in a suitably robust sense: Levinson contends that it does, while Kivy, Predelli, Currie, and others contest the point.

This question about the ontology of art has a close analogue with a question about the ontology of fictional characters, which, if viewed as collections of abstract properties or traits, similarly seem to be universals, and thus to encounter the same problems concerning the possibility of their creation. Peter Lamarque discusses the latter issue in the present volume and defends a view that allows fictional characters to be created in a straightforward sense.[22]

### (b) Defining "Creativity"

Turning more closely to the evaluative sense of "creation," the next issue concerns what precisely is meant by the term "creativity." There is a broad consensus that creative products and acts must exhibit originality and be valuable. Kant captured this dual condition when he defined "genius" as a matter of exemplary originality, a view that Paul Guyer discusses in the present volume. Mere originality does not suffice for genius, since there can be, Kant remarks, original nonsense, which he saw in those Sturm und Drang artists who strove after originality while lacking talent to produce something worthwhile (an observation that resonates in the context of some recent art movements). Exemplarity

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of artworks is a matter of their serving as a standard or rule for art, and is thus a mark of their value.[23]

The correctness of the dual condition of originality and value has been widely, though not universally, accepted by philosophers. For instance, Carl Hausman, in developing criteria for creativity, bases them on the observation that "creativity occurs on condition that a new and valuable intelligibility comes into being."[24] Psychologists have also generally agreed that creativity involves at least these two constituent factors.[25] The first condition corresponds to the platitude that no matter how useful an instance of routine problem-solving may be, it cannot be creative. One way in which psychologists have specified this condition is to add that if a novel and valuable idea or "response" is creative, it must be addressed to a task or problem that is "heuristic rather than algorithmic."[26] The second condition expresses the thought that a wholly new yet useless or destructive invention cannot be creative, since truly creative innovations must be valuable, useful, appropriate, or adaptive.

Within this broad consensus there are, however, disputes. A first source of disagreement concerns what to say about independent discoveries. When a chess master invents an effective chess opening, the likes of which has never been seen by informed experts, it is uncontroversial to deem this a creative contribution to the game. What, however, if a precocious young player independently rediscovers the same opening some years later, without knowing of the earlier invention? Some have held that such an achievement would not be a creative one. As psychologist Colin Martindale expresses this position, "Were someone to rediscover the theory of relativity, we would think the person to be quite clever but not creative because the idea has already been discovered."[27] Mihály Csikszentmihályi agrees, and goes on to claim that it follows that the creative process takes place outside the person, in the interactive system where ideas and artifacts get made and appreciated.[28] Other psychologists, however, deny that any absolute form of novelty should be deemed necessary to creativity. They prefer to investigate creativity as a species of innovative thinking or problem-solving located within the creative agent (or group of collaborating agents).[29] George Mandler, for example, claims that "from a psychological point of view, the focus of interest is, of course, a creative or novel act by an individual, whether or not

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the same novelty has been produced by any or many other individuals before."[30]

One response to such disagreements is to distinguish between different senses of "creativity." Margaret Boden distinguishes historical from psychological creativity (H- and P-creativity, as she calls them). An idea is P-creative if it is valuable and "the person in whose mind it arises could not have had it before"; the relation holds whether or not the idea has ever been had before.[31] To be H-creative, the idea must be not only P-creative, but also must never have been had by anyone else in all of human history. This is, we may note in passing, a rather strong condition, and weaker, tradition and context-specific alternatives could be formulated.

Boden's reference to ideas that could not have been had before brings us to a second source of disagreement about creativity: how to specify the degree of originality that it requires. If originality simply meant that something is new in some respect or other, then almost any idea or product would count as original. Boden's modal condition attempts to specify the relevant difference. It does not express some form of metaphysical necessity, but rather a relation between the valued idea and the generative rules that structure a person's productive activities. For example, Boden holds (pace Chomsky) that the generation of previously unheard-of well-formed phrases in English is not an instance of P-creativity, because such utterances are covered by the grammar of the language, and thus in a sense could have been produced before. Genuine P-creativity requires a "change of conceptual space" in which something emerges that would have been impossible had the agent's activity remained determined by the generative rules which obtained before. It requires dropping one or more of the rules that structure the conceptual space; and the "deeper" the rule that is dropped (i.e., the more fundamental the role which the rule plays in structuring the system), the more radically P-creative is the result.

David Novitz has criticized this criterion. Goodyear invented vulcanisation by dropping various substances into liquid rubber until he came across the correct one by trial and error. He altered the conceptual space for thinking about rubber, but his achievement was not creative; so satisfaction of the modal criterion is insufficient for creativity. Nor is it necessary: Jenner invented vaccination and should be counted as creative, but there existed no conceptual space concerning vaccination

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