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Creativity and Contemporary Value

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Creativity and Contemporary Value

Abstract: There are few English nouns that have generated such relentlessly good publicity as the word 'creativity'. It is increasingly found scattered across the literature of the arts and sciences, industry, business management, information technology, education and government. It has been called the key to economic growth, the 'decisive source of competitive advantage', and the 'very heart' of 'wealth creation and social renewal'.[1] *It is also a burgeoning object of study in the humanities, where it is increasingly applied across spheres and disciplines, extending far beyond the artist's studio into the new interdisciplinary schools of Creative Industries, as well as into the mainstream of the traditional humanities in the rhetoric of the 'New Humanities'.*[2]

This paper is part of a larger project that investigates the cultural construction of creativity in the context of the history of ideas. It understands creativity not as a given human attribute or ability, but as an idea that emerges out of specific historical moments, shaped by the discourses of politics, science, commerce, and nation. It shifts the ground of analysis away from the naturalised models that have traditionally dominated the field of creative practice research, in order to highlight the historicity of a concept that is more commonly deemed to be without history.

In a recent, if slightly antipathetic, exchange following a presentation of my research in progress, I was informed by an anonymous interlocutor that it was superfluous to tackle the concept of creativity in any kind of detail, because 'people who are used to dealing with creativity on a daily basis' have no need of such analysis. I wasn't particularly offended by my exclusion from this rarefied circle of 'people who are used to dealing with creativity on a

[1] The references are to John Howkins, *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*, Penguin, London, 2001, p.vii; Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Basic Books, New York, 2002, p.5; and John Hartley, *Creative Industries*, Oxford Blackwell, Malden, Mass., 2005, p.4.
[2] Terry Flew, 'Creativity, the 'New Humanism' and Cultural Studies,' *Continuum*, 18, 2, 2004, pp. 161-178.

daily basis' — much of my teaching load is currently taken up with designing a core undergraduate writing subject which is largely designed to tackle the problem of literacy, and creativity often seems a distant chimera. In any case, I presumed my interlocutor's intended meaning was that 'people who are used to dealing with creativity on a daily basis' have no need of such an analytical perspective because their understanding of creativity works via an intuitive logic of 'I recognise it when I see it'. From this traditional or commonsense perspective, creativity is understood to be a word that denotes something different and valuable — something that is original rather than imitative. A creative person is understood to be somebody who is a rule breaker, not a follower — somebody who manages to embody something in words, light or colour that did not previously exist. In this view, a creative object is understood to be something valuable (and, in this sense, almost useful), but creativity is said not to be a consciously controlled or even purposive activity. Creativity is said to be something that does not produce a preordained result. Despite this, creative objects are said to possess both coherence and lucidity — and this is understood to be a necessary rather than a fortuitous aspect of a creative work. Though doctors and critics have regularly diagnosed famous writers and artists with psychological disorders, traditional critics, like my interlocutor, are still apt to draw a distinction between creativity and, for example, the art of the insane.

I rather suspect that while people like my interlocutor claim that they approach creativity intuitively — that is, by a logic of 'I recognise it when I see it' — more often what really occurs is that such people recognise creativity by what it is *not*. Creativity, for example, is typically styled as something that is antithetical to scholarship — it is not 'academic', for example, which in this context implies contempt — and the subjection of creative method to formal academic scrutiny is therefore seen to constitute the actions of a villain or a fool. Even the standard definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* supports the logic of this approach, defining 'creativity' as something that is 'differentiated from the merely critical, academic,

journalistic, professional, mechanical, etc.' In this sense, the concept of creativity appears to function as an organizing absence rather than an active presence in the discourse it sustains — and this possibly accounts for its capacity to encompass so many paradoxical interpretations. This paper attempts to denaturalize the discourse of creativity – to understand the multiple and contradictory ways in which the idea of creativity is deployed in the present by tracing its genealogy — its lines of descent — through the past.

Myths of Origin

One of the most suggestive properties of the word creativity is the late date of its emergence — making its first appearance as an abstract English noun in 1875, before entering into common usage a half century later.[3] Though Raymond Williams has argued that the antecedents of the discourse are to be discerned in European culture since the Renaissance — for example, Williams cites Shakespeare as one of the first English writers to apply the word creation to human imagination, this was, to quote Macbeth, in the largely negative sense of 'A Dagger of the Mind, a false Creation, Proceeding from the heat-oppressed Brain'.[4] The concept of imagination as productive and positive that is entangled in the modern meaning of the word is difficult to sustain in any popular sense before the nineteenth century — and imagination as a passive, inferior, or as Samuel Johnson put it, 'vagrant faculty,' was very much the hegemonic discourse until the arrival of romantic discourse in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.[5]

This paper argues that the discourse of creativity is more recent and complex

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[3] Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Creativity and Tradition', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44, 1, 1983, pp.105-113.

[4] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1961, and *Keywords*, Fontana, London, 1976.

[5] Samuel Johnson, 'The Rambler No. 125', in *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Talboys and Wheeler, London, [1751] 1825, p.93 Google Books <http://books.google.com.au>

than Williams' hugely influential argument allows. It claims that the concept of creativity is largely the product of a mid-nineteenth century materialist discourse (much of which remains unexamined), rather than a product of renaissance, enlightenment, romanticism, or even, as Williams' text seems to imply, a re imagining of classical texts in the fifteenth century with a lengthy trail of influences leading back to ancient Greece.[6] Moreover, I argue that there is a strong sense in which Williams' text needs to be read historically, as a product of the rapid expansion of the discourse of creativity through the decades of the 1950s and 1960s — as a work that seeks to celebrate the arrival of a concept that 'we should be glad of,' as Williams puts it, rather than to cast a critical eye over its uses and origins.[7] Creativity, in Williams' account, is something that is understood to pre-exist both the naming and, indeed, the thinking or understanding of the concept. Hence, his historical narrative is completely teleological — one in which certain exemplary writers come successively 'very near to' recognizing creativity for what it really is,[8] and 'what it really is' is then defined by neuroscientific theories of mental activity that were current at the time of publication in the 1960s, and are now superceded.

The paper also seeks to highlight the ways in which recent studies undertaken in the context of the creative industries phenomenon have largely followed Williams in continuing to portray the cultural historical narrative as one of progress or increasing perfection — as a grand narrative in which the cultural blindness of artists and critics of the past inevitably gives way to the greater sophistication and recognition of artists in the present. For example, in a recent work, *Creativity Communication and Cultural Value,* Keith Negus and Nigel Pickering take Williams' argument a little further, claiming that cultural blindness is coupled with resistance, and it is this resistance on the part of the dominant order that accounts for the absence of an overt discourse of

[6] Williams, *The Long Revolution*.
[7] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p.3.
[8] The words are taken from a discussion of Coleridge. Williams, p.21.

creativity in the four thousand odd years of history that they canvas, because, they argue, it is only in the late nineteenth century that 'creativity could be explicitly named as such'.[9]

Rob Pope's *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice* provides another interesting example, in particular his chapter 'Defining Creativity Historically', an extract of which was subsequently presented to the UK Parliamentary Committee on Creative Partnerships.[10] Pope's chapter on the history of creativity almost exactly replicates the linear arguments of his sources, which, once again, are narrowly dependant on the etymology cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and Raymond Williams' *Keywords.* Hence Williams argues that the history of creativity from the medieval to the modern era is one of increasing 'emphasis on human activity'[11] and Pope echoes that it was 'gradually and fitfully' that a 'human sense of agency' crept into the meaning of the word 'create'.[12]

Although Pope characterises his history as 'fitful', there is actually little that is fitful or disruptive in his narrative, which is one in which 'much more positive'[13] links and 'firm'[14] associations are made down the centuries, and in which all roads and citations lead smoothly to a climax in the present. Also problematic is the way in which Pope's argument presupposes a direct equivalence between the history of the word and the history of the idea — so much so, that his method appears to be one of extracting citations from the *Oxford English Dictionary* and matching them to printed sources. There is little if any elaboration of the cultural historical context of the citations he uses, or any attempt to question the methodology that underpins the *OED*'s selections. Ultimately, the problem inherent in Pope's work is best summed

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[9] Keith Negus and Nigel Pickering, *Creativity, Communication and Cultural Value*, Sage, 2004, p.2.
[10] Rob Pope, *Creativity: History, Theory, Practice*, Routledge, London, 2005.
[11] Williams, *Keywords*, p.83.
[12] Pope, p.38.
[13] Pope, p.38.
[14] Pope, p.39.

up in the chapter's title — the way that Pope embarks on his project with the stated intention of 'defining creativity',[15] posing an ideal signification in the present for which he then constructs an alleged origin in the past.

The problem here is not simply one of historical teleology — including the way in which the recent flurry of creative industries narratives overlook developments in cultural historiography as it has been debated and practiced for the last thirty years (tending towards an old-fashioned presentation of narratives in which ideas are transmitted in unbroken lines from one 'great man' to the next, with little attempt to grapple with the problem of audience, or to look for their alleged origins in the world beyond the arts). But also because these proliferating narratives or 'myths of origin' have the effect of eliding alternate paradigms and ideas of process that could more productively inform the contemporary debate.

The Reproductive Imagination

Though critics point to wildly different dates for the origin of the discourse of creativity, Williams (and, following his lead, Negus, Pickering, and Pope) present the eighteenth century as a pivotal period in its formation. Despite this consensus, the evidence they present for the claim is slight.[16] In particular, Williams points to the fact that in 1728 the minor Scottish poet David Mallet was the first to apply the modern concept of creativity to the powers of the poet.[17] The source for the claim is a quotation from Mallet's The Excursion, in particular Mallet's opening line 'Muse, Creative Power, IMAGINATION!' However, it ought to be noted that Mallet makes use of the word creative in the context of invoking the poetic muse, a literary device that poets traditionally used to signal that they were working within a given tradition,

[15] Pope, p.35.
[16] A detailed analysis of the sources and origins cited for the discourse of creativity is given in a forthcoming article, Camilla Nelson, 'The Invention of Creativity: the Emergence of a Discourse,' *Cultural Studies Review*.
[17] Williams, *Keywords*, p.73; Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p.9; Negus and Pickering, p.3; Dawson, p.27; and Pope, p.38.

composing their work according to fixed rules. There are in fact several earlier examples of the word 'creative' used in the context of the hymnic tradition (as Paul Dawson points out, the poet John Hopkins invokes his Muse's gifts: 'You, like creative Heav'n your Labours frame;/You spoke the Word and at your Breath they came'),[18] and this makes it difficult to determine whether Mallet intended — or that his readers understood — the word 'creative' to signify a human rather than divine or muse-like attribute.

Moreover, the version of the poem quoted in all the above-mentioned works is taken from the radically revised 1743 edition of The Excursion, and not the original 1728 edition (as cited), which actually read:

> FANCY, creative Power, at whose Command
> Arise unnumber'd Images of Things,
> Thy hourly Offspring; Thou whose mighty Will
> Peoples with airy Shapes the Pathless Vale
> Where pensive *Meditation* loves to stray
> *Fancy*, with me range *Earth's* extended *Space*
> Surveying Nature's Works.[19]

The 1728 work falls more naturally within the tradition of the invocation, with the poet asking his muse 'Fancy' to be his companion on a journey. In the more commonly cited 1743 version, the balance shifts and imagination becomes a more impressive player in the poem. Thus,

> Companion of the muse, creative power,
> IMAGINATION! at whose great command,
> Arise unnumber'd images of things,
> Thy hourly offspring: *thou*, who canst at will

[18] Quoted in Dawson, p.27.
[19] David Mallet, Mallet, D. ([1728] 2007) *The Excursion*, J. Walthoe, 1728, pp. 5-6, Google Books <http://books.google.com.au>

People with air-born shapes the silent wood,
And solitary veil, thy own domain,
Where *Contemplation* haunts; O come invok'd,
To waft me on thy many-tinctur'd wing
O'er EARTH's extended space:[20]

The changes would seem to suggest that Mallet welcomed a more radical interpretation of his work, given the emphasis he gives to the word 'IMAGINATION,' for example. However, Mallet's description of the poem as it is laid out in the poem's 'Argument' continues to make it clear that the invocation is 'addressed to Fancy' — that it is Fancy and not the poet who is creative, using her heavenly power to waft the poet on her 'many-tinctur'd wing'.

Other than Mallet's use of the adjective 'creative' there seems little in The Excursion to differentiate it from the work of his contemporaries, and less to suggest that the use of the adjective signals a new epistemic relationship to imagination. Indeed The Excursion belongs, together with James Thomson's better known To the Memory of Sir Issac Newton, to a sizable genre of eighteenth century poetry devoted to Newton's *Principia* and *Opticks*, which, in the words of literary critic M.H. Abrams, it 'joyously pillag[es]'.[21] Far from being innovative, M.H. Abrams characterizes the genre as the product of an illustrative process, via which the 'truth' of Newton's *Opticks* is turned into poetry through a process of ornamentation — an illustrating of its statements — rather than creating things afresh. In other respects, The Excursion retains the Classical period's concern with the external world (as opposed to, for example, the idea of creative self expression). It is heavily influenced by the Gothic and Picturesque (elements that are also far more marked in the 1743

[20] David Mallet, 'The Excursion', in Samuel Johnson (ed), *The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper*, J. Johnson, London, [1743] 1810, p.17, Google Books, <http://books.google.com.au>
[21] Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1971, p.304.

edition), but these elements are strongly framed in the context of an ordered Classical universe, in which the rainbow, for example, is deemed more poetic for having been demystified by Newton's 'pure intelligence' and 'mind's clear vision' into a vision of 'ideal harmony'.[22] In short, an equally tenable interpretation of the poem would place it as yet another example of imagination enlisted in the service of reason.

Joseph Addison is another eighteenth century writer whose work is commonly invoked to support claims about the flourishing of the discourse of creativity in that period, and his use of the divine analogy 'Imagination ... has in it something like creation' is enlisted in the arguments of Pope, Engell and Dawson among others.[23] However, in 'The Pleasures of the Imagination', the essay from which this citation is taken, Addison goes on to suggest that the faculty of imagination is actually less refined than the faculty of reason. He argues that reason searches for hidden causes, while imagination is content to passively experience things. For Addison, this is why the pleasures of imagination are more easily acquired than those of reason. He writes:

> A beautiful Prospect delights the Soul, as much as a Demonstration; and a Description in Homer has charmed more Readers than a Chapter in Aristotle. Besides, the Pleasures of the Imagination have this Advantage, above those of the Understanding, that they are more obvious, and more easie to be acquired. It is but opening the Eye, and the Scene enters. The Colours paint themselves on the Fancy, with very little Attention of Thought or Application of the Mind in the Beholder. We are struck, we know not how, with the Symmetry of any thing we see, and immediately assent to the Beauty of an Object, without enquiring into the particular

[22] Mallet, The Excursion, in *The Works of the English Poets*, p.61.
[23] Pope, p.38; Engell, p.36-38; and Dawson, p.27.

Causes and Occasions of it.[24]

According to Addison, seeing a landscape or reading about one affects us equally — both require remarkably little effort; just an 'opening [of] the Eye'. Though Addison's essay is justifiably famous for the way in which it collects the imaginative arts together (a new concept for the eighteenth century), the imagination it describes remains profoundly passive. Thus, the 'scene enters', 'colors paint', we are 'struck … with the Symmetry' and 'immediately assent'. Collectively Addison's essays on the imagination work to suggest that the imagination is not serious, rather it 'bestows charms', offers 'a kind of refreshment' or 'ornament' to the more important work of reason.[25]

In attempting to create a narrative that reaches as far back into history as possible, the studies of creativity examined in this essay often miss the fundamental fracture in the discourse of the mind that occurs at the end of the eighteenth century — what M.H. Abrams once called the 'Copernican revolution in epistemology' that was the Romantic era.[26] As Foucault has argued, the shift between the classical episteme and the modern is one in which the structure of knowledge undergoes a fundamental reversal. In the course of this reversal, imagination, once regarded as a poor cousin to reason — at best, passive, and at worst, a dangerous faculty that led to madness or delusion — becomes the primary faculty of the human mind. To overlook this shift is to miss the tension between the Enlightenment ideal of the rationally bounded individual and the Romantic myth of the unbounded autonomy of the infinite self. It is also to elide the possibility that the arrangement of knowledge that gave rise to creativity may well have been that which created the modern and anthropological subject — a new arrangement of knowledge that created man as the central subject and object of reality.

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[24] Joseph Addison, 'The Pleasures of Imagination,' *Spectator* No. 411, 1712, Project Gutenberg <www.gutenberg.org/etext/12030>
[25] Addison, 'The Pleasures of the Imagination,' *Spectator* No. 412.
[26] Abrams, p.58.

Kant is an obvious figure in this transition. It was Kant who increased the scope of the imagination in the theory of knowledge to a revolutionary degree. Just as Copernicus reversed the way people thought about the relationship of the earth to the sun, Kant reversed the way people thought about the relationship between the mind and the world of objects and experience. In a dramatic reversal of both empiricism and rationality he argued that some of the properties observed in objects might be due to the nature and constitution of the human spectator. Or, as Kant indelibly put it:

> Failing of satisfactory progress in explaining the movements of the heavenly bodies on the supposition that they all revolved around the spectator, [Copernicus] tried whether he might not have better success if he made the spectator to revolve and the stars to remain at rest.[27]

Kant accepts that knowledge begins with sense experience, but argues that the mind applies preexisting categories of perception — including logic, causality, substance, space and time — to the object. In this sense, the perceiving mind might be said to discover only that which it itself has partly made. With Kant, imagination ceases to be an empty storehouse for images generated by the senses, a blank sheet of paper on which the imprint of experience is placed, and begins to be understood as active and productive. Interestingly enough, it is not long after Kant, that scientists and phrenologists such as F.J. Gall, Charles Bell and Erasmus Darwin begin to elucidate the active mind in neurological terms — for the first time locating

[27] Immanuel Kant, ([1787] 2003) Critique of Pure Reason, trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn, [1787] 1855, Project Gutenberg <www.gutenberg.org/etext/4280>

the mind in the brain, and not in the heart, the spinal column, the pineal gland, or the body as a whole.[28]

In English, Kant's influence manifested itself in poetry before entering into philosophy. In particular, in the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge imagination is seen to take the leap beyond the subject through the act of artistic creation. With Coleridge, the imagination ceases to be 'a lazy Looker-on on an external world' and is endowed with a synthetic or 'magical' power.[29] He describes this new apprehension of imagination as a power of knowledge that is a repetition in the subject's mind of the auto-poetic power of God's creation. Or, in Coleridge's own words, the imagination is 'the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception' and 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'.[30] This statement of the artist's auto-poetic power is qualitatively different from, and therefore historically discontinuous with, the tradition of the divine analogy — that is, the many statements likening the poet to a 'second Maker' that form the subject matter of so many histories of creativity, such as, for example, the quotation from Tasso that Williams argues is the 'decisive source of the modern meaning' of the term,[31] and that the literary historian E.N. Tigerstedt has extended back to the Florentine poet Christoforo Landino in the fifteenth century.[32] The essential difference is that for Coleridge the perceiving mind is seen to be active in giving shape and meaning to what is outside it, so that our knowledge of what is outside us is also the knowledge of ourselves. Hence, Coleridge calls this new creative power both a self-manifestation and self-discovery because we see ourselves through the structure of our own minds.

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[28] The idea that the brain is the location of mental activity is actually very modern. Aristotle, for example, believed that the brain was the organ that supplied heat to the body.

[29] Quoted in John Shawcross, 'Introduction', *Biographia Literaria*, The Clarendon Press, [1817] 1907, p.xxxi, Google Books, <http://books.google.com.au>

[30] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, The Clarendon Press, [1817] 1907, p. 202, Google Books, <http://books.google.com.au>

[31] Williams, *Keywords*, p.72.

[32] E.N. Tigerstedt, 'The Poet as Creator: Origins of a Metaphor,' *Comparative Literature Studies*, 5, 1968, pp. 455-488.

Coleridge is an alluring progenitor for the concept of creativity. However, there are many intractable problems in his styling of the concept, which Williams' ignores. The most obvious, perhaps, is the way in which Coleridge constructs the problem as primarily theological, and the strange distortions, digressions, convolutions and confusions in his work are more easily understood as the result of his attempt to make both science and philosophy compatible with traditional Christian doctrine. Coleridge, in company with radical scientists of his time, felt compelled to understand the world not as mechanism but as dynamic flux. However, much of his philosophical work — such as, for example, the posthumously published, though little read, *Theory of Life* — is an attack on scientists such as William Lawrence or Erasmus Darwin who attempted to understand the world as a kind of spontaneous or self-sufficient growth. In fact, what is original in Coleridge's reworking of the works of the German idealists and *naturphilosophen* from whom he borrowed, is precisely the way he takes their 'dangerously' pantheistic ideas and presses them into the service of Trinitarian Christian dogma.

W.A. Ward, the late Victorian academic who is credited with originating the noun 'creativity' by the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* has very little to say that is positive about Coleridge's philosophical work. In an essay by C.E. Vaughn, commissioned by Ward in his capacity as editor of the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, Coleridge is portrayed as 'the fiery foe of the rights of man', as an advocate of an aristocratic style of government 'imposing itself upon the rest of the community from above'. He is accused of obscuring rather than illuminating Kant, of twisting 'truth into the service of a particular religious creed'. Vaughn concludes, 'The result is that, at the present day, his theory seems ludicrously out of date.'[33]

[33] C.E. Vaughn, 'Coleridge' in W.A. Ward ed., Cambridge History of English Literature, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.139.

That is not to say that Coleridge has not been influential in the contemporary construction of creativity. Rather, it is to argue that the version of Coleridge that has been so influential — that Williams argues comes so 'very close to' the concept of creativity in its modern sense — is the secularized, modernized version that is largely the product of departments of English literature from the late 1950s onwards.

Nevertheless, it is in the period following Kant and the Romantics that creative imagination comes to be seen as the 'true source of genius' and the 'basis of originality', words which themselves gain a new meaning. Genius is distinguished from mere talent, and redefined as a quality of mind that makes rules instead of following them, and the art object comes to be understood as the embodiment of original aesthetic ideals that are the product of the artist's creative imagination, not mere reflections, imitations, or perfections of truths found elsewhere. The emergent discourse also needs to be understood as a product of the new system of the arts arising in the eighteenth century, with its now familiar dualities of art/craft, aesthetic/purpose, genius/talent, creative/mechanical, which can be usefully mapped through the shifting definitions provided in the French *Encyclopédie* between 1751 and 1780.[34] The consequence of this reorganisation is that art is effectively created as a separate realm of human endeavour standing above and outside the rest of social and economic life. For this reason, Marx argued that 'The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of the division of labour', attributing an economic origin to the process through which the older idea of art as construction is replaced by a system that devalues the work of the artisan as a manual worker, and revalues the work of the artist via a cult of mystification.[35] Also relevant is the way in which the new

[34] For an excellent account of this development see Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part II,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 13, 1, 1952, pp. 17-46.
[35] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, [1845] 1976, p.151.

discourse intersects with the artist's bid for respectability, driven by the artist's new reliance on the vagaries of the market as traditional patronage systems collapse. There is an emerging sense in which artists 'add value' to their work by placing art beyond value.

The new discourse affects both the creation of art and its reception. Creative art is arranged in the contemplative spaces of the recently invented art museum, a centre that also becomes a storehouse for imperial plunder. In the same way, the cannon of English literature appears on the university curriculum for the very first time (for example, Oxford University did not introduce English Literature as a subject until 1875), just as music moves out of church and salon into the rarified spaces of the concert hall. The new discourse is also edged with a strange nationalistic fervor, and it is not coincidental that the *OED's* earliest citation of the noun 'creativity' occurs in the context of a chapter on Shakespeare as the English national poet written by the German-educated historian W.A. Ward, with my own research locating earlier citations in historical works influenced by the prevailing nationalist/racialist interpretation of Herder. It is from this dense cultural matrix that the concept of creativity actually emerges. It a strange and remarkable birth — one that eclipses a two thousand year old tradition of art practice — and occurs in an age that prided itself on its scientific spirit, but saw fit to endow the practice of writing on paper or painting on canvas with mystical attributes.

Hence, 'Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance,' wrote Shelley in a sentence that reverses many centuries of European thought.[36] For Wordsworth, the mind is 'creator and receiver both' and human imagination 'Is but another name for absolute power/And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,/And reason in her

[36] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, Read Books, Cookhill, [1821] 2007, p.12.

most exalted mood'.[37] John Ruskin addressed himself to objects that bore the impress of 'highest creative life that is to say the mind of man'[38] William Hazlitt located 'this creative impulse, this plastic power' in works of art from Chaucer to Shakespeare.[39] Thomas Carlyle extended the term to other professions, finding an 'active power', 'creative instinct' or dynamic force in all kinds of human production,[40] and popular newspapers of the period were as likely to invoke the 'creative power' of industry, as they were to invoke the creative powers of the poet. It is also during this period that statements of a qualitatively different order seem to be found, including Benjamin Disraeli's assertion that 'man is made to create,'[41] Marx's argument that human happiness lies in a 'positive, creative activity,'[42] Matthew Arnold's claim that 'a free creative activity is the true function of man,'[43] and Frederic Nietzsche's argument that it is 'creative plenipotence' that separates the *Ubermensch* from the rest of humanity.[44] The work of such writers exemplify the shift away from the eighteenth century idea of a fixed and immutable universe (as exemplified in the mathematical physics of Newton), towards a universe that is understood as a continuous process of organic invention — a universe unfolding within a metaphysical structure that is malleable enough to impart a new sense of freedom to human endeavour. The concept of creativity can be understood as a product of the flux and upheaval of the industrial revolution — the period of the mid-nineteenth century when the term 'creative power' entered into popular usage. This paradigmatic shift gains its most

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[37] William Wordsworth, 'The Prelude' in *Selected Poems,* Penguin, London, [1850] 1994, p.426.
[38] John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Wiley, London, 1865, p.123.
[39] William Hazlitt, 'Sir Walter Scott,' *The Miscellaneous Works*, Vol.2, H.C. Baird, London, 1854, p.83.
[40] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, Oxford, 1987, p.149.
[41] Benjamin Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming: a Psychological Autobiography*, Vol 2, Harper, London, 1832, p.170. Google Books <http://books.google.com.au>
[42] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Penguin, London, 1993, p.614.
[43] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' in *Essays In Criticism*, Macmillan, London, 1865, p.4. Google Books <http://books.google.com.au>
[44] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern, KayDreams/Plain Label Books, p.203

characteristic expression in Darwin's theory of evolution — and, no less famously, in *The Descent of Man,* the work in which Darwin aligns human imagination with a narrative of continuous novelty or invention, formation and transformation, arguing, 'The imagination is one of the highest prerogatives of man. By this faculty he unites, independently of the will, former images and ideas, and thus creates brilliant and novel results'.[45] In this sense, it might even be possible that the discourse of creativity does not originate in art, or the discourse of imagination, as is commonly believed, but represents new forms of thought migrating into the arts from philosophy, political economy, or what is more likely, from the emerging biological and life sciences.[46] These new forms of though can be seen to reach full expression in twentieth century works such as those of the philosopher-mathematician Alfred North Whitehead, who defined creativity as the process, 'whereby the actual world has its character of temporal passage to novelty'.[47] Or, more forcefully, 'The creativity of the world is the throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into a new transcendent fact.'[48]

Despite its emphasis on the new, what seems crucial to the functioning of the discourse as it flourishes is that 'creativity' appear old, that it offer us a mythical history stretching back to the first time man applied paint to a cave wall. This illusion is aided by the emergence of a new critical vocabulary with which to survey the entire history of European art, together with means and opportunity, as art and literature programs flourish in the university cloister. In reality, the discourse of creativity is not even two hundred years old. It is more likely less — for it is only once creativity is reified and named that it makes itself available as an object for scientific study. Once named, it can be measured and dissected by psychologists and brain surgeons, and political

[45] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Penguin, London, [1871] 2004, p.95.
[46] My own preliminary research has also located a sizable discourse emerging in the fields of technology and commerce, which requires further investigation.
[47] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, Fordham University Press, New York, [1926] 1996, p.174.
[48] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Free Press, New York, [1933] 1967, p.227.

and educational institutions can create policies for its cultivation. In this sense, the important period for the formation of the discourse might even be the twentieth century — the period in which the discourse becomes codified.

In this respect, my own preliminary research indicates that the abstract noun creativity entered into common usage in the US between 1926 and 1953, where it far outstripped its then minimal usage in the United Kingdom. The growing popularity of the term was accompanied by a dramatic shift in the contents of the discourse, so that creativity ceases to be understood as the preserve of genius, but is located in all kinds of people and human endeavours. The American ideal is exemplified in the work of the advertising impresario Alex Osborn and his wildly successful bestseller, *Applied Imagination* — a work that is inflected with a particular American character, combining ideas of 'uplift' with ideas of accessibility and the concept of the 'common man'. In this sense, Osborne's work draws implicitly and explicitly on the ideas of the pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, whose work influenced the cultural activities of the Federal Arts Program under Roosevelt's New Deal, the Progressive Education Movement (of which the creative writing movement is an enduring legacy), and the work of others including the psycho-educationalist Hughes Mearns at the Chicago Laboratory School. The significance of Osborn is that he radically transfigures these ideas in order to make them compatible with a specifically nationalist enunciation of entrepreneurial capital.

The decades of the 1950s and 1960s saw an unprecedented proliferation of institutes and foundations devoted to the fostering of creativity in the US, a phenomena that J.P. Guilford, dubbed the 'father' of creativity studies in psychology, allegedly attributed to the massive redirection of funds from the US defence budget in the wake of the 'Sputnik Shock' — the US, it was feared, was losing the Space Race because its scientists were not 'creative' enough. Shortly afterwards, Paul Torrance invented the Torrance Test (the 'creative' equivalent of the IQ test) to measure creativity in American

children, an estimated one trillion dollars flooded into tertiary education institutions through the National Defense Education Act, Osborn's Creative Education Foundation received contracts from the US Air Force, and Guilford's research at the University of Southern California was funded by the US Navy. These government-sponsored initiatives shifted the focus of the discourse once again — this time onto the identification and study of individuals and individual traits as a means to combat Soviet totalitarianism, but mobilizing those traits within a framework that placed emphasis on organizational and structural optimization, which is the most likely antecedent of creativity theories in organization and business studies today. Significantly, it is also in the decade of the 1950s that the Anglo-American word 'creativity' is imported into European languages, such as French and German.[49]

It would be foolish to argue that creativity is a purely cultural fabrication, but it would be equally foolish to allege a purely biological origin. There is a need for caution when it comes to touting the successive discoveries of neuroscientists scouting for the creative gene, or attempting to make use of those discoveries by cultivating certain attributes within the classroom. There is also a pressing need to examine the ideological content of the discourse — particularly in these days of Creative Industries, Creative Economies and Creative Nations. Given the genealogy of the term, it is perhaps unsurprising that creativity should become such a prominent feature of contemporary managerial discourse, for example — that creativity should be so constantly touted as the thing to fix the economy, prop up the nation, and in one of the most discomforting uses of the term I have so far encountered, that the 9/11 Commission Report should argue that it is 'crucial to find a way of routinizing, even bureaucractizing, the exercise of imagination' and the US House Select Committee on Intelligence should call hearings to discuss the

[49] See Paul Imbs et al, *Trésor de la Langue Francaise*, Paris Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1971-94 and Joachim Ritter et al, *Historisches Worterbuch der Philosophie*, Swarbe, Basel, 1971-1998.

Commission's 'requirement for imagination and creativity' in the US intelligence service.[50]

[50] *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, Norton, New York, 2004, p.344.