

# Against ‘creativity’: a philistine rant

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## Abstract

The aspiration to be creative seems today to be more or less compulsory in an increasing number of areas of life. In psychological vocabularies, in economic life, in education and beyond, the values of creativity have taken on the force of a moral agenda. Yet creativity is a value which, though we may believe we choose it ourselves, may in fact make us complicit with what today might be seen as the most conservative of norms: compulsory individualism, compulsory ‘innovation’, compulsory performativity and productiveness, the compulsory valorization of the putatively new. This article suggests that, in order to escape the moralizing injunction to be creative, we need to cultivate a kind of ethical philistinism, albeit disaggregating such philistinism from the negativism of outright cynicism or fatuity. However, there is not much use in outlining an abstract model of philistinism. Instead, we take some ‘exemplars’ of a philistine attitude to creativity – Gilles Deleuze, F. R. Leavis, and Paul Cézanne – in order to show how such an ethos can be accomplished, on the one hand, with or without philosophy, and, on the other, with or without even the very idea of creativity itself, invoking instead the notions of ‘inventiveness’ and an ‘ethics of inertia’ as against creativity as such. The message should be that, rather than this or that theory, only exemplars – the bit-by-bit assembly of reminders – can help liberate us from the potentially moronic consequences of the doctrine of creativity.

Keywords: creativity; Gilles Deleuze; F. R. Leavis.

I’ve never painted, never written, never taken photos, but I’ve always thought of myself as a creative person. Business is my canvas.

(Anita Roddick, quoted in Howkins 2001: 197)

We live, it seems, in a veritable age of creativity. Those engaged in the creativity industries – experts of various kinds, managers, media workers, designers,

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futurologists, public relations practitioners, psychologists, consultants, marketing gurus, educationalists, 'thinkers of the unthinkable', doyens of 'promotional culture', sensationalist artists and postmodern philosophers – all variously signal that to be creative is the highest achievable good. An age in which creativity is actually a kind of moral imperative, then. For who could imaginably be *against* creativity?

### **Technologies of creativity**

For some, the creativity explosion will seem to be merely ideological: a response to the needs of capitalism or more generally to the structural needs of the economy. Certainly, the 'creative economy' has been built on the back of the recent boom in the values of intellectual property and the growth of 'creative' industries such as design, fashion, software production, video games, marketing, advertising, pop music, the performing arts, publishing, the arts market and R&D (see Howkins 2001: 82–117). But to say that the ethos of creativity simply answers to structural needs would be to ignore the fact that the creativity explosion is also a product of human agency and the machinations of experts and – loosely speaking – of workers of the intellect. It is, then, as much a matter of our governmentality as of ideology. Two kinds of expertise have been especially important in establishing the image of a veritable doctrine of creativity: psychologists and managers. These are really our contemporary ideologues of creativity.

For some time now, psychologists have been active in promoting the values of creativity. Psychology, especially popular and managerial psychology, has in fact become akin to a sort of modern *techné* of creative powers. For much contemporary psychology, creative individuals are not those who simply innovate within accepted conditions, but those who can change the domain in which they work, that is, those who can change the conditions themselves. And yet such change is also something that is held to occur within individuals: hence, the use of creativity as a resource in the personal psychology of everyday life. For creativity, according to this discursive logic, is no longer the exclusive prerogative of geniuses or great thinkers, but of all of us. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes the creative person as potentially a sort of 'everyman' who has a great deal of energy but who is often quiet and at rest; someone who is smart yet naïve at the same time; someone with a combination of playfulness and discipline; someone who is humble yet also proud (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; cf. Sankowsky 1987). But it is not only the popular psychologists of the Tony Buzan or Edward de Bono variety who have been engaged in the creativity explosion. On a somewhat more academic level, the long-standing concern with creativity as an aspect of intelligence (Guilford 1950) has mutated into a more exclusive focus on the intrinsic values of creativity as an end in itself. Here, creativity is less a unit of intelligence that can be measured than it is a general cognitive value that can be promoted by the use of certain techniques; for instance, on the basis of the creative problem solving model of Osborn and Parnes, which employs five

major steps of the creative process – fact finding, problem finding, idea finding, solution finding and acceptance finding (Parnes 1967; Van Grundy 1987; cf. Swede 1993; Kitchen and Hackley 1995).

It is not too difficult to suppose that such a concern with the psychology of creativity has connections with the outlook of a 'knowledge society' in which the values of ideas and non-linear thinking are at a premium in increasingly flexible organizations (Gibbons *et al.* 1994: 9). Hence too the importance of the field of education for the creativity explosion, for, in a 'knowledge society' such as ours, education comes to be recognized as more a way of life than a stage that is preparatory to maturity (see, above all, Seltzer and Bentley 1999). But it is in economic life that the creativity explosion has witnessed its most recent and perhaps most marked manifestation (see Thrift 2002). In business culture today, it seems, the values of creativity are increasingly given priority over those of mere competence, business ability, probity or going by the book. According to the logic of what we might call the entrepreneurialization of business and economic life, managers are required to demonstrate their creative talents, while marketing experts tell us that selling is more to do with the aesthetic presentation of the products than it is with anything intrinsic to the products themselves. Of course, to many this has long been obvious (Haug 1987), but the creativity industries turn such a fact from what might be considered a matter of shame into a positive – precisely *because* creative – value.

On this model, creativity is not something you just hope to encounter. Rather, you can manage so as to produce creativity. Any glossary of business terms today would reveal that creativity is increasingly susceptible to finesse through technique; thus we have blockbusting techniques, CPSTs ('creativity problem-solving techniques'), cube crawling, fishbone techniques, the Knight's Move, Syntectics, trigger sessions and SCAMPER techniques (see Rickards 1990; Adams 1980). There is a prestigious Creativity Research Institute at the State University of Buffalo; there is an International Foundation for Creativity and Leadership (Gottlieb 1997) and links are made in the creativity literature between the management of creativity and the currently fashionable literature on chaos and complexity, for creativity is nothing if not non-linear and unpredictable – 'creative acts are not planned for and come from where they are least expected' (Robinson and Stern 1997; cf. Smith and Ainsworth 1989).

Of course, it has been for some time now that managers and business gurus have promoted the ideals of informality and innovation through enterprise. In that sense, the creative 'turn' can hardly be regarded as being so recent. The complexity analogy, however, may mark a subtle shift from the era when one searched for excellence through cultivating the non-rational aptitudes of managers to one in which creativity becomes valued as a form of investment in its own right (Rose 1999a: 114–15). Whereas once it was the case that creativity would allow you, as the saying went, 'to get to the future first', contemporary creativity enables you, as it were, to invent the future itself (Howkins 2001: 129). Creativity, in this sense, is not just a property of persons but of systems and especially of *networks*. The inventors of the 'Mindmix' strategy, for instance, tell

us that ‘innovation in organisations is about mixing things’ – people, processes, thought, objects, information (Smith and Ainsworth 1989). Creativity, then, would not be the motor of change so much as the emergent quality of the system that resulted.

It should be said that alongside the ideologues of creativity – the psychologists and managers – there has also developed a more intellectual discourse of creativity that has been in some evidence in the human sciences and humanities. For the creativity industries are joined by a more general celebration of creativity in quite a few parts of intellectual, academic and cultural life. Some have invoked the virtues of an aesthetic model in philosophy (Lyotard most obviously, post-structuralism more generally), as well as in political culture (from forerunners such as Hannah Arendt to the likes of today’s Mark Leonards and Charlie Leadbetters), while within some parts of the human sciences it seems that the creative ‘turn’ has had quite liberating effects, in the turn, for instance, towards the study of inspiration, wonder and imagination, the affectivity of the body and, similarly, a whole field of performance studies, emerging not least within contemporary feminism, and which accords greater import to the singularity and creativity of the occasion of performance than to the settled letter of the text (see, above all, Thrift 2000 and references cited there; Phelan 1993; Aalten 1997; Butler 1990). This is the intellectual morality of the doctrine of creativity. And, of course, as a combination of doctrine and morality, the creativity explosion is unquestionably variegated and double-edged; it can be captured by business gurus and management writers, Californian lifestyle sects, new age groups, post-identitarian philosophers, literary critics turned cultural theorists, intellectuals, postmodern geographers, anti-globalization protestors, whoever.

### **Deleuzian creativity**

How are we to assess this creativity explosion? Certainly with the help of various exemplars: a few proper names that have absolutely no biographical interest for us but which embody specific equations of concepts and their limits rather than overall points of view or ‘theories’ as such. None of these exemplars claims that there is no such thing as creativity; on the contrary, they are obsessed with capturing it in various ways. On the other hand, in the very activity of doing so, all point their concerns away from any determinate sense of what creativity has to be, that is in the sense of a finite doctrine or a morality.

First of all, the example of Gilles Deleuze. The Deleuzian equation has talismanic status at least in the more academic confines of the creativity explosion. Deleuze is the great symptom and even ideologue of the creative turn but he is also its best diagnostician and – at times scathing – critic. Equally certainly though the currently booming levels of interest in Deleuze in the academic world today can themselves hardly be regarded as unconnected to the sociological existence of the creativity explosion itself. We might imagine, then,

a sort of sociology of Deleuzism in this respect, as long as we recognize that even this would probably need to use Deleuzian resources. In assessing Deleuze, we need to forget Foucault's oft-quoted remark that the twentieth century would one day be known as Deleuzian. Perhaps we would do better to go back to what Max Weber said about Nietzsche and Marx: not that one had to be a Nietzschean or a Marxist but that these two figures were the indispensable voices of the *next* century, the twentieth. Deleuze, one suspects, occupies a similar place for the intellectual landscape of the twenty-first century: his presence is simply unavoidable. With his characteristically *ressentiment*-free philosophy (nothing could be less creative than *ressentiment*), his Spinozism and Bergsonism, his vitalism and his empiricism, and his (and of course Guattari's) notions of becoming, movement, the line-of-flight, delirium, the body without organs, Deleuze opened up a pathway for thinking of creativity in terms of a differentiating, impersonal, inventive power. It would doubtless betray all the signs of a 'vulgar' reading of Deleuze to observe that such notions, together with those such as the capitalist axiomatic of de-territorialization, open up a sort of apology for the unfettered march of capitalism itself. And yet, as Thrift comments, the musings of political Deleuzians such as Hardt and Negri often sound uncannily like today's proponents of creative management speak (Thrift 2002). In any case, it is not the least of its importance that Deleuzianism is not outside the creativity explosion but is immanent to it.

And yet Deleuzism is a critical, and for that no doubt indispensable, part. For of course, Deleuze himself was quite resolute in restricting the very generalization of the idea of creativity that has been such a marked feature of the creativity explosion. In *What is Philosophy?* his notion of creativity was restricted solely to certain kinds of intellectual work: to the arts certainly, to the sciences in a certain way and, of course, to philosophy, though not – with the singular exception of Gabriel Tarde – presumably to the social or human sciences and the humanities (Deleuze 1992: 283; Deleuze and Guattari 1994). What is the status of this threefold categorization of science, art and philosophy? It is not a question of disciplinary identity; a philosopher, an artist or a scientist is not a creator simply because he or she inhabits a certain disciplinary space called philosophy, art or science. And yet Deleuze would doubtless have found the idea of being a creative educationalist or management consultant somewhat disarming to say the least. So the categorizations are not exactly disciplinary but nor are they universal. They are something more akin to variants on the will to power in knowledge rather than professional 'fields' as such. For Deleuze was always alive to the fact that such fields themselves are constantly burdened by – indeed, more often than not ('state philosophy', 'royal science') defined by – non-creative forces that have captured them, where what was being spread was not creativity as such but imitation. 'Imitators imitate one another, and that's how they proliferate and give the impression that they're improving on their model, because they know how it's done, they know the answers' (Deleuze 1992: 287).

Imitation, in this Deleuzian sense, is not just doing what other people do. It is

also about making creativity seem like an easy thing to achieve. No doubt, on the Deleuzian model, the last thing the true creator would be concerned with would be with working out a theory of what creativity itself actually is and certainly not with outlining any finite protocols for gaining access to it. So, not surprisingly, for Deleuze 'authentic' creativity is not easy and is as destructive as it is productive: 'A creator who isn't seized by the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator. A creator is someone who creates his own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities. It's by banging your head against the wall that you find an answer' (ibid.: 292). Creativity in this sense, then, is not generic so much as transversal. As Deleuze would put it, you're not a creator if you just sit on the line, identifying yourself as such. You have to flee the line, become a traitor. Even the traitor knows that she or he may be a trickster after all: 'For it is difficult to be a traitor; it is to create. One has to lose one's identity, one's face in it. One has to disappear, to become unknown' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 45). Those who imitate are those such as the journalist-writers, mentioned by Deleuze, who think they are doing literature when they recount their travels and personal experiences, and who do not realize that literature is something completely different, a becoming of something other than what one is (Deleuze 1992). But they are also, assuredly, those in the creativity industries as well as some of those who espouse the academic politics of creativity at whatever degree of sophistication – be they philosophers, literary critics, aesthetic theorists, whoever – all those, in short, who claim to know in advance what creativity is, who seek to speak *in the name of* creativity, whether as doctrine or as ethos. For, if the substance of creativity cannot be known in advance, then, as Stanley Cavell might put it, you have to invent the *criteria* of creativity itself in the very process of creation. Creativity is a matter of experiment, even head banging, but not, in this sense, of doctrine or a determinate ethos. Paradoxically, if we care to serve the *ends* of creativity, then we have to take something like a transversal stance towards creativity itself.

Such a transversal type of creativity would be akin in fact to a kind of anti-creativity, or at least it would take a philistine, treacherous approach to the whole question. The last thing that would matter would be any avowable morality or doctrine of creativity, not least because any such moral or rationalistic avowal runs the risk of turning the value of creativity into something like 'fashion', the endless repetition of permanent change under conditions of permanent imitation – production for the sake of production, 'ideas' for the sake of 'ideas' – and something which ultimately, perhaps precisely because of its character as a sort of compulsory heterodoxy, has *conservative* effects. 'The frequent changes in fashion constitute a tremendous subjugation of the individual and in that respect form one of the necessary complements to increased social and political freedom' (Simmel 1997: 203).

Deleuze hardly takes a 'fashionable' view of creativity in this sense. Take the example of his work on literature. Instead of uncovering clandestine authors, Deleuze constructs a pantheon of writers that is iconoclastic only in so far as it is so removed from the usual minority suspects invoked by post-structuralist discourse. For a start, Deleuze is quite happy to endorse the idea of 'literature'

and even the notion of the 'great writer', although he remains at a remove from any humanist comprehension of that notion (Deleuze 1997; cf. generally, Buchanan and Marks 2000). But, instead of being 'creative artists' as such, these authors become more like makers of machinery; the proper names through which entire symptomatologies are expressed: sadism, masochism – but also, assuredly, Bartleby-ism, Proustianism, and Beckettism (Deleuze 1997).

Beckett, in fact, might be a good illustration. Beckett provides an apt example for anyone such as Deleuze hoping to espouse an approach to literature at some odds from any determinate doctrine of creativity. For Beckett himself is a particularly good example of a writer who espouses something like a negative aesthetic, which entails a sort of comic denial of creativity (Osborne 2003; and the great article on Beckett and exhaustion in Deleuze 1997). Beckett's so-called tramps of various kinds embody the persona of being really aesthetes in the negative, or – at any rate – failures who can scarcely be said to fail; as Krapp says of his glorious literary career, 'Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas'. Hence Deleuze and Guattari's own invocation of the Beckettian corpus in the opening pages of *Anti-Oedipus* and of 'schizophrenics' such as Malone who, they say, embody – even just in terms of their 'various gaits and methods of locomotion' – the very machinism of the processes of creative production which are to be the main theme of that work (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 2–3). Vladimir tells Estragon he should have been a poet. Estragon says 'I was' and gestures at his rags. It is these shambling, apparently impotent figures who deny knowledge of anything – they are in fact the archetypal Deleuzian 'traitors', of course – who end up as the epitome of the Deleuzian model of creativity. This Deleuzian persona out of Beckett is associated above all with the model of 'schizophrenia', but one might as well say that these are the Deleuzian artists and creators who have invented lines of their own rather than choosing to remain safely in the confines of any recognized aesthetic territory or any pre-existing doctrine or ethos of creative powers; indeed, their whole ethos consists of marking out territories and de-limiting their abodes for themselves.

But, then, what of the other writers that Deleuze endorses? Proust and Beckett, yes. But then just about all French philosophers write about Proust and Beckett at one time or another. But D. H. Lawrence? *Whitman*? Anglo-Saxon as opposed to French literature (Deleuze and Parnet 1987)? Thomas Hardy? Is Deleuze a philistine?

### Philistinism

In fact, it is doing no disservice to Deleuze to say that, yes, he is precisely something of a philistine. In the literary field itself, he is a philistine in relation to today's compulsory dogma – espoused by cultural 'theorists', judges of literary prizes, media 'intellectuals', the publishing industries as well as post-structuralist critics – that there is no such thing as literature only the

devariegated field of 'creative' kinds of writing – novels, travel books, memoirs, biographies, journalism. And being a philistine in that he takes a completely literal – almost unsophisticated – view of literature itself, which is to say that his stance is entirely 'illiterary': being wholly uninterested in the 'literariness' of the work. Rather, literature for him is unashamedly about *life*, or rather the idea of *a* life, life taken to the force of an impersonal power (Deleuze 1995). Literature is not a means of personal or subjective 'expression' but an apparatus for capturing and mobilizing certain kinds of percepts and especially affects, even a kind of 'machine', as Deleuze says in his book on Proust (Deleuze 2000: part II). But, in taking such a philistine attitude, Deleuze is combating precisely the fatuity of the creativity industries that tell us that even journalists are creating literature when they write down their experiences of parenthood or what happened on their holidays. So, by invoking philistinism one is invoking a particular perspective not advocating a generalized cynicism. Far from it. Deleuze is credulous, if anything, about literature's capacities for 'greatness'. This kind of philistinism is not cynicism or fatuity but a weapon against these tendencies, something more akin even to Brechtian 'crude thinking' perhaps.

But what, then, is a philistine in this sense? The philistine is not someone stupid or uneducated, though nor would the philistine be someone superior and culturally elitist, as with Adorno's magnificently high-handed critique of the putatively 'vulgar' culture industries (although in some ways Adorno, in our postmodern culture, *is* a good philistine, precisely as a result of his incongruous high-handedness and tunnel-visioned relentless pursuit – with utter disregard for the prevailing character of the times – of authentic works of high art). In any case, philistinism is not a morality but at most an ethos, which is to say a counter-power, a force brought to bear against a specific enemy. It makes sense only as a countervailing power against a perceived threat, in this case the doctrine of creativity. Hence, according to the *OED* definition, the philistine is a member of a foreign militaristic people; an antagonist, an enemy; a debauched or drunken person; a townsperson; a non-student; a person whose interests are literal, commonplace and material. Or, equally, in the more 'methodological' version espoused so eloquently by Alfred Gell, as a kind of countervailing tendency to the mystificatory powers of the romanticization specifically of the aesthetic sphere. For creative art, says Gell, is – as the paradigm of all creative powers as such – really a secular form of religion, not in that everyone embraces it but in so far as it has been sacralized beyond contestation; we can argue with each other within the aesthetic sphere but the aesthetic sphere itself is a sacred place. Of all things, we are unwilling to make a break with the myth of aestheticism, but, just as one cannot be a sociologist of religion without being a methodological atheist, so one cannot be a sociologist of art and literature – or, we might add, of the current discourses of creativity – without being something of a methodological philistine (Gell 1992: 42).

In fact, the philistine, in this sense at least, would probably be something akin to what Deleuze calls an ethologist. Or at least the one perspective might lead to the other and be aligned with it, though certainly not assimilated to it, for

Deleuze makes the concept of ethology do quite a lot of critical, philosophical and other kinds of work that would no doubt be beyond the philistine motivated by scepticism towards the creativity industries. Yet, in a sense, ethology is a literal-minded descriptive, artless kind of art. The ethologist, writes Deleuze in some well-known pages, 'defines bodies, animals, or humans by the affects they are capable of' (Deleuze 1988: 125). Deleuze likes to quote von Uexkull's description of the tick. It has three ways of being affected: climb to the top of a tree, let yourself fall onto the mammal that passes beneath the branch, and seek out the area without fur, the warmest spot. What could be more literalist, more philistine, more artless, than this sort of ethology? But then nor is ethology fatuous. On the contrary, it takes great scholarship, observation and care. The ethologist does not begin with a 'theory' or any *a priori* conceptualizations at all but works within a plane of immanence. An ethologist of creative powers, then, would be interested in documenting and defining in a more or less empiricist way the affects which are made available by creative powers, for instance in the arts themselves, whether this be a case of literature, painting, cinema or whatever. And such an ethology would, then, be specifically countered to any attempt to reduce the notion of creativity to a doctrine or a morality. Deleuze, then, would have to stand as our paradigmatic witness against compulsory creativity. With his ethological attitude he has, so to speak, at least opened up the black box of creativity and taken a serious look inside. He is, then, our first exemplar of a philistine orientation towards the creativity explosion.

### Half against philosophy

And yet, ethology aside, Deleuze, of course, still wants to do philosophy. Which is to say that his ethological approach to literature, and his approach to literature itself, is still conducted in the name of a philosophical critique. Is that such a bad idea? The answer may be that it works in Deleuze's case because he does not bring any *a priori* philosophical concepts to literature. Rather he uses philosophy as something like a lever to re-articulate literary expression into different terms. Philosophy of this sort would be more or less useless in *founding* an ethos of creativity, literary or otherwise. Which is to say in other words that, on this view, philosophy cannot actually take a legislative role in relation to creativity. The creative arts, the machineries of creativity – science, art, philosophy itself – have to have their own autonomy. But, in fact, since such a conclusion can be had only by way of philosophy itself, a smattering of philosophy may be useful – albeit in a minimal sense – in the endeavour to produce a critical attitude to the creativity explosion. Of all the many places to look for such a smattering, various well-known writings on the creative arts – aesthetics and 'aesthetics of existence' – may be of some illustrative use in thinking about creativity.

We need do little more here than to note that some philosophers have been concerned to show that it is difficult to see how any recourse to the category of the aesthetic itself would make much sense without some such idea of the aesthetic

being somehow independent of conceptuality, which is why philosophers from Kant to Levinas and beyond have sought to find some other guiding principle of creative reason; for instance, in the terminology of the image rather than the concept. 'The most elementary procedure of art', wrote Immanuel Levinas in a celebrated article, 'consists in substituting for the object its image. Its image and not its concept. . . . The well-known disinterestedness of artistic vision, which the current aesthetic analysis stops with, signifies above all a blindness to concepts' (1989: 132). This means, among other things, that if creative acts cannot be reduced to conceptual knowledge then it is simply what philosophers used to call a category mistake to expect to derive from them any determinate – rationally legislatable – doctrine of creativity itself. Rather, the description of what is creative must await the onset of the image itself not its concept, which is why Levinas, rather nicely, describes criticism as actually an enterprise which serves to deaden the intrinsic irresponsibilities of the creative arts, the critic as something of an expert or even moralist who comes along only after the noise of battle has died down, as opposed to a creator of any kind.

In short, the philosophy is useful here for telling us that philosophical elaborations of aesthetic creativity will not be of much use in terms of any attempt to construct a determinate doctrine of creativity let alone any transversal image of creativity. Even the reflections of a philosopher such as Foucault on the question of aesthetics of existence will serve only quite limited – if fascinating – purposes, for the idea of such an aesthetics is more by way of a regulative ideal than a determinate philosophy of creative morality, a negative aesthetic rather than a determinate doctrine of creativity (Foucault 1984, 1994: 382, 387–8, 405–6). Foucault's own version of the problematic of creativity has recognizable affiliations with Heidegger's account of the Nietzschean will to power as art, which means, certainly, that it is more than just the 'sphere' of art itself which is at stake. Or at least art, in this sense, has a very general meaning: it denotes something like creativity itself, the creation of oneself – the fabrication of one's own autonomy or – better – something like the concrete shaping of freedom. 'According to the expanded concept of artist, art is the basic occurrence of all beings; to the extent that they are, beings are self-creating, created. . . . Art, thought in the broadest sense as the creative, constitutes the basic character of beings' (Heidegger 1981: 72; Foucault 1994: esp. 629–30; cf. Osborne 1997).

But, in spite of this expanded conception of creativity, Foucault was quite consistently reluctant to fill in the plan of an aesthetics of existence with any determinate content. And rightly so. For the invocation of aesthetics was meant to be a means of escape from the traps of a doctrinal notion of morality, not the passage to another such doctrinal notion. For Foucault, then, if the creative potentialities of art were to become a kind of guiding meta-moral principle of judgement, the content of such creative activities remained to be invented through autonomous practices of freedom themselves. In other words, the philosophy of the aesthetics of existence was more a means of marking out a space of critique than it was a call for a determinate ethos based on any particular idea or doctrine of creativity.

But still, just as with Deleuze's work on literature, this enterprise was carried out if not exactly by means of philosophy then at least in the name of philosophy, as it were, in the last instance. Both Foucault and Deleuze assumed, it seems, that philosophy retained some kind of ultimate authority over the analysis of creativity even if not a legislative role in relation to it. Even if such analyses were not to be philosophical through and through, they could not take place, nonetheless, without philosophy. So be it. In the Deleuzian equation we have an ethological take on creativity, but one governed in the last instance by philosophy. Which brings us to our second exemplar, F. R. Leavis. Not that this is remotely a question of assimilation. The Leavis equation is certainly different from that of Deleuze (it is, as one might say, a question of a variant upon Anglican ethical culture as opposed to Spinozism): in its own way, a philistine take on creativity perhaps, but one not governed by philosophy. That is its interest in our small collection of examples.

### Creativity and anti-philosophy

Who sings the praises of Leavis these days? And yet who could be a better exemplar of a philistine approach to the creative field of literature? A writer who invokes life, who writes with a manic, opinionated intensity and who focused precisely upon a rather idiosyncratically defined 'great tradition' of Anglo-Saxon literature – who else could it be but Leavis? In spite of the few sophisticated critiques of Leavis's positions (Mulhern 1979; Hunter 1988), it is difficult to avoid the overriding sense that what most practising literary critics really object to in Leavis is his rather artless love of literature and his wholly unapologetic association of the values of 'great literature' with the values of life. There is something embarrassing in this for literary criticism. Leavis was just too good to follow, yet too embarrassing to emulate. But then Leavis was not really a 'literary critic' so much as someone who sought to capture by critical means what he saw as the authentic, which is to say living, voice of literature. His great project was conditioned by his opposition to two closely related tendencies: moralism and philosophy. For Leavis, the significance of literature and the 'tradition' was an autonomous one. The values of literature are *immanent*. For Leavis, literature did not offer moral guidance – that would make literary education a branch of moral philosophy, hence useless – but was rather *exemplary* of intelligence (Leavis 1967[1948]: 139). If it offered a moral form of education, then this was *without* any substantial codification of morals, and it certainly could not be replaced by any moral 'theory' or philosophy, a discipline he described – quite understandably given his aims – as being of *absolutely no use* to literary criticism (Singh 1982: 190; Leavis 1933: 63). Literary criticism was about the uncovering of the 'concrete particulars of immediate experience', and this required what amounted to an anti-theoretical bias, which meant that literary criticism had to be more than just a theoretical discourse *upon* literature: 'And it may be hazarded of all thinking, however abstract, that is likely to interest those of us who are pre-occupied with

the problems of living, that the criticism of it concerns its fidelity to concrete particulars and the quality of these' (ibid.: 51).

Concrete particulars. This is Anglo-Saxon philistinism to be sure. But it is not fatuity, and is obviously the opposite of cynicism. On the contrary, there is an engaging innocence about the idea. On the other hand, this emphasis did not, in fact, amount to quite the same thing as the familiar and anti-intellectualist, not to say romantic, argument that literature gives access to the immediacy of experience and is hence better – more satisfying, more humane – than, say, abstract thought. It was, for Leavis, rather – and conversely – that literature happened to be that kind of thought that was already *intrinsically* attached to experience: literature as the best, because wholly immanent, index of experience. Hence the anti-theoreticism of literary experience, and of literary criticism, did not imply anti-intellectualism as such, but only a different intellectual style, a style of its own, an integral rationality, a different 'practice of critical reflection' (to use James Tully's useful notion) from that of the natural sciences or philosophy (Tully 1989). And, because of this, the critic had to seek a direct relation to literature – hence the ubiquity of quasi-concepts such as 'life' in Leavis's work – one that mimicked the movement of vital experience itself. Hence the direct, rather philistine, approach was not down to the weaknesses of a charismatic embrace of what should be the rigours of literature but rather evidence of a *disciplined* attitude to precisely those rigours. In terms of the aims that he set for himself, Leavis's means were far more scholarly and scientific (in the sense of an appropriate fit between means and ends) than have been the procedures of most of his successors, who have wanted in the main to critique the romanticist bases of literature culture without for all that abandoning them (on which, see Hunter 1990; also Bennett 1988: 25). And Leavis to his credit was utterly unconcerned with legislating for creativity itself as a determinate or transcendental value. The critic here is not meant to ape the model of the creative artist, nor is he or she exactly an 'expert' on the creative arts, but is rather a kind of hybrid form, somewhere between the two but different from either.

Leavisism was itself, then, in its own particular way a kind of 'rational' critical machine: a machine for the capture of forms of creativity in their wild state, and not in terms of any pre-established doctrine of what creativity is. And rational in the sense that this was a machine well-fitted to the indeterminacy of its own subject matter. In this sense, Leavis is quite the equal of Deleuze in formulating the principles of an ethology of literature based not on the mystique of inspiration but on the idea of tradition; in other words, irreducible principles that belong only to literature itself, owing nothing even to philosophy.

### Against creativity

So far, then, we have the sketches of two exemplars in our collection. Exemplars, that is, of what we are calling a philistine's orientation towards creativity, in both

cases heavily oriented towards the literary arts. Deleuze attacks the mystique of creativity by connecting creative literature up to the forces of life. Leavis insists upon a valorization of great literature on its own terms, by constructing a tradition of great examples of his own – Austen, Eliot, Conrad, James (Leavis 1952, 1967).

These are worthwhile steps towards a philistine's attitude. And yet both remain content in their own ways with the notion of creativity itself. Deleuze critiques the creativity industries – those he sees as the true cynics, the proponents of mere imitation – but he is still happy to invoke, in the name of great writers, painters and cinematographers, a more authentic sense of creativity for himself. Leavis combats the mysticism of literature with the concrete particulars of the practice of criticism, but he retains a rather mystical notion of literary inspiration itself. Literature in each is unquestionably a *higher* calling (Hunter 1988). For both Deleuze and Leavis, then, creativity remains above all a *heroic* affair.

But is this to go far enough in a philistine direction? What would a *post-heroic* conception of creativity look like? In fact, would not a true philistine's approach entail expunging even this element of the creativity doctrine? For it could be asked whether we even need an ethology of *creativity* at all? Perhaps what would further define such a philistine's approach would be the *dissociation* of the notion of creativity from conceptions of inspiration and its *re-association*, so to speak, with the less romantic conceptions of invention and inventiveness.

Drawing upon research in the anthropology of innovation, Andrew Barry has offered some stimulating reflections on the category of invention (Barry 2000; Strathern 2001). Barry insists that we make an error if we assimilate the category of invention to the categories of either novelty or speed (Barry 2000). Invention is not just a question of novelty; or, rather, we need to broaden our conception of novelty away from artefacts and objects towards arrangements and practices. 'What is inventive is not the novelty of artefacts in themselves, but the novelty of the arrangements with other activities and entities with which artefacts are situated' (ibid.). And what counts in an invention is not so much an invented artefact as the questioning invention itself opens up. Invention, then, is the opposite of closure.

But nor is invention to be associated with quantity or product. A high turnover of novel products may not necessarily imply an escalation of inventiveness and invention. On the contrary, rapid rates of technical change may occur precisely when there is a sense that inventiveness needs to be restricted. Indeed, rapid rates of technical change may be more symptomatic of the will to lay claims to a territory precisely to ensure that others do not get there first. All this means, Barry suggests, that we should be wary of the doctrine of inventiveness for its own sake. Rather, we need to reframe the notion of invention so as to disassociate it from the quantification of production and the speed of turnover, and then to inquire – more empirically no doubt – where inventiveness actually occurs (see also, on invention, especially Rose 1999b: 279–84).

## Inertia

This seems, in fact, like a good approach to take with the notion of creativity too. Or rather, generalizing the logic of Barry's argument, we might suggest that it would be a good idea, in fact, to invoke the principles of inventiveness *as against* those of creativity wherever possible, not least to escape all the romanticist and subjectivist associations that tend to go with the term (the concept as well as the word). Inventiveness is more anonymous, more collective, more processual than the rather heroizing, romanticist notion of creativity. Above all, along with the notion of creativity always goes the problem of *inertia*, the resentment against those who are supposed to be preventing creativity, those who are holding things up, those who are saying 'wait a minute', those who are resisting certain kinds of change, against, indeed, all the constraints on creativity (see Elster 2000, for a brilliant account of the productivity of constraints). But these could be the people precisely who are doing that most Deleuzian of things: banging their heads against the wall? How do we know what is inertia and what is not, given that we cannot 'know' what creativity is in advance? Hence the need for a category that does not have inertia as its counterpart – inventiveness. Indeed, as we shall see, we can regard inventiveness itself as being in part made up of a certain kind of inertia.

Now, oddly enough, this emphasis on inventiveness actually brings us to the most obviously 'arty' of our exemplars, Paul Cézanne. This is fitting in that so far we have considered those who have sought to speak in the name of creative powers rather than seeking out the views of those paragons of creativity themselves – artists and such like. But, in fact, even a cursory examination will show that in a certain sense the true artists are the true philistines, if only in the sense that they – or at least the genuine 'artists' among them – are the very last people actually *trying* to be 'creative'. The watchword of art of the Cézanne variety is not some idea of creativity at all, but simply work. 'I try to succeed by work', wrote Cézanne. 'I despise all living painters, except Monet and Renoir, and I want to succeed by work' (Rewald 1976: 291). What could be a less heroic conception of the inventive endeavour in the field of the arts? For in doing work one is really taking inertia as one's subject matter; one is working on inertia.

In Cézanne we have the idea of inventiveness deployed without need for the concept – as opposed to the word, which does of course appear on occasion – of creativity. Inventiveness comes about through work. None of this has anything to do with any psychological powers of creativity. Plenty of people have those. But not everyone is Cézanne. Work involves repetition. Not repetition of the same object or specific theme necessarily, but repetition of the same activity, repetition in the name not just of seeking an answer to something but of locating, deepening, embellishing a *problem*: in painting, Chardin's repeated focusing on a few grapes, Giorgio Morandi's endless little bottles arranged and re-arranged on a shelf, Cézanne's own obsessive preoccupation with the capture of nature – and particular great lumps of it, repeatedly, such as Mont Sainte-Victoire. The list could be multiplied, but Cézanne in fact is a peculiarly appropriate witness

to the complete irrelevance of the whole doctrine of creativity to the creative arts themselves as actually practised.

In order to make progress, there is only nature, and the eye is trained through contact with her. It becomes concentric through looking and working. I mean to say that in an orange, an apple, a ball, a head, there is a culmination point; and this point is always – in spite of the tremendous effect; light and shade, colour sensations – the closest to the eye; the edges of the objects flee towards a centre on our horizon.

(Rewald 1976: 306)

In a sense one could say that Cézanne in fact only paints exactly the same thing day after day, this culmination point itself – in order to expose it as a problem. The culmination point is the inert point in Cézanne's world, its ballast of inertia. But in doing so he opens out, precisely in the sense invoked by Barry, a whole open field of further problems, avenues and questions.

Inventive work in fact seems to consist in an endless movement towards, into, around and away from the problem, the point of maximum inertia. It is *repetition*, we might say, but of the *attempt* – and endlessly so, because the attempt never materializes into the accomplishment. What is at stake is not closure but the opening out of further possibilities. This means that a certain fatalism often goes with the ethos of inventiveness. And fatalism is only another expression of this sense of inertia that overwhelms not the 'creative person' so much as – more anonymously – the impulse to inventiveness itself. 'There is no perfect picture and there is no perfect book and there is no perfect piece of music, Reger said, that is the truth, and this truth makes it possible for a mind like mine, which all its life was nothing but a desperate mind to go on existing' (Bernhard 1989: 20). Inventiveness in art is no doubt rather the repetition of attempt and the elimination of accomplishment. In that sense, it is desire not fulfilment, something which makes it more or less wholly at odds with most versions of the doctrine of creativity today. Merleau-Ponty said of Cézanne: 'What we call his work was, for him, only an attempt, an approach at painting' (Merleau-Ponty 1993a: 59). But this emphasis on process as opposed to results is not a sign of failure; it is just the condition of aesthetic inventiveness itself. For someone such as Cézanne no series of creations could be finite. 'If creations are not permanent acquisitions, it is not just that, like all things, they pass away: it is also that they have almost their whole lives before them' (Merleau-Ponty 1993b: 149).

One might observe at this point that not the least thing about the activity of inventiveness is that it is difficult, and that because of this one cannot necessarily see it happening at the time. Inventiveness is more often than not untimely – hence the critical import of the verdicts of posterity and, correspondingly, the necessity of a certain 'negative' aesthetics of creativity, the humility of acknowledging that even in acknowledging creativity itself we do not know what creativity is *as such*. What looks like inertia for some comes to a more objective, later generation as evidence of a breakthrough. And what may seem like a breakthrough can come to seem just like further inertia when viewed from a later

more objective perspective. So, in the terms given currency by Stanley Cavell, it is precisely *acknowledgement* rather than knowledge that is the only orientation we can take towards inventiveness itself (Cavell 1969). In the light of history, in the light of reflection, the experts can tell us that Cézanne was a subject-bearer of various powers of inventiveness. But was he a 'creative person'? No matter. Such a question is an irrelevance, an effect only of our psychologism.

### **Inventiveness**

So, in the interests of inventiveness, we should be suspicious of the idea of creativity when raised to the power of a doctrine or a morality. But being a philistine, it should be said, is not a way of life, but a strategy appropriate only to this particular problem: the likely subject matter indeed more for a rant than for a monograph. It encourages us to recognize that more often than not the very idea of creativity is just a component in a wider assemblage – the creativity industries, consumerist individualism, the cult of the new as ever-unchanging fashion, the forces of intellectual and cultural productivism for its own sake, the performativity of 'ideas' and culture. Yet, as Foucault once said, the problem with our culture is probably that there is too much of it around not too little. Our problem is overproduction, cultural hubris perhaps, nemesis no.

Samuel Butler, that great proto-Deleuzian – and philistine (or deluded) enough to venture to take on Darwin without having trained in the life sciences – once observed that 'experience in all kinds of poetical work shows that the less a man creates the better, that the more, in fact, he makes, the less is he of a maker' (Butler 1921: 143), an observation which, though somewhat absurd if taken too literally, nonetheless accounts quite well for the fact that – as Deleuze has it – the apparently highly mobile nomads are the ones who do *not* move; they move about geographically but actually they stay in the same place, meaning that they are the ones – whoever they are – who seem to be endlessly working on the same problem, doing the same thing. This has nothing to do with creativity as doctrine and everything to do with submission to the tasks of getting on with doing what one does, whether that is fashioning problems, engaging in work, developing skills or staying in one's room and banging one's head against the wall. Such procedures might well produce a lot less by way of 'product' but they might end up at least serving the forces of inventiveness. Who can say without trial and error? And without time?

Finally, it may well be the case that sociologists – practitioners, after all, of a feeble-minded 'pariah science' – make better philistines than most. Pierre Bourdieu's work on the arts would be a case in point, and Bourdieu might equally have been one of our exemplars here. But Max Weber put it best. Weber knew that the subjectivism of what were to become the creativity industries was a shallow recompense for the disenchantment of the world. Yet Weber envisaged equally that the result of this would be precisely a mushrooming of attempts at re-enchantment in what would no doubt be an orgy of romanticism and

subjectivism. For Weber, all that remained to do for those who really wished to cultivate 'personality' was to submit to the demands of work, whether in the callings of art or science or, indeed, wherever. Inertia and inventiveness surely went together for Weber. Invoking the virtues of commitment to the task in hand, Weber observed famously that 'this holds not only for the field of science. We know of no great artist who has ever done anything but serve his work and only his work' (Weber 1948: 137). Weber was right. Yet what we now have is a romanticism and subjectivism tied to the very demands of rationalization (economic performance and efficiency) and 'science' (the expertises of creativity). The doctrine of creativity, though, is more than just ideology. It is real enough. Indeed, at the extremity of this sort of interpretation, we might want to say that creativity has actually become a form of capital in its own right. If so, the capitalization of creativity can be resisted not by resort to a more authentic conception of creativity so much as by the rejection of the very category of creativity itself and its replacement by the more general, more anonymous, more inertia-ridden idea of inventiveness.

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