

# Creative Works

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## Creative works: novel, meaningful, valuable, and sustainable

The term “creative works” refers to novel artifacts brought about through human activity. Creative ideas are a necessary but not sufficient element of creative works, as the ideas need to be implemented and turned into reality in order for creative works to be completed. The origin of the creative element in works has long been seen to reside in divine inspiration, but since the 1950s it has become evident that it resides at the intersection of the uniqueness of the individual, collaborative activity, and the broader cultural context.

Creative works are products or artifacts. They can be distinguished from creative persons and creative processes. Works are creative if they are *original* and *novel* by showing relative rarity. Creative works involve aspects that did not exist before or were not yet manifest. This includes novel transformations and modification of existing artifacts. The criterion of novelty and originality is constitutive of creative works. Novelty is fully and widely accepted and leads to the question: “Novel for whom?” Answering it gives us greater insight into this criterion.

- Creative works can be novel for all humanity or novel in a specific cultural context. In this sense, creative works are eminent and involve high or “big C” creativity (Gardner, 1993). Pablo Picasso was a great artist of his time and developed a new technique. Moreover, his creative work played a crucial role in the advent of cubism, a new form of painting.
- Creative works can be novel for the creator or for a specific group. In this sense, creative works are personal and involve everyday or “little c” creativity (Craft, 2001). In everyday situations and interactions, people can create artifacts and meanings that are new to them. In some cases, these creations may have life-changing consequences. Creative works can also be new ideas in which two thoughts are combined that have yet been unrelated.

This leads to a further criterion of creative works. Besides novelty, creative works need to be meaningful and (socially) valuable, as they demonstrate being comprehensible and useful—to a person, to a given group of reference, to a professional field, to a cultural context, or to humanity at large. Works might be novel and original but, if they are not valuable, appropriate for use, somehow practical, or appreciated by someone (sometimes not even by the creator herself), then they cannot be considered creative.

More recently, the criterion of sustainability has been widely discussed as a constitutive element of creativity in works. Works are creative only if they are novel, meaningful, and valuable for a longer period and do not become meaningless, invaluable, or even destructive over time. These definitions also accentuate the relative use of the concept of creative works, because social value and sustainability are properties judged by individuals, groups, and society during a certain period of time.

### **The creative process**

Novel and valuable works are the product of a creative process. Core to this definition is the process, which results in a novel work. This novel work is widely accepted as tenable, useful, or satisfying by a certain group at a certain point in time. The creative process, taken as a sequence of thoughts and actions that lead to a novel work, is supposed to consist of four stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Preparation involves the construction, definition, and analysis of a problem as well as the conscious work that draws on a person's education, analytical skills, and problem-relevant knowledge. Incubation is the phase in which the person does *not* work intentionally and consciously on the given problem. Incubation may happen when working on other problems, during leisure time, or during play or dream. It is suggested that during the phase of incubation the mind rejects many ideas as useless, or as valuable in a nonreflective manner. Illumination is a period in which valuable ideas surface and become accessible to reflection. It appears to be some kind of sudden enlightenment, which, it is suggested, is preceded by the feeling of an emerging idea. Illumination is a delicate phase and cannot be rushed or pressed. After illumination, there is a phase of reflective work called verification. Here evaluating, refining, and reframing one's idea is key. This four-stage model of the creative process has been further developed by exploring subprocesses involved in creativity such as divergent thinking. Generally speaking it is becoming clear that the idea of a fixed sequence of four stages does not fit with the complexity and multidimensionality of creativity. The creative process is dynamic and allows for cycling between different processes, and it has been acknowledged that creativity might also involve the simultaneous presence of these processes.

More recent work shows that creative works stem from a creative process that presents individual, collaborative, and communal aspects (Craft & Chappell, 2016). At the individual level, the core drivers for producing creative works might be self-actualization, the human tendency to actualize one's potential (Maslow, 1974), and personality traits such as openness to experience, nonconformity, curiosity, and willingness to take risks. At the intersection between individual and collaborative levels there appears the aspect of thinking. As learning to think is a dialogic process, and given the relevance of external stimuli to core creative thinking, there are modes such as divergent thinking, lateral thinking, possibility thinking, and emotive lateral thinking. Thinking builds a bridge between individual and collaborative levels of the process of making creative works. At a collaborative level, different patterns of creative work have been identified, for example integrative, family, complementary, and distribute collaboration. At a communal level, values and thoughts about communal

consequences of creative ideas and actions play a crucial role, and so do cultural criteria for judging and valuing creative works.

Moreover, creative works do not come from nothing, as creation *ex nihilo*, but evolve in social situations as creation *in situ*. Creative works emerge from something that is already given. The creative process needs to build on a given structure, routines, and materials in order to eventually deviate from the given patterns. It involves analyzing and disrupting given structures of thinking and action, identifying open issues and blind spots, having and reframing ideas, putting them into action, and making creative works a novel reality (Stenning et al., 2016).

This might happen through the process of co-creativity (Schmoelz, 2018). Stemming from studies on little *c* creativity carried out by Anna Craft (2001), wise and humanizing creativity (Craft & Chappell, 2016), and emotive lateral thinking (Scaltsas, 2016), the relevance of *co-creativity* becomes more and more visible when it comes to creative works. Co-creativity is novelty that has emerged through shared ideas and actions. Co-creative actors take the impact of that novelty into account (Walsh, Craft, & Koulouris, 2014). The process by which creative works emerge entails shared ideas and actions that are based on wise creativity. Wise creativity means that people think about the value of their creative works, discarding those ideas and actions that lack such value.

## **Creative works in various domains**

Creative works can be found in business, politics, arts, humanities, science, and education. Even if creative works have long been associated with the arts, there are plenty of examples showing creative manifestations in various fields and professions. Gardner (1993) identifies Martha Graham and Pablo Picasso as big creators in the arts, but also mentions Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud as creators in the sciences and humanities. Moreover, creativity is key to formulating and asking new questions, a key factor in the sciences and humanities. Scientific creativity also occurs at a collaborative level. Key creative inventions in quantum physics have been made in a social process, and yet Nobel prizes are awarded to a limited number of people as a result of the condition of three scientists, which often neglects the cumulative and collaborative process that leads to the manifestation of creative works in science.

Creative works manifest themselves even beyond arts and science. In the business world, creative works are becoming more and more essential. A constitutive element of market disrupters are their inherent creative works. Florida (2002) even argues that there has been a rise of the creative class, which is the core driver of economic development in postindustrial cities in the United States. This is a demographic segment—a supercreative core of creative professionals—of people whose work is knowledge-based and who are constantly finding and solving novel problems. More recently, the creative class has seemed to be globally expanding. This class is functional in terms of *creationist capitalism*, a mode of capitalism in which creativity is understood as labor and production is understood as creation. At its heart stands prosumption, in which creative works are directed at the *marketplace* alone.

Reckwitz (2017) goes beyond the domain-specific analysis of creative works. He unfolds how we live in a global regime of the aesthetically new and how we generate a creativity dispositive that permeates *all areas of life*. Among other factors, mass media and media production play a crucial role in intensifying the creativity dispositive. The creative individual and her relation to creative works have evolved alongside the transformation of structural conditions such as media technology. In the Renaissance, letterpress printing made creative artists visible and enabled them, whereas the modern star is embedded in the structural conditions of periodical celebrity journalism and in the distribution of visual and audio media technology. Stars and their creative works have become the core currency of *liberal individualism*, and creative works are driven by technological change.

Creative works seem to proceed from a regime of the aesthetically new that is underpinned by liberal individualism, creationist capitalism, and the structural conditions of media technology. The *novelty* of creative works has, however, become questionable.

### **Creative works in media education**

The relation between creative works and the media reveals developments in the field of media education. Creative works proceed from an awareness of the cultural properties of the medium and from specific pedagogic practice, but not from the technology itself (Banaji & Burn, 2007). Even if some educators follow the imperative of mass media production in aiming for a noncritical reproduction of established media practices within the existing regime of liberal individualism (which is behind market-driven creative works), the essence of creativity in media education confronts aesthetical variations that go beyond existing routines and patterns of communication.

Facilitating media activism *in the classroom* might enable students to come up with creative media works that go beyond existing routines and patterns of communication in a twofold manner. First, creative media works might entail creative reframings of conventional technological practices. Second, they might critique and reframe existing normative practices of coercion, discrimination, and domination within and outside the media (Hug, 2011).

In literacy classroom practices, Walsh (2009) evidenced how students can critically reframe curricular knowledge through creative media works. First, students analyzed and questioned the knowledge of American history in their curriculum and critiqued the way Chinese immigrants are presented in history books. Second, they developed creative media works in which they reframed the representation of Chinese immigrants. A virtual exhibition of students' creative media works was then organized in a museum in New York City. The process of creating media works allowed students to disrupt and reframe the racist and exclusionary elements they encountered in school textbooks.

Other examples that go beyond existing routines illustrate the relation between creative media work in schools and the transformation of identity. Banaji and Burn (2007) exemplify how creative media works transform the creator by manifesting aspects of human identity in the form of multimodal texts and by making these aspects visible to other members of the community, inviting response and negotiation. In that

manner, creative media works may enable students to change their own patterns of communication. These forms of creative work show that wisdom and creativity are interlinked, because they exemplify a concern for the practical problems of everyday life, especially interpersonal relationships. To be wise, creators must deal with people, not with things. Wise creativity means that agents take into account the impact and consequences of their creative ideas and works (Craft & Chappell, 2016).

Creative media works can also manifest “wise” aspects when it comes to empowerment *outside the classroom*. The project It Gets Better (<http://www.itgetsbetter.org>) was initiated in direct response to a number of students taking their own lives after experiencing homophobic bullying; but it aims to inspire hope in young people who face harassment in society as a result of their sexual orientation. The project uses creative media works, especially digital storytelling, as counternarratives of resistance and triumph from LGBT youths and their advocates.

Another example is the 1000Voices project ([1000voices.edu.au](http://1000voices.edu.au)). Creative media works are used for amplifying the voices of people with disability. Their authors are collecting and creating lifestory data and enable multimodal narratives by using the participants’ preferred ways of representing, by incorporating creative abstract expression, and by valuing what is not said.

These examples represent the current decade of work on digital storytelling. Constructing creative media works with digital storytelling went from an educative decade, in which creative media works were related to the transformation of identity, to a social decade, in which they were seen to disrupt and reframe normative discourses by giving a voice to people who are currently not heard. The hallmark, the project that triggered the switch from educative to social in digital storytelling, was SilenceSpeaks (<http://silencespeaks.org>), cointiated by Amy Hill in 1999. An example of a SilenceSpeaks project is Hill’s (2008) study “Learn from My Story,” which aimed to create spaces for silenced stories. This participatory media initiative for Ugandan women affected by obstetric fistula showed how digital storytelling and its creative media works can serve as a starting point for building leadership skills among women and can empower them to self-advocate by spreading the word about prevention and treatment.

In these projects, “ordinary” people became producers of creative media works and were able to be a vehicle for the voice of the silenced. Creative works in the sense of media productions by “ordinary” people are also present in the realm of cultural studies. Jean Burgess (2006) has used “vernacular creativity” as both an ideal and a heuristic device, to describe and illuminate creative practices that emerge from highly particular and nonelite social contexts and communicative conventions. Burgess illustrates how different creative media practices transform everyday *experiences* into a shared public culture.

## **Co-creative works in media education**

Studies of co-creativity have shown that the process of making creative works has individual, collaborative, and communal (Craft & Chappell, 2016) dimensions. Creative persons and groups embody these different dimensions of the creative

process and therefore constitute the idea of co-creativity, a kind of creativity that happens *in* and *between* us (Schmoelz, 2017). Creative works are generated in a process that happens both *in and between* us. Individual ideas are a necessary element, but collaborative actions and thinking about the communal consequences of those actions are equally important (Walsh et al., 2014). Thinking outside the box evolves through question-raising and active listening during dialogue. It has further been shown that co-creative works evolve through co-determined actions. These actions are determined by shared preferences and volition that precede the enactment of the means by which creative works are caused (Schmoelz, 2017).

With regard to co-creative works and media, Chappell et al. (2017) have studied virtual learning environments (VLE) and their potential for co-creativity. They have shown how VLEs that go beyond the competitive aspects of displaying creative media works can be about collective journeys of becoming by contributing to incremental, cumulative, and ethical group change. Moreover, digital stories have revealed themselves to be co-creative media works (Schmoelz, 2018), as they stem from individual, collaborative, and communal thinking and from actions that involve disruption and reframing and take the value of their impact into account. The process of co-creative digital storytelling led to co-creative flow, in which students experienced full immersion and enjoyment as well as the absence of control and rationality. Connected with the enjoyment of digital storytelling, they idolized and somehow humanized their co-creative media work, their digital story. Their co-creative media work became the highlight of their media education lessons.

### **(Co-)creative works in the future**

Asking about (co-)creative works of the future and envisioning what may lie before us is not always an easy task. Future thinking and asking what probable, possible, and preferable futures might look like is one way to go. With regard to producing (co)creative works, a probable future is that creative persons will become more and more entangled in the diffuse and ambiguous schism between (i) noncritical reproduction of established media practices within the existing regime of liberal individualism of the market-driven creative works and (ii) being an agent of “wise” creative works that challenge the status quo and are mindful of the consequences of one’s thinking and actions. A possible future is that these two processes become more and more extreme and constitute different paradigms for producing (co)creative works; or that one paradigm is destroyed by the other. The future could go both ways; there are convincing studies and reflections that suggest that creative works will become marketized and functional for capitalism alone, and therefore novelty as a necessary constitutive element of creative works will be questionable, because it is all “old wine in new bottles.” Other studies suggest a “turn to life” (Heelas, 2002) for the creative industries. It is shown that claims for the demoralization of the creative and cultural industries may be premature and that individualization may offer spaces in which to reestablish noneconomic, “wise,” and ethical values in creative works. A preferable future might be one in which unforeseeable new processes are created that lead to

creative works, which are truly original, meaningful, valuable, and sustainable. This means that we may need to embrace ambiguity, contingency, empathy, and constructive conflict to create a kind of pluralism that does not lack a shared humanism.

SEE ALSO: Creativity and Media Production in Schools; Digital Storytelling; Media Education Research and Creativity; Media Production in Elementary Education; Understanding Media Literacy and DIY Creativity in Youth Digital Productions

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### Further Reading

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