

Openings: Creativity, Innovation and Leadership in the 21st Century

Overview and Lecture Summaries

By Warwick Powell

February 2015

Overview

The essence of our being is as revealers. That is to say, to be human is fundamentally about how the world reveals itself to us through our involvement with it. This revelatory mode finds its wellspring in creativity (*creo*) and the integrated *poietic* sensibility comprising *poiesis*, *phusis* and *aletheia*. As human beings we are, thus, always creating; and by virtue of this, continually innovating if by innovating we take to mean activities that create novel things through new combinations. The current explicit (re)turn to innovation is specifically conjunctural; it has been appropriated as a panacea to the accumulation malaise of post-GFC capitalism, though it was already evident prior to the GFC (2008) when creativity itself was framed as an industry in its own right. Yet, in framing innovation as the solution to the malaise is to elide the reality of the role of innovation in the crisis itself. Financial innovation coupled with the global discourse of urban boosterism has, over the past 25 years, made possible the creation of a global financial apparatus that is brittle and fragile.

Innovation within a technologised frame has progressively starved our creative appetites. By rendering the world as a “standing reserve”, ready to be consumed and discarded, the technological gaze has now set its sights on the acts of creativity itself. If creativity can be harnessed as a “standing reserve” then it can be deployed and discarded at a whim. Creativity isn’t the preserve of the mentally insane, as it was once believed. Rather, it is something that can be grappled with through the tools of neuro-biology, so it is believed. The ongoing developments in artificial intelligence, robotics and automation are premised on, in the first instance, the capacity to render life’s rich tapestry as repeatable processes – however complex – that can be treated as algorithmic functions. The same goes for creativity itself. The digitalization of life, through the advents of modern technology, has dovetailed with the contemporary rebalancing in favour of a concern for security, so that human beings are increasingly enlisted into a range of integrated modalities in which each of us are little more than digital traces.

The problem isn’t that we aren’t innovative; the problem is that we invest too much into innovation without responsibility. Today’s secular nihilism does call for a re-opening to our creative wellsprings, which can be found in the recesses of our imaginative forces. A re-awakened creativity, which can flourish when we are immersed in focal experiences and focal moments imbued with a rich sense of hospitality, can deliver a constructive re-orientation towards technology and all that it has spawn. Nostalgia has no place in this re-orientation; what is needed is a constructivist frame that can re-invest creativity into

our daily lives by the awakening of the *poietic* possibilities of our being. These possibilities go to a reclamation of time and space, both of which have been eviscerated by the doppelganger and instantaneity of the digital age. Whether this reclamation takes form in finance, in food or in how we power ourselves, a revived imagination enables creativity to discharge real meaning into our lived experiences and relationships to our world. In doing so, we must remain mindful of the fact that while machines may in most cases become better versions of ourselves that we don't mistake this to mean that we are a lesser version of them.

Lecture #1: Innovation redivivus

The student shall begin to gain an appreciation for the conjunctural conditions of the recent emergence of concerns about creativity and innovation. In doing so, the student can reflect upon the question just whether innovation can be treated as a panacea to the contemporary economic and social malaise, or is little more than a placebo. Case examples of innovation in government and the Human Genome Project are introduced to illustrate the performative shortcomings of the innovation trope over the past thirty years.

Lecture #2: The roots of Creativity and Innovation

This lecture explores the philosophical underpinnings of what it means for human beings to be creative. The student shall develop an understanding of the ontological foundations of human creativity, which are examined through an appraisal of the classical Greek ideas of *poiesis*, *phusis* and *aletheia*. Through Heidegger, we trace the creative nature of our Being, and recognize the source of *poiesis*' authenticity in the wellsprings of human imagination. The discord between *techne*, as it manifests in the technological age, and imagination is the source of the smothering of our creative essence. Only by reclaiming the *non*-sense of the imaginative can we begin to re-appropriate creativity as the essence of our being.

Lecture #3: Technologicalisation of innovation and creativity

If it is that human beings are creative in their essence, and that innovative practice is ever-present, the particular technological inflection of contemporary innovation is the defining character of our epoch. The student will begin to develop a critical appreciation of that technological inflection, and its recent rhythms, which foreground an understanding of the particular effects and implications of the contemporary inflections of technology in terms of speed, scale and calculation. We explore these dimensions through an examination of the emergence of "Speed of Light Man", and the increasingly ubiquitous presence of calculative methods like double entry bookkeeping. The capacity of modern technology to transmit information instantaneously has eviscerated space and time; we can in effect be anywhere, anytime ... or nowhere in particular. This kind of technologised innovation is contrasted with creativity *tout court*, and the student will begin to appreciate the need to resist the confusion of creativity in its authentic richness with its contemporary technological manifestations.

Lecture #4 In aid of what? The Modern embeddedness of innovation

Building on from the philosophical explorations of the previous lecture, this lecture introduces some grounded milieu in which the modern inflection has played out. In doing so, we explore so-called applied innovation in the fields of urban management, financial innovation and regional economic development. In this lecture, the student will expand their critical knowledge of specific aspects of contemporary innovation. The intersection of innovations in these three domains has been something of a backdrop to the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, and raises again the question of whether innovation per se is a panacea to our contemporary malaise. The student shall gain an understanding of the unintended consequences of innovation under specific institutional and historical contexts, and develop a critical understanding of the culpability of discourses on urban renewal in the production of speculative financial products. A regional development discourse that hopes to promote rejuvenation on the back of “urban boosterism” will be sorely disappointed. This lecture is an important antidote to the fawning praise that often accompanies the rhetoric of innovation.

Lecture #5: Situating creative production

Creative production cannot be disconnected from the institutions of power, knowledge production and the dynamics of capitalist accumulation. This lecture explores in detail late capitalism’s turn to innovation as it seeks a way out of the present crisis. In doing so, it has enlisted modern technology, the consumer and even architects as it seeks to harness creativity and through this, innovation, in the aid of kickstarting a new cycle of accumulation. The student will gain an appreciation of how spatial design through modern architecture has been enrolled as a key enabler of creativity and, more importantly, creativity capture. This spatial grounding aims among other things to enable creativity to be provoked, produced and stored. In other words, it is a physical manifestation of humanity’s quest to instrumentalise creativity itself. Via this lecture, students can gain an understanding of the interconnections between innovation and the demands of capitalist accumulation.

Lecture #6: Risky business

This chapter introduces the preconditions of humanity’s creativity, and introduces the idea of the unknowability of the future that both presages creativity itself and propels its quest. We revisit some philosophical themes first discussed in the second lecture, and introduce new ones that deal with how humanity has dealt with the uncertainty of the future. After considering some of the musings of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, the student will develop an historical understanding of the emergence of risk calculus and the taming of chance through the development of probability statistics. As innovations themselves, risk and probability calculus have played pivotal roles in how we have confronted the future; yet, despite the seemingly tremendous leaps in epistemological certitude achieved on their back, today we are less certain about the future than we have ever been. Chance may have been tamed, but uncertainty abounds.

How we respond to this uncertainty will be vital to how we re-embrace the creativity that defines our humanity.

Lecture #7: Increments, accidents and speed

This lecture seeks to extend some of the discussions in Lecture #3 on the rhythms and inflections of technology. We begin with a proposition about the conditions of *ecstasis*, which are the episodes that puncture the leaps-and-bounds of innovation and creativity, based on Feyerabend's idea of "anything goes". This anarchic historical frame foregrounds the idea that creativity is at its best when it is unbridled. This rule-less context sets the scene for a further reflection on contemporary innovation in the form of "Speed of Light Man". In doing so, the student will be exposed to further critical reflections concerning the commodification effects of contemporary technological innovation and the role of such innovations in the context of a shift in the centre of social gravity towards a concern for *security*. If the concern with security has enlisted technology in its subjugation of human beings, then technology is also hurtling headlong in other directions that raise existential questions about the future of humanity. We talk of automation and artificial intelligence.

Lecture #8: Care of the creative self

This lecture introduces various ways in which we have sought to come to grips with what it is to be creative as human beings. In particular, the focus is on the various discourses that have sought to frame creativity as a condition of the self-contained autonomous self. Launching from historic ruminations of the association between madness and creativity, we trace the emergence of creativity as a scientific object through the various psy-disciplines. Eventually, we are now exploring creativity through the biological rubric of neuro-biology. That creativity continues to elude the scientific gaze should come as no surprise; surprisingly, however, recent discoveries such as neuro-plasticity would suggest that locating the object solely within the isolated and autonomous individual is a misleading and partial endeavour.

Lecture #9: Care of the creative commons

This lecture revisits the theme of space in the cultivation of creativity. However, rather than focus on the specific design preconditions of what could arguably constitute creative spaces, we develop an understanding of the role of place in creative production through a phenomenological exploration of the relationship between being and place. This is accomplished first by a critique of urban spatial approaches to the creation of "creative precincts", which extends the earlier critique of urban boosterism to the specific claims made about promoting urban creativity. In the light of this critique, the relationship of being and place is re-examined through the question of "being-with". That human beings are at their most creative when they are in a place that invokes a feeling of being at home, this lecture then introduces the idea of "hospitality" as a critical attunement needed to maintain vitality in the being-with condition of human habitation. Lastly, in conditions where "hospitality" is present, the capacity to generate conducive

moods through the creation of focal events and focal experiences – to borrow from Albert Borgmann – is seen as central to our grounded creativity.

Lecture #10: The ghost of Babel: through language we speak and think

Being-with implies a communication between the participating beings. This goes for beings with other beings, human and otherwise. This lecture explores the role of language in humanity's essence as revealers. That language is thoroughly invested in the slippage of metaphoric relationships makes it possible to be both revealer and concealer at the same time. This lecture thus considers the centrality of metaphor in the creative production dynamics of imagination, and considers Paul Ricoeur's account of imagination. Grasping the profundity of metaphoric production is central to how we can creatively open new spaces in our encounter with the world.

Lecture #11: Thoughtful sensibilities

The lecture begins a three-part conclusion, which draws together the threads of the preceding lectures. It does this by first revisiting the heart of human being's essence as revealers in terms of the idea of *poiesis*. By drawing back together the revelatory power of *poiesis*, *phusis* and *aletheia* and bringing *techne* back in from the cold, we have the potential for a re-energised engagement with the world. This involves the recovery of the imaginative potential in human beings. Focal experiences and focal places contribute to the cultivation and expression of *poietic* sensibilities. Examples of such *poietic* experiences drawn from everyday life are discussed. A willingness to take the plunge, and let our creative capacities express themselves, is risky business. It involves a fair dose of uncertainty. A creative commons imbued with an ethos of hospitality is, therefore, a must.

Lecture #12: Not all is lost; it's just hiding

This lecture focuses on re-positioning our disposition towards technology in the 21st century. A nostalgic retreat is largely impossible, yet we cannot just accept the nihilism that the “device paradigm” (as Borgmann put it) without critical reflection. To do so would be to jettison our creative essence as human beings. This lecture explores ways in which we can think about a more constructive and positive engagement with technology. To do this, we continue our exploration of Heidegger (and his idea of the fourfold), and the possibility of focal experiences to provide us with a grounding in an age of breakneck speed. By considering the preconditions for a 21st century engagement with creativity and technology, the instrumental impulse must be left at the door. An openness to exploratory experimentation, grounded in a strong sense of purpose and responsibility to our human creativity, is the cornerstone of this re-positioning.

Lecture #13: To close with an opening

This lecture closes the series through a number of “real world” vignettes that serve to illustrate how a focus on creatively reconfiguring our relationship to space and time can contribute to an enriched encounter with our being-with. That is, a purposeful application of creative energies sees them brought to bear on our social and economic

relationships. We do this firstly by considering the *placing* of an innovation and creativity festival, to illustrate the interaction of place and mood to create shared focal experiences. We then show how “reframing” our approach to technology can be undertaken, before considering some practical case studies. These examples illustrate the creation of focal experiences in the aid of creative engagement with regional challenges, the emergence of an epicurean subjectivity as a way of grounding our relationship to the production, distribution and consumption of food, the possibility of reframing our socio-economic relationships through concepts such as “chains”, which are used to illustrate a critical posture towards grocery retailing, financial products and banking and how we fuel ourselves. A new topology or geometry of 21st century social configuration can then be imagined. Lastly, we take a direct look at an engagement with technology – in the form of 3D printing – that can transform our being-with and reignite a *poietic* engagement with the world of raw materials and their possibilities. The work of Frithjof Bergmann’s New Work Culture is introduced.