

The Silliness of Plural

*The Influence of
Plurality on Creativity*

This Visual Talking Point, *The Silliness of Plural*, came about over the last four years through a series of conversations (directly and indirectly) and observation, with ‘creatives,’ students and colleagues to whom I am most grateful.

I work in education, arts education and design to be specific, so creativity and experiential learning are important to me. Everyday I witness young people learning and negotiating ideas connected to their daily life. What I hear from them sounds both as a plea for answers (what should I do?) and their defiance to be uniquely individualistic.

This confusion, I have come to realize, often comes from pre-set notions of history (**Twentieth Century**, in this case) and a reliance on it as an feasible model for generating expression as we enter a second decade in the **Twenty-first Century**. The difference being that this younger generation is now fully attuned to technology and their bodies with all their senses on high alert.

This VTP is intended as a brief overview about, against, and for the condition of creativity during any pluralistic moment in history.

*This is strange
territory indeed,
which brings me
to letters. So I ask,
what influence does
a culture immersed
in pluralistic thinking
have on creativity?*



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With Plurality, everything is good and everything is equal. There is no hierarchy as to value, because value itself is subjective.

Plurality flourished in the post-Cold War era in late 1980's and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Preceeding this event, which was a core signifier of oppositional political and economic mindset, divisive thinking was common place: them/us, inside/outside, black/white. For those born in the middle to late parts of the twentieth century, when the turmoil surrounding national/colonial/racial thinking shifted, there no longer remained a need for remnants of competing oppositional markers¹. Soon after, everything began to beautifully blur. I'm obviously condensing the story. Terminology changed and the use of the word hybrid, multi-, inter-, or trans-disciplinary, was widely adopted to account for the uncertainty or blurring of distinctions.

Do events really blur? In biology, hybrids die-off because they are too specialized².



Aesthetics also has a split personality. There is the aesthetic of being sensory bound to seeing, observing, experiential learning as guided by our bodily senses.

On the other hand, aesthetics has also migrated away from sensibility, becoming more about “being sensitive,” or appreciative of physical things, i.e., connoisseurship; or even having a sensitivity towards a cause. The latter is practices by foundations and institutions as philanthropy. The differences between the two are great. The latter is immersed in language and moves away from tactile understanding of the physical world, and seeks a particular type of meaning (via representation) to justify experience as participatory. Vision, taste, aural, touch, and smell differ than language, technology and social constructions. In a pluralistic culture both aesthetic positions are valid., and they also directly effect creativity in both production and consumption. But it should also be known that these models are non-responsive to challenges creativity may face as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century.

There is no particular lingua franca on the production side of the arts industry. There are several parallel areas of pursuit: representation, abstraction, ornamentation, art and design, identity-multiculturalism. Because there are so many possible conventions to use, borrow, or mash-up, there remains a standing confusion as to a prevailing direction.

Another developing condition is that missteps are guarded against. This may signal an even bigger problem ahead where the appearance of creativity has obtained a familiarity or habituated presence.

To understand the challenges placed on creativity we must first define what purpose we have in store for discussing creativity.

Plural

Creative expression is a human iteration found in many forms from computer programming to object-making. Within plurality, iteration, exists with a new host of variables.

What's most informative about the arts is not the individual work and what they supposedly mean, but rather how 'all' works tend to reflect upon our larger cultural behavior.

Remember: All creative work is at least a little bit interesting.

A political aesthetic

*is an oxymoron. Which
of our senses governs*

politics or activism?

Plural



**“Tell us something we
don’t already know³. ”**

Creative education is currently too specialized, and has become predictable in its methods: acting primarily as an internalized response to market desires.

In Jaron Lanier's, *You Are Not A Gadget⁴, 2010*, he describes MIDI technology, a 1980's innovation for synthesizing sound (think music), which is still the current standard. It is an old makeshift technology, which has yet to be updated. We use it blindly, as if it's an accurate interpretation of the original sound.

The arts now operate in a similar manner. We assume topicality, when what we actually need is new blood (ideas). Younger persons today have been raised within a multi-sensory culture: primacy is no longer the sole territory of any single sense. These persons are already experts in the twenty-first century, similarly as how their predecessors were experts in the twentieth.

Suggestion: Provide room for floundering.

While plurality has an expansive purpose within the diversity of opinion, style, and form. Creativity is, in part, an aberration. The lack of boundaries, and open-endedness, may be a tricky proposition to negotiate if a specific resolution is expected.

Suggestion: Stop seeking the backstory. Sure, understanding a narrative can justify, reason, and provide consistency, but it does little to magnify the significance or passion behind any actual event.



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*Can there be too
much creativity, can
it run amok?*

*How much creativity
can any culture absorb
at any given moment?*

Creativity is subject to all cultural forces – existing and imagined, so plurality has an enormous influence. Our preoccupation with media, social networking, and screens demonstrates that the development of our competing sensibilities now rival the stranglehold which vision had so dominated in communications through the majority of the twentieth century⁵.



***What expectations
do we carry about
creativity?***

The
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'Of course the delineation between conservative/liberal, republican/democrat still exist today, but this is a carry-over, which fortunately enough in the long run cancel each other out.

?It is curious, but out of this change economics remains the only industry within our pluralistic society, which is non-pluralistic.

³This applies to all fields. In the opening decade of the twentieth-first century, the financial sector seems to be the most creative, and capable of taking risks. The music industry has reached a creative plateau finding itself recycling through a fifth generation of rap music, as the new.

'Jaron Lanier, *You are not a Gadget*, 2010. Alfred Knopf Publisher, New York

⁵Please do not misunderstand. I fully support all truly creative initiatives in all fields, but I am suspicious of any cultural tendency, in which, individualized expression may be jeopardized.

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**The paintings presented in this Visual Talking Point date from 2000 to 2010.
Titled in order of appearance: Two, Acheepee (*Eavesdropping Narrative*), Peek-a-boo,
One, Yell over Red. Oil, pigmented shellac on aluminum substrate.**

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