

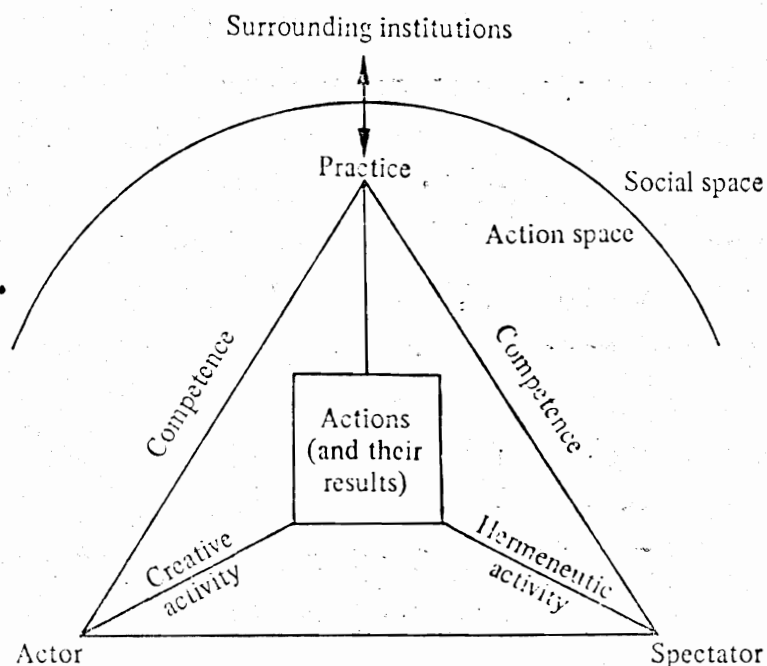
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ON THE LOGIC OF CREATIVE PROCESSES.

1. Creative processes, like all other human activities, are rule-governed activities. A necessary condition for something being labelled an "action" is that it is carried out in accordance with rules which are essentially public, (Cf. the private language argument in Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations.) Ways of acting are "practices" or "customs", "uses", "institutions", to use Wittgenstein's terminology. We don't normally learn a rule, in the sense which is intended here, by having it recited to us. The rules which constitute our practices are learned by examples and counter-examples. (Even when a rule has been explicitly formulated, we have to learn to use it with the help of examples.) When we have learned a set of rules, we might also learn to break the rules. This, I submit, is also a form of rule-governed activity. The rules which make up our competence as speakers of a language, for instance, invariably include rules for breaking the rules. This aspect of our communicative competence is also the key to the linguistic creativity which all of us have in more or less ~~well~~ developed forms. The linguistic model is not a bad one if one wants to understand other forms of creativity, like creativity in the world of art.

Aesthetic practices, like other practices, presuppose other practices or institutions like education, museums, galleries, and the economic market. The connections between an aesthetic practice and its background institutions is contingent in the sense that the details of the institutions are contingent. That there exists a set of background institutions is not a contingent matter but a necessary feature of any practice.

The conceptual structure which has been indicated here may be visualized in the form of a diagram which is intended as a reminder of the structure of action situations and of some of the necessary conditions for creative work :



The basic reason for considering art in relation to society and for paying attention to the abilities and resources at the disposal of artists and beholders is that it is necessary to do so in order to understand art and in order to grasp the nature of creative processes. The links between actions, intentions, rules, competence, and practices are conceptual ones. The mastery of the relevant rules and practices is a transcendental condition for the possibility of the creation of art.

2. There is a traditional view according to which an action consists of an intention which occurs in the mind and behaviour which occurs in the world. According to the traditional view, the occurrence of the intention in the mind comes before the occurrence of the behaviour in the outer world, and sometimes it is considered to be the "cause" of the behaviour.

On the background of the traditional view, it is tempting to read intentionalist explanations as accounts of how behaviour in the external world is caused by intentions occurring in the inner world of the mind. If, for instance, Piet Mondrian intended to make painting autonomous and considered that he could not bring this about unless he let the illusory treatment of space go, then this might be interpreted to mean that the painter first formed an intention in his mind and then looked around for ways of realizing his intention, and finally, after having found the means, started the process of doing away with the illusion of space. As an account of how Mondrian reached the position that pictures - at least his own pictures - should be simple arrangements of rectangles in a strictly limited scale of colours, this sounds rather unconvincing. Nor is it compatible with his own accounts of the road to "neo-plasticism" (in De Stijl and elsewhere). It is not plausible to assume that the intention existed in advance of the search for the means and the pictorial experiments. Rather, it belongs to the logic of creative processes that the intentions and the means are clarified along the road. Mondrian was searching for the questions as well as for the answers, one might say. The aim was as much to clarify the ultimate intentions as it was to find the suitable means to realize those intentions.

The traditional view, according to which intentions precede and perhaps cause behaviour in the external world, fits a certain selection of examples only, and Mondrian's case does not seem to belong to those examples. A paradigm case of pre-existing intentions being translated into behaviour is the building of a house following a set of instructions. I shall refer to the relation between intention and action illustrated by such cases as "the blueprint model".

A comparison between blueprint cases and cases of searching will help to shed some light on the nature of creativity.

In the first place, intentions do not have to be clear. In the cases which fit the blueprint model they are; the building instructions are (one hopes) sufficiently clear for the builder to perform the succession of actions required to erect the building in the desired shape. In creative processes, intentions are often not clear at all, to start with. They exist in the form of hunches, intuitions, ideas, a general sense of direction (which is a good reason for a painter to say, as Picasso did, that it is not permitted to talk to the driver). In the second place, intentions do not have to be fully articulated. In the building instructions, they are relatively explicit. In the painter's case, the intentions exist more in the eye and the fingertips than on the tongue. Intentions, like the competence which make them possible, may exist in the form of practical knowledge, knowing how to do things, rather than in the form of theoretical knowledge, that is knowledge about how to do things (knowing that).

Creative processes are characteristically processes in which means and ends continually modify each other. The overall intention of Mondrian's work (and Mondrian is no mean model of creativity) may, in retrospect, be characterized as an intention to find out what he really intended. The result was a process of continuous searching and experimenting, with the overall aim of finding more and more adequate expressions for the aim that was gradually becoming clear through the work itself. Mondrian did not have the competence required to do what he did in his neoplastic period when he started his series of pictorial experiments. It was only when he had built up that competence through a process of trial and error that the intention of it all could be clearly formulated, i.e. shown.¹

1) The approach to creativity adopted here builds upon the results from the ongoing aesthetic project at the University of Bergen. Cf. the contributions by Gunnar Danbolt, Kjell S. Johannessen and Tjore Nordenstam to Contemporary Aesthetics in Scandinavia (eds. Aagaard-Mogensen & Hermeren, Lund 1979).