

THE AESTHETIC TURN, CREATIVITY, AND THE CITY

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Aims

- Superseding both the rationalist and the aestheticist approach to creativity because of inadequacy to deal effectively with it
- Reassessing the relationships between creativity, the rational and the aesthetic

Main results

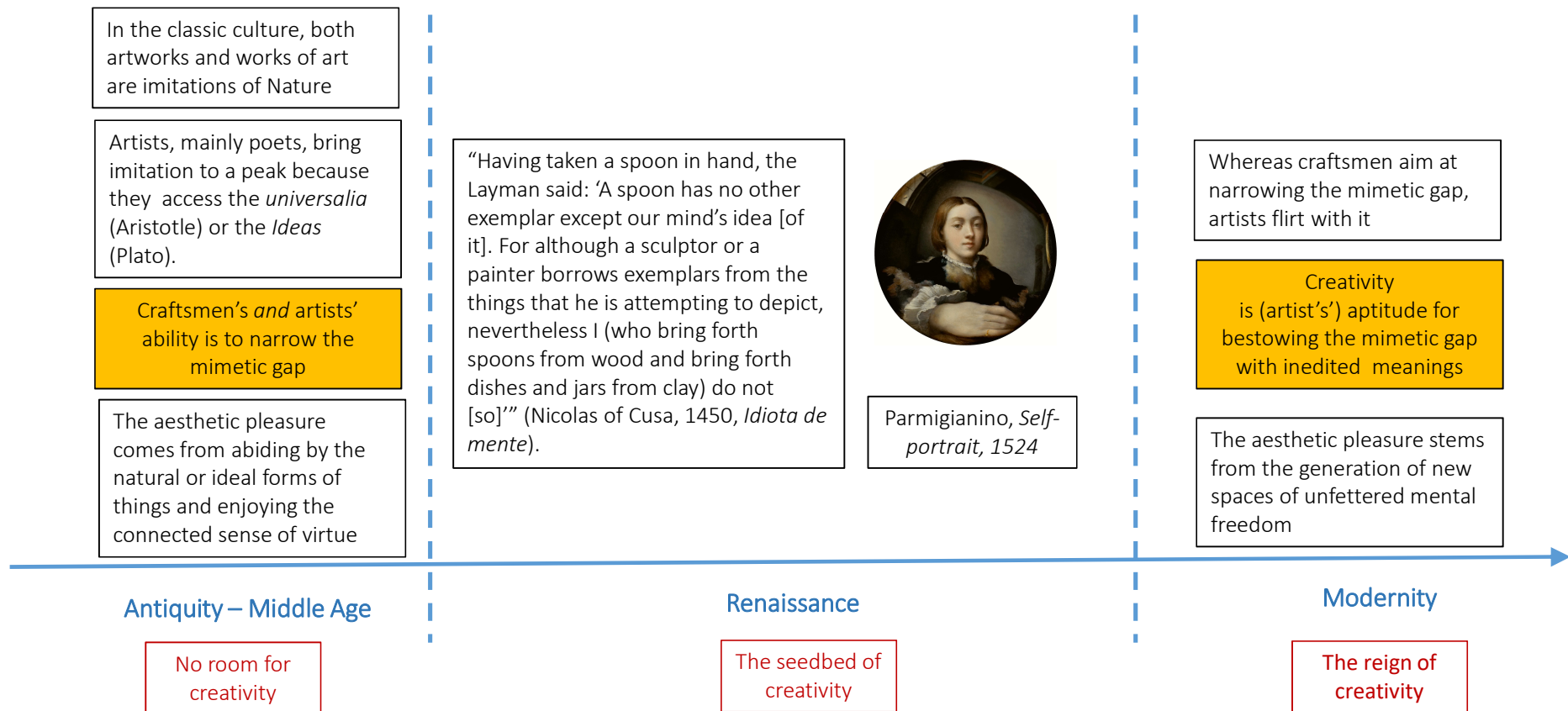
- Creativity stands on both the rational and the aesthetic leg
- Space is an inherent component to the creative process
- Landscape, with its aesthetical content, is the mental device to accompany creativity
- Urbanscape is the *dispositif* par excellence to foster creativity at the social level

The complex ties between creativity, the rational and the aesthetic

Irrespective, for the moment, of what 'creativity' means, scholars in social science and the humanities generally agree on the following points:

- Creativity, as a mental aptitude, lies inherent to human mind, and is peculiar to it
- The classical idea of arts as mimesis left no room for 'creativity'
- Creativity, as artist's faculty, stemmed pragmatically with the Renaissance aesthetic turn
- Creativity, as an acknowledged praxis within artists' circles, followed from Enlightenment's abandonment of any teleologism in human affairs
- Creativity, as **an acknowledged** social praxis (and must), follows from the aestheticization of the economy (and the society as a whole)

The aesthetic turn and the ‘invention of creativity’



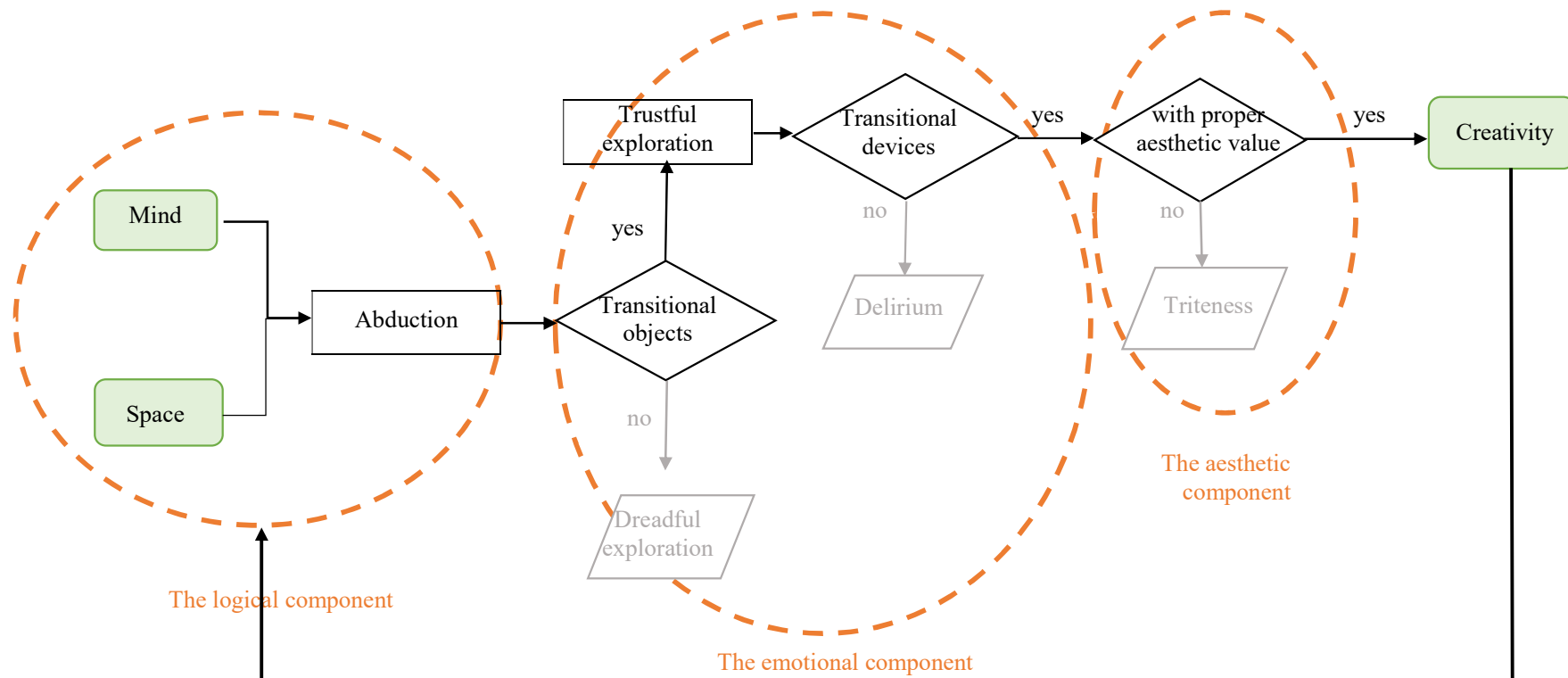
The rationalist (reductionist) *fil rouge* on creativity

« On est convenu [...] que l'homme ne crée rien dans le sens élémentaire du mot, et qu'il ne fait autre chose que trouver des combinaisons nouvelles d'éléments préexistant ; il en est du même de l'inventeur, il trouve ces combinaisons » (A. C. Quatremère de Quincy, *Dictionnaire historique d'architecture*, Tome 2, 1832. Paris: Librairie d'Adrien Le Clere et Cie, p. 23; emphasis mine).

“To create consists precisely in not making useless combinations and in making those which are useful and which are only a small minority” (H. Poincaré, *The Foundations of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913, p. 386).

- The belief that creativity works as a combinatory device is common to the classical and the positivist thoughts
- If so, creativity is a mere matter of ‘invention’ [Lat. *invenire* = to find] rather than creation
- That belief abides by the rationalist need for dealing only with group algebraic structures, viz. closed operational systems
- The fact that the outcome of a creative act *appears* as a combination of previous elements does not entail that creativity works as a combinatory device
- Aestheticists have fallen into the rationalist trap by claiming, on the contrary, for the filiation of creativity from the aesthetic, as an “analogous of reason”

The logical structure of paper's argument



Reassessing creativity. The logical side

“... the surprise that we feel on encountering a creative idea often springs not merely from an unfamiliar combination, but from our recognition that the novel idea simply *could not* have arisen from the generative rules (implicit or explicit) which we have in mind. With respect to the usual mental processing in the relevant domain (chemistry, poetry, music ...), it is not just improbable, but *impossible*. [...] This is not a matter of abandoning all rules (there madness lies), but of changing the existing rules to create a new conceptual space” (M.A. Boden, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*. New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 52 and 58; emphases original)

Accordingly, creativity is the ability of articulating mind algebraic structures by devising inedited composition laws, and the ensuing new universes of meaning

Abduction: the logical basis of creativity

C. S. Peirce (1868) showed that a new idea – ‘hypothesis’ – does not stem from the combination of old ideas according to certain established rules, but from their infringement through abduction

Peirce’s celebrated example of beans

Deduction	Induction	Abduction
Rule. All beans from this bag are white.	Case. These beans are from this bag.	Result. These beans are white.
Case. These beans are from this bag.	Result. These beans are white.	Rule. All beans from this bag are white.
Result. These beans are white.	Rule. All beans from this bag are white.	Case. These beans are from this bag.

- Whereas in deduction and induction “cases” the referred relationship between “these beans” and “this bag” mirrors a factual datum, it is a pure conjecture in abduction
- Unlike deduction and induction, space is a constitutive element of abduction

Space matters

Let us purge Peirce's example from any spatial reference:

Deduction	Induction	Abduction
Rule. All beans are white.	Case. These are beans.	Result. These beans are white.
Case. These are beans.	Result. These beans are white.	Rule. All beans are white.
Result. These beans are white.	Rule. All beans are white.	Case. These are beans.

- Whereas deduction and induction continue to be meaningful in an a-spatial dimension, abduction becomes meaningless
- Abduction lies on a spatialized distribution of all sorts of items, namely a map

The emotional side of creativity. Landscape matters

- Space is a necessary but not sufficient condition for carrying out abduction
- Space exploration is the necessary and sufficient condition for **carrying out** abduction
- ‘Transitional objects’ (Winnicott 1989) are the expedients for Humans to explore space trustfully
- Landscape is the social transitional device to allow them to explore the world without “going off the furrow”
- But, is landscape a sufficient condition to allow them to be creative, viz. to devise inedited hypotheses?

The aesthetic matters

- Though pleasant, the landscape experience can belong to the realms of improper or proper arts, i.e. to the repetition of already known *definite* experiences or the opening to *infinite* – hence inedited – prospects of mental freedom
- Only landscape experiences bestowed with proper aesthetical contents are conducive to creativity
- Seizing on visual though imaginary visual obstacles is the expedient to devise “infinite spaces beyond them”, thus enhancing creativity

Urbanscape matters

The city matters for creativity because it enjoys, not only high density and variety of material items, functions and people(s), but also a suitable morphology for enhancing landscape experiences (at least for the 'intelligent' onlooker)

Two extraordinarily similar literary passages on the generative role of urbanscape:

“The view of the city light is delightful and extremely emotional, where this is beveled by the shadows, where the dark contrasts with the light, where the light degrades *poco a poco*, like on the roofs, where some hidden places conceal the sight of the sun, etc. etc. The variety, the uncertainty, the impossibility of all viewing, and the possibility of ample vision through imagination as regards what one does not view, all this contributes to the delight” (G. Leopardi, *Pensieri di varia filosofia e di bella letteratura. Volume 3*. Firenze, Le Monnier, 1901/ante 1837, p. 345; my translation).

« ... tout d'un coup un toit, un reflet de soleil sur une pierre, l'odeur d'un chemin me faisaient arrêter par un plaisir particulier qu'ils me donnaient, et aussi parce qu'ils avaient l'aire de cacher au delà de ce que je voyais, quelque chose qu'ils m'invitaient à venir prendre et que malgré mes efforts je n'arrivais pas à découvrir » (M. Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu. Volume 1: Du côté de chez Swann*, Paris, Gallimard 1992/1906-1922, p. 172).

Urbanscape as a generative palimpsest of landscapes

Buildscape

- The urban buildscape is scattered with innumerable visual barriers
- The urban buildscape is the outcome of human ingenuity in shaping the physical environment

Powerscape

- Power shows and conceals itself in the city, thus creating a symbolic play of light and shade

Socioscape

- The density and variety of crowd rhythms, with their recurring appearances and disappearances of bodies, sounds, colors, objects, create another multiplicity of imaginary horizons

Urbanscape is the resultant by union of the above layers

Conclusions. The interpretive side

- a) Topological space plays an essential constitutive role in abduction
- b) 'Transitional objects' are needed to allow people to practice abduction trustfully
- c) Landscape is the transitional device that allows them to practice abduction without 'going off the furrow'
- d) The suitable kind of landscape experience for fostering creativity entails 'proper' aesthetic value, viz. openness to new though imaginary spaces of unfettered freedom;
- e) The expedient for bestowing landscape with such aesthetic value is to seize on discontinuities within it, whether they are visual barriers, alternations of empty and full, light and shade, sounds and silence, assortments of rhythms, or other interruptions;
- f) Urbanscape is the most suitable device for practicing that exercise, thanks to the paramount density, variety and artificiality of those features;
- g) Power's self-displayed-and-dissimulated presence multiplies the chances for fostering creative imagination;
- h) The ongoing joining of urbanscape and the aesthetic economy is turning the city into the 'creativity *dispositif*' par excellence.

Conclusions. The normative side

- Vesting territory by landscape layers in order to enhance creativity at the social level
- Urban & territorial design (along with urban & territorial management) must meet with, not only functional aims , but 'proper' aesthetical canons
- They must create a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, thus evoking that other possible structures/worlds are possible beyond the existing ones