

Creation

Kiene Brillenburg Wurth

Creation is **speculation**. To *speculate* is to consider, to think through, and to guess. The uncertainty, the openness inherent in the verb *speculate* indicates our direction to think through creation. The oldest frame for conceptualizing creation is *creatio ex nihilo*, the speculation about absolute beginnings that bring in the new: to generate something new out of nothing. For a long time – we tend to say until the Romantic era – *creatio ex nihilo* was an activity preserved for the gods. It was an activity beyond existing knowledge, beyond existing rules: an act of freedom. What was created was truly new, that is to say, distinct from god, and it was good, as it emanated from an overflow of gratuitousness (Blowers 2012, 168–169). We can see in this early conception of creation the kernel of modern conceptions of human *creativity*: the ability to operate beyond established criteria and rules of the game, to produce new modes of thinking, feeling, experiencing, sensing, or knowing. The overflow of gratuitousness of a creative god already announces, we might say, the Kantian purposefulness without a purpose that was to be the blueprint for Romantic creativity. To create out of freedom something that need not serve a purpose outside of itself – that modern notion of art as autonomous holds within itself a religious idea of creation. Wordsworth’s “overflow of powerful feeling” signals this embedded presence of creation.

38 Modern philosophers like Alfred Whitehead (1925, 1926, 1929) and Gilles Deleuze (1988), as well as process- and relational theologians (such as Catherine Keller in *The Face of the Deep*, 2003) have a problem with *creatio ex nihilo* because it starts from the model of an origin that annuls all difference and halts all movement. Everything begins and ends with this origin that typically generates the new as order out of chaos, form out of monstrous formlessness. We do not want this origin, not only because it is violently charged but also because the dichotomy between order and chaos does not do justice to creation as *constant process*. Keller and others (Bauman 2009; Justaert 2012) have therefore started to rethink origin as *beginning*: the logic of an opening that, as Edward Said already observed in *Beginnings*, “encourages nonlinear development, a logic giving rise to the sort of multileveled coherence of dispersion” (Said 1985, 372f.). If we reconceive of creation as a process that is always already scattered, and as such always happening anew, the archaic notion of *creatio continua* we find in Maximus and Hildegard von Bingen (Keller 2003) gains new significance. *Creatio continua* holds that creation did not happen once and for all by an all-powerful divinity but is an ongoing presence: the cut that creation marks is the onset of a process.

Sigmund Freud invokes this process in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920) where he thinks the creative **entanglement** of life and death in terms of molecular diffusion: the pressure of matter to return to its original, inanimate state. Elaborating on Arthur Schopenhauer and contemporary speculative biology, Freud suggests that matter may have once been shocked out of inanimation, and then inadvertently became ever more complex to preserve itself. Evolving life is, as it were, a constant attempt to ward off the shock of animation of which it is the effect. What drives such matter is a compulsion to return: Life is just a detour to death, and as such not “its own” but an ongoing effect of a primary trauma. Creation here no longer emanates from a single principle (God) but is present as an irreducible trace in every

being as becoming – or rather, a becoming that veils a desired unbecoming. The shock of animation is not an identifiable single moment: It is, comparable to Derrida's concept *différance*, a movement that may signal beginnings (and deferrals) but no origins. Freud's speculation very sharply shows us *creatio continua* as processual de-creation. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Jean-François Lyotard (1997) would adopt this Freudian logic of accidental, ongoing creation in his aesthetics of the sublime: the instance of the "now here happening," an instant that overwhelms through its incalculable occurrence. The sublime is invasive as it makes the soul or *anima*, as Lyotard calls it, aware of its own dependability on an "outside." The soul is not itself, but an other that propels its animation or creation: "Existing is to be awoken from the nothingness of disaffection by something sensible over there." (Lyotard 1997, 243) In the feeling of the sublime, the soul senses its vulnerability, its contingency on a violence that poses itself as "external" but is at the same time always already internal in its constitutive force. The experience of the sublime could thus be seen as an experience of one's own creativity.

To regard creation as continuous, and happening in every moment, is not only to allow for change but also to acknowledge *potentiality* as an ontological force – in everyone and everything. Creation in this perspective is *distributed* and *as such* can be thought of as a "first" principle. This is a way of thinking about creation that can in part be traced to Henri Bergson's notions of virtuality and of duration as differentiation (Bergson 1911, 1946). Duration is the space that opens up becoming. As Elizabeth Grosz explains the double movement of duration:

Duration is that which undoes as well as what makes: to the extent that duration entails an open future, it involves the fracturing and opening up of the past and the present to what is virtual in them, to what in them differs from the actual, to what in them can bring forth the new. This unbecoming is the very motor of becoming. (Grosz 2005, 4–5)

40 Difference propels becoming as a continuous multiplicity. Continuous multiplicity is what constitutes the virtual: a dynamic estuary of the actual that can only be gauged through intuition. In intuition, we appreciate and tap into the flux that perception casts as static material. Though never opposed to the intellect, intuition requires a different kind of thinking that is creative to the extent that it combines concentration with distraction: it is fluid.

A wonderful example of such a fluid, creative thinking is offered in the picture book – the search book – *The Yellow Balloon* by Charlotte Dematons (2004). This book offers a series of landscapes that include different time scales simultaneously – eighteenth-century air balloons alongside twenty-first century planes, medieval German farmhouses next to twentieth-century Dutch houseboats – as if they were cities in which such time scales have been spatially deposited. It is clear for us to see that *The Yellow Balloon* is in fact not just about looking for a yellow balloon drifting through different landscapes with their multiple time scales. Rather, it is about the exploration of the conceptual space of storytelling: there are no plots or margins, no words or storylines, just fragments of events that give the impetus to multiple narratives. An endless number of narratives could be created. Yet, *The Yellow Balloon* is not about distraction and multiplicity alone: It shows us the double movement of intuition. On the one hand, there is the purposive- or directedness of searching for the tiny yellow balloon on each page. On the other, and at the same time, there is the purposelessness of the virtual – the dynamic estuary of virtual stories that is real, though not yet actualized, on every page.

The felt and fruitful tension between such a limiting and limitless thinking epitomizes creation as a constant becoming and differing – in being, but also in art. In twentieth-century psychology, these contrasting but interrelated attitudes of thinking have come to be known as convergent and divergent thinking: thinking in a specific, perhaps pre-determined direction, and

thinking that is freer in that it does not start from a set goal. Convergent thinking means finding the “right” answer, based on skills and knowledge, while divergent thinking means finding as many (unapparent) answers to a problem as possible, based on analogical patterns. Divergent thinking is what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari preached when, in *What is Philosophy?* (1994), they posited philosophy (and science) as an inventive discipline, opening up new fields with the creation of new concepts. Divergent thinking is the production of novelty and the production of novelty that is useful and valuable nowadays makes up “creativity.” While philosophy and critical theory after Deleuze have spent a lot of time thinking through difference, repetition, virtuality, and creation as becoming, the concept of creativity has not been thought through as rigorously. We need to turn to psychology and cognitive theory to make the transition from creation to creativity, from ontology to epistemology and aesthetics. If creation is differing, how can we critically conceive of creativity as an ability to generate novelty? If we start from the concept of creation as sketched out here, we would want to move beyond the idea of a creative author (whether artist or common individual) paralleling the idea of a creative god. We would have to invoke our knowledge of inter/intratextuality, actor-network theory, and new materialism to rethink creativity as productive potentiality: a potential in *things*, generating ever new forms, images, and ideas in the collision with other things. However, creativity requires an entirely new entry in this book of critical concepts. Alfred North Whitehead, thanks to whom the term “creativity” became current in the twentieth century, would be the logical starting point for such an entry.

We have moved from theology to philosophy to a little psychology, from being to thinking, to unravel creation as a critical concept. This entry has only done a little justice to this concept (for instance, it did not even begin to invoke philosophers like Baruch de Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz) because, as we have seen, creation is bound up with the most pressing questions

42 in Western philosophy: questions about origins and beginnings, about the future, perception, experience, experimentation, the infinite, the soul, time, language, and difference. At the same time, it is difficult to carve out the concept of creation in itself because we still lack a specific critical theory of creation and creativity. Such a critical theory is especially urgent today now that creation and creativity has been appropriated all around us, from innovation sciences to organizational psychology, without a proper conceptual regime.

References

- Bauman, Whitney. 2009. *Theology, Creation, and Environmental Ethics: From Creatio ex Nihilo to Terra Nullius*. London: Routledge.
- Bergson, Henri. (1911) 2007. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Bergson, Henri. 1946. *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Mabelle L. Andison. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Blowers, Paul. 2012. *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1994. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: University of Columbia Press.
- Dematons, Charlotte. 2004. *The Yellow Balloon*. Honesdale: Front Street; Rotterdam: Lemniscaat. Some pages can be seen at: www.lemniscaat.nl
- Freud, Sigmund. (1920) 1967. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated and edited by James Strachey. New York: WW Norton.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 2005. "Bergson, Deleuze, and the Becoming of Unbecoming." *Parallax* 11 (2): 4–13.
- Justaert, Kristien. 2012. *Theology after Deleuze*. New York: Continuum.
- Keller, Catherine. 2003. *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*. London: Routledge.
- Liotard, Jean-François. 1997. *Postmodern Fables*. Translated by Georges van de Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Said, Edward. (1975) 1985. *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. New York: University of Columbia Press.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. 1925. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Macmillan Company.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. 1926. *Religion in the Making*. New York: Macmillan Company.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. 1929. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. New York: Macmillan Company.