Why we should take a second look at the politics of creativity: The dangers of a celebratory mode

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Abstract

At the heart of this chapter is an ethical contention: By avoiding scrutiny of creativity sustaining processes, strategies and products serving authoritarian, violent or discriminatory practices, we fail to face the tricky question of what happens when we fetishize 'creativity' either in the abstract or in particular circumstances (such as in regard to digital culture, AI or education) without attending to the ethics and politics of its deployment. Leading up to this contention, the chapter draws on evidence from more than two decades of work with children and young people in regard to media use, political or civic participation and contributions to everyday social reproduction to describe a range of political and social creativity. The chapter theorises the way children and young people apply creative learning – and technologies old and new – to everyday survival, politics and activist struggle. Generated from a range of qualitative methodological fieldwork carried out between 2007 and 2020, including in-depth face-to-face interviewing, ethnographic observation, textual analysis and contextual, historical analysis, three youth-centred vignettes at the heart of the chapter offer a necessary provocation around unreflexive normativity when theorising creativity and learning, problematising the non-recognition of *forms of creativity* that do not line up with normative imperatives and frameworks.

Key words

Creativity and discrimination, global south, sustainability, dangerous creativity, children and youth, unreflexive normativity

Introduction

This chapter draws on evidence and experiences from more than two decades of work with children and young people in regard to media use, political or civic participation and

contributions to everyday social reproduction. Some of this has been meticulously documented (Banaji and Buckingham 2013, Banaji 2017, Banaji et al. 2018, Banaji and Mejias (Eds) 2020); some remains speculative. The opening sections of the chapter describe a range of political and social creativity engaged in by children and young people in the course of their daily lives and the way they apply creative learning – and technologies old and new – to survival, politics and activist struggle. The brief vignettes and case studies at the heart of the chapter were generated from a range of qualitative methodological fieldwork including in-depth face-to-face interviewing, ethnographic observation, textual analysis and contextual, historical analysis. The latter parts, in line with the overall aim of the chapter, offer a necessary provocation around unreflexive normativity when theorising creativity and learning. The discussion aims to problematise the non-recognition of *forms of creativity* that do not line up with normative pro-social imperatives. In the conclusion I suggest that by tending to refuse to discuss or engage with as 'creative' processes, strategies and products which serve authoritarianism, violence or discrimination, we fail to face the tricky question of what happens when we fetishize 'creativity' either in the abstract or in particular circumstances (such as in regard to digital culture, AI or education) without attending to the ethics and politics of its deployment.

Creativity, technology and lived experience: learning to survive, teaching to resist

While the definition of each of these key terms will emerge more fully as we proceed, at the outset it is worth noting that I use technology here in its most capacious sense to denote all material systems, assemblages, artefacts and tools deployed by humans to communicate, support and scaffold life and human dignity, and this is important to note, to undermine and destroy the life and human dignity of some groups while privileging others. There is often an unspoken assumption in the fields of media and education that we all understand *technology* as information and communication technologies or new digital media, and that these usually denote social progress. Meanwhile, whether we think of creativity in this chapter as interlinked processes involving imagination, playfulness, problem-solving and potentially novel assemblages made by individuals and groups, or as some combination of processes and products is less important than acknowledging the unspoken *rhetorics* which cling to this word in our usage. That creativity is conceptualised in different and even contradictory ways within different epistemological, cultural and political traditions, and within different fields, is significant to the argument of this chapter. *Learning* is likewise a term with multiple formal definitions in the field of education but which we will deploy in this chapter as the acquisition of any set of habits, preferences, values, skills, knowledge, understanding or insight without a necessary bias towards learning as a value in itself,

since some learning can be faulty, some can be counterproductive and some can be linked to survival but also profoundly traumatic.

So, let us start by assuming that we all know what creativity is – namely that both processes and products are familiar and desirable, that they involve innovation, imagination, constructive problem solving, an orientation towards social good, and so on and so forth. Partly to lay out the connections between this benign version of creativity (which is the one most of us use in everyday parlance), and learning as the generally positive acquisition of helpful knowledge and skills while also interrogating our obsession with the newest of digital technologies in the context of lived experience, I want to begin by recounting some of the different creative processes and products (as well as the circumstances) I encountered over a decade of researching children and media in India. These range from the young domestic servant in a tower block who fashioned a device out of spoons and string to retrieve something that one of her employers' children had dropped off the balcony to the innovative repurposing of a variety of rubber tyres and plastic bottles by teenagers into play-things for their baby brothers and sisters as well as the "jugaad" (जुगाड़) or constant searching for ways of hacking into, altering settings or eluding surveillance by parents, relatives, husbands and boyfriends which seemed to be a common-place of the new digital era.

As I discuss in chapter 6 of *Children and Media in India* (2017: 151-186), I met Mansi and Dheeraj, brother and sister, 8 and 12 years old, both garbage sorters in a rundown suburban area of Bombay. Mansi and Dheeraj's parents, working class contributors to the Indian informal economy, come from Bihar in the north of India; but Mansi and Dheeraj had never been there. They walked around barefoot, lived on the pavement and cooked on a kerosene stove. I never met their mother, a rag picker, or father, an unqualified mechanic. At the time of my fieldwork, Dheeraj was responsible for collecting bits of metal from the garbage along with batteries for their mother to dispose of or sell. While doing this he also came across multiple broken but coveted objects including tube lights and phones which he disaggregated and gave to his mother to be sold as scrap or re-assembled to make tiny non-mechanised objects for his younger siblings to play with. One of Dheeraj's favourite sayings (which he repeated at least ten times during our conversations) was, '*we* [the poor] can live because *they* [the rich] throw things away. Everything can be used somehow, you just have to work it out'. It was obvious to me that in Dheeraj's life, disaggregation and disassembly – both highly creative processes – played as central a role as assemblage; and both assembling and disassembling things allowed him considerable scope for creative agency and learning. You try things, you make mistakes, you fail, you try again in a more

inventive way, or a way that you had not considered previously. Mansi likewise seemed to be following in her family's footsteps both in occupation and creativity. Excluded almost entirely from the glittering realm of the digital but nevertheless linked into the digitisation of everyday life through the digital and electronic detritus collected via their family's waste work, Mansi and Dheeraj demonstrated a repeated *creative conservation* that puts billion dollar corporations and million pound development projects to shame.

Varsha was 14 and working for an upper middle class family in a north Bombay high-rise when I met with her to observe and discuss her routines and media consumption over the course of several weeks. We established quite early on that Varsha was incredibly dextrous and that she had a penchant for digital technology – she wanted ardently to 'learn computers' and possess 'a mobile phone' of her very own but knew well that she would be punished for attempting to touch anything belonging to the family she worked for. I gradually ascertained that although her employers had taken her away from her family in order to send her to school and had promised only to ask her to work "a few hours a day", she was not being educated formally and was instead at the beck and call of her employers and their twin 9 year olds almost 18 to 19 hours a day. She was insulted by her female employer, slapped by the children and yet retained a sense of dignified resistance. This was evident in every aspect of her being from her class solidarity with her fellow servant Dhavan, her compassion for her employers' children which would not allow her to let them get punished by their parents, to her constant and repeated creative fixes to everyday problems. As I recount in the book, my observations with Varsha were filled with examples of her creativity:

> On one occasion I was playing with the children and Mickey [the boy] broke a toy helicopter that he had just been given by some 'foreign' guests. Dhavan guffawed, saying 'now he'll get what he deserves'; Mickey started to cry. I did not intervene. Varsha was aware that he would be punished by his father for this transgression: she spent half an hour carefully repairing the mechanism, connecting wires and gluing the plastic so that no adult would know the toy had been damaged even if it did not work. On another occasion Minnie [the girl] was throwing a tantrum and managed to fling her mother's silk shawl off the balcony of their penthouse and it lodged precariously on a metal outcrop used for hanging flower pots and trailing plants. Dhavan was a witness, as was I, so Varsha could not be blamed. However, she took pity on Minnie, rigged up an elaborate mechanism – an assemblage – consisting of rope, a curved cooking utensil, and sticky tape, to reach out and dislodge the shawl. She took time out of her busy routine –

exposing herself to the risk of being beaten for time-wasting – to descend to the courtyard of the building to collect the shawl and rewash it. (Banaji, 2017: 80).

Without romanticising the dire poverty, violence, discrimination and exploitation that working class children like Dheeraj, Mansi and Varsha experience every day of their lives, it is also important to draw attention to the enormous erasure that takes place when discussions of creativity and learning focus only on *digital technologies* limited to mobile phones, platforms and apps while abandoning all the other tools and technologies to some supposedly pre-modern realm. Of course, there was no dearth of digital-aided creativity on display amongst the children and teenagers I interviewed during those years of fieldwork – from computer-assisted musical compositions, programming apps, memes, GIFs and short videos of themselves and their friends performing to digital art and scientific inventions. I was shown the products repeatedly, and I witnessed the processes frequently. There was also an in-between realm of low-tech digital tools such as older mobile phones with no internet connections being touted for their relevance in education and learning as well as other media from television and films to songs and comics that featured regularly in children's play and adolescents' imaginative identity work. However, it was also obvious that amongst the scholarly communities in media and communications, education and international development, an internalised rhetoric of digital creativity was playing a powerful role in preventing other forms of creative praxis from being recognised and explored. Ergo, the deep pedagogic mechanisms of trial and error with multiple materials, tools and technologies deployed by working class children, young people and their families in everyday survival situations, far from being linked to the kind of creativity desired in silicon valley or Scandinavian school curricula, were associated at worst with victimhood and at best with the dubious psychological concept of resilience.

Before turning to the more critical aspect of this discussion, I want to dwell briefly on the varieties of political creativity – or rather creativity applied in the service of political and social change that I and my colleagues encountered on a cross-national European project, CATCH-EyoU which investigated young people's political activism across eight different EU countries: The Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and the UK. A central issue for our project was that of creativity and innovation in active citizenship. Therefore, amongst other questions about representation, voice and access, we asked what, if any, were the most creative and innovative aspects of the selected groups, networks, organisations and initiatives and proceeded to examine how these aspects of innovation and creativity fitted with *traditional* (voting-centric) political participation and *dutiful* (compliant to the state) citizenship?

One of our key findings was that not only were innovation and creativity conceptualised differently by organisations, but also this divergence in definitions also held good for our cohort of researchers. Nevertheless, there emerged several points of agreement. Most of the initiatives examined, including formal and informal organisations and groups, loose political and civic networks, purely online or purely offline youth bodies, and even social movements, actually seemed to rely on a limited range of well-known and accepted activities and strategies such as leaflets, websites, social media campaigns, demonstrations, lobbying, civic networking, informational presentations, and regular meetings to carry out their mandate.

In writing about the work of these organisations and networks I found it extremely helpful to distinguish between three types of creative and innovative practices: (1) where an organisation or initiative itself was *built around a surprising and unexpected theme or topic*; (2) where an organisation or initiative's *practices* demonstrated features of creativity and (3) where the *organisational structure* of the initiative was unusual and creative. Although they occasionally converged, these three types of creativity and innovation did not always go hand in hand. The examples I include below demonstrate the deep interconnection between pedagogy, politics, new and emerging communications technologies and creativity. Creative ways of putting democratic values into practice were evident in several of the initiatives. For example, take Piána na ulici (Pianos on the Street) in the Czech Republic. This group places pianos in diverse public spaces across the country and experiments with other ways of building community cohesion and enlivening public space, such as the placement of chess tables and poetry 'jukeboxes' (including, even, a design device). A video of a policeman playing one of the pianos on the street had gone viral at the time of our research, connecting the offline and the online seamlessly. Such attempts at community building clearly are forms of political creativity in addition to having significant pro-social benefits. In Portugal, our colleagues worked with the environmental campaign group Cidade+ who were at the time putting on spectacular but also deeply pedagogic events with multiple material and digital props to simulate, teach and explain aspects of climate change to a sceptical, dubious or uninterested public (cf. Cruz, et al. 2020).

Several of the creative practices used by the young activist citizens we encountered were of course *new media-based*. In the early 2000s when social media was rather newer even in Western Europe, only the most cutting edge organisations were making use of those tools and techniques for communication and engagement. Interactivity was at a premium on youth civic websites (cf. Banaji, 2008; Banaji & Buckingham, 2013). However, by the time we were conducting our research in 2017-18, some of the strategies which might have been innovative at one point in

time, had become commonplace and were used by almost every organisation. This was the case with many of the social media campaigns and pages. Therefore, to have an impact, an organisation or network had to think beyond the domesticated uses of new and emerging technology towards ways of deploying and creating such technology that solved pressing social problems or changed minds. In the UK, the socialist youth campaign group *Momentum* were engaging with a multitude of young tech designers, programmers, film makers and editors to design startling and funny viral videos that drew attention to economic injustice or social repression by the British government, as well as engaging in different forms of campaign training and agit-prop theatre to arouse interest in the election campaign of the then Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn (cf. Mackova, Mejias and Macek 2020). One of Momentum's most innovative and impactful projects was *M-app*[1] that was said to be able to revolutionise the way young socialist activists could have their voices heard within the broader party on issues of policy and direction. This technological innovation joined their already widely successful app *My nearest Marginal*[2] which was designed to allow Labour Party supporters and members to campaign in areas which needed just a bit more voter engagement to have a strong chance of changing the local Member of Parliament. In addition we noted their use of an amusing and engaging Tinder bot that engaged would-be daters in political talk before going on to discuss dating preferences.[3] Of course, what all of these young socialist innovators in the UK should probably have considered but could not have allowed to get in the way of their creative energy was the fact that conservative forces with a far greater amount of capital and funding were waiting in the wings to copy and deploy these sorts of creative ideas in service of the very opposite ideological and political goals.

To conclude this section, then, it is worth noting that the most exciting practices we observed, several combined young people's passions for food, art and music with their groups' sense of the need for social justice and/or resistance to authority while others employed creative strategies to embed democracy from the most basic stages of action planning. There were certainly some which centred new and emerging digital technologies – and we observed how young people had to teach their older peers ways of handling and managing these. However, the brief list below (excerpted from over 50 different observed strategies and practices) demonstrates that digital and non-digital practices were evenly balanced:

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[1] https://www.wired.co.uk/article/momentum-app-labour-party-conference

[2] https://mynearestmarginal.com

[3] https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/36240/1/meet-the-flirty-tinder-bot-swinging-the-youth-vote-general-election

- Making political or social oriented graffiti and street art with political messages
- Collecting scrap metal, plastic and other pollutants on beaches to clean the environment and then turning these into street art for the public
- Conducting political meetings which would allow everyone to speak and to draw up moral and political manifestos together without excluding anyone (some of these lasted all night and sometimes even for two days, with young members camping out together in open spaces or disused factory buildings)
- Film making clubs and film screening co-operatives on youth social issues
- Philosophical discussion groups which brought communities together (eg. Muslims and Christians; Catholics and Protestants)
- Largescale street food events to highlight particular issues around food waste
- Helping homeless people back into the community through social enterprise – giving them unusual jobs such as 'tourist guide'
- 'Guerrilla gardening' and 'Guerrilla farming' – taking over unused land for permacultures
- Street theatre and spectacular events - (projecting symbols onto official buildings, holding mock trials through the use of digital tools)
- Running alternative media on and offline – magazines, newsletters, radio and television as well as social media content aggregators
- Making and circulating apps that help protestors to avoid surveillance by police and other authorities
- Making proxy web addresses to circumvent censorship of particular issues (e.g. to do with protests against the monarchy, or Muslim Lives Matter)

Further discussion of activism and activist practices can be found in our project Blue Paper 'Defining successful citizen action' (2018)[4]. The next (penultimate) section moves away from the pro-social and inspiring examples of working class children deploying creativity for survival and activists using creativity to challenge political elites and the capitalist status quo to engage with a series of areas in which critical thinking, innovation and problem solving, and indeed a blend of these, have been deployed to create systems and tools which allow users to discriminate against, dispossess, suppress and violate people and communities around the world in ever more efficient and extractive ways. Notably for the argument of this chapter, it is as important to grapple with the ramifications of creativity as always open to inflection by different moral and political

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[4] https://www.catcheyou.eu/download/BP8%20(website%20version).pdf

perspectives – even destructive ones – rather than as having a positive moral weight in and of itself and thus conferring that moral superiority on any and all creative endeavours.

The missing rhetorics of creativity?: From military strategy and torture to neoliberal exploitation and authoritarian disinformation

Writing at a moment when a US drone strike at Kabul airport sent ostensibly to punish a terrorist organisation did exactly what it was programmed to do and killed more than eleven Afghan children. This was only the tip of the horrific iceberg of Afghan civilians murdered by US drone strikes, British and US armed forces and different factions of Islamic fundamentalists with various explosive devices over the past two decades, and leads me to ponder technologies of death, learning about insurgency and counter-insurgency and the notion that each of the these death-dealing groups, militias and their political backers have at points celebrated the creativity behind the prototyping of newer and more deadly machines. Distressing as this may be, and far as it is from the intentions of many educators in classrooms, contemporary education systems including tech apprenticeships and job-training often support people in learning how to create and produce systems and tools of discrimination and death. But let me backup a moment to contextualise this shift in perspective.

While writing *The Rhetorics of Creativity* (Banaji and Burn, 2006) I and my colleagues debated fiercely about the extent to which creativity should be defined as a *relational sentimental value* tied to normative understandings of beauty, productivity, resistance to authoritarianism and pursuit of pro-democratic political change. The fact that creativity is often automatically assumed to connote something constructive and sought after, I argued, does not guarantee that its products (and processes) are necessarily a universal moral good. On the contrary, and particularly in the arenas of politics, spurred by an interest in ecological destruction, neoliberal capitalism, political authoritarianism and settler colonialism, I was coming to view creativity as potentially *either* regenerative and uplifting *or* destructive. While creativity in many spheres can be either amoral or expressive of sets of normative values, where it is embedded in moral value systems, it has as much of an affinity for hate and violence as it does for construction, love and restoration. Or, put another way, creative individuals and their creations do not necessarily have an affinity for justice: they can contribute both to oppression and liberation, there is no intrinsic link between creative production and fairness.

In this vein – and setting aside for the present all the works of art, poetry and music that have long been held as the epitome of creative genius but whose creators were embedded in the

oppressive systems of their day whether these be Nazism, racism, colonialism or misogyny – there is no doubt that creative praxis informs the actions of resistance movements. We have only to look at those who conceived of and participated in setting up the underground railroad, the civil rights movement, the decolonial struggles of the mid-20th century, the Palestinian intifadas, the civic justice movement of the women of Shaheen Baag in India and so on and so forth. However, while some would by definition rule out such possibilities, creative forms of invention, violence and suppression are also implicated in slavery and colonisation; in sweatshops, military surveillance and killing technologies, and in co-opting discourses of revolution to sell T-shirts and conservative politics. Pondering this tension between the outcomes and aims of creativity in 2006, I argued that it was important to question the taken-for-granted celebratory and sentimental attachment to the idea of creativity as *implicitly benign* and thus always necessarily *normatively desirable* which was evident across almost every domain where this concept was being interrogated.

It is a matter of history and editing that much of this complex theorising did not make it into our final paper. While we agreed to include a section on creativity as art and resistance, my incipient theorising about the 'creative' nature of particular forms of state and nonstate violence, for instance, remained just a little too far beyond the pale for those of us engaging in arguments to include creativity in the curriculum because of its illuminating and democratic potential for educators and students. Perhaps we shared an anxiety that discussion and description would be taken as a form of flattery and endorsement – that naming aspects of the military-industrial complex as 'creative' might imbue these institutions with some false sense of moral good. Our reticence was even odder, considering the many historical sources praising military strategies and tactics by labelling them creative, regardless of the vast populations suffering and dying in their wake and the many contemporary sources advocating for 'creativity' within professional military ranks[5]. Perhaps we were correct not to open that can of worms at that time, and instead to focus on the important task of interrogating the multiple different definitions of the word.

In the 15 years since we wrote that monograph, the rise of social media and artificial intelligence based technological systems have emphasised different aspects of the rhetoric at different

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[5] In a classic example of this, Lowther et al. (2020) writing for Thestrategybridge.org ask: 'Is it possible to incorporate a creative mindset into professional military education curriculum?' and go on to argue 'In our *War on the Rocks* article, "Professional Military Education Needs More Creativity, Not More History," we argued that it is possible, but did not explain how. Here, we offer some insight into developing a creative mindset by first explaining what we mean by creativity and then offering steps for embedding creativity education into a joint professional military education program. Our recommendations are drawn from successful creativity programs the private sector invests in for their own employees, from examples already used across professional military education, and from academic research'.

moments, particularly with regard to creative affordances, creativity as an economic good and as a social good. Companies founded with inherited or venture capital accrued through the exploitation and extraction of racialized labour, and teams of digital creatives such as Google (now Alphabet), Facebook, Amazon, Alibaba, Reliance-Jio and Uber, have monopolised the public sphere, entrenched their economic and social transcendence and overtaken many older, more established industrial and media conglomerates (Dean, 2013; van Dyck 2018, Meng, 2018). The roots of these large corporate entities are firmly within the neoliberal capitalist system regardless of their faux creative rhetoric (Ross, 2009). In fact, the multiple exploitative facets of the 'gig economy' associated with these platforms are frequently theorised through a link between creativity and self-commodification. However, there are other ways of theorising them which link them to a clear and present danger to human rights, civil rights and democracy (Raji et al. 2020; Banaji and Bhat 2019).

In our work on the use of WhatsApp by far right Hindu nationalist government IT-cells and far right Hindu nationalist vigilantes in India to target Muslims, Christians, Dalits and other minorities by discriminating, intimidating or inciting violence against them, Ram Bhat and I traced the types of digitally literate disinformation distributors who were most likely to be involved at the tech end of the business. These people, we found, were engaged in a variety of tacit and open propagandist tactics that drew on their knowledge of programming and building information systems, as well as of algorithmic detection (of misinformation) and how to evade it. These individuals and groups possessed high degrees of ideological certainty about the correctness of their actions in calling for and committing discrimination and murder against fellow-citizens from minoritized groups, while also possessing a chilling degree of creative and innovative knowledge and attitude when it came to creating loop-holes in the technological solutions proposed by the policy and tech teams in WhatsApp, Facebook and other cross-platform apps. To give an example, if WhatsApp limited the number of forwards or the number of groups that a user could join, it was a matter of days before one of these far right IT cell innovators had worked out how to clone the app, use an old version of the app, or some other plug-in which again enabled messages to be sent to hundreds if not thousands of users, or the user to join more than the upper limit on groups by buying and using multiple cheap sim cards. Meanwhile, an Israeli spyware called Pegasus was being used illegally to surveille and harm dissident activists who used WhatsApp in India[6]. All of this happened despite Facebook's claims to be entirely protecting the privacy of their users via encryption and despite the many far right

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[6] https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/pranavdixit/an-unidentified-government-spied-on-dissidents-in-india

Indian users uploading what were in effect snuff videos and rape videos to WhatsApp groups with celebratory comments. While none of this is even remotely similar to the creative process and production engaged in by a Mozart, a Sembene Ousmane or a Simone Biles, within the rhetoric of technological innovation, this is clearly recognisable as creativity, and given that multiple other users then go on to learn from these procedures, there is also an element of democratic creativity and creative learning – invitation to experiment, to collaborate, to play and to do so in a supportive environment – involved.

Meanwhile, in the world of bots, propaganda, disinformation, misinformation and deep fake scholarship, it is still unusual for scholars of creativity to acknowledge the elements of creativity that make such negative innovations possible. When other scholars do discuss creativity in this field, it is usually because they are aiming to entice corporations to invest in their work, with a view to prototype development and subsequent mass production. The likelihood of this connection between business and research is made all the more likely by the decline in public funding of universities and the corporate sponsorship of university labs or 'creativity hubs'. In a paper entitled 'FakeRetouch: Evading DeepFakes Detection via the Guidance of Deliberate Noise' Huang et al (who hail from the worlds of tech scholarship and business research) explain that '[t]he novelty and creativity of DeepFake generation techniques have attracted worldwide media attention' (2020: 1), before going on to outline their proposal:

> the FakeRetouch, a framework that takes a hybrid approach of deep image filtering and noise addition to improve the fidelity of GAN-based fake images. Our method effectively reduces and destroys the artifact patterns introduced by existing fake image generation methods, in both spatial and frequency domain. Through removing fake artifacts, our further reconstructed image retains photo-realistic and high-fidelity, and can bypass state-of-the-art DeepFake detection methods as well as DeepFake provenance method (Wang et al. 2020b). (2020: 7)

In the sometimes murky world of AI-based tech-innovation that allows images to be morphed in ways which make them indistinguishable from images of events and persons that really exist or existed, what this group of writers are proposing is not in the least uncommon – a protocol for ensuring that DeepFakes will become ever deeper and less accessible to scrutiny by those desirous of 'fact checking' or ensuring the authenticity of images and other information contained therein. Given that such deep fake videos depicting the left candidates in Brazil consorting with paedophiles or apparently engaging in non-consensual sexual activity were circulated by Jair Bolsonaro's infamous 'Office of Hate' and swung the last elections towards the

far right candidate, one can only imagine how much further damage those with neo-Nazi beliefs, extensive capital and a will to power will wreak on public opinion. If we are to learn anything from these examples, it is imperative that we heed Raji et al.'s warning that 'it remains challenging for practitioners to identify the harmful repercussions of their own systems prior to deployment, and, once deployed, emergent issues can become difficult or impossible to trace back to their source' (2020: 1) before pushing ever more complex and powerful, but biased and contaminated AI and machine learning into production and out into the public domain. As has been said, just because we *can* invent an atom bomb, does not mean that we *should*.

To take another deeply troubling instance, the methods of 'torture' and 'technologised disinformation' deployed by military regimes, the CIA, and secret police in multiple different regimes are rarely discussed as examples of 'creativity' *in the scholarly literature on creativity and learning*. However, these techniques fit many of the rhetorical descriptors of this concept. This is not to say that the connection has not been noted. For instance, writing of human rights, Natan Lerner notes that 'human imagination has shown great "creativity" in devising means by which to destroy the capacity of prisoners and suspects – guilty or innocent – to resist, sometimes without even touching their bodies but always at the price of horrendous pain and suffering' (1986: 126). Given how ubiquitous contemporary accounts of torture through the infliction of varieties of physical pain, incarceration, sleep deprivation, water-boarding, electrocution, humiliation and psychological warfare are in fiction and non-fiction alike, and regardless of the political persuasions of those advocating the necessity of these vile practices, the connections between power and creativity are apparent. In other words, those in power, and wishing to gain or retain it, have always called on the creativity of the torturer to meet their ends; but along the way, they have also co-opted the work and inventiveness of many others who would have deeply regretted the contributions of their creativity. The inventor of pepper-spray is famously said to have been horrified at its use by police against protestors[7].

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Historically there were times, particularly in pre-enlightenment Europe, when creativity was regarded with fear (Becker, 2001). Those who claimed it or engaged in it without attributing it to God were vilified or incarcerated. This all changed dramatically in the 19th and 20th centuries, albeit in very specific domains such as art, literature and music or industrial invention. The

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[7] https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/11/ive-created-a-monster-on-the-regrets-of-inventors/249044/

rhetoric of creative genius found itself pitted against that of democratic creativity. And, in many ways, those of us who have been educators in the 20th and 21st centuries have tried in the face of increasingly regimented and surveillant education systems to encourage learning through creative means rather than the stultifying absorption and regurgitation of bits of knowledge during standardized assessment tests. But we do, nevertheless, need to reflect on creativity within its many private and public, historical and contemporary contexts.

As will have become clear during my previous writings and specifically in this chapter, I do not take a singular stance towards creativity or view it as an absolute desirable or social good in every circumstance. Both as process and product, and in many of the rhetorical domains named by our 2006 monograph as well as in several that we did not venture into, the contexts of deployment, strategic priorities for which creativity is engaged and goals of use of creative products and systems need to be interrogated alongside and in tandem with an understanding of creativity as inhabiting a series of rhetorics. Some creativity – such as that discussed in the opening sections of this chapter – is either easily recognised or easily erased and dismissed based on the social status and political goals of the creative individuals and groups. All of those practices and products from democratic campaigns to resource conservation and assemblage remain well within the liberal normative frame. Yet vast swathes of creativity remains under-theorised or wrongly theorised simply as technological innovation and/or wealth production because it does not fit so easily into a liberal normative framework.

The connections between capitalism (now neoliberalism), military occupation, colonisation, carceral systems and social discrimination are fairly clear. The complex ways in which creativity has been harnessed and exploited in order to further the goals of those in power in political and economic domains are not difficult to evidence, particularly in historical texts about colonisation, the industrial revolution and the first and second world wars. However, the importance of reading creativity transversely and historically across these systems is increasing both in order to understand them and what makes them so attractive to some people but also in order to combat, take them down and replace them with alternatives.

With precisely this aim in mind, and writing about the capitalist epoch in *The Communist Manifesto* Marx was very clear:

> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without *constantly revolutionising the instruments of production*, and thereby the *relations of production*, and with them the whole *relations of society*. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first

condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned …. (1948, chapter 1. Emphasis added).

The problematic in this passage – of capitalism as a creative and damaging force, of creativity and destruction as a kind of dialectic – raises a number of key questions which are encompassed by but not confined to: Why do so many of us baulk at acknowledging the ways in which creativity and destruction are often yoked together in practice? So let's conclude this chapter with a series of questions that hopefully can scaffold future research into creativity that plays a less than salubrious role in contemporary societies.

Why, in an era inundated by the harvesting of big data that has been called surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) and of vigilante publics (Banaji, 2018) whose internalisation of the logics of violent authoritarianism lead to multiple exclusions, lynchings and perversions of justice set against the backdrop of the resurgence of fascist political elites from Turkey and India to Israel and the US (Berberoglu, 2021; Glassman, 2019) is it still so rare to find discussions of torture and bombing campaigns, or deep-fakes, systematic disinformation and viral propaganda as *political creativity*? And why, particularly amongst those of us who consider ourselves politically liberal or socialist is there so much denial about the aspects of rampant capitalism that many citizens find attractive – particularly the aura of self-commodification and producing the self through competition? The answers to all of these questions suggest a deep denial that creativity and devastating harm can go hand in hand, and a dangerously myopic belief in the moral and normative worth of all forms of creativity. While we debate and research further the theoretical and definitional implications of creativity that is complicit in or actively enables dispossession, dehumanisation and violence, my main aim here has been to warn that ethics and ideology cannot be separated from the teaching and learning of creative praxis without dire consequences. Some of those consequences are already becoming clear in the neglect of environmentally friendly low-tech forms of creative survival in the global south, and in the devastation wrought to our environment through the fetishization of the digital realm which centres an extractive relationship with minerals such as Coltan and the communities which must mine it and turn it into smartphones. This is, quite certainly, a discussion to be continued.

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