

Convergence and Divergence in Creative Practice

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Introduction

Our paper, *Convergence and Divergence in Creative Practice*, will explore the continual external/internal movement through which creative processes take place. We use the terms convergence and divergence to conceptualise a continual, on-going interplay and inter-relationship between an internal focus (being that which is integral or within the practitioner), in the form of synthesis, praxis, and the liminal, and an external focus (that which is other or external to the practitioner), in the form of theory, and relationships with society.

An inability to engage with these processes leaves the individual in the vulnerable position of only being able to create a one-off, or of only being capable of a limited period of creativity. Furthermore, an individual's inability to integrate moments of transformation into their very existence or conception of the world leaves them unchanged and further development limited or unrealised. We see this alternating, interconnected, and multi-faceted movement between the internal and external as being fundamental to the creative process.

At the core of a connective creative practice lies the ability to generate change, to transform, to make the world new, to bring forth. This is a process equally important to the creator as it is for the receiver, leaving both parties changed by way of re-navigating, re-mapping and the transformation of the human condition in the world.

We feel that it is important to state we are referring to a conception of creativity which is not specific to the creation or manufacture of art objects. Our primary concern is the place where the creative process meets the world.

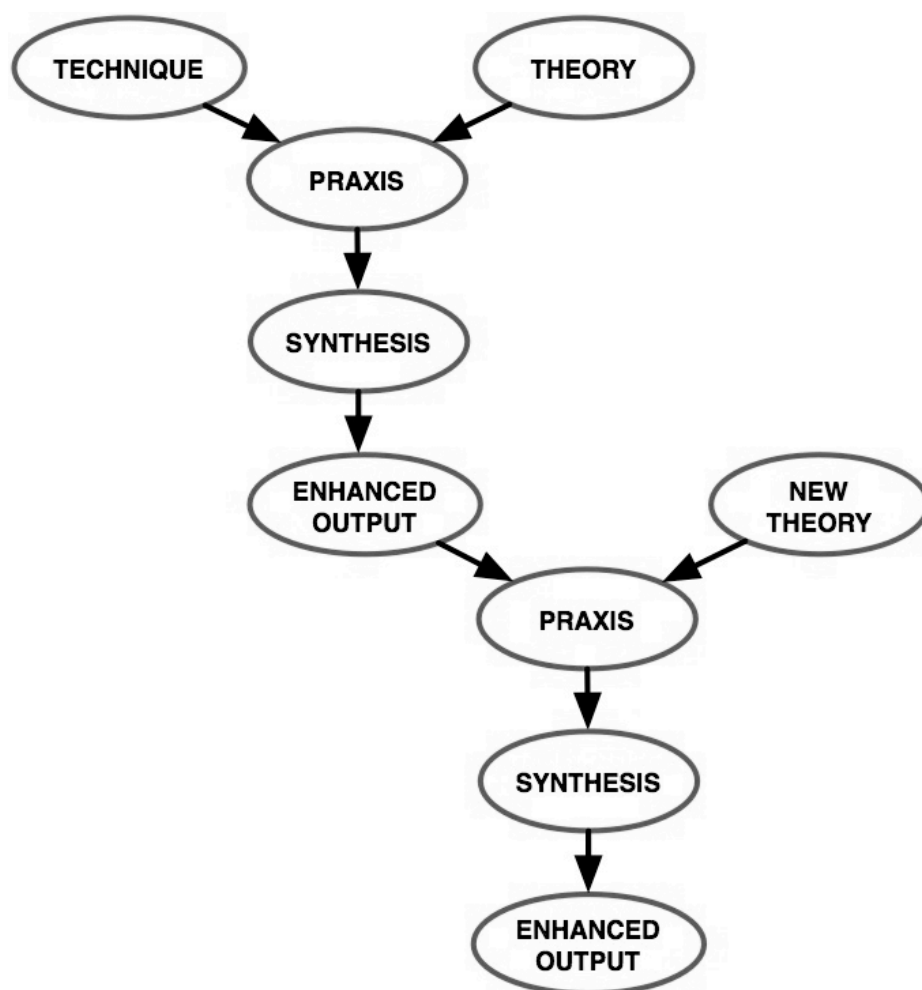
We will refer to a state of being or of being in the world. In using this term we are drawing on Heidegger's concept of *dasein*, and in particular to the aspects of *dasein* in which being [*sein*] is rooted/grounded in a human and socialised world. An individual's experience is contextualised in a particular societal structure, and made personal through a set of unique experiences. Each individual's synthesis and praxis is therefore unique but interconnected with others. The world and the individual are inseparable and wholly intertwined.

Convergence and Divergence

A pre-requisite for the divergent process is that of an enquiring mind, of being open to the new. Implicit in our concept of divergence is the search for the

new and non-obvious, the unknown; the taking in of experiences, ideas, concepts, codes and conventions, which takes place as part of being in the world. These elements can go on to form the component parts in the creation of new relationships of doing and thinking which are fundamental to the ongoing process of praxis.

Convergence is the process central to the concatenation of practice and theory. Following a successful assimilation of divergent material, the creation of a new complex whole in the form of an enhanced practical output, involving synthesis, is possible. The notion of convergence does not adhere to any formula as connections between, and reactions to, stimuli are unique for every individual, this being based upon their unique experience of being in the world.



Praxis and Synthesis

Praxis, the Greek verb meaning to do, is the synthesis of theory and practice; a place where abstracted theoretical knowledge meets action. Intrinsicly the term involves the notion that something is changed. An intervention takes place into the status quo or normative state. The concept of praxis is therefore

not simply empirical, but involves the desire to make or change through intervention. Within praxis theory never sits on its own but is always connected to a system of doing.

We need, here, to make a distinction between making and doing as systems which are able to be incorporated into ongoing developmental and sustainable models of creativity.

If the individual is only taught how to make, they run the risk merely creating a 'one off'. That is, of creating a work which is unable to be integrated into an ongoing process of development, or, that which merely facilitates a temporary and unsustainable state of creativity. In contrast to being able to merely make, the ability to do carries with it transferable skills; one of the most significant of which is the ability to abstract theory from a particular context, and for that theory to then become a tool which can be brought to bear in a variety of disciplines and situations. Furthermore, successful ongoing, and sustainable creative work requires reflection and connectivity, which are fundamental ideas relating to the notion of synthesis.

Synthesis is the bringing together of the elements of the search, of experience, creating a new complexity. Hegelian thesis and antithesis. Synthesis is not a process of the simple, in that there is a complexity to the component parts, which come together to form a new and self-contained complex whole. The result of synthesis comprises more than the sum of its component parts.

Once synthesis has taken place there is an inherent pull towards a new context, new material, new theories need to be brought to bear. Existing theory no longer has the same resonance or ability to contextualise a practice; it no longer sits external to the practice and so can no longer provide insight or perspective on the operation of the practice.

As such, new theories contextualising the work then become material for the development of future work, future practice, and future synthesis. The world has been changed by the intervention of the work – being the product of praxis or synthesis.

The following quotation by Pierre Macherey illustrates this point;

The act of knowing is not like listening to a discourse already constituted, a mere fiction which we have simply to translate. It is rather the elaboration of a new discourse, an articulation of a silence.

-- Pierre Macherey, A theory of literary production

The Liminal

Another key concept within divergence and convergence is the concept of the liminal, which comes from anthropological studies concerned with rights of passage and is based upon the early C20th work of Arnold van Gennep. Within the liminal the status quo and convention are suspended, with the individual being between states with no specific objective or outcome. This could also be thought of as a state of play where logic, the cognitive are suspended, and new association, and new connectivity is able to be made, free from the demands of normal logical processes.

... liminal activities, mark sites where conventional structure is no longer honoured, being more playful, more open to chance, ... consciously or by accident introducing or exploring different structures that may develop into real alternatives to the status quo.

-- Marvin Carlson, Performance, a critical introduction.

A state of play is at the heart of the concept of the liminal. In conventional Western societal frameworks, play is often seen as taking a secondary position to that of logical, cognitive and developmental processes. We function in a hierarchy of order which places a concept of work (that which is moving towards a specific objective), above that of play. Play is often perceived as purposeless, childish, a waste of time, or unproductive. Hence, when your real work is done you can play around a little as a reward. We feel that play and experimentation is absolutely key to a concept of creativity.

A liminal state is an especially concentrated area of divergence and convergence. There is a need here to delineate between shallow and deep forms of play. If especially deep, then developments may not be able to converged; and the various ideas or concepts experimented with during the liminal experience will not be able to be reconciled or integrated, and further development will not be able to occur. This material therefore stays in between states effectively. One notion of a dream state would be that dreaming takes place on too deep a level to be able to be re-integrated directly within the creative process. A dream partially remembered is considered to have taken place at a shallow area of play and hence can be integrated.

This is a particularly divergent aspect of the creative process, which then needs the practitioner to overhear themselves, and in so doing bringing various discourses and theories to bear upon the results; in the form of the cognitive, logical and technical, in order to formulate the results of this play into a form which has sufficient connectivity, both personal and societal, to allow communication to take place. An inevitable move towards the external following internal developments.

It is interesting to reflect back using the concept of the liminal on the development of early C20th arts practice, and on the investigation of states

beyond the rational as alternatives to systems of reason and logic. For example, Dadaist actions included creating works by chance, and use of irrationality. The Surrealist movement proposed and developed automatic writing as a way of attempting to remove of the cognitive mind, critical intervention, and traditional narrative or intent. A crisis within the structures of western society made manifest by the devastation of the First World War, forced artists to search for alternatives, and in that search into the liminal. Rather than seeing this as an iconoclastic shift, they move into a liminal 'between' state to enable change, to investigate, re-evaluate ways of changing society.

The artist and society.

In working versions of this paper we related conceptions of creative states to ideas derived from quantum theory; we considered the creative moment as existing in multiple states simultaneously; as being both connected and separate from society, of a practitioner being focussed both internally and externally, simultaneously. While not entirely literal this idea fundamentally relates to the rate at which divergence and convergence take place. In essence, the idea is not that a practitioner is in both places at the same time, but is concerned with duration. It is concerned with how long a moment can last? The notion of action and of overhearing oneself in action.

Fundamental to the notion of dasein, a person is integrally connected to the world by virtue of their being thrown into it. The practitioner is in the world, and is inherently connected to it through processes and structures of cognition, whether external or internal, overheard or not, it is a product of being in the world.

Essential to the creative process, something new, not obvious, yet useful needs to be sought out, wrestled with, and subsequently brought back to a wider community. For creative practice to have any significance within a society, the expression of the practice must find an understandable form. It has to achieve communicative value; being able to be read, or to make sense of the experience of others within a group.

Although a person's consciousness and cognitive processes are fundamentally shaped by their experience of being, we are saying that unless the results of a creative process (INTERNAL EXTERNAL MOVEMENT) can be communicated with an other (achieve communicative value), the process remains dormant or unrealised.

When the individual is working outside the bounds of their society they are not separate from it provided they can bring the results of this search in a form and present them in an understandable, integratable form within society.

At times there is a need for an individual to remove themselves from a

societal context, for example Heidegger goes into the forest and writes for extended periods; in the role of the hermit, these individuals remove themselves from society, returning with new insights into being and existence. [reflective]

Composer Claude Debussy is an example of an artist who stepped outside his societal and cultural framework after encountering Indonesian Gamelan at the 1889 Grand Universal Exhibition in Paris. He is exposed to a different cultural and structural form, and later, through synthesis with Western musical frameworks, he integrates this experience into a form which achieves communicative value in his society. He is able to bring forth a new, complete whole as a result of synthesis.

CONCLUSION

These states of convergence and divergence are able to be re-approached or revisited as a reflective creative process moves forward. These elements or stages take place in an ongoing leapfrogging or alternating process, on both a macro and micro level, as new material is encountered and new connections take place. For example, synthesis can take place at multiple points within a project, with these multiple processes or elements continually informing this ongoing process.

Creative activity is a way of navigating your place within the world, and that place can only be navigated in relation to others. Why are we sitting here when we could be debating at home internally, or typing at our keyboards?

With the concepts of convergence and divergence we are offering conceptual tools which can facilitate an ongoing process of creativity and engagement with the world. We are offering models that enable processes of creativity to be worked with constructively and productively. We want to facilitate an engagement with an ongoing practice of being in the world, which is inherently creative, explorative, and re-constructive.

Concepts of divergence and convergence become at once thesis and antithesis, synthesised through ongoing modes of creativity on both individual and societal levels. This is a playground where experience is navigated and formulated, the laboratory of being in the world.