7 Nothing is Free in this Life
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Years ago, while suffering from extreme seasonal allergies, I came across something on the internet which clarified for me a crucial aspect of the business of marketing. I had tried everything for my tears, runny nose and grating, itchy throat, but nothing had worked, and I wasn’t willing to exacerbate my dependence on antihistamines.

Willing to read anything that might have a connection to my condition, I happened upon an area of alternative therapy, hitherto unknown to me, going under the euphemistic name of ‘uropathy’. Now, stated bluntly, uropathy consists of drinking your own wee – fresh, sometimes allowed to ‘breathe’ – and my source referenced all manner of very interesting research on the matter.

I recommend a web search, if only out of curiosity. The thing that struck me, however, in relation to uropathy, which claims for itself amazing curative powers (and there were numerous miraculous testimonials), was a statement by one of its advocates, explaining why uropathy was not likely to be promoted by pedestrian, allopathic healing modalities. The writer explained that due to the fact that uropathy primarily works when the patient consumes their own urine (due to the specific hormonal profile of the filtrate), it was never going to be of any use to the medicine business. Uropathy, in other words, offers absolutely nothing that can be sold. Urine is available enough and since one needs to use one’s own, it subverts any kind of exchange economy. Abundant and specific – an odd combination in itself – urine consumption would then be analogous to an unusual kind of exchange economy. Abundant and specific, it was never going to be of any use to the medicine business.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to inquire into the current state of my hay fever. However, the example of uropathy, as a playful analogy, raises certain important questions in relation to the central concern of this book: What is it that the creativity market purports to sell? Or, what is creativity and how do we situate it theoretically? And, finally, is it scarce?

To this end, I would firstly like to take up some writings of the French thinker Jacques Derrida and his contributions to our understanding of the possible readings of ‘creativity’ and, more specifically, how creation may be distinguished from the category of invention.

In his work, Psyché – Inventions of the Other, Derrida (1987) brings attention to the distinction between ‘creating’ and ‘inventing’. To create, he explains, relates more to notions of genesis. God created the world, for example. One does not normally say that he ‘invented’ it. Creation would imply that out of nothingness, came something. Noting that the category of invention can imply both ‘invention’ that pertains to the things invented (invention as noun) or to the activity of inventing itself (invention as the name of an activity), Derrida writes:

But in the two cases, according to the two points of view (object or act), invention doesn’t create an existence or a world as an assembly of entities, it doesn’t have the theological meaning of a creation of existence, as such, ex nihilo. (1987: 85)

Creation, therefore, implies an almost magical process or, at least, a theoretically inflected one. It would have to do with generating (out of nothing) something. It would not relate to a new approach or an innovative utilisation of what was already there. Its definition, in other words, would not be satisfied by a mere rearrangement, or alteration of form, based on existing categories or elements.

If we borrow Derrida’s instructive question in this regard: ‘Does one invent a child?’ (1987: 14) or does one create one? the answer – conventionally and, somehow, intuitively – is that one creates a child. The angle on this matter points us towards the biological aspect of creation. All living creatures are ‘creative’, in that they create themselves down the genealogical line. It would be a natural happening and not an exclusively human one. Out of nothing (or, at least, two very small things), comes a new being. This is a kind of creation. God gave birth to, that is, created the world, and we – beasts and creatures – give birth to the next generation. Creation, paradoxically, would be both more, and less, surprising than invention, with the theological kind of creation lying completely beyond the reach of the mere human and the biological kind being typical of the human qua animal.

Derrida’s approach here is useful for our wider inquiry, even if his choice of terms might appear to derail our discussion. Yes, we are talking about the so-called creativity market, but if this is a self-given title, the term ‘creativity’ might well be the result of advertising rhetoric, rather than definitional accuracy. Aggrandising its promise and desirability, as well as its importance within a marketplace, have those agents who make up the ‘creativity market’ auto-assigned a name for it that rings the most impressive and works the most strategically.
On the other hand, it is worth noting that the term ‘creativity’ can also function as a slight. The ‘creative’ within tertiary education has been viewed at times disparagingly by other faculties and disciplines of the academy, as if it were somehow less serious, more immature and less related to the adult preoccupations of epistémé (knowledge) and isoria (history). ‘Creativity’, in this sense, can be another term for the unrigorous, unscientific and flippant.

If we allow ourselves to split hairs, we find that the so-called creativity market does not at all pertain to the realm of mating frogs, budding wizards or gods who might be imagined as being capable of Derrida’s idea of creation ex nihilo. Rather, the creativity market more commonly claims to be able to sell inventiveness (following the Derridean definition), to nurture it and teach its whimsical ways. Perhaps the name ‘creativity market’ prevails since it flatters a human consumer to believe that she, or he, might have this power of the gods to make something (other than offspring) appear where there was nothing before. However, to summarise Derrida again, God did not invent the world, and parents do not invent their children. A novelist, however, might invent a new technique in fiction, or a dancer might invent a new choreographic syntax.

Restricted to the so-called biologically natural or to the supernatural, creativity may therefore be theoretically distinguished from inventiveness, which—according to Derrida (1987: 36)—is restricted on the whole to the realm of the human and relates to the human’s capacity for techne.

The creativity market, then, might be a misnomer for the market which offers to sell to the public the skills, luck and practices that relate to being inventive. Simultaneously, it is also that market which facilitates the production of the outcomes of inventiveness. In other words, this market would produce both inventiveness (as act or experience) and inventions (as objects: films, novels, images, happenings). To explain this in another way, the creativity market has both a process aspect and a product aspect, purporting to generate the double-edged outcome of experiences and objects—that which can be ‘lived’ and that which can be ‘had’. This reminds us of the old Aristotelian distinction of praxis and poiesis, where the former relates to activity in-and-of itself and the latter emphasises the products of activity.

Individuals and groups who approach the ‘creativity market’ with various wishes, agendas or hopes may be framed in relation to this double-edge. Let us just make a loose division and say that some may seek the experience of being (what is called) ‘creative’, while others might seek the know-how, mostly in order to produce the saleable objects or entities that fall somehow into the category of ‘creative’ or, even, ‘artistic’. These might include quirky clothing, re-imagined homewares, industrially designed children’s furniture, or noise music for advertising and so on.

We might also speculate that some consumers in ‘creativity markets’ are, in fact, unconsciously seeking something theological or ‘metaphysical’. Beyond the scope of this discussion, it would be interesting to interrogate whether there is a relation between secularisation and an increase in the number of people seeking ‘creative avenues’ as a means of facilitating a particular kind of existential encounter.

The invention for Derrida, despite appearing less magical or miraculous than his ‘creation’, is, upon closer inspection, at least as complex a notion.

The Six Criteria of the Invention

There are six important criteria relevant to our discussion that help frame the notion of the invention. These are:

(a) the invention’s illegality;
(b) the invention as a category pertaining to form and composition;
(c) the paradox of the invention;
(d) the iterability of the invention;
(e) the invention as both a first and last time; and
(f) invention as ‘finding there for the first time’.

These criteria assist in the identification of inventions already in the world. Let us examine them more closely.

(a) Illegality

The first interesting thing that Derrida notes about this category is that an invention always supposes some illegality, the rupture of an implicit contract, it introduces disorder into the peaceful order of things’ (1987: 11).

An invention would somehow always be illegal, radical and a break with tradition, existing codes or the status quo. An invention goes against the grain of the order as humans have established it, forcing something new into its grid, making something that was previously not possible, possible and via a contravention. I read this to imply that unless the order is ruptured in some way, there will have been no invention as such. Or, without such disturbance to the way things are, the so-called invention will have been a mere reshuffling a predictable link in an existing chain of everyday goings-on.

(b) Form and Composition

The next aspect of the invention, Derrida goes on to explain, referencing the development of patent law between the 17th and 19th centuries, is that,
Invention can be understood as meaning rather than to actual content (1987: 14). This would support the legality, it would from here on. Insofar as it (see a.) always involves a rupture with the existing order and traditions so... 

(c) Paradox of the Invention

An invention, according to Derrida's definition, operates paradoxically. Insofar as it (see a.) always involves a rupture with the existing order and legality, it also, in order to be classed as an invention, must be taken up and recognised by laws and society (Derrida, 1987: 16). The invention breaks traditions so as, ultimately, to be called into being via their acknowledgement, thereby adding to them. Derrida will say this amounts to the impossibility of a 'private' invention and that inventions are therefore creatures of the public and, by implication, the social or political realm (1987: 15). It is, in this sense, also, presumably, that they are not 'natural', but rather, produced by, and producing of, human worlds.

(d) The Invention's Iterability

Iterability here refers to a capacity to be repeated. Closely related to the previous aspect, it suffices here to quote, a little lengthily, from *Psyché*, in order to make clear the consequences of both the necessity of invention breaking with tradition and also its being called into being by it:

[The invention] will receive its status of invention, moreover, only to the extent that this socialisation of the thing invented is guaranteed by a system of *conventions* that will assure at once inscription in a shared history, belonging to a culture: heritage, patrimony, pedagogical tradition, discipline and chain of generations. The invention *begins* by being able to be repeated, exploited, reinscribed [my emphasis]. (1987: 16)

For the invention not just to be a one-off, abhorrent breaking with tradition or a queer anomaly, it must demonstrate the capacity to be repeated, used and/or exploited. Derrida will even call it a *machine* (1987: 21), thereby hinting towards the invention's close, but unexpected, link with human technology.

(e) Invention as First-and-Last Time

Stemming from the previous point, the invention is the coincidence of both an *inaugurating* time (a 'first' time), but also of a *last* time, insofar as it must be unique. As the only 'first time', other 'times' will not be classed as inventive moments, but will be merely examples of its inscription in the tradition, or the system, that will take up the invention's machinic possibilities (Derrida, 1987: 16).

(f) Finding-There For the First Time

In this final aspect, Derrida recalls the reader to the fact that – according to pure definition – invention can be understood as meaning 'finding there for the first time' (1987: 16). Within this definition, we find the antithesis of 'creation'. Invention *finds* and finds what was already there. It is inventive because it finds for the *first time*. The *finding* is unique, but *what* is found was already at hand with potential, but in an as yet unacknowledged form.

To risk a simplifying summary, then, invention would be a new relationship to the raw substance/content already available in the existing context. Rather than pertaining to the creation of fresh *matter*, it involves a discovery of an approach, perspective or structuring that would render the same old 'stuff' uniquely new, enabling this relationship/configuration to be repeated and taken up by the system of relationships in which the matter previously existed.

If, then, the criteria outlined above are the means to recognising an invention when one comes along, we are still no closer to understanding how inventions arise. Since this is the primary concern of the industries or markets that would declare themselves 'creative', let us examine what Derrida says about this.

What Has Happened When an Invention Happens?

At this point, we are able to identify an invention after the fact, but, obviously, the 'creativity market' would wish to make some claim about its ability to shepherd, coerce or facilitate inventive capacity. Derrida distils the mechanism of invention down to a very straightforward, but also *impossible*, coincidence.

To use Derrida's example, we need to clarify several concepts stemming from *Speech Act Theory* in linguistics. An important area of debate within linguistics relates to the classification of certain statements into those that are descriptive (called 'constative') and those that are themselves acts (called 'performative'). To make it simple, examples of the latter are usually statements that, in fact, effectuate some change (in legal status, for example) or action through their being uttered. The obvious example is always 'I do' in

No...
marriage. On the other hand, an example of the former would be something typical, like 'the sky is blue today', a statement that doesn't make anything happen (superficially, at least).

We will leave aside Derrida's other work that has challenged this simplistic division in Speech Act Theory, however, what is useful here is the way a discipline (linguistics), or indeed any system, can set up categories and rules that are deemed complete and self-evident, almost 'naturally true'. This is where the idea of the 'impossible' becomes central. Invention arrives in a system or a context where it had seemed that nothing new or radical were possible, and this arrival happens via 'impossibility'. In other words, the impossible can happen and its happening relates to what we understand invention to be.

Taking a work by Francis Ponge, Derrida gives the reader an example of when the constative and the performative categories of linguistics collide illegally in a happening that can be deemed 'inventive' and related to the so-called 'impossible'. As a rupture, whose outcome is iterable, but also unique, it will be both reliant upon convention and totally subverting of its typical use. 'By the word by begins therefore this text' (Derrida, 1987: 19). This simple sentence of Ponge, grammatically sound, at once performs itself and describes itself at the same time. Since most (actually, all, except those that are inventively rupturing) statements tend to manage to fall into only one of the categories of Speech Act Theory, it is a kind of event when a statement simply and quietly inhabits the two at once. Such an 'event' – of co-inhabiting – is astounding and 'unpre-emptable', but (after the fact) not impossible at all. Once uttered, any prior, apparent impossibility of the statement's invention drops away and is nowhere to be found.

Put simply, once the invented is found, it is difficult to unthink its foundness. Round things existed, for example, before the invention of the wheel, but the application of round-cylindrical-ness to movement may be classed as an 'event' for human animals. It is difficult for us (now, at this historical moment) to imagine a time prior to the obviousness of the wheel's existence. It has already, in other words, been found for that first time. Once employed and used as a machinic pattern, it can never be found, in that initial way, again.

Inventive Instability

To describe the movement out of which inventiveness emerges as a 'collision' between two apparently mutually exclusive states (the 'performative' and 'constative', for example, in linguistics) is perhaps to simplify what will prove, upon closer observation, even more interesting. Referencing the Belgian theorist Paul de Man's comments about the relationship between fiction and autobiography, Derrida writes:

The infinitely fast oscillation between performative and constative, language and metalinguage, fiction and non-fiction, auto- and hetero-reference etc. does not only produce an essential instability. This instability constitutes the event itself, let's say the oeuvre, the norms, statutes and rules of which the invention normally perturbs. (1987: 25)

By satisfying the definition of the performative and the constative in one gesture, Ponge's line ('by the word by begins therefore this text') constitutes a rupturing of an established convention of linguistic logic. To think it geometrically: that which was parallel has become circular. The rupture only, however, puts to use that which our existing grammar and 'sense' had already provided. The inventive structure is found, for the first time, there, where it always was.

So the event, for Derrida, is characterised by an essential instability, a rapid change of state and a failure – so to speak – of imperatives to obey the established categories provided by a system. In this sense, to invent would amount to the subversion of binary categories through the taking up of both sides of them in an infinitely accelerated fashion.

Derrida's Invention and Badiou's Event

I have used the term 'event' above, to designate Derrida's notion of invention, but – given the theoretical players contributing to thought today – this sphere of inquiry must also, I believe, give us to think the Badiouian event. I would claim, here, that the 'event', as framed by Badiou and then Derrida's notion of invention, each speaks to the other and that this definitional conversation can persuade us to take notice of what these thinkers offer to our understanding of how events come about and what agency humans have in relation to them.

A 'creativity market', whether it chooses to share such a theoretically rigorous understanding with its consuming public or not, could still do well to have the capacity to think invention-events. On the other hand, one can argue that consumers should be informed about the kinds of things money can realistically buy, and whether inventiveness is one of them.

Despite relying on vastly different methodological approaches, Derrida and Badiou, I believe, inform us about potentially foundational veracities concerning 'events'. Let us take up this idea and see if it can contribute to clarifying our inquiry about 'creativity markets'.

An event, for Derrida and Badiou, would be something that ruptures. For the former, in relation to invention, the rupture – always somewhat illegal – would arise via a kind of manoeuvre within a context that is both perfectly possible retrospectively, but pragmatically impossible to stage prior
to itself. The unique constellation that opens the event's possibilities pertains to an odd coincidence of naming-as-doing or an oscillation between these mutually exclusive categories. As simple as it sounds to describe, this coincidence cannot be made to happen.

For Badiou, comparatively, the event is undisputedly random and beyond human coercion. In his use of set theory, Badiou is able to depict very clearly using mathematical 'syntax' what is at play in the rupture that his event constitutes. He offers the following definition:

The event (at a given evental 'site') is 'the multiple composed of: on the one hand, elements of the site; and on the other hand, itself (the event)' (2007: 506).

The matheme, or formula, of the event is able to be identified as an extraordinary kind of set, since it contains itself: \( e = \{ x \in X, e_i \} \) (Badiou, 2007: 179). Such scenarios within mathematics have often been outlawed or, at least, designated as destabilising and undesirable. See, for example, Douglas Hofstadter's book *I am a Strange Loop* (2007) for a very accessible description of these issues for the field of mathematics. Or, the other option has been for mathematicians to employ different systems of classification so as to prevent certain inconsistencies from arising (Goldblatt, 2006: 9–12).

Badiou's matheme of the event is not unrelated to the arising of the event that Derrida outlines in *Psyche*. Ponge's 'By the word by ...' is also a kind of set that contains itself. By self-referencing, that which would be both itself and the invention of itself at the same time, it initiates a feedback loop, and this looping or whirligig 'acceleration' (to use Paul de Man's vocabulary [1979: 921]) is essential for whatever it is that constitutes the moment of the invention-event.

We can conclude that, with its possibility contained within the elements of the context or situation itself, the invention is both an exception to the rule and also reliant on nothing that is (not) already there. What does this mean?

**Abundant Voids**

For Badiou, an event happens when somehow our day-to-day reality – its rules, statutes, practices, technologies, language systems – fails to secure itself, and the void of which it is the structured organisation (and only that) reveals itself as the ontological foundation. To quote Roffe on this point: 'Its border status, its exposure to uncounted, inconsistent being, is what opens it up to the aleatory' (2006). The rupturing that the event is – completely outside of any kind of inscription system that could document or record it – disappears as soon as it has occurred. Or, to quote Roffe again, 'it also has no temporal reality other than the moment of its (dis)-appearance' (2006). The event leaves nothing in its wake and sometimes this 'nothing' is noticed by humans and a process begins.

Whether events are common or scarce is, to me, not completely clear from the sum of Badiou's work I have read, and perhaps the point is that we cannot really know. In relation to our ongoing inquiry, that which remains central is that whether scarce or not, the stuff of inventiveness – that is, Nothingness, the Void or accelerated instability – is not something that the market can annex, privatise or patent. This Void (of Badiou's) cannot be made to disappear entirely, no matter how tightly the reigns of the State or the status quo might pull and attempt to cover it over. Always there, this 'nothingness', however, must be secured – that is, locked down in the 'count' of structuring, organising and disciplining – and we must understand that for there to be anything, this, too, is crucial. It is also interesting to note that the void, for humans, is pure horror, since we do not exist there and are irrelevant. Or, to anthropomorphise a little, the void is not dis-interested in the human, simply non-interested.

Due to both the importance of the securing of the void, in order that 'there is' anything at all, and the necessity that this order be ruptured from time to time, added to, destabilised, re-invigorated and topped, even, humans seem to have a justifiably ambivalent relationship to liminal experiences, such as inventiveness. This ambivalence can give us a hint about the role of the 'creativity market' and also its limits.

**So, What Can Money Buy Me?**

Given the theoretical, even ontological, discussion above, we return to our question of what it is that can be sold under the rubric of 'creativity'. Let us quote Derrida again:

If the word 'invention' knows a new liveliness, upon a foundation of anguished exhaustion, but also since the very desire to re-invent the invention itself, and to the point of re-inventing its statute, it is without doubt in relation to a scale that is unmeasurable against that of the past, that which one calls the 'invention' to be patented finds itself programmed, that it is to say, submitted to powerful movements of prescription and authoritarian anticipation, of which the modes are most numerous. And this as much in the domains called art or fine arts, as in the techno-scientific realms. Everywhere in the projects of knowledge and research are firstly programatics of invention. [...] One could evoke also all the institutions, private or public, capitalist or not, who declare themselves the machines for the production and orientation of the invention. (1987: 59)
Derrida notes an urge to want to re-invent what inventiveness is and notes that, at the same time, powerful forces are at work hoping to corral the stuff of inventiveness. Seminars, self-help books, tertiary institutions, privately-run weekend retreats, think-tanks, research institutes (to name a few) the market that sells creativity and the bodies that would claim to have its key seem to have something to offer, but, as we’ve read above, they can’t have nothing to sell.

If the Badiouian Void, or the inherent instability or oscillation of which Derrida speaks, is somehow always already there and un-quashable, what factors influence or enhance a person’s or organisation’s ability to mobilise or to promise the delivery of that from which inventiveness springs?

Let us acknowledge a disconcerting coincidence. As a Caucasian, female, Australian-born, human animal, I can say that at this historical moment I am regularly subjected to forces demanding an obedience to statutes, or to promise the delivery of that from which inventiveness springs? 

Let us call again on the distinction noted above between the experience of inventing and the products of invention – experiences and things. It is quite obvious that ‘newness’ is a very saleable quality. Much of what passes for newness, however, is of the stale, programmed type noted by Derrida in the passage above. As a mere rearrangement of existing elements, it would not constitute a rupture.

Bombarded with the advertising speak of ‘all new’, consumers may, and will, allow themselves to believe that some trace of the void (or a rupture of their unbearable daily normality) will grace them if they acquire a new style, a new piece of technology, etc. This is a furphy, and anyone who has shopped knows the let-down of this mistaken hope. A particular intellectual rigour or simple street-smartness might be enough, at least, to decelerate the incidents of unnecessary consumption elicited by claims of pseudo invention-events. Or, in the absence of this, shopping (and this includes for education) might simply emerge as what it is: the acquiring of more things/skills, some necessary, some not. A justifiable and pragmatic human activity among many, but by no means expected to be revolutionary or revelatory.

On the other hand – as is often the case with the fine arts and its products, so-called ‘design’, the literary business, etc. – something else is at stake in the wanting to attain proximity to someone else’s invention event. In the absence of being inventive oneself, the possession of the trace of inventiveness (so-called creative products) may still seem appealing. This more vicarious aspect comes, perhaps, closer to what might be a driving factor in those markets termed specifically ‘creative’.

So if most ‘newness’ isn’t really new and being close to the traces of inventiveness is not the same as inventiveness itself, what, then, is saleable, given all our previous discussions about the nature of invention-events?

Let us propose that, despite humans not being able to influence the arising of events, specific human animals may have more or less aptitude, or practice, in noticing events when they do happen and being there to ‘follow through’ when events/invention arrive. Were there to be anything in which a ‘creativity market’ could trade, it might be in the teaching of what I propose to term an ‘evental sensitivity’ – a kind of preparedness. This may be what is purportedly on offer during creativity seminars, in the university classroom and within the covers of self-help books. If creativity markets are
able to offer anything realistic, it is via this aspect. Providing employment for many people (many of whom are artists, researchers and creative practitioners themselves), these markets are clearly 'selling' something, and their product is neither toxic, unethical, nor even – if they pay attention to invention's ontology – deceitful.

Conclusion: Nothing is for Free

The old traces of inventiveness make up the majority of what we would call our cultural and technological canons, indeed, our civilisations. To read, 100 years after the fact, the literary works of an originally inventive writer is surely to be graced by beauty and to be groomed in sensitivity to something. This something might be human psychology, certain aesthetic qualities or grammatical elegance, among other things. In other words: light, colour, form, imagination or rhythm. To read will not necessarily constitute inventiveness, but it will not necessarily impede it, and it may even contribute to the possibility of the reader's noticing, and being able to respond,\(^{6}\) to an event when it does arise.

The void of Badiou is mostly quite securely 'locked up' in structure..., but not entirely. As Badiou will explain, it can be seen to 'haunt' the situation, but in non-presentation (see 2007: 94). This void is beyond the reach of any market – a fact which renders it both frustratingly evasive to those wishing to heed it into an exclusive and lucrative form by promising to sell the paradox of inventiveness, but also reassuringly resistant.

To conclude, then, let's say that an artist (in the broadest sense) may be that kind of creature who practices both a fluency in the rules, codes and techniques of the situation or current historical context, but who does not confuse this programmatic competency with the stuff of true invention, which is, in fact, nothingness or the void – that which is always there to be found and which is always already for free.

Notes

1. This use of the term 'impossible' in Derrida's thought is not casual. 'Impossibility' for Derrida may be the very condition of that which renders any inventiveness, change, or justice-to-come possible at all. In other words, he proposes that something able to shift dominant patterns or old hierarchies is likely to involve a passage through 'impossibility'.

2. I say this, well aware that Derrida's work of deconstruction challenges such bifurcations. The mutual exclusiveness, however, of these categories traditionally persists within systems that declare them – linguistics, for example, but it could be art, history or literature at given historical moments – and the system supports itself upon the very structure of that categorisation.

References


