EPISODE ONE

THE ONE WHO OBSERVES

ACT ONE

CREATIVITY

"Creativity is as individual as it is universal" (Tilley, 2017)

I don't remember much about kindergarten. However, I do recall one particular event. One day, our teacher asked us to draw a picture of our home. I enjoyed the task, put much effort into it, and hoped she would appreciate my incredible artistry and mastery over crayons. She looked over my shoulder and declared: "The sun doesn't come out at night." I was mortified, and it was likely the reason 'art' was never one of my considerations for a career. Looking back, I recall the picture that I had drawn – it was my family home, I was in the front yard, and in the night sky I had drawn the stars, the moon, and the sun. The highly intuitive art of a five year old had depicted a reality that she could not see. For in fact the sun and the moon and the stars live together in one sky and their separation is only a matter of time.

In the distant past, our greatest thinkers believed that creative inspiration came from 'without'. Professor of Psychology, Robert Weisberg, writes: "It was proposed originally by the Greeks that creative ideas were gifts from the gods. Specifically, the Muses, nine daughters of Zeus, each of whom was in charge of a separate domain – played a central role in producing novel ideas" (2006, p. 90). Weisberg adds:

> The residue of this school of thought is seen whenever someone says that he or she "got an inspiration" or was "inspired" in describing the appearance of a creative idea. Inspiration means "breathing in"; one received inspiration from the Muses, because they breathed creative ideas into people. (p. 90)

Catherine Yang (2017), in her article *Chaos, Inspiration, and the Creation of CREATIVITY,* says that the "…idea that creation and creativity are an act of God, or that it comes from the divine, is one that has its roots in antiquity and across many cultures" (B2). The Greek

philosophers, including Plato, she says "discussed how creation was of the realm of the divine, whereas humans could only make things and mimic ideal forms through their efforts" (p. B2). Tod Lubbart, Professor of Psychology at the University of Paris, concluded, "after reviewing close to a dozen other studies on the ideas of Eastern creativity […] that in these cultures the creative artist taps into some universal source and recreates, imitates, or develops something from it" (in Yang, p. B2). According to Yang, "During the Middle Ages, or the medieval period, one with a special talent or ability was seen as being a conduit from an outside force—something greater and most likely divine. Humans were not yet creators but makers who could be divinely inspired" (p. B2). It wasn't until the Renaissance (Re-Birth) that we started believing that creativity was more than divine inspiration, and that "the human mind could act independently of nature or the supernatural as well" (p. B2).

Although in today's scientific 'materialistic' world the Muses have been dispensed with, it does not negate the fact that the Muses were created in order to understand the existence of creative inspiration. Although there appears to be some consensus within the discipline of psychology on the definition of creativity, even in today's world, where science has taught us to ignore what we cannot see, touch, hear, taste or smell, there remains much disagreement about the creative process. In this religiously scientific world, where we cannot easily measure insight, inspiration, and intuition, the source of creativity remains a mystery, just as it was over 2,300 years ago. The Muses might be gone, or perhaps they're in hiding so they don't get squished into a test tube, but creative inspiration lives on, whether we can measure it or not. And the immeasurable muse within me may yet have a few words to say.

For the following discussion on creativity and how it works, I drew from three primary sources (considered experts in their field, although with somewhat different and sometimes opposing perspectives):

- Carl Jung, deceased psychiatrist and philosopher and former disciple of Sigmund Freud, focussed most of his studies on the psychology of the unconscious.

- Robert W. Weisberg, PhD, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Brain, Behavior, and Cognition Cluster at Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, specifically focusses on creativity as a cognitive function of the human mind. Weisberg's treatise: *Creativity – Understanding Innovation in Problem Solving, Science, Invention, and the Arts* (2006), "presents the major psychological theories of creativity and illustrates important concepts with vibrant and detailed case studies that exemplify how to study creative acts with scientific rigor" (back cover).
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Professor, and former chairman of the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago, studies the creative lives of exceptional people, and shares his insights in *Creativity – Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, (1996).

Weisberg's definition of creativity is:

> Creative thinking occurs when a person intentionally produces a novel product while working on some task. Sometimes those intentional novel products are valued highly by society, and sometimes they are not, but all of them are creative products. A novel product intentionally produced by a person is a creative product, and the person who produces such a product is a creative person. (p. 70)

Weisberg's main thesis is that creativity is simply an extension of ordinary thinking. Ordinary thinking possesses a number of characteristics, "among which are the following:

- Our thoughts follow one from another, or are related to one another. That is, our thinking has *structure*.
- Ordinary thinking depends on the past: That is, our thought exhibits *continuity* with the past.
- Knowledge and concepts direct ordinary thinking: Psychologists call the direction of our thinking by knowledge and concepts *top-down processing*. […]

- Ordinary thinking can be influenced by environmental events. Our thought is *sensitive to environmental events*" (p. 108).

Weisberg argues, quite successfully I might add, that creativity is not a gift of the select few, but is something we all have or all could have: "…creative capacity may to some degree be present in all of us" (p.5). The intent of his research is to show that "…the differences in personality and other psychological characteristics between creative individuals and ordinary people may not be very large, and, furthermore, those differences may not be crucial in making creative people creative" (p. 5).

Csikszentmihalyi's perspective stretches the creativity process beyond the individual. Creative works and ideas emerge from a culture and from a domain within a culture, and the individual is simply a part of this greater creative structure. According to Csikszentmihalyi:

> Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it. (p. 28)
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> […] creativity results from the interaction of a system composed of three elements: a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain, and a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation. All three are necessary for a creative idea, product, or discovery to take place. (p. 6)

In supporting notes, Csikszentmihalyi acknowledges that there is an unresolved disagreement in the field as to "whether an idea or product needs social validation to be called creative" (p.403) and he does admit that his preference is to approach creativity as a subjective phenomenon (relative). However, he believes we need "some criterion – logic, beauty, or usefulness" and therefore, the minute we apply criterion, "we introduce a social or cultural

evaluation" (p. 403). Csikszentmihalyi says he was therefore "led to the systemic perspective on creativity, which relocates the creative process outside the individual mind" (p. 403).

On creative people Csikszentmihalyi says "Their contribution, while necessary and important, is only a link in a chain, a phase in a process. To say that […] Albert Einstein discovered relativity is a convenient simplification" (p. 7). I agree. Albert Einstein did not develop his theories on his own. He was immersed in a domain that was wrestling intensely with the issues of energy, mass and light. At the time, relativity, in all senses of the word, was garnering much attention from physicists, philosophers and psychologists. There existed a highly competitive and collaborative (sharing of ideas) environment that produced the necessary ideas that when combined together in the head of the right person, became the greatest ideas ever imagined by anyone.

According to Catherine Yang, in Epoch Times, the common definition of creativity (used by researchers) as established by professors Robert Sternberg, Professor of Human Development at Cornell University and Todd Lubbart, "is that something creative is novel and appropriate" (p. B2). From a scientific paradigm, where research must produce something useful or valued, especially for those who pay for it, this is a suitably bland and 'appropriate' definition.

All agree that the definition of creativity is the act, 'phenomenon' or process that creates something new. However, some believe this process must produce something that is appropriate, accepted by a domain, useful, and/or valued. I, and many others, do not; we correctly accept that 'value' is relative, like everything else.

One of my favourite definitions of creativity, from Creativity at Work (2014), an international consortium of creativity and innovation experts, design thinkers, and arts-based learning practitioners, is:

> Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. Creativity is characterized by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions.

I believe creativity is an innate function of the universe, and everything in it. I could equate creativity with 'diversification'. According to the theory of evolution, it is not the fittest who survive (although this does help), it is the lucky who survive. When a comet blew up the dinosaurs and almost all life on this planet, it was the lucky little mammal living in its hollow that survived. Diversification is the greatest defense against the seemingly random chaos of the universe. Investment advisors would also agree. The best defense against the random nature of the world's money markets is diversity. Diversify the managers you use, diversify the countries you invest in, diversify the types of investments you invest in (stocks-bonds), diversify the companies you invest in, and so on. Then when a catastrophic event happens, one or a few of your investments will live another day. Creativity is the connective process that creates something new – it increases diversity. And since the value of anything new is indeterminable (until the next comet or meteor arrives) perceived value is therefore irrelevant.

While researching the subject of creativity, I often wondered if there might be two types of creativity, or perhaps two components of the creative process. As mentioned previously, Weisberg argued that creativity is simply an extension of ordinary thinking. I agree that critical thinking (or ordinary thinking as per Weisberg) and creativity have much in common. To some, they are synonymous. The creators of the You-Tube video, *Critical Thinking and Creativity* (2014), try quite valiantly to explain and/or merge the similarities and differences of critical thinking and creativity:

- Critical thinking, for example, helps you look at a problem objectively and take into consideration the entire picture, while creativity enables you to take that entire picture and look at it in a new way.
- Both critical thinkers and creative types are masters of the thought process.

- Our greatest thinkers and inventors had streaks of creative thinking that took them beyond the realm of logic. It takes critical thinking to be creative.
- Creativity carries the thought process further by presenting it in a creative light.
- The creative thinking process thinks beyond existing boundaries, breaks away from the rational and conventional, and relies on imagination, divergence and the random.
- Creativity is the ability to imagine or invent something new.

I do believe there are two main types of 'creatives' (although both types could operate interchangeably throughout a 'creative process'). Professor Keith Simonton, Dean of Psychology at the University of California, as noted by Karen Kersting in her article, *What Exactly is Creativity* (2003), groups the types into 'scientists' and 'artists'. Both are creative, but science and art attract different personality types. He says the main criterion for attraction is how much constraint there is on the creative process. "Science has to be constrained to scientific process, but there's a lot less constraint on artists. Many artists come from more chaotic environments, which prepare them to create with less structure".

I label one of the two creative 'types' the 'Einstein Type'. This is the problem solver. This is when the 'thinker' thinks very deeply about mass amounts of information for long periods of time. Many of these Einstein Types could also be called absent minded professors. Their minds are actually absent from the outside world. Their entire consciousness is focussed on the 'issue' or 'problem' at hand – for days, weeks and sometimes months. They forget to eat, to bathe, to sleep, to change out of their pyjamas. The Einstein Type uses all of their energy to solve the problem. They enter the 'Zone' and stay there until the right synaptic connections are made – usually between information existing at opposite sides of the quantum universe that is their brain – or when new information is obtained – perhaps subconsciously at first, and finally consciously when the 'Aha' moment arrives.

The other I label the ‘Picasso Type’. This is the ‘random accidental’ new thing type. This happens when the ‘creative’ is not necessarily thinking deeply about anything. They are absorbing information from their environment, somewhat randomly, paying attention, sitting in a garden, taking a nature walk, perhaps taking notes as ideas pop into their head. Then, when sitting in front of a canvas they decide for the first time to mix this colour with that other colour they never really liked, they wave their brush this way instead of that, and lo and behold a work of art is born. Or when writing the first words of a poem (the concept for which they got from the funny looking tree in the woods), an odd word that doesn’t fit with any other words they wrote so far jumps into their head, and they write it down anyway, and they decide to leave it there, and all the other good poets in the world are amazed at their brilliance (insert wink emoji here).

Both types involve connection; the deliberate or accidental or random connection and/or combination and/or metaphorical comparison of two or more pieces of information (ideas, symbols, emotions, sound, touch, or smell) that were not connected and/or combined or compared in a particular way before, resulting in a new piece of information, that may or may not be related to the previously aforementioned pieces of information. The two or more pieces of information may or may not have been new to the ‘creative’, but the connection and/or new combination and/or new comparison is. The moment this conscious connection/combination/comparison occurs, or the moment when a related new idea emerges, is the moment of inspiration. AHA!

Cobbling together my thoughts and insights, and the thoughts and insights of our greatest thinkers and artists, I have ascertained that the creative process requires four main ingredients:

- The ‘creator’ (or group of ‘creators’) who is themselves a unique creation. As a unique creation, the ‘creator’s’ potential to create something new is innate.
- Input. An environment from which the ‘creator’ absorbs knowledge, information, and experience.

- Energy.
- Conscious and ‘sub’ conscious processing (incubation-connection).