Perspectives on Creativity: Volume 2

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For John & Joan, who set me on this path.

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PREFACE

This book, like the first volume, represents a subset of the work presented at the *Perspectives on Creativity* conference held at Holy Family University. The keynote address of the 2010 conference, given by Mark Runco, was entitled "Perspectives on Creativity: Controversies and Commonalities." As I read and edited this volume, I noted more commonalities among the chapters than I did controversies, and the commonalities were even more striking given that the chapters were written by individuals from extremely diverse fields of study. For example, the relationship between psychological functioning and creativity is addressed in (at least) two chapters, 8 and 12. Forgeard (chapter 12) reviews evidence showing the influence of mood state on creativity and Charles and colleagues (chapter 8) present research on creativity in psychotic individuals. Both chapters have an empirical base but the former looks at creativity in nonclinical populations, the latter in individuals in intensive treatment for schizophrenia. Forgeard's chapter takes what could be considered a cognitive perspective while Charles's takes a psychoanalytic perspective. Ultimately, both chapters arrive at the same conclusion—that the creative process is significantly influenced by our psychological state—but they take very different roads to get there.

I hope, as you read, that you will see the bridges across chapters, the parallels, the similarity of conclusions, and the commonalities that exist despite the differences in disciplinary backgrounds of the writers, in approach, and in style.

The nature of creativity and how it can be cultivated

In this first section, we have two chapters by creative writers (Moore and Packard) and a chapter written by an artist (Rosen). All three chapters outline activities, practices, habits, and general stances the authors have found useful in their own creative work and in working with other individuals to enhance their creativity. The similarities between the chapters are numerous, from the discussions of how to find inspiration to the need for self-discipline to the need to resist the lure of cell phones and the internet and their (potentially) detrimental effects on creative focus. Packard emphasizes the need for discipline and focused hard work while

Rosen encourages brainstorming and "wandering," a kind of free association that allows creative ideas to flow naturally. Moore takes a middle road, acknowledging the need for structure and discipline, but also giving a nod to the everyday, unexpected experiences that can spark creativity, such as overhearing a conversation in a train station.

Although these chapters present suggestions that seem intended for pursuits within the arts, the practices described will be useful to individuals from all areas of study (including the sciences) who want to give structure to their creative process in order to augment their productivity. Scientific researchers, too, can benefit from ways to discover inspiration, and from learning to balance self-discipline with brainstorming and free association.

What can we learn from creative individuals?

The second section of the book, perhaps more than any other, underscores the diversity of the authors. In chapter 4, Wood and colleagues discuss the impact of different cognitive approaches on creative output. While not a study of creative individuals as we typically think of them (e.g., painters, musicians), this empirical research makes an important contribution to the field of in that it explains ways to support or encourage creativity in the workplace, where creative problem-solving is crucial to innovation, and the conclusions from this research are applicable to all creative endeavors.

Curtiss shares a very personal account of what she has learned about creativity from her own work as an artist. This chapter is almost a self-case study in which Curtiss takes an introspective look at her creative process and extrapolates principles that she offers as suggestions to others working within any field that requires creativity.

In chapter 6, Kupper, a French professor, presents the case of writer Albert Cohen and discusses the relationship of creativity to estrangement. Is creativity motivated by estrangement? Do they have reciprocal influences on each other? How might the process of creating diminish personal estrangement? Kupper considers these questions in the context of Cohen's work.

On the therapeutic nature of creativity

Hagert begins the third section with her perspective on conducting therapy with creative individuals. She explains common motivators for seeking therapy, goals for therapeutic work, and offers case studies from her years of practice with creative clients. In chapter 8, Charles and

colleagues offer an empirical study based within their practice with psychotic clients. Their findings, along with Hagert's observations, refute the romantic notion that "madness" is a necessary (and beneficial) component of creativity. Roccaforte's phenomenological study of artists stems from her work as a therapist and I think she, Hagert, and Charles would agree that psychological dysfunction is neither inherent in creative individuals, nor particularly advantageous to the creative process. Echoing my perspective on the chapters in section one, the suggestions that Roccaforte presents are applicable across creative pursuits (regardless of the content domain), including scientific work. Charles (in chapter 10) concludes this section with a personal account of the power of creativity to heal. Both she and Curtiss (chapter 5) share their stories of how the creative process helped them cope with, and work through, traumatic events in their own lives.

On a side note, I couldn't help making a connection between Charles's depot collages in chapter 10 and the train and tunnel drawings by Martín Ramírez, presented in Atkin's chapter in the first volume of this series. Is there something about the images of trains and train stations that are a sort of archetype—a journey to wellness, perhaps? A journey through the dark places in one's psyche? It would be interesting to discover whether train imagery is common in art therapy settings.

Creativity, cognition and mood

The chapters in the last section of this volume attempt to shed light on areas of study that are filled with ambiguous findings. Cerruti and Wilkey tease apart when the participation of our verbal system enhances, and when it detracts from, creativity. Forgeard "unpacks" the very complex findings related to the impact of mood on creativity. Finally, Coyle addresses the debate about whether visually impaired and blind individuals can participate meaningfully in the arts. Each of these three chapters represents a balanced treatment of the questions at hand and uses empirical evidence to support its conclusions. They also underscore that research in the field of creativity is by no means black and white. Although there are many commonalities, there do still exist controversies. These chapters point to the need for researchers to ask the right questions and to frame their conclusions in the proper context so as not to further muddy the waters in terms of our understanding of how best to nurture creativity.

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PART I:

ON THE NATURE OF CREATIVITY: WHAT IS IT AND HOW CAN IT BE CULTIVATED?

CHAPTER ONE

FINDING INSPIRATION WHEN YOU NEED IT: HOW TO TURN THE EVERYDAY INTO CREATIVE FUEL

LIZ MOORE, M.F.A.

Because I have made it part of my job to teach creative writing, I should probably be braver about doing just that. But whenever, in the past, I have set out to instruct, to give general advice on How To Be a Writer, I've gotten stage fright; the possibilities are so infinite, and I am so—finite. When forced to speak in generalities, I tend to produce advice on what *not* to do rather than what *to* do. To my undergraduate students, at the start of each semester, I give a list that I call "Liz Moore's Rules for Fiction." It aims to preemptively address some of the most common problems I see in student writing ("Pick a subject that's small enough to expand on"; "Telling us what color a character's eyes are tells us nothing about the character"; "If you are going to write about vampires, they must not resemble Edward Cullen, and you must not spell *vampires* with a *Y").* It's much easier to treat writing on a case-by-case basis, as I'm able to do in workshop settings.

This, however, is not a writing workshop. And because I don't know you, or what your interests are, I'm hesitant to talk about what I do when I actually sit down at my desk to work—for all I know, you are the second coming of Donald Barthelme, and what you really want to produce are stories about magical, city-encompassing balloons (which have historically eluded me, from a writing standpoint).

Acknowledging, then, the impossibility of giving general advice on how to actually write, I'm going to spend a bit of time on how to find the inspiration to write. Ideally, these sources of inspiration, which have worked for me in the past, will allow you to point yourself in the direction of whichever creative outlets you prefer—legal outlets, of course, being preferable to illegal outlets.

And, finally, a note: although my chosen field is creative writing, I believe there are certain similarities that stretch across all creative forms that require, essentially, producing something from nothing. The visual artists, composers, writers, choreographers, and even scientific researchers I have met have often described to me their constant search for inspiration. Periods marked by a lack of it are dreary and sometimes frequent. Throughout this article, I'll be focusing on my own quest to find inspiration as a writer, but the methods I suggest are likely to be applicable to other arts and the sciences as well.

Eavesdropping[1]

I'm going to be very honest. I'm a terrible eavesdropper—*terrible*, here, meaning skilled. It's almost impossible for me not to eavesdrop. If I hear a particularly interesting conversation, I'll go out of my way to follow it: turning down streets that aren't on my route, planting myself next to fascinating-looking strangers in cafeterias, sitting one row behind or in front of other passengers on a bus if they've begun an interesting conversation while waiting in line. Is this unethical? I don't think so—I'd call it perhaps impolite, at the worst. I never repeat names or identifying characteristics, of course, nor do I eavesdrop on anyone but strangers—in case you had a vision of me pressing a tin cup to a thin wall in a friend's home. To reassure myself, I focus on the reverence with which I approach a good conversation. To me, a good conversation is like a short story; and often, the short stories I've written have come out of conversations I've overheard.

I'll give you an example. I lived in Brooklyn for a long while, and I generally wrote in a particular café. My writing schedule varied; mainly I went during the evening, but I went one Friday afternoon and noticed a group of young men who were huddled in one little corner of the place, discussing something intently. I saw them there again on a different Friday afternoon; this time, I intentionally sat next to them—and I was privy to one of the best conversations I've ever had the pleasure of overhearing.

The young men were playing Dungeons and Dragons, a game about which I have no particular expertise. To write a story about, or including, Dungeons and Dragons, would have required a great deal of research on my part, and probably still wouldn't have felt quite right.

I work on a laptop, and so I was able to discreetly open a new document and transcribe as much of their conversation as I could. Here's

[1] Different than "wiretapping." More legal.

one of my favorite moments, between three of the young men—one of whom, B, was new to the group:

A: What's your move, hombre?
B: Could I bring up my intelligence?
A: You could spend an extra 50 points to bring up your intelligence if you so desire.
C: If you so desire.
B: It’s 10 for every single point?
A: It's 10, my friend. For every point.
C: Welcome!
B: It pains me.
A: Pain is beauty.

I live for exchanges like this one. I live for the earnestness of them, the good-naturedness of them, the passionate conviction, the casual use of insider jargon, the unusual syntax that I could not possibly have discovered through research alone. Moments like these make me fall in love with language, and with humanity—with anyone who has a passion, and pursues it.

The final time I went, one of the members of the group struck up a conversation with me. I asked him about what they were doing and he patiently and graciously explained to me the rules of the game—many of which I had picked up, by that point, already. I told him I'd been watching them and that it looked fun. "We'll come with a blank character sheet for you next time," he said.

This is the final line of dialogue that now exists in the document I called "Dungeons and Dragons" in the folder I named "Conversations."

I didn't see the group again after that, though I returned one Friday—but I did write a short story about the world of RPGs (role-playing games—a term that, yes, I had to look up). The hours I spent listening served, conveniently, as both inspiration and research.

I've overheard sad conversations, as well, and disturbing ones. A great line of dialogue is invaluable, and whenever I hear one it runs through my head like a song until I have a chance to write it down. Over the years, many of them have made their way into my fiction.

Character sketches

If transcribing conversations forces you to rely on your ears for inspiration, writing character sketches requires your eyes. Both exercises have convinced me of the importance of always carrying a notebook, or a

phone, or any small portable device that will allow you to quickly capture what would otherwise be hard to remember.

I jot down a character sketch when I see a character. It sounds circular, but some people call out to be remembered. They don't just walk into sight; they enter, stage right. I am guilty of constructing elaborate back-stories for people whom I've never met—particularly those who seem out of place in some way, or those who conjure in me a feeling of pathos[2]. As subtly as I can, I'll take out my notebook and describe the person in question—sometimes allowing myself to venture into speculation, other times forcing myself to stick strictly to the facts.

Here's what I wrote in my journal on April 24, 2009, at the end of a trip to Philadelphia:

> At 30th Street Station, waiting to go back to New York. A woman across from me, 40, tiny, is wearing yellow pants. She's by herself. She's nervous. She's talking on the phone, one arm wrapped about herself tightly, the opposite elbow balancing on it, her cell phone to her ear. She has a perfect-looking suitcase and her shoes are perfect-looking. "He was fine, he was fine," she is saying to somebody. "I don't know if he liked me or not."

Although I didn't write anything else down, I can still remember this woman vividly: her suitcase eclipsed her in size, and was red, and she kept extending one leg and gently pointing a toe toward the floor, as if she had once been a ballet dancer.

She was a story unto herself. There was a story in her presence, in the way she was dressed, in her nervous demeanor, her perfect hair, in the two lines of dialogue I was able to catch over the din of the station. The paragraph I wrote down would later serve as inspiration for a story I wrote that I called "Nothing, No One."

It begins:

> Once, on a late call, I asked him "Why do you do this?" and he said, "I don't, I never do. You're my first," he said, and I wanted to tell him the truth about me but I didn't. "I don't either; you're my first too." That's what I said. I was picturing him the way I picture all of them: broad-shouldered, obscure, smoking cigarette after cigarette, his face turned away from mine. Before I meet someone I ask myself: can he take care of me? And I try to imagine him cradling me in his arms, literally, one arm behind my back, one beneath my legs, both hands clasped together on the other side so I feel that I am tight inside a little case. I want this! All I want is

[2] I'll explore this idea later; it's an important one.

> this—to be cradled tightly. I thought he had it in him, I really did. His voice on the phone was deep and warm as a priest's. I heard in it that he was a good man, one who was looking to get right.

The story continued with the narrator taking a trip to visit a man, whom she'd never before met, in Philadelphia. It ended with her in a train station, waiting to go home again.

Places

I once met a woman whose hobby was geocaching, which can be roughly described as a high-tech version of scavenger-hunting, in which participants use global positioning devices to hide "treasures" in locations both mundane and remote, and then work to find each other's hidden stashes. The woman in question had left a camera near her geocache, and encouraged those who found it to take a picture with the camera, and to leave some information about themselves. Upon developing the film, she bemoaned the fact that it was only non-Americans who thought to take pictures of their natural surroundings; "Americans always take pictures of themselves," she said, "or of their companions."

I must be very American, then. It is probably unsurprising, at this point, given that I have already told you about my somewhat-creepy spying habit, that my favorite pieces of visual art have always been portraits. In general, I'm much more interested in people than in landscapes, and this extends to my writing as well. Although I do conceptualize the settings of my stories at some point, the characters always come first. The settings into which I place them develop secondarily, and only out of necessity.

That said, I believe that particular places have the power to be excellent sources of inspiration and havens of productivity. I divide these particular places into two categories, but both categories share certain characteristics: namely, phonelessness and internetlessness (no, those are not real words. Yes, they should be). Both phonelessness and internetlessness are increasingly rare and therefore, in my opinion, increasingly valuable. Last year I had a writing residency that included an office. The organization providing me with the office was apologetic at first, because the space was not equipped with wireless internet access. "We're working on getting it installed," they said. I begged them not to.

I have internet access everywhere I go—on my phone, even. I get so much more writing done when I'm working on a computer without internet access, and yet I have so little willpower when it comes to *not* surfing the internet while writing, that I have had to resort to a sort of electronic

babysitter for myself. There is an application called "Freedom," invented by an ingenious man named Fred Stutzman, that one can download for free and that will, once launched, block internet access for a time specified by the user. The only way to override Freedom (whom I have come to think of as a sort of strict-but-benevolent governess) is to actually reboot one's computer, which generally feels too pathetic to do. Simply not having internet access to begin with is, I think, much more dignified—so if you find a place without internet access, treasure it.

The same advice applies to phoneless places. I'm generally referring to cell phones, though land-lines can also be intrusive. But cell phones, with their many functions, are nefarious. I turn mine to silent when I'm working and bury it deeply in whatever bag I'm carrying. And then toss the bag across the room.

Now that we have established that both phonelessness and internetlessness are essential components of any place that's meant to be inspirational, let us divide inspirational places into the two categories that have historically been most useful to me, or that have caused me to be the most productive.

Beautiful places

The more obvious of the two categories, beautiful places are just what they seem: locations that are riddled with physical beauty. Most artists' and writers' colonies are founded on the idea that natural beauty enhances inspiration and productivity. The MacDowell Colony, for example, is located in the rural Monadnock region of New Hampshire; Yaddo is located on a scenic estate in Saratoga Springs, New York.

To this definition, I would add the idea that physical beauty can be un-natural, as well—some of the best writing I have ever done, I did in an apartment with an incredible view of the Manhattan skyline.

I call some places *holy*, and by this I don't mean deeply religious—I mean places that feel sacred, somehow. Places that are buzzing with memories or emotion. I can think of a few places like this to which I am lucky enough to have access—the aforementioned apartment, owned by a friend; a woodsy cabin, first purchased by my grandparents in the 1950s, that has been a sort of family homestead; a suburban home with a beautiful garden and green backyard—and I find that when I visit them for long enough, I'm usually moved to write.

Hideously ugly places

I would also like to make a pitch for ugliness as a terrific enhancer of productivity. The same phoneless, internetless office I received last year, as part of the residency, was terrifically ugly: it was old, with walls that had been whitewashed so many times, so hastily, that great globs of white paint created little accidental sculptures over long-buried light switches and outlets. A great deal of refuse had been left behind by the last occupant—boxes and old furniture—and I wasn't quite sure if he or she would be back to claim it, so I pushed it into a corner and left it alone. There were two windows, but they faced an alleyway and a brick wall. The lights overhead were fluorescent.

Nevertheless, I finished a novel in this office. The appeal of the ugly place, I think, was in its lack of distractions. When I set to work, I didn't spend much time gazing out the window—there was nothing to gaze at. Instead, I worked steadily and well, for hours on end.

Music

For me, music and writing are inextricably linked. For one thing, I play and write music, and sometimes I write *about* music (my first novel was set in the world of New York City's [dying] record industry). But even when I'm writing something that has nothing to do with music, I generally listen to something while I work, and I find that it increases both my endurance and my inspiration.

Generally, I listen to music without words. Maybe it's my eavesdropping habit that's done it to me, but I find myself incapable of not focusing on lyrics when lyrics are there to focus on. Beyond this stipulation, what I listen to depends on what I'm writing.

When I was working on a sort of nostalgic short story about a resort in the 1960s, I listened, over and over again, to the song "A Summer Place," by Percy Sledge and His Orchestra.

When I was working on a novel—which turned out to be a false start, but that's an aside—about a somewhat villainous, disturbed woman, I listened to a record of tangos by the Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla, which seemed somehow appropriately devious.

When I was working on a personal narrative recalling an early memory I had of my father, who has played classical piano for most of his life, I listened to Maurizio Pollini's recordings of the several Chopin Nocturnes I could recall him playing, downstairs, as I fell asleep at night.

I'm a firm believer in the idea that music affects mood. Therefore, I generally try to pick pieces of music that I think match the mood I'm aiming for in my writing. If I'm not careful, a comedy can suddenly become tragedy, or a tragedy can suddenly become farce. But the idea that music can infect writing can actually be a useful one, if harnessed and used as inspiration.

An exercise I have my students do sometimes begins with having them pick three different people, places, or things to describe. I'll then play three different pieces of music, and ask them to describe each selection in turn. At the end, we talk about the ways in which each piece affected their mood as they wrote, or what it made them think of or remember. Sometimes, for me at least, listening to a particular piece can unlock a memory that had been buried for years.

Pathos

The final source of inspiration I'd like to discuss also, in some ways, encompasses the rest. *Pathos* has several denotations and even more connotations. It is probably most commonly thought of as one of Aristotle's three modes of persuasion, along with *ethos* and *logos.* According to Aristotle (1991), a speaker can effectively persuade his audience of something by appealing to the audience's sense of emotion, or pity, though pity doesn't quite express everything expressed by pathos. Pity, emotion, compassion, empathy: all of these and more are expressed by the Greek word.

Of course, we have also absorbed the word into our English vocabulary, and we use it casually in a slightly different way. If a situation can be described as pathetic, then it elicits pathos. If you pass a little girl on the street and she is shivering because she has no coat—pathos. If a group of poor schoolchildren from an underfunded school raise, through sheer determination, all the money they need to go on a school trip, and then the money is stolen—pathos. If a 90-year-old gentleman in a nursing home waits all day for his daughter, who has promised to visit him, and she never shows up—pathos. Gogol's short story "The Overcoat" is one long exercise in pathos, as is William Trevor's short story "Mrs. Silly."

These are all very good examples of pathos, but they don't completely illustrate how I use the word when I am trying to describe when, why, and how I am inspired to write. In fact, I think there is no word that I have come across in any language that fully meets this need. Therefore, I have repurposed pathos: I now use it to describe any situation that is

emotionally complex enough to elicit in me a desire to write—piteous or not.

For me, pathos has to do with a feeling of interconnectedness between all humans.

I have come across one quote that best describes this feeling, and that best illustrates the importance and the power of good writing. Although I primarily write prose, this is about poetry—nevertheless, I think it applies to all forms of writing, and perhaps to art outside of writing, as well.

It was said by the Italian poet Salvatore Quasimodo, and quoted in an article in the *New York Times:* "Poetry is the revelation of a feeling that the poet believes to be interior and personal [but] which the reader recognizes as his own" (Bracker, 1960, p. 47).

In this quote, the poet describes, more precisely than I could, what I am (inaccurately, out of necessity) calling pathos: the feeling that simultaneously inspires me to write and that I hope to transmit to others when I'm writing. It is a feeling of surprising universality, of comforting familiarity. It is coming across a friend in a stranger. It is what compels me to see the good in the foreign. It is, I think, the particular power of art: to jarringly unify, to startlingly unite.

Conclusion

I take inspiration from that which shocks me into observation. Sometimes what I observe elicits sadness in me; sometimes great happiness, usually a mix of the two. Whatever the case may be, it is through closely observing humanity that I find the best possible inspiration for my writing. Eavesdropping, sketching characters, dwelling in a place that other humans have carefully created, and listening to music that, in itself, has been written to connect to other humans: all of these things are part of my never-ending search for pathos, for the familiar in the strange.

Of course there is no universal formula for inspiration, writerly or otherwise. But I have found, over the years, that the sources I have described above are able to move something in me when I'm feeling intractable. My hope is twofold: that they work for you, too, if you're searching, and that you're able to develop and remember your own sources of inspiration. The one commonality I have found, in talking to many writers, is that all inspiration is rooted in observation. Keeping your senses sharp and aware and being able to see the unique in the mundane are, in my estimation, essential to any creative pursuit.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CURIOSITY HABIT: PROVISIONS FOR CREATIVE JOURNEYS EVERY DAY

DIANE ROSEN, M.A.

> It flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity she ran across the field after it just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge. Down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again. (Carroll, 1946, p. 4)

Introduction

Curiosity is common to all, yet few risk diving heedlessly into the unknown in pursuit of it. Traditionally regarded as troublesome, curiosity is a disposition that has been discouraged more often than not. In the sixth century BC, proof of the infinite nature of irrational numbers left the Pythagoreans fear-struck, and they imposed the death penalty for divulging this secret knowledge. Similar warnings are encoded in the familiar myth of Pandora, the biblical story of Eve, religious admonitions such as St. Augustine's "God fashioned hell for the inquisitive" (fifth century AD), and in widely popular expressions like "curiosity killed the cat." Conventional wisdom, it seems, responds to assaults on the rational worldview by stigmatizing curiosity.

Inherently linked with curiosity, creativity, too, has often been viewed as a potentially dangerous indulgence in unbridled emotion**.** Nineteenth-century French theorists, for example, conflated Eve's curiosity with the seductions of color. Exhibiting classic Cartesian dualism, they valorized the sublime rationality, order, and control of "masculine line," while denigrating color's allegedly feminine qualities of emotionality and chaotic sensuality. The triumph of color over line, they feared, would

signal the ruin of painting, “just as humanity was betrayed by Eve” (Kendall, 1996, p. 69). Though our social and political reality is still often circumscribed by established order, fixed hierarchies and situated meanings, today’s repertoire of thought encompasses far more varied and flexible approaches to understanding the world than rigid dualities or absolute truth.

Alice’s journey through Wonderland is a disarmingly profound exemplar of such a flexible mode of seeing and knowing. Surprised by the random sighting of something out of the ordinary, she is galvanized into action by her “burning curiosity.” She dares to follow this intriguing oddity into unfamiliar territory, experiencing unforeseen adventures in an upside-down, inside-out land of paradox, at once both voyage and destination. Here, the rule is no rules. Not either/or but both/and, events are defined equally by accident and intention, head and heart, sense and nonsense. Which leads me to suggest a parallel between fundamental aspects of the creative process in any domain, and the mutually informing characteristics of Wonderland: observation, curiosity, chance, risk-taking, paradox, and seeking/exploring. Their interactions challenge the merely possible and generate myriad seemingly impossible possibilities. Somewhere between Alice’s humdrum world and Wonderland, curiosity mediates what was, what is and what could be.

In the ardent chase that is any creative activity, then, curiosity is a necessary compass for navigating places of heightened uncertainty. This article explores how the habit of curiosity—regarded as a universal impulse to seek, wonder and wander—provides for realizations of creative potential every day. Empowered thus—and here we will touch on the role of education—we can begin to peel back restrictive layers of custom, welcome the unexpected, challenge assumptions, and trust a more open way of seeing, a perspective which itself is creativity.

Creative process

As a painter, I have always worked primarily from an intuitive stance, avoiding intellectualization of the process. Compositions are spurred by curiosity, and proceed as unmapped adventures wherein any preexisting component may be rattled, reimagined, redefined. Seeking as yet unrealized connections, my shifting thoughts and feelings catalyze and interact with recollections, immediate circumstances, and the unfolding work itself until, in a blend of deliberate and random, a measure of cumulative presence is attained. Paradoxically, newly ordered/constructed meaning can emerge only if disorder/destruction and uncertainty are

allowed a reciprocal role in this process. The work comes to exist not as an end in itself, but as the material or conceptual trajectory through time of a particular search for answers to half-formed questions.

When I moved to Paris for a French Government Fellowship in painting, issues of art theory and practice rose to a more conscious level. I became immersed in Dada and Surrealist views about contradiction and paradox as more than just playful means, but also a creative goal. Marcel Duchamp, for example, in one of many provocative works, turned a urinal upside down, titled it *Fountain* and displayed it in a 1917 gallery exhibit. This, he said, was merely an attempt to "create a new idea for an object that everyone thought they could identify. Everything can be something else" (quoted in Dachy, 2006, p. 73). But his modest sounding goal belies a thoroughly revolutionary and subversive aesthetic, one that fundamentally changed the world's conceptions about art. Openly scoffing at established conventions of beauty and the role of an artist, he and other Dadaists reinvented the mechanisms of creation and thought, and turned the very meaning of art on its head. No longer an elite cadre of the gifted few, artists were those who probed and constructed new meaning by disrupting the chains of habitual, everyday associations. From this perspective, the creative person, process, product, and ultimately viewers' responses as well, are more about questions that provoke, rather than answers that allay, the anxieties of uncertainty. Curiosity, thought, and imagination were tethered nowhere and might therefore be at work everywhere; free of predetermined definitions and directions, they could travel in all directions.

In his *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Breton (1986), too, stressed the importance of liberating the imagination, "by means of which the human explorer will be able to carry his investigations much further, authorized as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities" (p. 10). Beginning to shake off the dominance of a rational worldview, Surrealists in the early twentieth century infused creative imagination anew with the power to disturb, perturb, and dislocate expectations, and open up new avenues of exploration. Their alogical compositions juxtaposed unrelated objects, breaking the chains of familiar associations and replacing them with temporal, spatial, and psychological ambiguity. Stripped of prior context, everyday things and events took on new, unpredictable meanings that allowed them to be seen as if for the first time. This focus on the improvisatory gesture, which often turns out to matter in ways that could not have been foreseen, led me to reflect on a similar openness to chance in my own creative practice: namely, the interrelationship of curious wondering, playful seeking, and random

wandering. These elements hold, as well, broader implications for creativity across disciplines.

All who invent new art, science, or a just a freshly conceived approach to ordinary tasks, like preparing a meal, are engaged in creatively interpreting aspects of their lives. It is a transformative process of continually querying (What if? Why not?) and actively exploring. Unlike eminent or unambiguous creativity, these everyday creative explorations constitute a broad swath of human endeavor. Runco (2009) suggests that

> creative things all depend on original interpretations of experience. The experience may be scientific (as in the case of Einstein), visual and emotional (as in the case of Picasso), or even day-to-day….Creativity, then, boils down to a kind of freedom of thought. ("Candidate for a Creativity Universal" section)

This tendency to interpret memory and experience is universal. What makes each creative journey unique, though, is the random, meandering and interactive way that bits of everyday reality are reevaluated and freshly construed. Thus, small-c or personal creativity takes us far beyond issues of talent or domain-specific knowledge and into realms of infinite possibility. To effectively live through the vagaries of these curiosity-inspired journeys, to unravel and reweave meaning from the first obscure tug of a subjective urge, we must be inclined to wander freely through intuited time, space, and meaning.

My visual art process will be considered briefly here, not for its own sake, but as it may exemplify this open-ended perspective, the attitude of wondering and freely wandering that underlies any creative process.

The idea for *Undertow* began with wondering about various ways to represent pairs of contrasting figures. I was working on a series of paintings intended to graphically question dichotomies such as true/false, internal/external, fixed/uncertain, etc. Curious about reflections and doubles, but as they occur in nature, not in mirrors, I happened upon the word *undertow*, a current below the surface of the sea moving in the opposite direction to the surface current, and figuratively an implicit quality, emotion, or influence underlying the superficial aspects of something. Contrasting reality/reflection, above/below, and so on, provided an alternative dual image that would hopefully evoke for viewers the questions that originally surprised and interested me.