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WORLDMAKING: PSYCHOLOGY AND THE IDEOLOGY OF CREATIVITY

MICHAEL HANCHETT HANSON

Worldmaking: Psychology and the Ideology of Creativity

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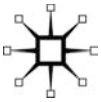

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For two departed friends.

Joe Wood, a master of the word and instigator of change:
Like many he touched, I remain inspired by
his generous spirit
and intellectual courage.

Luciana Steinzor, who provoked, challenged and
supported this book.
She was a wise psychologist, philosopher and friend.

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Preface: Teaching and Learning

'I want my students to be creative!'

I hear that often. As the director of a concentration of study in creativity at a leading education school, every year I meet teachers, administrators and researchers who want to promote my specialization. In discussing classroom applications, the graduate students in my classes are in the eye of a storm. One of the most enduring themes of creativity studies since the mid-twentieth century has been the call for education to instill, nurture or teach creativity. Responding to that call, though, has proven largely elusive.

This book is about the history of theories of creativity and the need for deeper appreciation of the controversies those theories raise. Even though the focus is not limited to education, my own understanding of these controversies has arisen from helping educators think about the practical implications of the concept of creativity. Before discussing theories and philosophy, I want to outline the reasons that I have come to believe this analysis is important.

The graduate students who take my courses tend to be sophisticated, committed and confident. But what do they mean when they say they want their students to be creative? Do they want their students to grow up to be famous shapers of history like Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso or Steve Jobs?

They hesitate at that question. I see on their faces the troubling thought of being Einstein's teacher. If they know the story of his education, there is also the disturbing possibility that they may have already taught this kind of brilliant but average-appearing student without knowing it.

If we want to inspire students to become luminaries of history, does our vision include Newton's mean-spirited competitiveness and obsessions with alchemy and heretical theology? Einstein's solitary nature? Picasso's notorious philandering? Jobs's demanding personality?

Not those parts. Just the *creativity*.

Can we slice and dice people like that? Do people develop revolutionary points of view without spending time alone? Do they try to bend the world to their vision without accompanying egotism and self-indulgence? Newton was famously vindictive toward anyone he saw as a competitor (White, 1993/1999). Might not strong-willed egotism and thin skin go along with revolutionizing the world's understanding of

mathematics and physics, though? Do Einstein's famous thought experiments, which were key to his conception of relativity, not make sense for a man who liked to live in his own thoughts, relatively undisturbed (Gardner, 1993)? Would Picasso's art have come from a man without an extraordinarily and unconventionally sensual life? Jobs had a strong vision of what consumers needed. Might not such confidence come from a man who demanded his own way?

Well, the 'great ones' may be a bit odd, but most students will not grow up to be Newton or Picasso.

So, should we be teaching students to pursue interesting, creative work but not necessarily try to shake the world? Maybe publish some writing or play in a band? Consider Mack Jamison, the pseudonym that Paul Torrance (2002) used for a fourth grade student who participated in what has become a 50-year longitudinal study. Mack went on to publish science fiction and compose and perform music in his twenties. His primary school teachers already recognized that he was very creative. By the fourth grade his illustrations of dinosaurs were of professional quality. He liked drawing, and he practiced drawing. A lot. He drew dinosaurs everywhere and all day – including on his desk during math lessons and English lessons and so on. Is this the ideal creative student?

At this point the graduate students in my own classes may get frustrated. Why do I not understand a simple idea like creativity?

As it turns out, some of these educators think of creativity in the ways research has found teachers tend to conceptualize creative students. Although attitudes have shifted over time, educators have long been in favor of creativity but have not associated it with the degree of unconventional thinking that creativity researchers have envisioned (see overview of research in Runco, 2007; see also Cropley, 2010a). Creativity researchers and practitioners have bemoaned what they see as educators' lack of understanding of true creativity or poor implementation of pedagogical practices to promote creativity (for example, Beghetto, 2010; Guilford, 1950; Nickerson, 2010; Richards, 2010b). In a limited way, I concur with the researchers. The concept of creativity may not be particularly useful in seeking to develop the ideal student. After all, the constructs of motivation, spontaneity and cooperation are more precise. In relation to the concept of creativity, the difficulties need to be addressed head-on. As an educational researcher who observes classrooms, I would not wag my finger at teachers who do not automatically adopt the methods the creativity researchers have developed. While it is possible to teach the rules of any given subject *and* provide a place to explore breaking those rules within the same set of lessons or over

the course of a year, it is a daunting challenge. The task is particularly complex when students in a single class represent a wide range of understanding of the rules. Simultaneously teaching rules and how to break them is even more difficult to institute across an entire educational system. Then comes the issue of evaluation. How does the teacher or principal or administrator know when they have succeeded? As we will see, psychology does not agree on a single definition of creativity that can be easily applied to classrooms. As a result, experts usually recommend complex assessments that involve multiple forms of evaluation or matching different forms of evaluation to different situations (for example, Kaufman, Plucker & Baer, 2008; Starko, 2014). I do not find it surprising that already overburdened educators have resisted a concept for which there is no agreed upon educational definition and, therefore, requires a series of additional, complex evaluations.

I do not advise teachers to throw out the old ideal student model, although I do encourage them to expand the concept. I suspect that debate will shift soon. So far, much of the educational debate has focused only on the concept of the creative individual, a somewhat democratized version of the nineteenth century's view of the creative genius. As we will see, creativity theories increasingly are looking at group, social and historical dynamics – how people *participate* in creativity rather than *possess, express* or *exemplify* creativity. These concepts are not just the leading edge of theory but also views that match much of today's real-world living and working conditions. As it turns out, these newer theories may also fit the goals and processes of education more easily than the old individualist models.

Beyond the ideal student

From years of these conversations with graduate students, I have come to see that their interest in creativity goes well beyond any view of an ideal student. When they say, 'I want my students to be creative', these educators speak with a passion and urgency that seldom arise in discussions of critical thinking or problem solving. There is an assumption of happiness in the creativity aspiration, a comfort with change and confidence in self. Instilling creativity implies a promise of potential success – or at least economic survival – in the unpredictable future for which these teachers are trying to prepare their students.

The earnest hope and commitment of these educators, tinged with desperation, is moving. At the same time, this is where the scent of ideology comes into the air. How could such a vague concept, sometimes

undefined and sometimes over defined in contradictory ways, hold such magical power? How could creativity, whatever it is, be always good in all situations for everyone? What are we not saying when we invoke the concept of creativity and expect such wide-ranging, positive results? What debates are we avoiding? Whose interests are we serving, and what future are we trying to make?

These questions are central underlying themes in the analysis that follows. Questioning the idea of creativity as a path to happiness is a starting place. Whatever creativity is, it seems to involve thinking differently from others and going against prevailing wisdom. Is that the best way to achieve happiness, confidence or success? Certainly, creative work can change the world and enrich lives, but creative people are not necessarily happy. Later, we will review research on correlations between trauma and creative achievement, correlations between mood disorders and creative achievement, and correlations between antisocial behaviors and creativity.

Even as creativity is often seen as a path to general success, a relationship to resilience is also in mind. I have learned that the educators I teach often include a concept of healing within the idea of creativity. The creative person is somehow made whole as people might be in therapeutic uses of art or music or writing. In this case, though, the healing is for everyone, a shield of resilience for the pain – and often trauma – that teachers know is part of their students' lives. One year, a group of students in my course on theories of creativity developed a presentation about a range of very different people, including the puppeteer and designer Jim Henson, the jazz saxophonist and composer John Coltrane, the writer C. S. Lewis, and the poet and engraver William Blake (Costa, Gold, Griswold & Stark, 2002). The common thread that they found among such different types of work was 'creating new worlds'. They argued that these diverse people, living in different times and working in different mediums, created their own worlds. Through their work, these people made imaginary places that corresponded to their ways of thinking and experiencing life, places that were safe as well as richly detailed, beautiful and stimulating. The first inspiration for the use of 'worldmaking' in the title of this book came from that presentation. It was an articulation of the highly personal and varied motivations that can drive people as they make new meaning. The second inspiration, a more academic reference to the work of Nelson Goodman (1978, see Introduction), pertains to the general symbol use and ongoing meaning making in which all of us are always involved. In other words, worldmaking is both what people do as symbol-making animals and

an always-particularized quest to remake the world as a good place – safe, exciting and worthwhile – for self, group and/or community. Not surprisingly, important controversies arise with worldmaking: activities that are at once intensely personal and social, with personal happiness, social status and the shape of the future hanging in the balance.

Beyond education

In addition to teaching in a graduate school, I have a consulting practice that provides curriculum development and program evaluations. As in education, promoting creativity also carries deep implications for museums, community-based organizations and corporations. What is it to be human? To express or feel or make one's *self*? Is human nature essentially good to be freed through expression, essentially evil to be controlled through conventions, or always potentially both to be confronted through acts of creativity? What is it to think, where does thinking occur, and how long does it take? Is an idea something we can write on a flip chart or send to the world in a tweet? Is it a moment of insight, something people commit whole lives to developing, a complex collaboration with other people and with history, or all of the above? Is culture a cage we fight against, a cradle that lulls us into complacency, a monument we are building or a battlefield where we take stands? What is the future, and how is it determined? And what is value? Is it in the product or idea, or is it elsewhere? Is it stable, or is it complex and fluid, always dependent on perspective?

These questions are not new. The study of creativity has raised and wrestled with them in distinctive ways, however. Understanding these underlying controversies and tensions can help us appreciate the continually evolving concept of creativity. Ultimately, thinking about these issues from the vantage of creativity also offers a new slant on the controversies and tensions themselves.

Assignment

In conclusion, I want to suggest an activity for, you, the reader, as you think about the issues that this book addresses. Stay attuned to the uses of the words 'creative', 'creativity', 'innovative' and 'innovation' that you encounter. (Possible distinctions between 'creative' and 'innovative' are discussed in Chapter 1, but for now treat them as roughly equivalent.) You can think about the implied definitions of these terms in any given usage, but do not worry too much about definition. From

my own and my students' experiences, I predict that most usages will evoke an amalgam of concepts, such as self-actualization, development, wit, success, nonconformity, progress and so on. Some of the amalgams will more or less make sense, and some will imply confusing contradictions.

Rather than focus on definitions, pay attention to how these concepts *function* in the discourse. Again, I predict there will be variety. In each usage, though, the functions will be fairly clear. For example, the idea of creativity can be used as a license to stop, at least temporarily, focusing on right and wrong and be more expressive. (The kinds and amount of expression are usually defined by the sentences that come after 'Be creative'.) The concept of creativity is also used to draw lines between 'us' and 'them': us creative people versus the 'quants' or the 'suits', us serious professionals versus the creative types, the creative students versus the academic students and so on. This idea can also be a stand-in for hope or progress or ageism or technophilia. It can be used to deflect anger or blame. Do not be angry at the organization or economic system that has left you unemployed in mid-life after years of labor and learning. 'Re-create yourself!' These are just a few examples. Sensitivity to the variety of functions that the concept of creativity serves is an important step in appreciating the contributions of the theories we will be examining and the controversies they address.

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of many years in education, as student, consultant, colleague and professor. My own teachers have been extraordinary. My formal graduate education included direct work under Howard E. Gruber and John Broughton. Howie and John met when John came to America from England in the 1970s, and although their perspectives on theory diverged, their admiration for each other did not. My own thinking reflects profound influences from both. Many other important teachers have informed this book, including Yvonne Agazarian on group dynamics, Paul Griffin on creativity within identify formation and my father on the importance of philosophy, irony and skepticism.

There are many important colleagues whose perspectives on psychology, creativity and philosophy have been invaluable. Overall, my intellectual life owes a big debt to Jen Burns, Chris Higgins and Luciana Steinzor. Colleagues who have helped in discussing or reviewing parts of this particular book include Vlad Petre Glăveanu, Beth Hennessey, Chris Higgins, Mark Runco, Keith Sawyer, Alan Schwartz, Patricia Stokes, Robert Weisberg and Jack Martin (who serves as editor for this series). Also, a magnificently creative person, Tim Cusack, has been invaluable in copyediting, correspondence and manuscript preparation. So many of my other friends have provided support as I have worked on book. Most centrally, Aditya Mukerjee has provided the personal support and encouragement that can only come at home.

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I can trace specific ideas in this book back to every person listed above. Spoiler: a central controversy addressed in the pages ahead is the concept that one person produces a work. I am only a determined and, possibly, unusual curator on the topics covered in this book. The ideas have come from those listed above and many others, more broadly distributed and deeper in history.

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Introduction: Our Concept of Change

Humanity faces unprecedented social, economic, political and ecological challenges. Old ways have proven inadequate. Our problems call for new solutions. Today's Edisons, Ghandis, Curies and Picassos will be essential to making a sustainable future of prosperity and peace. Just as the world desperately needs creativity, our economy demands it. To participate and succeed in shaping the future everyone must be free to achieve his or her creative potential. Doing so will be not only good for the world but will also bring happiness and a sense of fulfillment as people exercise this most innately human aspect of their being.

While not from an actual text, this type of rhetoric will be familiar to anyone who reads creativity literature. Sometimes arguments focus more on world salvation or on personal development and expression or on workforce readiness, but this kind of optimism often serves as a discursive tool to frame and justify scientific research (for example, Csikszentmihalyi, 1996/1997; Gruber, 1989a; Guilford, 1950; May, 1974; Osborn, 1948; Rogers, 1954; Sawyer, 2012) as well as popular and applied tracts (for example, Bronson & Merriman, 2010; Howard, 2014; Petit, 2014; Robinson, 2011; Starko, 2005; Tharp & Reiter, 2003/2006), including political and economic discourse (see Chapter 1). The central elements of the argument are dissatisfaction with the present, fear of extension of current problems into the future, rejection of the old, optimism about the new, and empowerment of individuals to shape the future. This is a distinctly modern conceptualization of change and value that has gained momentum in the global economics of the postmodern world (Weiner, 2000). Calls for change are, of course, far from new. Parallel arguments in other times called for a sinful world to be saved by conversion, a superstitious world to be saved by science, or a dangerous world to be saved by conquest.

Our new idea

Before considering how we use the concept of creativity today, a broader historical context is helpful. 'Creativity' has not always influenced how we conceive both of ourselves and of change. People have always created things, from the prehistoric paintings on the walls of the caves at Lascaux to the pyramids in Egypt, Teotihuacan in Mesoamerica, the cathedrals of the European Middle Ages, and the Forbidden City in China. They did not necessarily think about the sources or implications of their works like we do, however. A psychological concept of creativity is relatively new, and the shift to a view of novelty that arises from the psyche affects our conception of individuals, their power, and their relation to history. More generally, the promotion of novelty for its own sake has not been a hallmark of most human civilizations.

Over the last few decades intellectual historians and creativity theorists have examined the development of the modern concept of creativity (for example, Mason, 2003; Pope, 2005; Runco & Albert, 2010; Weiner, 2000). The idea of creativity arose in Europe and America but even there only recently. In the ancient European world, inspiration and genius came from outside the individual and primarily served the power of kings, priests and the cultures they embodied. The *psyche* and/or self were not the sources of novelty, and self-expression was not usually encouraged. In fact, during the European Middle Ages the Christian Church reserved the concept of creativity for the divine. God created. People made things (Pope, 2005; Weiner, 2000). To contend that people created things would have been blasphemous.

Broad histories of an idea outline dominant cultural norms, and we have to assume there were always exceptions and complications. In general, though, it seems that today's concept of creativity was not necessary to build extraordinary civilizations that included art, architecture, literature and governmental systems in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, classical Greece, or medieval Europe. There was obviously novelty involved in developing and maintaining such distinctive and complex cultures, and good ideas had to be distinguished from bad, but the idea of creativity did not come into play.

During the European Renaissance people started calling artists and their works 'creative' as a reflection of the creative force of the Christian God in whose image people were believed to be made (Weiner, 2000). By the first decade of the nineteenth century, the word 'creativeness' had come into use, but new ideas were still viewed with at least as much suspicion as enthusiasm until the latter parts of that century

(Mason, 2003). According to Robert Paul Weiner (2000) and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first application of the word *creativity* to people in English appeared in 1875 and was used in a book about the history of British drama to describe Shakespeare. 'Creativity' spread to some other European languages during the early twentieth century but did not appear in most English dictionaries until after World War II.

In other words, with the rise of modernity and its emphasis on novelty as an intrinsic value (Gardner, 1993; North, 2013) also came the idea of creativity. From the late eighteenth through early twentieth centuries the idea of what it is to be creative expanded in concert with other concepts, practices and values also emerging at that time, such as individualism, culture, genius, progress and market economics (Pope, 2005; Weiner, 2000). That evolution hit a pivotal point in the coining of 'creativity' to encompass a type of trait, force and value. Since psychology took the lead in defining creativity in the mid twentieth century, a host of related traits, attitudes, skills and ideas have been investigated. These new additions include insight, motivation, talent, risk-taking, divergent thinking, play, collaboration and self-actualization, among others. Each of these components has been defined within, and contributed to, the broader metaphor of creativity as a psychological force in individuals that fuels their own development as well as the progress of groups and societies. In keeping with its lofty rhetoric, then, creativity is a big idea linked to powerful aspirations.

Functions of the concept

Skepticism is easy in response to the breadth of power attributed to the relatively new concept of creativity. The harder task is to appreciate the functions of this idea – *our* idea. What are the implications of our distinctive calls to the salvation of the enlivened, creative self, our belief in the progress of ever-accelerating improvements in technology, and our extension of creativity-driven economies to all corners of the globe? Why does the view of past, present and future that comes with the call to creativity seem so natural – indeed, inspiring – to most of us today? What does it do for us? What are the pros and cons, for whom and in what circumstances?

Questioning the *functions* of the concept of creativity is rare. Most research and debates have focused on definitions of creativity (trait, insight, decision, purpose and so on), location of creativity (in individuals, groups or social dynamics) or stimulants of / obstacles to creativity. Analysis of the functions of the idea does not eclipse the other research.

The techniques developed for divergent thinking (Chapter 2) can still be useful in idea generation; creative purposes can still organize lives (Chapter 6); and gatekeepers can still integrate novelty into existing domains (Chapter 7). Instead of replacing other analyses of creativity, examination of function adds explicit debate about fundamental issues and assumptions.

Analyzing the assumptions may then change the conceptual terrain of research. Some of the functions of the concept of creativity that we will encounter will not be in line with the prevailing rhetoric. Yes, creativity can organize and give a sense of value to a person's identity, but it can also make people feel anxious, insecure and inadequate. Creativity can contribute to an open, inclusive stance toward the world but can also be a position of alienation. Creativity can help drive economies but can also contribute to economic crises. It may help save the world but may also cause many unforeseen problems.

To consider the functions of the concept of creativity this investigation will use two methods. First, we will go through the history of a variety of psychological theories of creativity to understand the scientific discourse, evidence and controversies. This understanding is necessary to appreciate the explicit and implicit functions of the theories. Then we will consider the implications of the theories in light of work social constructivist philosophy[1] has done on some of the same issues during the same time period. Placing the social science theories in dialogue with parallel perspectives in philosophy will provide new insights on conventional beliefs about creativity – in other words, apply creativity tactics to the concept itself.

A network of technologies

The chapters that follow describe how various theories of creativity envision different types of people doing different kinds of things: varying visions of the human self that fit different goals about how people relate to their colleagues, communities and society at large. These functions correspond to a complex and growing set of psychosocial *technologies* that the various theories have defined, tested and elaborated – practices reflecting particular ideals, values and beliefs that people use to improve themselves and their worlds.

For example, consider this thought experiment. You are commissioned to help a community that, until recently, was relatively isolated. This community has extraordinary diversity in its population and many new opportunities, but its culture enforces gender roles and has a history of deep racial barriers. Its business groups have a near obsession

with organizational charts. You need to convince the members of this community to value diversity in many ways: entertain ideas that at first seem far-fetched, value contributions from people of different roles and ranks, come to feel comfortable working with people who seem different, and even come to appreciate aspects of their own thinking that may seem threateningly unconventional. If only they had some kind of custom or ritual that would loosen them up, instill these values, and also be enjoyable! Ideally, after completing this ritual, people should feel satisfied and renewed, believing that they had done something important. That 'something' might not be the diversity lessons that had been taught, which they may not have been so keen to learn. Therefore, the ritual should also support already deeply held beliefs in the community. Finally, a little touch of magic would be nice, just to get everyone excited.

Sounds like a tall order, unless the community was America in the 1950s and the ritual was brainstorming. When Alex Osborn (1948) introduced the concept, he was adapting practices he developed in advertising to broader corporate uses. The magic was the concept that people thinking together could come up with more good ideas than those same people working alone, a merging of minds. Years of research have shown that classic brainstorming – a group thinking of as many ideas as possible without judging them and then evaluating the list – does *not* lead to more and better ideas than the same group of people would have working alone (Nijstad, Diehl & Stroebe, 2003; Runco, 2007). Osborn himself did not advocate *replacing* individual work with group brainstorming and, over time, he dropped many of his early claims about the superiority of brainstorming (see Paulus & Brown, 2003). That evidence, however, has hardly dampened enthusiasm for an experience that most people find stimulating and perceive to be effective (Nijstad, Diehl & Stroebe, 2003). The implications of that experience, especially the part of the 'ritual' where judgment is deferred, include a wide range of attitudes about the potential value of unusual ideas and the people who might come up with those ideas. Creativity researchers have also noted that brainstorming can facilitate team building (Runco, 2007), orient a group toward a new subject, activate background knowledge, share information within a group, and give group leaders, such as teachers, an understanding of the level of a group's knowledge about a topic (Baer & Garrett, 2010).

Does brainstorming, then, *work*? As a psychosocial technology it may *function* in many ways, even though it does not accomplish what was originally intended. One general function of the everyday use of

brainstorming is that it promotes the idea of creativity as enjoyable. Even though the classic brainstorming format as Osborn originally described it does not amplify the number of good ideas, research has developed alternative formats that produce more ideas. Researchers have also found that more heterogeneous group compositions tend to give a broad range of types of ideas and more homogenous compositions tend to give deeper exploration of ideas (Nijstad, Diehl & Stroebe, 2003). In other words, the technology continues to be refined.

All of the technologies related to the concept of creativity are not process oriented, like brainstorming. They include technologies for following dreams, being persistent and taking risks. Case studies, biographies and mythical stories about creative geniuses, for example, serve as inspiring and/or instructive models to emulate, much like hagiographies of saints. Stereotypes themselves serve are technologies, used to organize identity, communicate identity (for example, types of dress and social attitudes) or explain behaviors (see discussion of personality trait research, Chapter 4). In all of these cases, research has contributed, refined, promoted or disputed the beliefs, values and practices related to creativity.

Worldmaking

The concept of creativity and the attendant technologies have many tactical uses, such as the examples described above. More broadly, though, we use the concept of creativity and its technologies to give meaning to our experiences and to make our immediate worlds coincide with our often highly idiosyncratic experiences and aspirations. Through creative work we try to make places for ourselves, relieve alienation, and kindle hope in possibility. The results can be elaborate, surprising and thrilling or frightening (or both) to any given group. Today, many would argue that Leni Reifenstahl's Nazi propaganda films were both cinematically innovative and politically horrifying (Hinton, 2000; Strathausen 2008). The results can also be private or public or both at different times. 'Everyday creativity' (Richards, 2010a; Runco, Millar, Selcuk & Cramond, 2010) is a term that researchers have developed for activities that produce original, meaningful products at leisure and work, such as cooking for family or gardening. Indeed, linking of private to public meaning is also a key function of the technologies related to creativity (see sociocultural theories in Chapter 7). The function of integrating new ideas into existing culture determines what will be recognized publicly as creative and what the creative product will mean on professional, community and world stages.

Of course, the link between the meanings of individual work and public meaning-making is a complex dynamic, not a direct path. Creativity theorists have argued that both individual creative development and cultural meaning are systemic (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Glăveanu, 2014a; Gruber, 1989b; Sawyer, 2010, 2012) but in ways that are not necessarily equivalent. The development of an individual's thinking may overlap with cultural demands at one point in a career and not at another point. Some creative works that are catalytically meaningful for the individual's overall thinking (Gruber, 1981) may never be presented to the public. Ideas can also be reinterpreted in future historical contexts beyond, or even in contradiction to, the intentions of the author.

Symbol systems link meanings in individual worlds to the larger worlds of literature, art, science and so on. In *Ways of Worldmaking* the American philosopher Nelson Goodman (1978) examined how people use symbols to remake their worlds. Goodman was building on Ernst Cassirer's (1944) philosophy, defining humans as symbol-making animals. Goodman was also contributing to the broader philosophical work on social construction. His term *worldmaking* referred to an ongoing process of symbol use in continually remaking the multiple worlds in which people live through recombining, reweighting, reordering, deleting, supplementing and deforming symbols established by those who came before.

Goodman explicitly linked his analysis of worldmaking to 'the *creative* power of understanding' (p.1, emphasis added), and his work is among the many contributions to the rise in interest in creativity. One of Goodman's key arguments, however, has not been prominent in psychological research on creativity. People continually make decisions about *how* to remake the world, whether nuanced and sophisticated or brutish and regressive. Whether or not we participate in worldmaking is not a question, however. As symbol-making animals, worldmaking is what we do.

Furthermore, building on Cassirer, Goodman argued for the advantages of thinking of many worlds rather than one with various manifestations. He recognized that various symbol systems, such as those of physics, psychology, biology, art, music and poetry, interact and can work together. They can be conceived as one world, but none of these worlds is reducible to another. The system of meaning that is Renaissance painting cannot be equivalently expressed by the terms of physics or biology or even music. Then, within the symbol systems of a given discipline, individuals are remaking the worlds in their particular ways, resulting in different styles.

Within a symbol system there can be right and wrong moves in formulating new combinations, but there is no absolute truth or falsity. The same person may be able to perceive an object, say a teacup, in multiple conceptual frames – poetically, musically and scientifically, for example. In so doing, however, the person is moving among different worlds of meaning.

Such social construction often does not sit well with scientists, including psychologists. They tend to look for truth in relation to a solid, underlying world.[2] What of that unified, solid world? What of the teacup in itself, without any frames of reference? Goodman admitted its existence, but a world without the meanings that come with symbols was not of interest to him. Such an underlying world was, by definition, not a perceptible world: 'We can have words without a world but no world without words or other symbols' (1978, p. 6). Goodman noted that, in practice, the 'real world' was often simply a privileging of one's own knowledge and experience. The physicist tends to see physics as fundamental; the phenomenologist sees the perceptual world as fundamental. Here, Goodman's views were relevant to the concerns of creativity researchers who have had particular interest in the juxtaposition of disciplinary perspectives to produce novelty, as well as the obstacles that the conventions of disciplines may pose to novel viewpoints.

Furthermore, the various theories of creativity themselves have been exercises in worldmaking. The disconnects in assumptions, goals and values of trait theories, such as divergent thinking (Chapter 2), compared to cognitive developmental models, such as Gruber's evolving systems (Chapter 6), make the different theories feel like different worlds. Exploration and appreciation of the various theories becomes easier using Goodman's worldmaking perspective. Just as a home may have places for books of poetry, scientific journals, abstract art and ceramic figurines, the various theories are incommensurate only against the standard of a singular phenomenon called 'creativity'. As illustrated by the earlier discussion of brainstorming, each creativity tool can serve different and sometimes surprising ends in different contexts.

Goodman, then, brings to the discussion of creativity three reminders: (1) that symbol remixing is the underlying activity of what we call creativity – new worlds are made out of existing worlds; (2) that symbols always function systemically, making *integration* of novelty central to creative processes from the level of the individual working in a studio to the level of society writ large, and (3) that everyone is involved in symbol use and remixing.

An unusual dialogue

Goodman's perspective is also part of the second method used in this investigation: comparison of the psychological perspectives on creativity with work by social constructivists on some of the same issues.

Since the mid twentieth century, psychology's work in defining creativity has produced a series of theories that have elaborated a highly optimistic view of individuality and change. Many of these theories were developed in the contexts of the Allied victory over the German Nazis and Imperial Japan and the subsequent Cold War. The individualistic focus of the concept of creativity that had emerged in the nineteenth century, alongside the idea of genius, both fit and fed postwar psychology particularly well, especially in America. At the same time, social constructivist philosophy was also analyzing change resulting from both people's actions and social forces, including psychology itself. Instead, of focusing on the concept of creativity, these philosophers talked about social discourse, construction of the subject and subjective agency. Ever since Michel Foucault laid the groundwork (see for example, 1972/1969, 1965/1988, 1982/1997b), social constructivist theorists (Danziger, 1990; Rose, 1998) have also examined how psychology, psychiatry, and related practitioners (the 'psy' disciplines, Rose, 1998, p. 2) are part of social power dynamics. The power of psychology has been particularly important in constructing certain kinds of people. For example, the sociologist Nikolas Rose (1998, 1999), building on Foucault, has analyzed how the institutionalization of training and practices in the psy disciplines play crucial roles in the current necessity of 'inventing ourselves' (1998, p. 17), a process with both costs and benefits. In this process, 'pedagogies of self-fulfillment' have contributed to a situation in which 'subjects are not merely "free to choose", but *obliged to be free*' (p. 17). Rose has noted that freedom is, itself, a complex construct: 'an ideal that imposes as many burdens, anxieties and divisions as it inspires projects of emancipation' (p. 197). A central focus of his analysis has been the apparent paradox that we look to the authority of psy experts to help us be free of authority. Rose has not focused primarily on the construct of creativity, but few topics fit his analysis as closely as the development of theories of creativity. Indeed, *freedom* itself has been one of the central issues underlying concepts of creativity (Runco & Albert, 2010).

The psy disciplines' practices are part of larger power dynamics of society, ways in which the society governs itself. For social constructivists, power is always at play in any society, and it is also always subject to critique. In contrast, leading creativity theorists have seldom cited

social constructivist theory or focused on critical perspectives on social power dynamics. Indeed, acceptance of an idea by existing power structures – eminence – has consistently been used as validation for any given instance of creativity.

Given these opposing perspectives, it is extraordinary that assumptions and the goals of the social constructivist analyses are so similar to the assumptions and goals of creativity researchers. Indeed, over time, both sides in this split have incorporated more and more of the complexities of their topics and, in the process, moved closer together.

People within power dynamics

In social constructivist theory, being aware of how power dynamics are functioning may give people (*subjects*) greater efficacy (*agency*) in how they participate in power (Foucault, 1984/1997a).

As will be explored in the chapters that follow, creativity research in psychology has often argued for the importance of creativity *as a tool of power structures*. Researchers have contended that their interests were crucial to the success of (American) business and governments, first during the Cold War and later in globalized markets. Creativity researchers have also argued that their work helps people have successful and fulfilled lives, and the construct of creativity has helped conflate the good of business and government with the good of the individual. This is all, of course, fodder for social constructivist critique.

In spite of their differences, social constructivist and psychological perspectives have focused on the same goal: how to make people more effective in their participation in the world and their impacts on it. Furthermore, ever since the psychological study of creativity took hold in America in the mid twentieth century, researchers have given increasing attention to the roles of sociocultural forces. Of late, some researchers have developed more skeptical positions concerning the previously unquestioned value of creativity. Today, creativity theorists themselves (such as Runco & Albert, 2010; Weiner, 2000) cite negative ideological functions of the concept of creativity, and one of the newer trends is consideration of 'the dark sides' (Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman & Runco, 2010) of creativity and its potential for negative impacts on people and society. The psychologists have not come quite to the critical stance of the social constructivists, but they have moved in that direction.

Complex social dynamics

Social constructivists recognize that there are many intentions at play from different people and social sectors (e.g., law, psychology, medicine,