REIMAGINING CREATIVITY FOR A PARTNERSHIP WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Susan Carter, partnership educator and editorial board member of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, joins with Sara Saltee, creativity coach and theorist and co-director of the Center for Partnership Studies, for a conversation about the intersections of partnership and creativity. They introduce Saltee's creative constellations framework, which proposes that we each express multiple different creativities and that our array of creativities shapes the contributions we are designed to make to the healing and evolution of the world. Four interlocking dimensions of the creating self—creative identity, creative process, creator consciousness, and creative direction—are explored.

Key words: creativity; partnership; human capacity; multimodal creators; ethos of creativity; ethos of productivity; creative process; the creating self.

INTRODUCTION

The importance and value of creativity are deeply embedded assumptions in the field of Partnership Studies. Partnership is a framework and a process that allows us to develop and access our full human capacity, which includes caring, consciousness, and creativity (Eisler & Fry, 2019, p. 2). In her foundational work on partnership systems, Riane Eisler has highlighted the importance within partnership cultures of a view of creativity that goes beyond creativity as an individual talent or trait and recognizes

both the social context of creativity and the ways in which creativity is expressed in the creation of society itself.

In her book *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body*, Eisler writes:

> …[P]erhaps the most important thing about this new view of creativity is that it focuses extensively on the social context for creativity, on what supports or inhibits us in being creative, and even beyond this, on what is today called social creativity: the creation of social institutions, belief systems, and myths. In other words it recognizes, and thus opens up for both study and action, the fact that from the very beginning of our human adventure here on Earth we humans have been cocreators of our social evolution. (Eisler, 1995, p. 375)

Susan Carter and Sara Saltee met through partnership projects more than a decade ago and have been engaged ever since in an evolving conversation about the inner life of partnership, creativity, and social change.

Our work together for the Center for Partnership Studies has included designing and facilitating two online courses for global audiences: the Caring Economy Program and the Power of Partnership Program. We both share a desire for *partnership in action* not simply as a conceptual framework or talking points, but as a way of being and moving through the world. As our friendship and collaboration deepened, we co-authored an article for this journal, "The Inner Work of Partnership: Tools for Making the Personal Shift from Domination to Partnership," in which we shared ideas and practices for living in partnership with oneself (Carter & Saltee, 2015). While we acknowledge that it can be easy to "get stuck" in partnership with self to the exclusion of exploring the social dimensions of partnership, we also realize that partnership with one's own spirit and needs remains an important foundation, a ready touchstone to which we can return in

challenging times, times such as these. Indeed, our shared interest in creativity is connected to our understanding that to be in partnership with ourselves requires us to partner with the creative needs, impulses, and drives that propel us to make our highest contributions to the world.

Eisler's work highlights how domination systems inhibit and suppress our innate human drive to create, and shows why an essential project in the shift to partnership systems is to redefine what it means to be creative and reclaim access to our creativity. Sara has been grappling with precisely this project in her longtime work as a creativity coach and theorist. She has devoted the last decade to developing the creative constellations framework, a conceptual framework and a set of tools which helps us reimagine our core assumptions about creativity, offers a way to answer the question "How are you creative?" and supports creators of all kinds in expanding their impact on the social world. In this conversation, we focus on exploring the resonances between Sara's thinking on creativity and her work as a partnership educator.

CONVERSATION

Susan Carter: Sara, to begin our conversation, would you share about your background and training in creativity coaching and how you became interested in this field?

Sara Saltee: My interest in creativity comes from a few different angles. The first is that I spent nearly the entire decade of my twenties pursuing a PhD and experiencing a serious depression which worsened as I went along, until it culminated in a kind of breakdown. In the process of trying to understand the dynamics of that depression and recover from it, I became fascinated by creativity and how creators live and work. Because I struggled so much with getting myself to write my dissertation, I thought I had a "writing problem," so I read everything I could about the writing process and the ways writers lived and worked. That reading soon broadened to include personal narratives by and about artists, musicians, entrepreneurs, designers, and leaders. I was

deeply fascinated by the ways that creative people thought about their work, how they went about their work, and how they found the courage to live unconventional lives.

In trying to get out of my depression, I also reflected on times in my life when I had experienced more joy and satisfaction, and realized that, prior to graduate school, I had always been engaged in artistic endeavors alongside the intellectual work of school—activities that I had taken for granted like playing the cello, acting in plays, writing stories and poems and personal essays, and making collages. So I brought creative practice back into my life as part of trying to re-establish my own wellness (a practice I continue to this day.)

I also saw that there were people around me in graduate school who brought the same enthusiasm and passion to their scholarship that I had felt when I was engaged in artmaking, and I knew that I didn't have that same passion, although I loved teaching. Somehow, I put it together that this didn't mean that I was creative and they weren't, it just meant that we were creative in different ways. And that got me thinking both about the many different expressions of creativity and about the intersections of creativity and purpose.

A few years after I extricated myself from academia, I went through what was then the first ever creativity coaching training program with Eric Maisel (2007), a creativity expert and psychologist who founded the field of creativity coaching. In the two decades since then, I've continued to coach individual clients and teach workshops on creativity and writing, and have continued to read and learn in the field of creativity.

Carter: How did those interests and experiences lead to the development of your creative constellations framework and your upcoming online program, Discover Your Creative Constellations?

Saltee: The creativity coaching training I received focused largely on understanding how we get ourselves into and out of experiences of being stuck or blocked, and patterns of not-creating. But as I began working with clients and reflecting more deeply on my own experience, I started noticing how often problems with creating were attached to problems of life direction. I realized how often people's struggles were not actually about feeling stuck or uninspired, but rather about making sense of their own complexity and the challenges of creating their own lives.

The people I was encountering had questions like:

> "I'm interested in so many different things, why can't I just settle on one?"
>
> "How do I choose between my desires to heal the world, my desires to express myself, and my desires to earn a living?"
>
> "How do I figure out the difference between what I should do, what I can do, and what I actually want to do?"
>
> "How do I organize myself to put my time and energies into things that really matter to me?"
>
> "What should I do next? Will people think I'm nuts if I totally shift direction *again*?"
>
> "Why do I feel so guilty when I even think about doing what I love the most?"

I started becoming less interested in the idea of creative blockage and more interested in the interconnections between creating, purpose, and direction. I got interested in finding ways to apply the insights that artists and writers have about the creating process to the work we all do of creating a life. And, I realized that if I were going to be able to offer any kind of useful guidance to people with these other kinds of questions, I would need much more than advice on "getting more creative" or practices for "unlocking," "sparking," or "unleashing" blocked or deficient creativity.

Over time, I started thinking in terms of four interlocking dimensions of the creating self, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Interlocking dimensions of the creating self*
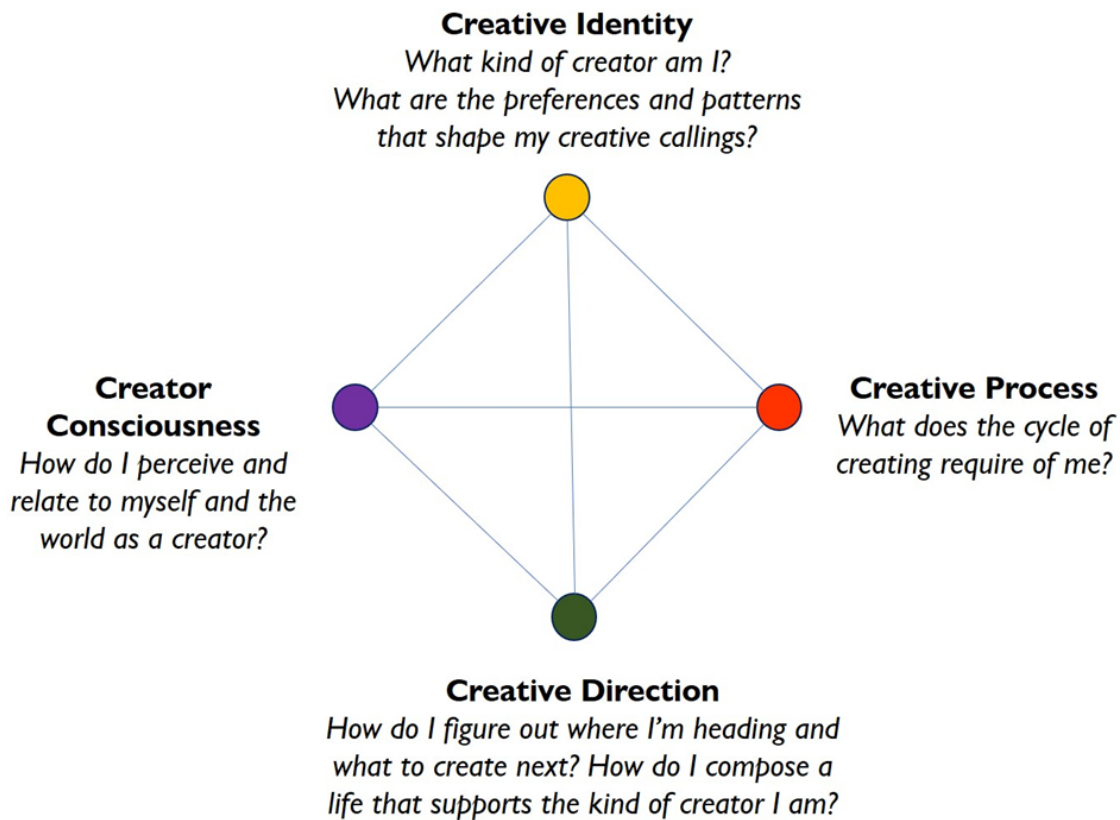
Note: These sets of questions are interdependent and inform each other.

Over the years, I developed a set of original tools and exercises to help my clients and students find their own answers to each of these four dimensions of their creative selves, and that work is what I've now brought together as an online program called Discover Your Creative Constellations program.

Carter: How has your background in partnership and your work at the Center for Partnership Studies informed or influenced your work on creativity?

Saltee: I've been working with Riane Eisler and the Center for Partnership Studies for over 10 years now, and the same kinds of fascinations that drew me to the field of creativity drew me to learning and teaching about partnership systems—namely a desire to uplift women's voices and marginalized perspectives; a dissatisfaction with false distinctions between the personal and the political; an orientation to thinking systemically and focusing on relationships and interactions; a practice of digging below the surface of received narratives about power; and a commitment to theorizing in ways that are grounded in the realities of people's lives.

As I learned more about partnership systems, I realized that creativity, which is suppressed and minimized in domination systems, plays an essential role in partnership. In partnership theory, creativity is understood as a shared human capacity, a core value, and an essential practice for evolving ourselves and our world.

As the place of creativity in partnership systems came into focus for me, I started to recognize that my creativity work is not so much on a separate, parallel track from my partnership work, but rather is about developing one part of the larger project of bringing partnership systems to life. It is exciting to have the opportunity of this conversation to make those interconnections more visible.

As you've written in your own work on transformative education, Susan, partnership theory offers a foundational conceptual framework that can apply to so many fields and areas of study. It meets people where they are and helps us name dynamics that are deeply felt, but aren't always easy to articulate without the categories of domination and partnership systems (Carter, 2015).

Carter: As we have already mentioned, your forthcoming online program is called "Discover Your Creative Constellations." Can you explain what you mean by a creative constellation?

Saltee: One's creative constellation is the particular combination of creativities one expresses, and the interactions between them. The idea of a creative constellation is my answer to exploring the dimension of creative identity—a way of answering the question "What kind(s) of creator am I?"

The idea that we each have an array of creativities, of course, presumes that creativity is not a singular talent or drive that some people have and others don't. It presumes that there are multiple creativities and that what is interesting—what makes us unique—is not whether or not we are creative, but rather what combination of creativities we express through our lives, our work, our parenting and care giving, our art, and our activism.

This idea of multiple creativities parallels Howard Gardner's work in the 1980s on multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Gardner argued that intelligence is not a single ability that you either have or don't have or that you have more or less of than your neighbor. He proposed that it is more accurate to think of intelligence as a set of eight distinct "modalities" that each of us has the potential to access to a greater or lesser degree. Thanks to his work, educators could go from asking "Are you smart?" or "How smart are you?" to "How are you smart?" And of course, in the education world this was enormously powerful.

Multiple intelligences theory helped us move beyond the categories of "smart or dumb" that for generations had been used to penalize learners whose intelligences didn't happen to be visible or valued within a traditional school setting. It gave teachers a new way to honor the diversity and complexity of their students and allowed them to approach each one with a presumption of strength. And the learners who had dismissed themselves as "stupid" because their intelligences were not valued within traditional classrooms were suddenly offered a framework within which their gifts were named and valued.

My work is an effort to make the same move in the realm of creativities. Through my research, I've identified 25 distinct creative modes, and the Discover Your Creative Constellations program walks people through a process of identifying which of the 25 creativities they most express, then exploring how their array of creativities interact with each other and work together as a system.

Importantly, the 25 creative modes include not only modes that we are used to thinking of as creative (like the ones that artists and writers use) but also modes that we have not previously considered creative, including modes in which creativity is expressed through care giving, and through the cultivation of healthy relationships and networks. In my coaching, it is a great joy to see how this understanding of a range of creativities allows people who have not previously thought of themselves as creative—because they don't see themselves as artistic—discover that they, too, are creators. It's just that their creativities have not been traditionally defined as creative.

Although there are a few people who are strong specialists in one creative mode, most of us are what I call "multimodal creators." We draw on many different creativities within a given project, in different parts of our lives, and certainly over our lifetimes.

Carter: This leads me to ask: What opens up for us when we understand creativity not as a single talent or trait but as a combination of drives or modes—what you call multimodal?

Saltee: When we can only see ourselves as being "creative or uncreative" or "less creative or more creative" we aren't even close to having an accurate or helpful picture of who we really are, how creativity works through us, and what we are capable of creating next.

Once we start to ask "How are you creative?" and think of our creativities as a set of drives that represent our preferred ways of exploring and evolving ourselves and the

world, we can look for patterns in what otherwise might seem to be a random set of "interests." We can stop wasting our time trying to locate a singular purpose or passion, and instead embrace the idea that our most potent impact in the world comes from expressing our full range of creativities, in different patterns and combinations, as we evolve and grow. We can stop asking our kids "What do you want to be when you grow up?"— a question that presumes both that one's work will be one's identity and that your identity will be fixed and static once you reach a state of 'adulthood'—and instead, ask them (and ourselves) "What do you want to create in your lifetime?"

The other thing that the shift to thinking in terms of multimodal creativity opens up is what Stephen Nachmanovitch calls "combinatorial flexibility," the power to respond to the needs of a complex and changing world by exploring new combinations of our own diverse inner creative potentials (Nachmanovitch, 2009). Conceptualizing ourselves as multiple and changeable helps us remain flexible as we sense and respond to changes in our inner needs and also changes in what the world is calling from us.

I think this ability to hold a sense of having a diverse portfolio of creative potentials is essential in the cataclysmic times we are living in. The incredible fragility of our democracy, the environmental crises, the social justice crises, and the pandemic have called all of us to respond in new ways. Multimodal creators can rise to those challenges by understanding that they may need to shift the patterns of their creativities, and by seeing themselves as part of a community of creators who are collaborating in the work of imagining and manifesting new systems and new ways of being and working.

Carter: What you share here about combinatorial flexibility reminds me of the late Arthur Koestler's bisociation theory (1964), which I include in my community activism courses. Bisociative thinking is put into play when two seemingly unrelated and disparate ideas are combined to create something altogether new. One example Koestler uses is that of the printing press, inspired by existing moveable type blocks

combined with what Gutenberg saw while witnessing a wine harvest. Seeing the sheer force applied to the mechanisms of a wine press the idea arose to combine that force with type blocks (Koestler, 1964, p. 123). The resulting printing press led to the widespread availability of the Gutenberg Bible, which created sweeping societal changes. The printing press seems simple to us now, but it required drawing upon diverse life experiences to have these ideas come together to create it.

Saltee: Yes, this is so important! The evolutionary principle is that diversity is what makes creativity possible. We are used to thinking about the value of diversity in terms of having diverse voices, people, and perspectives in the room. We know that better decisions get made and new solutions get articulated when different ways of thinking bump up against each other and start to play together.

I think it is helpful to extend this understanding to the diversity within our inner lives as well. Many of our work cultures still encourage singularity of focus and equate that with professionalism or mastery. They become monocultures that discourage interplay and creativity, and they become burnout factories. Recovering from burnout often requires re-engaging with facets of our creativities that we've cut ourselves off from.

The contemporary movement to claim intersectional identities is also coming from the understanding that we are more powerful when we are not reduced to a single fragment of who we are. Partnership systems require us to let go of simplistic understandings of identity that reduce us to the color of our skin, or who we love, or how old we are, or the gender(s) we perform. Intersectionality insists that we look at our socio-political identity as a dynamic system in which multiple aspects of who we are (like race, sexuality, gender, and class) work together in different moments to shape our experiences of power and privilege.

Ultimately, the aim of all this work to acknowledge and engage the multiplicity of identity—whether in the register of socially- and historically-defined identities, or in the register of multiple intelligences or creativities—is to make it possible for all of us

to bring the full power of who we are to bear on those challenges of the world that ignite our caring and curious imaginations and that we are uniquely patterned to address.

Carter: So, we have been talking about a shift from thinking of creativity as singular and fixed to multiple and dynamic, and now I want to ask about a different shift, from thinking about creativity as linear to thinking of it as cyclical. Riane Eisler and Alfonso Montuori (2007) explain: "The shift here is from a linear cumulative view to a more cyclical or spiralic one, in which repetition and recombination play an important role. Moreover, it takes us to a broader view of the creative process that includes not just the creation of a product, but the whole network of social interactions which brings the product to life" (p. 490). How does the cyclical/spiral nature of creativity show up in your project?

Saltee: The creative constellations framework is completely aligned with Eisler and Montuori's insights about the shift away from linear models and toward cyclical/spiral models of the creating process, which I love. The creative process dimension of my framework is built on a cycle model that I developed from my synthesis of reading and observing how creators of all kinds describe their process, long before I learned that this was a trend in the scholarship around creativity. For me, the cycle map came into focus because I saw that, regardless of how multi-faceted our creativity may be, all creators need a mental map of the terrain involved in the creating process, so that we don't assume we're doing something wrong when we feel like we're going in circles, or when we run into headwinds of fear, or when we find our expansive, hopeful creative energies alternating with times of retraction and doubt.

The tool I developed helps people visualize how creating takes us through spaces of generation, manifestation, connection, and void times. It also shows how creators sustain their forward momentum in the face of fear by drawing on a set of core

practices, and by seeking guidance from people whose creativities are expressed by helping others through the cycle.

Another image that I often use in my teaching is of a fiddlehead fern, which has lots of little fractal spirals unfolding within a larger spiral. This is very useful for helping us visualize how every creative accomplishment is made up of countless mini-cycles that involve trying out ideas, experimenting with bringing them into form, testing them in practice, evaluating their success, forgiving their imperfections, finding ourselves in the groundless discomfort of the "I don't know" space of the void, and then allowing time and space for a new idea to come forward.

Another exciting aspect of the creative constellations framework is that the 25 different creative modes cluster around five different spaces within the cycle of creating. This means that a person can map the creativities in their personal constellations onto the creative cycle, allowing them to visualize the zones within the creative process where they have strengths and areas where they are most likely to rely on collaborators or co-creators to bring their projects full circle. It allows us to see that some people are specialists in one or two phases of the creating cycle, while others of us are full-cycle creators who get the greatest satisfaction from moving through all the spaces within the creating process as we see projects through from start to finish.

In other words, not only do we have diverse identities as creators, but those identities also shape different relationships to the cyclical process of creating. Depending on how we are creative, we may be particularly strong in generating new ideas, for example, but need creators with different strengths to help bring those ideas into form or into conversation with the world. Or, we may be very strong at bringing other people's ideas into form, but feel like we are floundering when we are asked to generate expressions of our own inner life. So, the cycle of creating is not only a helpful map of the terrain that all creators travel, it can also be a map of where in our journeys we are likely to sail along, and where we're most likely to get stuck or turn back.

Carter: In a recent article on creativity, society, and gender that appeared in this journal, authors Eisler, Donnelly, and Montuori propose that "the expansion of what is considered creativity is a sign of movement toward a partnership social and ideological organization" (2016, p. 6). Do you agree?

Saltee: I do agree that this potential exists. I very much hope that by broadening our concept of creativity to include a whole array of creativities that express themselves through the nurturing of people and ecosystems and the creation of psychologically safe and trusting relational contexts, we begin to give more value to the essential work of partnership systems.

However, I think we will only realize this potential if we understand creativity outside of the ways it is framed within the ethos of productivity that remains the dominant ethos in American culture, and certainly in our business cultures. No matter how much lip service we pay to the value of creativity, if we buy the versions of creativity that are being packaged by productivity culture, we won't actually be able to experience creating.

When we look at creativity through the lens of the ethos of productivity, we see it is domesticated and diminished in a couple different ways. One narrative, which focuses mostly on women, is the narrative of creativity as self-care. One emblematic example is the "Paint n Sip" businesses where mostly women gather after work with their girlfriends to drink wine and paint matching pictures. The notion of creativity as an escape from the grind of dehumanizing work cultures and a way of patching yourself up to be able to go back again, plays into old beliefs about creativity as a luxury or a selfish treat to be enjoyed after your work is done. And, this vision of creativity puts all the emphasis on "making a picture"—a product—while removing the dimensions of exploration, experimentation, surprise, discovery, and engagement with the world around you that actual painters concern themselves with.

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In workplaces, there is a second narrative about creativity that has gained increasing traction as innovation is tied more and more to business success. This version, which is more masculine in its expression, focuses on having more good ideas per day. So, the same productivity ethos logic of relentless improvement that is behind the whole industry of "life hacking" has led to a fascination with brain stimulation machines and micro dosing LSD—all driven by the desire to "get more creative." In this narrative, creativity is conceptualized as a brain event that happens inside of an individual, or sometimes inside of groups, and the focus is on technologies for pumping up the output of creative ideas.

It seems clear to me that if we are looking at the definitions of creativity offered to us by the dominant culture, we are not going to move any closer to partnership systems— we'll just have domination systems that talk a lot about creativity but have no pathways into the kinds of experiences of creating that actually heal and evolve ourselves and our world.

I see this all the time with creativity coaching clients. The thing that prevents them from doing the creative play or work that they long to do is not time or space, it is guilt and fear. And whenever there is guilt involved, it is a signal that there is an ethical issue in the mix. For people raised in the ethos of productivity, there is tremendous guilt about entering into a space of exploration and discovery for its own sake; it feels deeply selfish and a bit corrupt to do anything that isn't guaranteed to lead in some linear way to a "useful" product or result. It can take a long time to learn to recognize and unwind how the logics of productivity are at work in us so that we can have the inner freedom we need to create.

And, for many women, there is a second source of guilt—a second ethos that they have to find their way out of—which is the ethos of service. Many women I work with not only bring a whole set of concerns about letting go of the goal-setting, task-doing, and results-orientation of the productivity ethos, they also bring a set of beliefs that tell

them they are supposed to be constantly vigilant to the needs of their families and communities, and that their worth is measured in the degree to which they are needed by others. So, finding our way to experiences of creating—which require us to engage in practices of stillness, listening, and play—require untangling ourselves from some very powerful anti-creative social narratives that we've internalized.

Carter: So, you've talked about the limitations of the productivity ethos, but what exactly are the features of the ethos of creativity?

Saltee: I've been fascinated by that question for a while now. I do think that there is a distinct set of values, beliefs, mindsets, and practices that are embedded in the creating process and shared by seasoned creators of all kinds.

People who regularly engage in practices of creating share ways of thinking, ways of being, and ways of relating to the world that extend far beyond any discrete, visible "acts of creation." Fundamentally, creators share the understanding that creating is not a way of producing fancy things (or a fancy way of producing things), creating is a way of being-in-relationship.

Creators understand that the quality of their relationships determines the quality of their results. And I don't mean just relationships with people, though those are important. Creators hold a vision of a desired result, or even just an idea of a direction for exploration, loosely in the background, while they focus their attention on deep listening to their tools, instruments, and materials, as well as their environment, their co-creators, and their inner states of being. They focus on being in conversation with what is wanting to emerge, which means they practice thriving in dynamic fields of activity defined by ambiguity, risk, tension, vulnerability, and surprise.

And because creators know that tangible "results" are only the after-effects of states of being and qualities of relationships, the characteristic aspirations that creators share are aspirations to bring the world to life by weaving, evolving, repairing, and strengthening the webs of relationships that bond us to ourselves, to each other and to all beings. This is why, in my work, I offer a definition of creativity as the "caring and curious imagination that brings the world to life."

When I need to remind myself or my students of this fully subjective way of being in the world, I often turn to this beautiful passage from Ursula Le Guin in which she describes how things appear from the creator's perspective:

> Relationship among all things appears to be complex and reciprocal — always at least two-way, back-and-forth. It seems that nothing is single in this universe, and nothing goes one way.

> In this view, we humans appear as particularly lively, intense, aware nodes of relation in an infinite network of connections, simple or complicated, direct or hidden, strong or delicate, temporary or very long-lasting. A web of connections, infinite but locally fragile, with and among everything — all beings — including what we generally class as things, objects. (Le Guin, 2015, Foreword pp. *i-ii*)

Carter: So, if the ethos of creativity is tied to this relational, complex, interconnected perspective, what different ways of acting or being does that perspective lead to? What are some commonalities in the habits or behaviors of people who are functioning as creators instead of as producers?

Saltee: I think the fundamental difference is that while the "productive self" is focused on imposing its will upon the world, the "creative self" sees itself as acting within the world. In place of the linear, plan/execute modality of the productivity ethos, the creativity ethos values sensitivity and response-ability to ongoing shifts in the context within which creating is happening.

For example, if we look at what happened to people in this pandemic, the productivity ethos says, "Make whatever technical adjustments you need to make as fast as possible to make sure that you still reach your goals. The conditions may have changed, but the plan is the plan and we go on executing." Since the central aspiration of the productivity ethos is to produce as much as possible as quickly as possible, complex and changing conditions lead to a lot of stress and a lot of perceived failure. No amount of forced positivity or self-discipline (which we might also call self-domination) or incremental process tweaks are going to make this kind of time bearable for people who understand their worth in terms of their measurable outputs. And I think we've seen a lot of people who, without the props of productivity to hold them up, resort to a sort of nothingness, just waiting and numbing out until things "get back to normal." But people who brought a creativity ethos to the experience were more likely to say, "Whoa, the whole context of living has shifted in ways that impact my work, but also go far beyond my work. I'm going to need to be really attuned to what this means for me, for my children, for my community, for my friends and colleagues, for my team. I'm going to be as flexible and inventive as possible as I sense what is most needed in this moment. I'm going to be willing to set aside my task lists in order to focus on the work of care and connection that is never done, never measured, and never finally accomplished. I'm going to focus on keeping life worth living, staying present and available, staying playful, staying hopeful, staying engaged, and staying curious about how this is all going to go."

By the way, I think it is important to add that the ethos of creativity doesn't exclude concerns about accomplishing results—far from it. Creators are extraordinarily eager to make meaningful contributions and to impact the world in positive ways. It's just that creators situate those concerns within a much broader perspective that sees ALL of the business of living—from work to parenting and care giving to activism to community-building to artmaking—as part of one dynamic, multi-threaded ecosystem of life. From

this perspective it gets really clear that for the whole ecosystem of one's life to thrive, over time the relative weight of those different threads is going to change, and the threads themselves are going to get woven and interwoven in a thousand different patterns. When the world around us changes in disruptive, shocking ways, creators focus on listening for what kind of reweaving is going to be needed to support the continued aliveness of ourselves, our families, our communities, our democracy, our planet. Operating in this broader perspective requires very different kinds of inner work from the work that the productivity ethos teaches us to do.

Carter: It certainly seems that bringing the ethos of creativity to any situation greatly increases our capacity for resilience and ability to be in relationship in challenging times. So we've now talked about three of the four interlocking dimensions of the creative self in the image you shared—we've talked about creative identity, creative process, and creator consciousness. Let's move on to creative direction: How does our array of creativities help us find our way in the world?

Saltee: Creativity, in general, guides individuals and society forward because all creativities are fundamentally about moving beyond what already exists. Creating requires pressing into the unknown with a willingness and intention to generate something beautiful, something authentic or true, or something more just.

But within that larger orientation that all creators share, we as individual multimodal creators have a lot of wayfinding and decision-making work to do as we create our lives, and we have a lot of questions: How do we find a sense of direction when we constantly perceive multiple possibilities? Are we supposed to have a plan? Is there any guidance we can trust? Aren't there any guarantees?

After years of playing around in the field of these kinds of questions about direction and decision-making at the level of life-making, it finally occurred to me that these are the exact questions that creators face every day in the process of work-making. As we engage in the meta-project of sensing and shaping our own emerging futures, knowing

how to focus our listening inward to our particular array of creative drives and impulses is a vital practice.

If we understand our creativities as our preferred ways of being-in-relationship to the world, we can accept responsibility to create lives that honor and support the kinds of creators we are. In a world filled with complex and pressing challenges, we can home in on the kinds of challenges that we are uniquely patterned to address. We can see our constellations as a dynamic, evolving map of our inner needs, which are always in relationship to the needs of the world around us.

Again, our experience of living through this pandemic is instructive. These times have really brought home the ways in which creativity is not an individual "brain event" or a kind of party trick. It has become easier to see that creativity does not happen in isolation from the world, but rather in response to the world. And because creating occurs as an enactment of complex interconnectivity both within ourselves and between ourselves and the world, creators are able to meet the moment when big shifts happen. Practices of creating are practices of transforming difficult or even impossible-seeming conditions in directions that advance our individual and collective aliveness.

My hope is that as more of us begin to understand creativity—and creativities—in this way, we can conceptualize ourselves as dynamic, patterned systems that are part of a vast community of creators, all working together to shift our ways of being and to heal and evolve our world. Knowing that none of us has to do it all is hugely helpful in light of the enormous challenges we face that can so easily overwhelm us. As multimodal creators, we have the potential for multi-threaded conversations with the world; our creative constellations help us name the capacities we bring to the specific fields of relationships we want to play in and to shift.

Carter: Our ongoing conversations about partnership and creativity have been inspirational and expansive, and this has been no exception. It is so exciting to learn about this new view of creativity because it allows me, and I hope others, to think about how we are creative, and about the power of creativity to shape a better world. It is wonderful to hear how your work has evolved and how it adds to our toolkit for applied partnership in our communities and in our daily lives. It reminds me that we truly are "…quite literally partners in our own evolution" (Eisler, 1995, p. xiv), a thought that I find particularly empowering in these times.

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