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Creating Creativity: Reflections from Fieldwork

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The present article addresses the question of 'When can we say something is creative?' and, in answering it, takes a critical stand towards past and present scientific definitions of creativity. It challenges an implicit assumption in much psychological theory and research that creativity exists as an 'objective' feature of persons or products, universally recognised and independent of social agreement and cultural systems of norms and beliefs. Focusing on everyday life creative outcomes, the article includes both theoretical accounts and empirical examples from a research exploring creativity evaluations in the context of folk art. In the end, a multi-layered perspective of creativity assessment emerges, integrating dimensions such as newness and originality, value and usefulness, subjective reception and cultural reception of creative products. Implications for how we understand and study creativity are discussed.

Key-words: creativity; assessment criteria; culture; folk art; Easter eggs; Romania

Despite what the title might suggest at first sight, this article is dedicated to the 'reception' (by means of identification and assessment) and not the 'production' of creativity. Its starting point is the fundamental question 'When can we say something is creative?' and its main domain of focus is the creativity of everyday life. This has been chosen considering the fact that 'ordinary creativity' is both pervasive and oftentimes unremarked (Bateson, 1999, p. 154). Acts of 'historical creativity', like celebrated artworks or influential theories, tend to stand out as mountain peaks and their creativity is often taken-for-granted, but creative expression exists also well beyond the world of research labs and art studios (Fischer et al., 2005, p. 484). In fact, as Ellis Paul Torrance (1988, p. 43), an illustrious figure in the psychology of creativity, stated, "Creativity is almost infinite. It involves every sense – sight, smell, hearing, feeling, taste, and even perhaps the extrasensory". For him, creativity is required whenever the person has no learned solution for an existing problem, and there are countless situations in our daily lives when this is the case. One should not disregard of course the power of 'routines' in leading human behaviour, and yet, even when faced with habituated ways of doing things, novelty can characterise the details of our actions. Creativity and routine, the guiding principles of human behaviour, illustrate a 'reversible figures' situation where, depending on how we decide to look at things, one will stand as the main figure, and the other as the perceptual background. In effect, whenever a creative solution is successful and moves beyond routines (Borofsky, 2001, p. 66), it will certainly become

part of future routines, thus contributing to the never-ending cycle of our daily actions and inter-actions.

This state of affairs makes recognising creativity difficult. If departing from what already exists is the defining feature of creativity, how can we say when something is 'sufficiently' different to be called creative? Plus, contemporary creativity theory, as we shall see next, emphasises the fact that creative outcomes should also be of social or practical value. This twofold condition is typically hard to appreciate or to satisfy. For example is children's play creative? An overwhelming number of teachers and parents would be ready to testify that it is. And yet, rigorously following scientific definitions children are unlikely to produce in their play anything of true value and their 'right' to creativity can be contested on this basis (Cohen and Ambrose, 1999, p. 11). What about a musician playing in an orchestra? Again, who would deny creativity to an artist? However, strictly speaking, we could be the victims of an attributional bias in considering musicians, dancers, comedians and other 'performers' creative instead of the actual 'authors', the composers, choreographs and writers (Kasof, 1995, p. 330). Of course this argument can be challenged by pointing to the fact that every re-edition is never simply a 'duplication' but a new performance in itself (see Eco's, 1989, notion of 'open work'). But then what about copying and imitation? They must surely be uncreative types of activity. Well, pushing the previous argument forward, one could come to see the important role of improvisation in aligning the observation of the model with acting in the world to produce the 'copy' (Ingold and Hallam, 2007, p. 5). Following from this last example we can start wondering if, in fact, everything is creative. Let's consider language, as possibly the "best example of everyday creativity" (Runco, 2007, p. x). We always 'create' sentences we never heard before and they all have an indisputable value (for communication, self-regulation, etc.).

This is probably a good time to think about the implications of considering that everything is (potentially) creative: it would simply do away with the notion of creativity. We must resist the temptation of collapsing creativity into everyday life, and making these two utterly indistinguishable (Negus and Pickering, 2004, p. 45; also Hausman, 1979). This is actually the stance of science which, faced with the ubiquity of creative expression, searches for the limits of creativity (Rouquette, 1973). A bounderless phenomenon is also meaningless and so is one whose specific qualities are not clearly distinguishable. In the case of creativity this last remark raises the question of how we could separate the 'creative' from the beautiful, the adaptive, the technically suitable or the merely bizarre. Oftentimes, judging a creative outcome is intrinsically linked to considering its technical aspects or its importance for responding to society's needs (Lubart, 2003). Furthermore, we are also confronted with the aspect of intentionality. Do 'creators', when they 'create', actually want to be creative? Or are they simply trying

to make something beautiful, something interesting, something useful for their life or the lives of others?

And yet, despite all difficulties, science perseverates in studying creativity. And the first step taken to differentiate the creative from the non-creative is to locate and 'isolate' creativity. Traditionally, creativity has been associated in psychology with either the creative person or the creative product (see Glăveanu, 2010a). From these two the creative product approach seems to be the most commonly used and the most fertile for scientific investigations (Amabile, 1996; Bailin, 1988; Hausman, 1979). Products have the obvious advantage of being available for measurement and evaluation. They also help us make inferences about the 'who' and 'how' of creativity (person and process). Although this focus in the psychology of creativity has been questioned (see Runco's, 2007, p. 384, notion of 'product bias'), it is probably one of the best starting points in our quest to answer the question 'When can we say something is creative?' There is great consensus in the literature that something is creative when it is both: a) novel or original and b) useful or valuable (Stein, 1962; Martindale, 1994; Gruber and Wallace, 1999; Mayer, 1999; Manson, 2003; Mumford, 2003). These two criteria circumscribe the scientific vision of creativity or, to be more precise, the Western scientific vision of creativity (Montuori and Purser, 1995; Westwood and Low, 2003). Is this also the basis for creativity judgements made by non-scientists; is this what people take to be creative when they talk about creativity and 'recognise' it? What does common sense say?

This kind of questions have seldom been raised in the study of creativity, and when they have, it was mostly in the spirit of taking scientific definitions as the ultimate markers of what 'true' creativity is. Indeed, science strives for objectivity, and creativity science uses its established definition to capture 'creativity in itself'. There is a clear underlying assumption that creativity *exists* as such, independent of social agreement, cultural conventions, above and beyond commonsensical ideas. However, even the actual definition of creativity in terms of novelty and usefulness exposes its cultural relativity. In the words of Flaherty (2005, p. 147), "using a lever to move a rock might be judged novel in a Cro-Magnon civilization, but not in a modern one". Usefulness also implies a relational standard of appreciation (useful to whom and for what?). Trying to achieve a 'pure gaze' on creativity, researchers are often more preoccupied with great creations and great creators and forget the everyday life dynamics of the phenomenon. In the very end, any clear-cut distinctions between great creators and ordinary creators, great creations and ordinary creations, do not hold. All creativity takes place in social and cultural contexts (Glăveanu, 2010a, 2010b) and the study of how it is received and recognised in these contexts is of utmost importance. Scientific views are not to be disregarded, nor are they to be transformed into 'ultimate answers'. Science and common sense should not be each other's enemy, especially if we consider the

multitude of ways in which they come to inform one another. The real question is: what does each do with the 'inputs' received from the other?

The present article will therefore make an attempt to integrate scientific and 'commonsensical' notions of creativity. In doing so, it will be structured around the scientific criteria for creativity (newness, originality, usefulness, expert judgements, etc.) while at the same time shed light on how these criteria are expressed in everyday settings. This will be facilitated by making reference to examples from an area often associated with 'ordinary creativity', that of folk art. In the end, based on both theoretical considerations and empirical illustration, the importance of 'cultural frames' for the reception of creativity will become obvious. Conclusions will be drawn regarding a multi-layered approach to creativity assessment, one meant to reunite the 'objective' aspects of creativity with its critical subjective and social dimensions.

The fieldwork

Empirical examples in this article come from a research project that explores creativity in Easter egg decoration in a Romanian context (also in Glăveanu, forthcoming). Informed by a cultural psychology approach (see Cole, 1996), the project uses primarily naturalistic observation and semi-structured interviews to investigate the interdependence between creative expression and reception among adults and children from both urban and rural settings. The craft of egg decoration has been chosen for its richness of practices, connecting the realms of folklore, art and religion as well as, more recently, the requirements of a growing market for the distribution of Easter eggs. The egg itself is an object of tremendous symbolic value in cultures around the world (see Newell, 1984) and in Romania egg decoration is a custom with very ancient, probably pre-Christian roots (Gorovei, 2001, p. 62), one of the oldest and most wide-spread folk arts in the country (Zahacincshi and Zahacinschi, 1992, p. 22). Egg decoration before Easter is ubiquitous in cities and villages in Romania and highly expressive of national and religious identities.

If in urban settings the decoration techniques are based mainly, but not exclusively, on dying eggs, principally in red (symbolic of the blood of Christ), it is in the rural areas that 'traditional' forms of wax decoration are practiced. Women are the main 'artists' of the craft, often joined by children and sometimes by men, and can produce, especially in villages in Northern Romania, great numbers of decorated eggs working throughout the year (Hutt, 2005). Traditional decoration generates both monochrome and polychrome eggs (hen and duck most often, occasionally goose, ostrich, etc.) and it is based on applying wax at different stages to draw the motifs on the emptied egg shell while successively immersing the egg in colour (usually yellow, followed by red and finally black). There is an impressive number of motifs displayed on Easter eggs,

representing geometric shapes, plants, animals, people and familiar objects (typically in the form of schematised parts; Gorovei, 2001). Decoration work involves combining these shapes and colours and oftentimes generating new ones, and this also explains how the craft has changed over the last decades, "getting further and further from the initial magical symbol, (…) [and closer to being an] artistic jewellery that gives priority to beauty in itself" (Zahacincshi and Zahacinschi, 1992, p. 50). Besides dying and decorating them with wax, there are many other ways of adorning eggs, from the use of leaves applied on the shell before colouring to the application of stickers, a clear sign of modernity spreading rapidly from city to village.

In this context, the fieldwork for this research was very diverse, including settings such as private homes, schools, museums, fairs, community celebrations, etc. For the purpose of the present article though reference will be made exclusively to data obtained through interviewing ethnographers (7), priests (6), art teachers (6), and folk artists (8) about the craft, about creativity and, of course, about the creativity of Easter eggs.

New and Original

Novelty and originality can be said to represent the 'essence' of creativity, and this is probably so for both scientific and lay understandings of the phenomenon. Creativity means, in the end, to bring something new into being, something different compared to the past (Hausman, 1979, p. 239). This feature is included virtually in all definitions of creativity, explicitly or implicitly (Torrance, 1988, p. 43; see also Barron, 1995; Liep, 2001). 'New' is the necessary precondition but not the sufficient one. The creative product also needs to be original, meaning to differ substantially from what already exists. Here things become more complicated since something can be original for the person, but not for the entire society. This led to established distinctions in the creativity literature between P-creative (new for the individual) and H-creative (new for society) (Boden, 1994), or, more generally, between 'mundane creativity' and 'mature creativity' (Cohen and Ambrose, 1999, p. 9). Reinforcing this division, modern Western societies at least are often characterised by their 'obsession' with 'high creativity' and originality at all costs (one needs only to think about contemporary art). And yet, if we take into account the fact that all creativity is founded on the combination of old ideas (Liep, 2001), the mere notion of 'complete originality' becomes a logical impossibility.

The idea that one can be creative by following traditions and conventions, moreover, that it *can only* be creative in the context of a tradition is common knowledge among folk artists involved in egg decoration. Traditions and conventions give meaning to the creation. In the words of Rodica Berechea, "*you can't, no matter what you do, abandon tradition, because you would be making something else [not Easter eggs] and it would be worthless*". Novelty is recognised as part and parcel of the decoration

work, especially since every Easter egg is different (after all, eggs are not of the exact same size and shape) "*and even if I want to make a certain model, I still have to change something, it's like it is easier to change then to let everything be the same every time*" (Livia Balacian). This drive towards creating the new is frequently noted by folk artists, however originality is never considered a break with tradition, but a continuation of it. Even when highly innovative families of decorators contributed to diversifying the working techniques and the existing types of Easter eggs (working eggs with coloured wax in relief, drawing on the egg with coloured wax, making Easter eggs for different seasons, something that led to the now common 'Christmas eggs', etc.), everything done was believed to enrich the tradition and keep it alive. In the end, there is always a subtle dynamic between 'new' and 'old' that governs the craft of egg decoration, beautifully captured in appreciations such as: "*We keep the tradition. But in every egg, in the colours, there is a little piece of us*" (Rodica Berechea).

Assessing 'objectively' and in absolute terms how creative an Easter egg is with regard to its originality would be a difficult task. It would require comparisons with each and every Easter egg ever made and this is, of course, impossible. In fact, creativity tests' scoring systems themselves reflect this difficulty. Most of the times creativity is measured using divergent thinking tests, which invite respondents to give as many answers as they can to an open-ended question and then score responses for fluency (total number of responses), originality (unusualness or uniqueness of responses), and flexibility (variety of responses) (see Runco, 2004). This way originality is evaluated based on comparisons between answers and answers themselves are never capable of exhausting all possibilities. The fact is that, when deciding what is new and original, we always rely on comparative judgements, on the knowledge we and others have about the world of existing artefacts that makes up a cultural domain. This is why authors like Montuori and Purser (1995, p. 71) advocate for the importance of studying the "'genealogy' of creativity and the contextual influences that lead us to consider works to be creative in our present period".

Looking into the 'genealogy' of creativity in the case of Easter egg making reveals an interesting aspect for our understanding of creativity. Novelty and originality are certainly central criteria for 'diagnosing' creative outcomes, but in everyday life the attribution of creativity is founded on much more than this and often involves comparative judgements between 'classes of artefacts'. An Easter egg, or a type of Easter eggs, is more or less creative compared to another egg or type of decoration. This is how there tends to be a general agreement that 'traditional' eggs are the most creative and that eggs decorated with stickers are the least creative. Furthermore, when explaining creativity evaluations, people refer to a variety of aspects. Four associations are particularly salient. The first connects creativity and work, where higher creativity comes out of effort and skill, of "*thinking through*" and making "*cognitive*

effort". The second one links creativity and beauty, creative eggs need to have an aesthetic appearance. Thirdly, creativity has to do with the 'quality' of the work, a very important criterion for folk artists themselves, who appreciate that working with "*soul*" and dedication is paramount. Finally, creativity is intrinsically related to meaning. Eggs with stickers are often labelled as uncreative and *kitsch* especially because they are "*outside*" of the Easter tradition; they are, as one ethnographer put it, "*a synthesis made by people with no roots*". Of course, ideas of value and meaning are also important for the scientific definition of creativity, as we shall discuss next.

Valuable and useful

As mentioned from the beginning of the article, psychology operates with the dual criteria of novelty and usefulness in distinguishing the creative form the non-creative. If there is little ambiguity about what it means to be new and original, the second 'dimension' of creative products is presented under a variety of names. Among these, authors refer to: being tenable or useful or satisfying (Stein, 1962), intelligible (Hausman, 1979), appropriate or useful (Runco, 2007; Martindale, 1994), correct and valuable (Amabile, 1996), significant (Mason, 2003), fitting constrains (Lubart, 2003), compelling (Sternberg, 2006), etc. Moreover, it is slightly unclear what the reference term for this criterion is: the situation or task that generated the creative outcome or the group of people who use it, or both. This is quite an important aspect because it marks the difference between 'objective' assessment (thinking about the nature of the task) and 'subjective' assessment of creativity (thinking about how the creative product impacts the existence of different persons and groups). Whatever the interpretation though, the 'value' dimension is meant to draw the line between a creative result and a simply bizarre one (Arieti, 1976, p. 4).

Three observations derive from this. To start with, including usefulness in the definition of creativity raises some problems when it comes to evaluating all 'original' expressions with no demonstrable social value. In this large category we can include dreams, unexpected thoughts or the imaginative gestures born out of children's curiosity (Barron and Harrington, 1981, p. 441). It would certainly be appropriate in these cases to use a particular definition of 'value' that is less based on tangible contributions and more on adaptability and emotional impact. Second, by adopting utility as a central aspect of creativity we are confining this phenomenon to the 'bright' side of human experience. This is a curious situation for scientific enquiry, used to place phenomena on continuums and to avoid assigning any 'moral' dimension to them. Creativity, it seems, is always 'good', and this is certainly something well-reflected in popular Western culture as well, where being creative is one of the most highly priced virtues a person could have. Finally, it is to be noted that there is some 'tension' between the two defining features of creativity, a kind of tension that is at the core of any type of

creative expression: that between originality and appropriateness, between disrespecting rules and playing by the rules, between being 'new' and yet fitting into the 'old'. As previously commented on, folk artists are very much aware of this reality that is shaping every aspect of their work.

What are the constrains that, once respected, make an Easter egg 'valuable' and therefore contribute to its creativity? Unsurprisingly, there are different constrains for different people according to their professional background and engagement with decoration practices. Ethnographers and priests, for example, who are rarely involved in any complicated forms of decoration, emphasise traditional and religious constrains. For them, both red eggs (with clear symbolic value) and eggs decorated with wax are 'appropriate' considering the nature and purpose of this custom as an integral part of the Easter celebration. In the words of one of the priests, Easter eggs are creative:

> "*for as long as the meaning of being an Easter egg is not lost. For as long as they are not dissociated from symbolism, for as long as the ones seeing the Easter egg don't forget the tight connection it has with the sacrifice of our Savior*".

Art teachers, who are sometimes involved in adorning eggs at home and/or with their students before Easter, focus more on the aesthetic constrains of the task. Without losing track of the traditional meaning of a decorated egg, they are preoccupied as well with chromatic harmony, the choice of shapes and their disposition on the egg, with being able to apply colours on small surfaces and allowing them to dry before continuing to work, etc. Such *practical constrains* are also essential for folk artists. When they talk about what makes a 'good' Easter egg they start explaining the rules of decoration such as: not making mistakes when working with wax (since even if you remove the wax, the surface will not preserve colour properly), segmenting the egg before drawing the motifs, obeying the law of symmetry whenever possible, not juxtaposing similar colours and aiming for chromatic harmony, starting always from bright colours and ending with darker ones, using clean wax and applying it at the same level (for eggs with wax in relief), etc. In the end, the final measure of 'appropriateness' for folk artists is given by how much the eggs are liked and bought. This operates as a selection criterion since, at the end of the day, it is the 'market' who ultimately decides what is valuable and not valuable in terms of egg decoration.

Subjective Reception

Up until now we can conclude that the evaluation of creativity depends both on 'objective' and 'subjective' criteria (see also Kasof, 1995). We can also state that, so-called 'objective' measures (how different something is from what existed before, how well does it conform to the constraints of the task) are relative in themselves and often

end up relying on social agreement (can we know everything that existed before? who sets the constraints of a task?). New artefacts, once they emerge, "demand interpretation" (Zittoun et al., 2003, p. 429). And interpretations require communication with other people, interaction and engagement with existing cultural artefacts. In fact we can say that we never perceive creativity as such since it clearly lacks any physical reality, we *interpret* the outcome as creative, we infer that it came out of a creative process and even go as far as to attribute creativity to the 'author'. In all cases creativity is based on subjective reception at the level of 'audience' members: "Perfection in execution cannot be measured or defined in terms of execution; it implies those who perceive and enjoy the product that is executed" (Dewey, 1934, p. 49). And, as Dewey goes on to argue, the 'creator', both while creating and once the work is finished, also acts as an 'audience', trying to interpret the work from the perspective of others.

This state of affairs probably brings a saying to mind, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. And if indeed creativity is so relative as to depend on the subjectivity of each and every individual than surely science could not be able to say anything about the topic and would exclude it from its preoccupations. At the same time it would be impossible to try and claim the absolute 'objectivity' of creativity. What is there to do? The answer that 'solves' all these epistemological dilemmas is that one can try to study creativity based on subjective reception or judgement because subjective evaluations (especially in the case of experts) are extremely consensual. This is the basis for the consensual definition and assessment technique pioneered in the psychology of creativity by Teresa Amabile. Her approach to creativity is that "a product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate observers independently agree it is creative" (Amabile, 1996, p. 33). Consequently, creativity is to be studied with the help of 'appropriate' observers, ideally familiar with the domain of the 'creation', observers who independently agree on whether something is or not creative and on the level of creativity. Of course the use of expert judges has deep roots in creativity studies, but what makes Amabile's contribution unique is the fact that she argued (and demonstrated in her research) that judges don't even need to start from an explicit definition of creativity. Subjective reception will do, and it will generally prove consensual between people. The consensual assessment technique is widely used today in the literature and the consensual definition of creativity is accepted by most researchers (Lubart, 2003). It is indeed comforting for creativity scholars to think that, although "no person, act or product is creative or noncreative in itself" (Gardner, 1004, p. 145), creativity 'exists' at the level of subjective reception. In addition, we are on 'firm ground' whenever experts evaluate creativity, as compared to lay people.

What would an exercise of using both expert and non-expert opinions say about creativity? What would it mean to include the opinions of creators themselves? The

study of Easter egg creativity with the use of multiple groups of evaluators, all belonging to different 'communities of interest' for this artistic craft, shows how consensus in evaluations is always complemented by divergence. For example there is great consensus among ethnographers, priests, art teachers and folk artists alike that 'traditional' forms of egg decoration require creativity of a higher level. At the same time, not all forms of wax decoration are considered equally valuable (to use the established terminology). Drawing on the egg with coloured wax is catalogue by some ethnographers as stepping outside of established canons. Moreover, eggs decorated with Christmas motives are considered an expression of *kitsch* by several ethnographers, priests and art teachers. Notably, folk artists are more open to 'innovations' and show respect (at least at a declarative level) towards all types of decoration. Red eggs, although largely considered as involving less creative ability, are nonetheless highly 'valuable' for what they represent, especially for priests and ethnographers. Opinions diverge again in what eggs decorated with leaves are concerned. An illustration of 'creativity in the small' for ethnographers and priests, they are potentially very creative for art teachers depending on what types of leaves are used and how they are used, and whether they are painted further with watercolours. In conclusion, evaluators from the four groups show that there are at least two different types of 'reception' of Easter eggs, one supporting the idea of clear differences in creativity (found predominantly among ethnographers and priests), and the other advocating for the creative potential of each decorated egg (more common among art teachers and folk artists). These different evaluations are rendered meaningful when we look at what types of personal engagement with the practice and relations with others and a shared socio-cultural background are characteristic for each of the four different groups. Subjective reception of the new, as we will argue next, is rooted in the larger frames of 'cultural reception' specific for every community and every society.

Cultural Reception

> "Originality, freshness of perceptions, divergent-thinking ability are all well and good in their own right, as desirable personal traits. But without some form of public recognition they do not constitute creativity. In fact, one might argue that such traits are not even necessary for creative accomplishment. (…) Therefore it follows that what we call creativity is a phenomenon that is constructed through an *interaction between producer and audience*. Creativity is not the product of single individuals, but of social systems making judgements about individuals' products" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 314).

Positions such as that of Csikszentmihalyi might be considered extreme by mainstream creativity researchers who would find unsettling the idea that all our criteria for 'recognising' creativity should be replaced by one and one only: social judgement.

While it might indeed be arguable whether novelty, originality, utility are "not even necessary" for creativity to be attributed, it is certainly important to realise that all creativity evaluations are framed by socio-cultural systems of beliefs, norms and practices. The ultimate validation of creativity depends on social agreement which, in its turn, is shaped by broader cultural structures. As Negus and Pickering (2004, p. 23) state, our actions and the products we create are never fully realised as creative acts until they are achieved within some form of social encounter. Our 'subjective reception' of creativity is conditioned to a large extent by 'cultural reception', the set of principles and rules used in a particular culture (of a group, a community or of an entire society) to legitimise creativity. Since we all are subjected to processes of enculturation, we end up internalising these 'cultural lenses' which provide us with useful mental short-cuts or heuristics for deciding what is and what is not creative.

For example there is a great tendency in many cultures to automatically consider everything labelled as 'art' to be 'creative'. The reverse is also true, and Runco (2007, p. 384) referred to this as the 'art bias', reducing creativity to artistic talent alone. This ends up making the terms 'creative' and 'artistic' interchangeable, something that also came out of the study of Easter egg creativity. Asked whether or not Easter eggs, as a class of cultural artefacts, can be considered creative, many respondents from all the four groups answered by giving arguments about their indisputable artistic value. The assumption is clear: Easter eggs are, in most cases, forms of art and art involves creativity. Categories such as 'decorative art' or 'folk art' are frequently used in discussing the creativity of decorated eggs. Moreover, art teachers are ready to claim high artistic value for some Easter eggs as forms of "*pure art*". This naturally opposes them to more trivial everyday life expressions, thus reproducing an implicit distinction between 'high' art and 'popular' or folk art, where the latter is always seen as less creative and valuable than the former (see Dewey, 1934).

Culture doesn't only offer us the lenses through which to look at the world, and therefore also at creativity, but, through social interaction and processes of education, we also acquire the ability to 'decode', to understand the objects and situations that we encounter. In this regard Bourdieu (1993, p. 22) talked about 'artistic competences' as forms of knowledge that allow us "to situate the work of art in relation to the universe of artistic possibilities of which it is part". Generalising this we might say that some people also come to acquire and be recognised for their 'creativity competencies' or ability to identify and evaluate creativity. We refer to these people as 'experts' but it is important to keep in mind that their definition would be 'persons who demonstrate superior ability in mastering the cultural codes that define creativity'. In a way they are the ones who 'embody' the 'cultural reception' of creativity since their judgements are not only expressive of existing cultural norms but also constitute them. Cultural reception is therefore based on *culturally-constructed codes* for distinguishing

creativity. It consequently sets the boundaries of the creative 'domain' and makes the question 'Is this creative?' meaningful in certain situations and not others. To return to the example of Easter eggs, the question concerning their creativity was 'controversial' for at least some of the priests. For this group in particular, Easter eggs belong to a different universe of significations, built around the notions of faith, religious practices and the Resurrection, and evaluating these eggs based on their creativity was not the most 'appropriate' or 'natural' thing to do.

One conclusion emerging from our discussion above is that creativity evaluations are potentially consensual *within* the same professional group, community or culture, but also potentially divergent *between* groups, communities and cultures. The cross-cultural study of creativity testifies to this last claim. Creativity in the West is very much product-centred, focusing on originality and the pragmatic aspects of problem-solving, while Easter cultures are more process-centred when it comes to creativity, emphasising personal fulfilment, enlightenment and inner growth (Lubart, 1999; Raina, 1999; Westwood and Low, 2003). The scientific literature on creativity could not have remained oblivious to these findings. The fact that lay conceptions are crucial for 'discovering' the creativity of certain products or people inspired a growing body of literature on implicit theories of creativity. Although tempting as a theoretical perspective, the assumptions Runco (1999b, p. 27) starts from in defining implicit theories as belonging only to non-scientists (scientists always 'explicitate' their theories) and being often "personal rather than shared" are surprising. As the present article strived to argue, personal constructs of creativity are always embedded in social constructs (see also Weiner, 2000), just as subjective reception is framed by cultural reception. This does not mean that two persons from the same culture think the same about creativity and evaluate it in an identical ways (in the end culture is a plural phenomenon and we cannot leave out personal life experiences) but that cultural values are powerful 'guidelines' we tend to follow in conscious or subconscious ways. The implicit theories of creativity ethnographers, priests, art teachers and folk artists hold, for example, show both communalities and particularities and these can be explained by the fact that, while all respondents belong to the same national culture, they are also members of different professional groups. For folk artists and ethnographers creativity is a continuation of tradition, for priests a form of improving what already exists, for art teachers a natural ability alimented by our desire for the aesthetic. Thinking about creativity necessarily leads us to thinking about culture.

When can we say something is creative?

In the end, we have to return to our initial question and see what we might have learned about identifying creativity in everyday life. As a starting point we would need to agree with Lubart's (2003, p. 11) assertion that: "There are no absolute norms to

judge the creativity of a product". And yet, both science and common sense make constant efforts to anchor the notion of creativity in products that are collectively recognised as creative. At the core of a potential definition of creativity seem to stand the features of newness and originality. Creativity means generating 'difference', but not of any kind. When it comes to creative products, there is merit in being different (Hausman, 1979, p. 240), and ideas of value and usefulness come to complement those about novelty and originality. Within these grounds, specific for the psychology of creativity, there is an important argument to be settled: is creativity evaluation an 'objective' process? In other words, do we need subjective judgement to decide what is new, original, useful? This question is not gratuitous. In the efforts made to promote 'objective' measures of creativity lies the assumption that creativity in itself has an 'objective' nature, an assumption rightfully catalogued by Csikszentmihalyi (1999, p. 321) as "too metaphysical to be considered part of a scientific approach". The arguments and examples given so far in this article indicate that, outside of 'newness', appreciating originality and especially usefulness require some degree of subjective judgement and, in any case, these qualities are always relative (to what we know, to the reference points we take, etc.). This is how, in the past few decades, the emphasis on 'subjective reception' increased and today the use of the consensual assessment technique is widespread. Paradoxically though, the grounds on which this methodology is employed can in fact take us back to the idea of an 'objective' existence of creativity. If personal evaluations of creativity 'naturally' converge then there must be something about creativity in itself that can be immediately recognised (at least by experts). But the real question is: is it something about creativity, or does it have more to do with the cultural lenses we 'wear' and 'use'? The first conclusion to be taken out of this article is that subjective reception is in fact conditioned, to a large extent, by cultural systems of beliefs and norms about creativity. And these beliefs and norms are both similar and different across cultures. In the end it might even be that ideas about originality and usefulness act as common cross-cultural 'anchors' for creativity (although evidence suggests they are more reflective of Western values).

The analysis of creativity in the context of Easter egg decoration in Romania points exactly to the intricacies of both creative expression and evaluation. It shows that opinions tend to converge when it comes to the creativity of 'traditionally' decorated eggs and also to the 'un-creative' nature of Easter eggs decorated with stickers. The two ends of the creativity continuum, as it were, pose little problems. What about the 'middle' instances? The creativity of eggs decorated with leaves for example is harder to appreciate by participants because, while it fades when compared to wax decoration, it does certainly involve more than the simple dying of eggs. It is also interesting to notice that, although persons from different professional groups agree on the fact that creativity is involved in 'traditional' decoration, the ways in which they reach this conclusion are slightly different. Ethnographers and priests emphasise the

value of these products for continuing a deep and meaningful Romanian tradition. Art teachers and folk artists are more inclined to appreciate the beauty and artistic harmony characteristic for these products. Such discrepancies are important since, as it came out of the research, members from all these groups engage in Easter egg decoration and relate to others who decorate differently, based on their conceptions of creativity, art and tradition. Ethnographers decide on what types of Easter eggs are to be displayed at Museum fairs, priests tell their parishioners what types of eggs are to be appreciated, art teachers teach students in the classroom how to make an Easter egg and folk artists continue producing the kinds of eggs that correspond to what they like and what customers want. Understanding creativity evaluations in this folk art context therefore needs to take into account the '*ecology*' of practices, social relations and beliefs presupposed by the craft. This is the case, we can assume, for all forms of creative expression, from the more 'modest' to the most highly acclaimed.

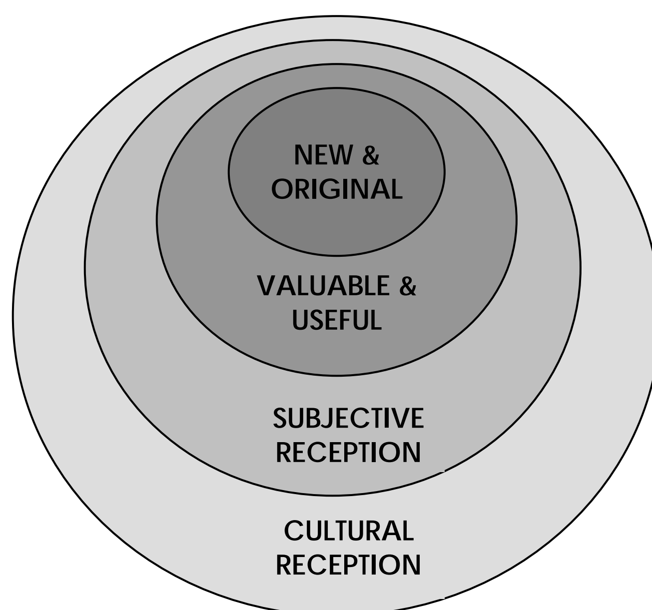

Figure 1. The multi-layered approach to creativity assessment

In light of the above, one contribution to the literature on creativity assessment would be to define it as a *multi-layered process*. Figure 1 tries to depict the multi-layered nature of our criteria for identifying and assessing creativity. This depiction suggests that while newness and originality are central for evaluating the creativity of products, they always need to be 'qualified' by reference to value and utility. Furthermore, all these aspects are often perceived and appreciated in 'subjective' ways and personal judgements about creativity are formulated in the broader context of cultural norms for the reception and recognition of creativity. This embedment in culture needs to be taken more seriously into account by current research on creativity and especially by modern assessment techniques. In addition, the multi-layered approach would require researchers to reflect upon and specify: a) what are the exact criteria used for

assessment (novelty, usefulness, subjective judgement, etc.); b) how these criteria relate to other micro- or macro-level factors (from comparisons within a pre-set sample of responses to dialogue with larger cultural frames) and c) who makes the assessment (the author, 'lay' persons, experts, etc.), based on what theoretical assumptions (creativity as 'subjective', as 'objective', etc.) and with what practical implications. Of course not everyone would happily accept this approach. Runco (1999a, pp. 242-243) for example advocated for separating creativity from reputation, novelty and aesthetic appeal from social value and impact. This, in the author's vision, would make for "good science" and also "increase the objectivity of creativity research". But is 'good science' troubled by or unable to deal with the complexities of our existence as social beings? Is it upset by the idea of relativity and by the study of culture? Because, if this is the case, then probably creativity cannot be approached with its means. We could maybe study 'creation', understood as the mere generation of a new artefact, something different than what (we know) existed before, but not creativity. The richness, complexity, and, in the end, the importance of creativity for our daily lives rests exactly in the fact that it is a psycho-socio-cultural phenomenon (Glăveanu, 2010c). When we lose the social and cultural from sight we 'mutilate' the phenomenon we are aiming to study and we end up studying something else.

What other research implications can we take from these conclusions? To begin with, we need to think about modalities of contextualising creativity evaluations and of being more sensitive to the social and cultural dynamics behind their generation. We can always start our study of the cultural context by looking at what particular cultures (at a community or national level) celebrate as being creative and see how these 'examples' infiltrate commonsensical notions of creativity and become an important point of reference for both acknowledged and anonymous creators. Besides, such criteria also 'contaminate' the way in which we build and score creativity tests and, in this area at least, serious efforts are made at present to generate culture-specific norms for creativity assessment (despite resulting difficulties in comparing test results; see Lubart, 1999; Westwood and Low, 2003). Paying more attention to lay conceptions of creativity and incorporating their insights into our theories about the phenomenon and our assessment tools can only increase their ecological validity and can "help make our definitions more realistic and practical" (Runco and Bahleda, 1986, p. 94). Another significant question from a methodological perspective is: Who should judge creativity? Is it the author, the community, scientists? If we do adopt a perspective in which creativity it to a large extent culturally constructed than we come to realise that it is not important 'who' evaluates creativity but 'where' these evaluations come from and how they affect the creators and their larger communities. Anyone can evaluate creativity and every one of us, in different circumstances (at home, at work, at school, in museums or at science fairs, etc.), more explicitly or implicitly, does so. This doesn't mean that expert judges are to be dismissed; there is certainly value in the opinion of

trained professionals. But again, maybe more 'ecological' value and more direct impact on the 'creation' and the 'creator' have those judgements made by people who are in a position to influence either one of them (who could be defined as belonging to 'communities of interest'). If we are to understand creativity we need to consider who the 'actors' of creative acts are and these actors are certainly more numerous than the creator him/herself (Glăveanu, 2010a). Finally, and related to the above, it would be also worthwhile exploring all 'mismatches' in the evaluation of certain artefacts, what happens when creativity is attributed to an object that was not intended by its author to actually be 'creative', or when the status of 'creative' is given after some time to certain creations (the classical case of Van Gogh) or, more interestingly, taken away from them. These situations are most revealing of the 'cultural frames' discussed in this article and point to their dynamic and co-constructed nature.

In concluding, we can offer a tentative answer to the question: 'How can we say something is creative?' in the form of 'Something is creative when it is, to our knowledge, new *and* culturally validated as creative, which, in the West at least, often means being appreciated as original and useful'. Therefore nothing is creative because it just ***is*** creative. There is always a factor of subjective reception and social agreement involved. To say that creativity exists as such, independent of any context, just means being tricked by linguistic reification or following strictly positivistic criteria that struggle to eliminate subjectivity, relativity, or common sense forms of knowledge. The psychological science of creativity should not fall in either of these traps. Operating with *emic*, locally informed criteria, rather than *ethic*, universal standards in the case of creativity (Glăveanu, 2010b) leads by no means to the dissolution of creativity as a notion, but to an integrative vision that does justice to the complexity of the phenomenon under study. Recognising the fact that we don't 'discover' but 'create' creativity takes nothing away from the importance of the concept and the necessity of understanding its underlying processes. If anything, it opens a new challenging path for researching the 'creative' ways in which individuals and societies think about creativity.

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