

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

DS481
Fall 2024

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[Elizabeth Gilbert – “Your Elusive Creative Genius” \(2009\)](#)

ANCIENT GREECE & ROME

- Believed creativity did not come from humans
- It was “a divine, attendant spirit that came to human beings from some distant and unknowable source for distant and unknowable reasons.”
- Daemons / Genius



Cézanne – “Kiss of the Muse” (1860)

GENIUS

- [Merriam-Webster](#)
- an attendant spirit of a person or place
- Later genius came to refer to both remarkable talent or intelligence, and to someone who has such



Est. 1828

Dictionary

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Definition

noun

adjective

Did you know?

Synonyms

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genius

1 of 2 noun

ge-ni-us ('jēn-yəs) 'jē-nē-əs

plural geniuses or genii ('jē-nē-ī)

Synonyms of genius

1 a plural **genii** : an attendant spirit of a person or place

b plural usually **genii** : a person who influences another for good or bad
He has been accused of being his brother's evil *genius*.

2 : a strong leaning or inclination : **PENCHANT**

3 a : a peculiar, distinctive, or identifying character or spirit
the *genius* of our democratic government

b : the associations and traditions of a place

c : a personification or embodiment especially of a quality or condition

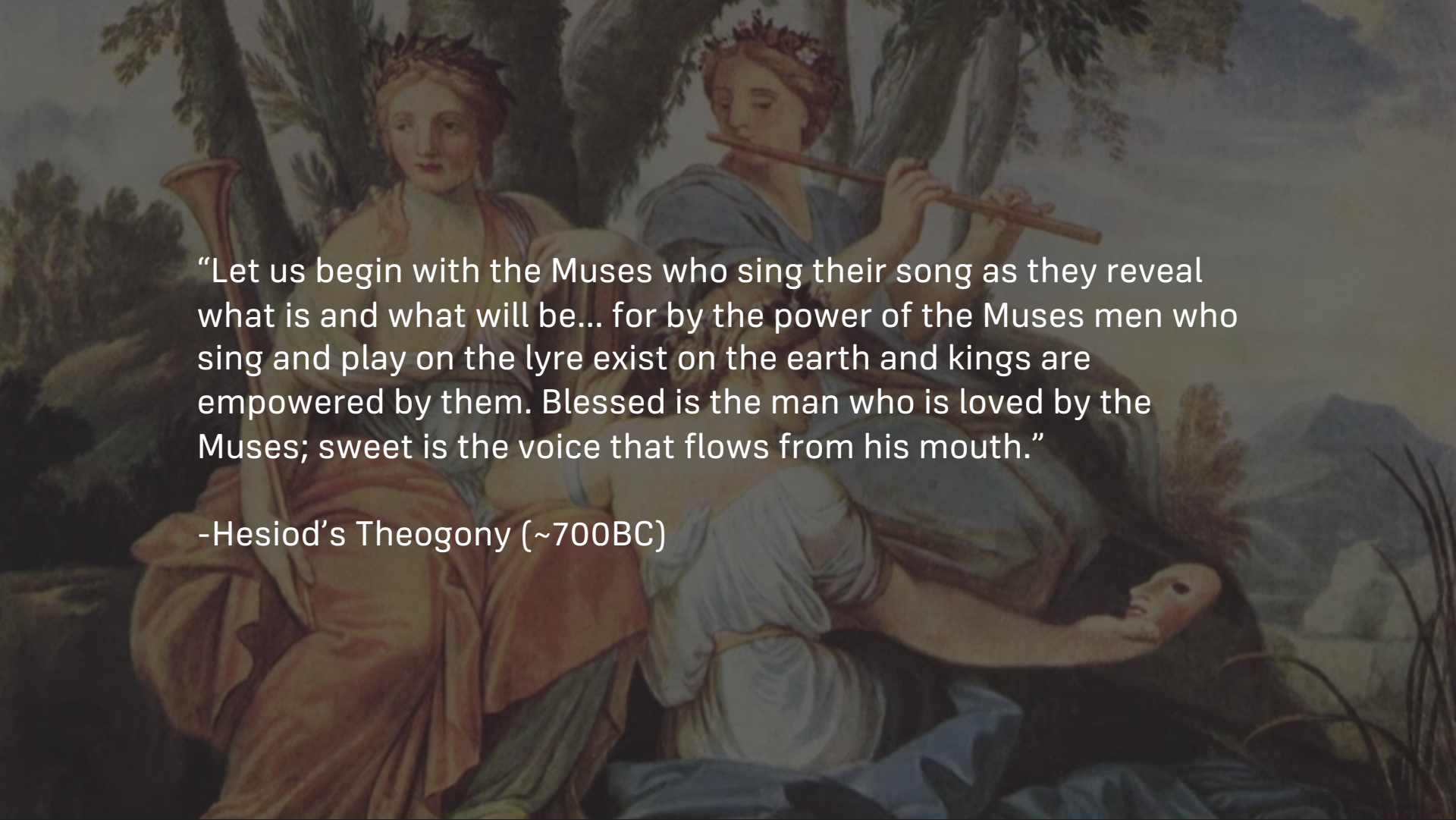
4 plural usually **genii** : **SPIRIT, JINNI**

5 plural usually **geniuses**

a : a single strongly marked capacity or aptitude
... had a *genius* for getting along with boys ...
— Mary Ross

b : extraordinary intellectual power especially as manifested in creative act

c : a person endowed with extraordinary mental superiority
especially : a person with a very high IQ



“Let us begin with the Muses who sing their song as they reveal what is and what will be... for by the power of the Muses men who sing and play on the lyre exist on the earth and kings are empowered by them. Blessed is the man who is loved by the Muses; sweet is the voice that flows from his mouth.”

-Hesiod's Theogony (~700BC)

THE MUSES

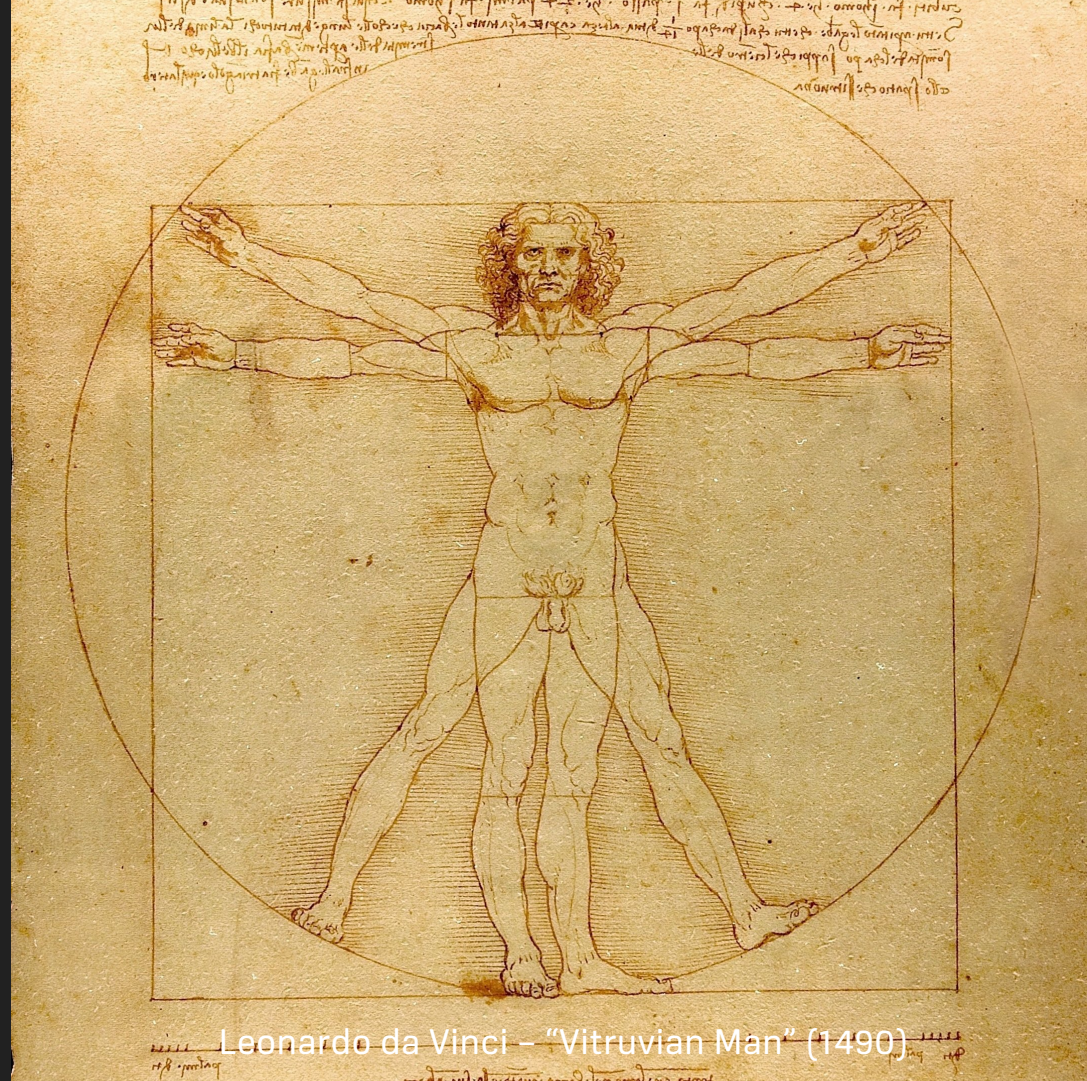
- Said to be the source of knowledge and creativity
- The poet Hesiod wrote they are the personification of art
- Others claimed there were 3 muses: Practice, Memory, and Song



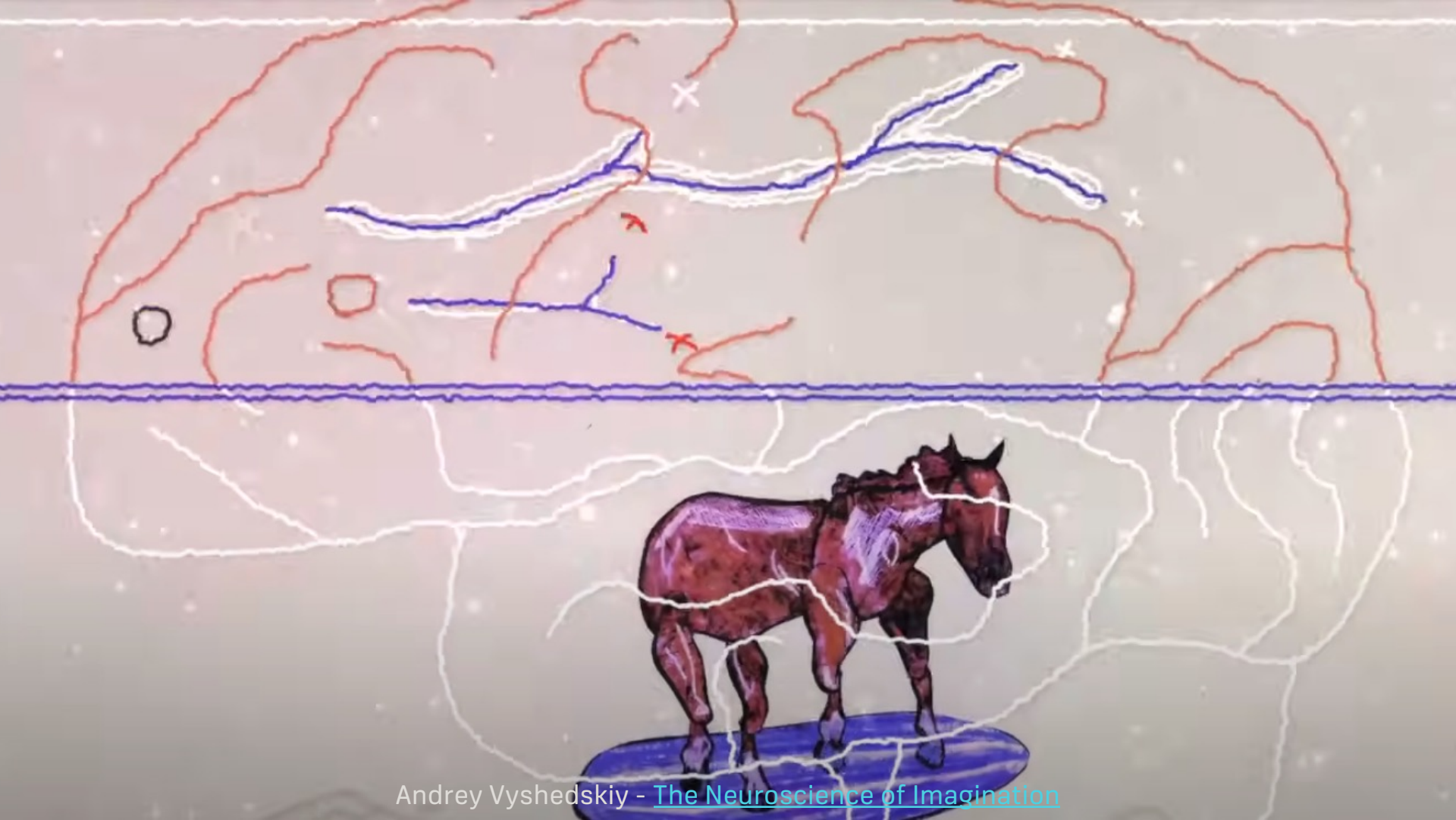
Eustache Le Sueur – “Clio, Euterpe, And Thalia” (1650s)

RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

- 13th/14th Century Italy
- A worldview centered on the nature and importance of humanity
- The human mind as the source of genius



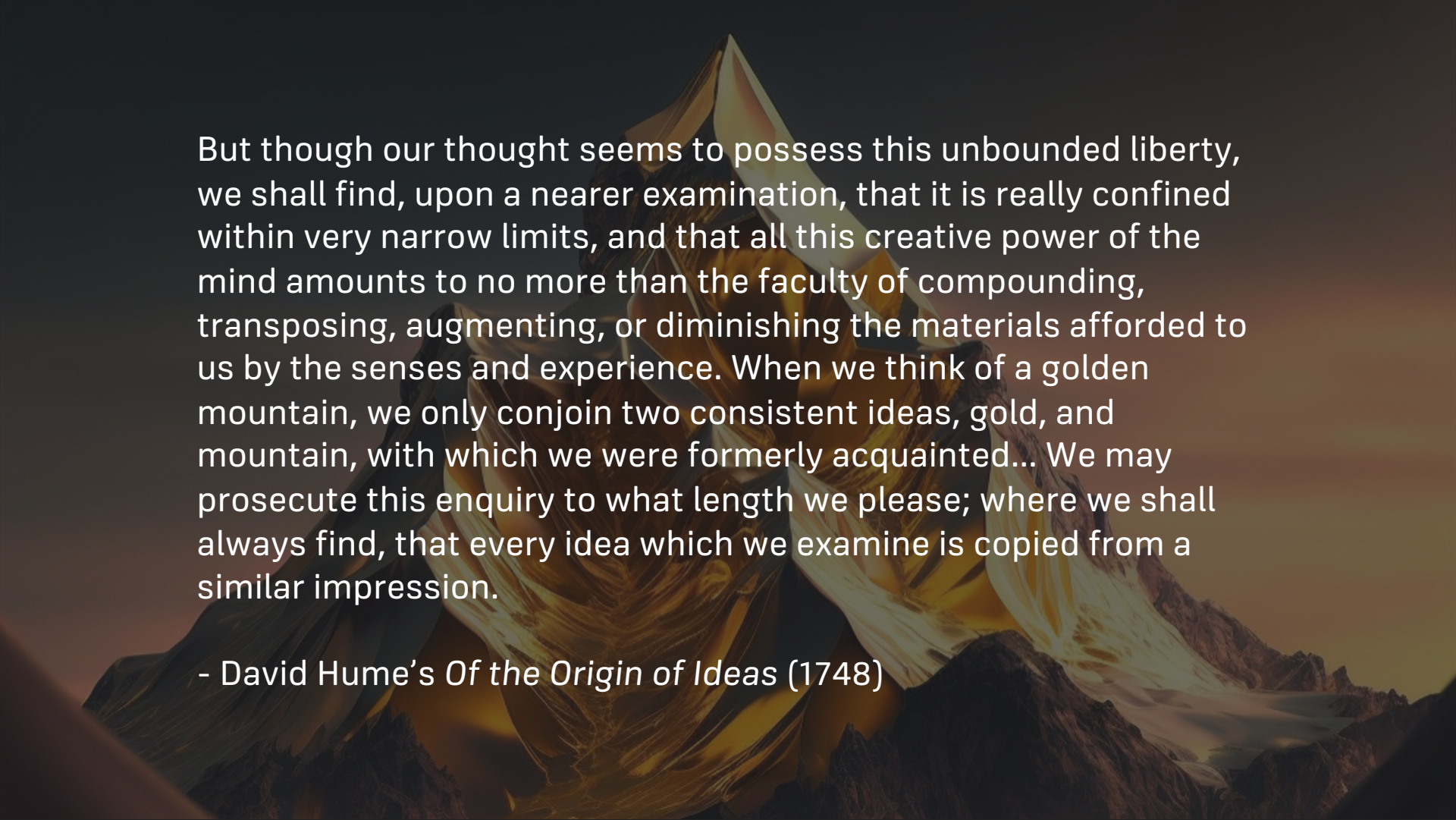
Leonardo da Vinci – "Vitruvian Man" (1490)



THE HEBBIAN THEORY

- Donald Hebb's *The Organization of Behavior* (1949)
- When you look at an object, your brain encodes characteristics into a "neuronal ensemble" or "engram"
- "Neurons that fire together wire together"





But though our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded to us by the senses and experience. When we think of a golden mountain, we only conjoin two consistent ideas, gold, and mountain, with which we were formerly acquainted... We may prosecute this enquiry to what length we please; where we shall always find, that every idea which we examine is copied from a similar impression.

- David Hume's *Of the Origin of Ideas* (1748)

HUME'S GOLDEN MOUNTAIN

- David Hume (1748)
- Your brain takes familiar pieces and assembles them in new ways
- It's impossible to imagine something you've never seen before.



MENTAL SYNTHESIS THEORY

- Multiple engrams are activated at the same time
- Something in your brain must coordinate this
- Neural fibers go from the prefrontal cortex to the posterior cortex where they trigger multiple ensembles, creating a hybrid image



The image features a dark, monochromatic version of the famous sculpture 'The Thinker' by Auguste Rodin. The sculpture is shown in a three-quarter view, with the figure leaning forward in a state of deep contemplation. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the figure's skin and the contours of his body against a solid black background. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text 'WHAT DO YOU THINK?' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The text is positioned across the figure's torso and arms, creating a direct connection between the visual subject and the question posed.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

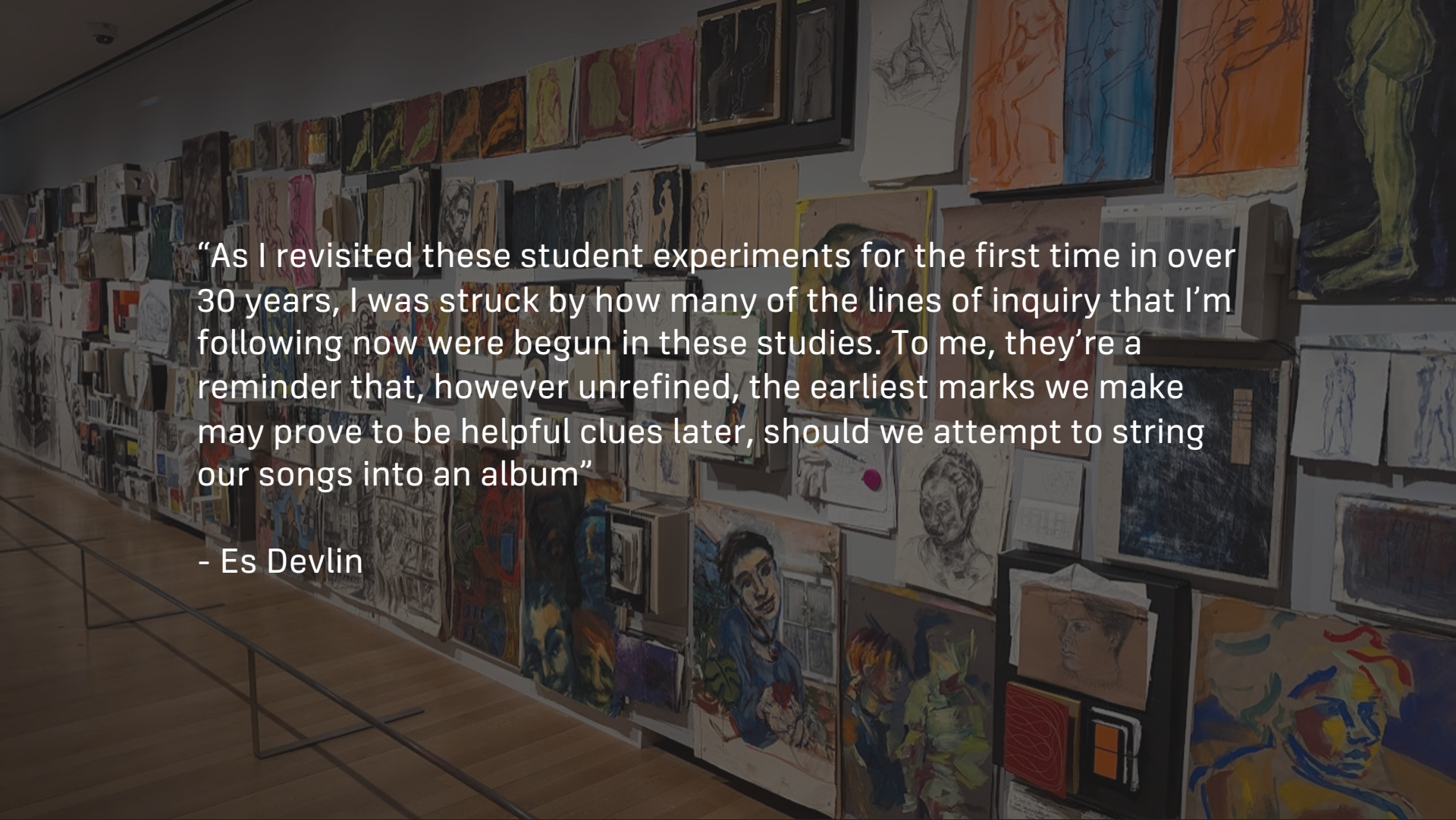
EXCUSE ME, CAN'T YOU SEE I'M DRIVING?

- "The genius doesn't have to be this internalized, tormented thing. It could be this peculiar, wondrous, bizarre collaboration between [the artist] and the strange, external thing."





MODULE 1



“As I revisited these student experiments for the first time in over 30 years, I was struck by how many of the lines of inquiry that I’m following now were begun in these studies. To me, they’re a reminder that, however unrefined, the earliest marks we make may prove to be helpful clues later, should we attempt to string our songs into an album”

- Es Devlin

MODULE 1

- Module 1 will guide students through a recap of any meaningful design work they have completed throughout their academic careers.
- The aim is to recognize **3 Threads** in this work to uncover each student's personal design interests. Students will isolate these and work to illustrate them in a visual "**mood board**" that will help to define their research path moving forward.
- During this module, students will write **2 short papers** that are meant to connect the readings to their research.

HOMEWORK

- **Read** Nigel Cross – Creativity in the Design Process (available on Moodle)
- **Watch** [Ethan Hawke – Give Yourself Permission to be Creative](#)
- **Write Paper 1** at least 1 page (double-spaced) examining the things that give you inspiration.
 - What puts you in a creative mindset? What motivates you to get up and create something that has meaning for you?
 - Include at least 3 quotes from the reading or video with proper MLA citation and bibliography.

CITATIONS

IN-TEXT CITATIONS

"What many people call 'impossible' may actually only be a limitation of imagination that can be overcome by better design thinking" (Buchanan 19).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Buchanan, Richard. "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking." The Idea of Design, MIT Press, 1996.

PURDUE OWL

- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style

3 THREADS (pt 1)

On the page(s) following your paper, make a list of at least 5 projects you've done and/or courses you've taken that have held meaning for you. For each one answer the following questions:

- Why did you choose that class or project?
- What did you gain from it?
- How did this experience spark your curiosity as a designer?