

Chapter Nine

CREATIVITY II

You will become what you think about. Don't let your self-esteem get mixed up with your golf score. Follow your dreams, and enjoy the trip.

Davis Love III, professional golfer.

The artist is the brother of the felon and the madman.

Thomas Mann, *Dr. Faustus*

Other artists and their works are food, nourishment for the soul, companions along the way. But ultimately I, like every artist, must sit alone, go within, and seek and find and express whatever is there. Sometimes it's difficult. Other times, it emerges like ocean waves frolicking in high winds.

LU



SL Creative Anxiety, Neurotic Anxiety

You said you need to be painting again, but you are finding it difficult to take the first step. I know how that feels, as does every artist. It's rather like the dinner party you have coming up — on the one hand you want it and welcome it; on the other, you feel fear, insecurity, the sense of being imposed upon. Yikes!

With artistic creation, there are two kinds of anxiety: one is creative; the other is neurotic. Neurotic anxiety prevents you from taking that first step; it is a self-critical fear of failure or success or both; it keeps you inert. Creative anxiety is healthy; it is an awareness of your strengths and creative energies; it is a sense that you are about to leap off the edge into an new and unknown journey; you feel a little insecure, anticipating the fact that you will not be entirely in control; it is the rush of adrenalin as you actually pick up the brush and make the first daub or line, leaping out of the nest, as it were, feeling wind beneath your wings for the first time. Once you do that, once you actually begin, the creative process takes on a life of its own — and, voila! — anxiety disappears and joy, intensity and creativity take over.

Am I right? (In some ways, it's very much like writing a letter, isn't it?) When this self-generating creative process happens, you are once again flying without fear.

GS Hope is Not a Lie: Just Trust — And Do the Work

You are not like anybody else. Yes, it's true that you share your humanity with all other human beings, but you are also *unique*, one of a kind, very special. Existence never repeats itself. No two trees are alike. No two leaves on the tree are alike. No two pussycats. No two people. The Universe is not something created. It is *endless creativity in and of itself*. So I urge you not to despair, and do not think of hope as a lie.

If I recall correctly, Henry Miller didn't get published until he was 43. Ian Fleming was 44 before he wrote his first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*. I didn't get *Blue Melody* published until I was 64. (I know, how could a guy like me be so ancient? Actually, what with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll during my madcap Buckley years, I am more like 104 today — and holding up pretty well!)

My point is simple: Trusting your own evolutionary development is the only sane and strong way to go. There is nobody else like you in the Universe. You have special talents, special interests, special gifts that are yours and yours alone. As you explore them with courage and confidence — and trust — everything will come together in its own time. Don't push, don't fight, don't panic — just *trust, and do the work*.

Some people are like Tim and Jeff Buckley. They flower early. Others are like Fleming or Miller or dozens of others. It takes longer for us to pass through the valley of confusion; longer for the search to proceed; longer for an awakening into the clear light of whom we truly are. Trust is the key — and patience, sustained searching, examining, and working.

I greatly admire the place you are in. Simple people are thoughtless. They do not question. More evolved people such as yourself think about things. They question. And that questioning creates doubt. If they don't give up in fear and fall back into the comforts of thoughtlessness, if they press on through the doubts and anguish and don't give up, they ultimately arrive at the pinnacle of clarity, awareness, self-realization, compassion and creativity.

Once again, keep on keepin' on, and know you are on the right track!

SL Creative Anxiety, Patience, Trust

I find the creative process to be incredibly engrossing. It seems to me the fundamental thing to keep in mind is that answers and solutions *always* emerge. *Always*. Simply keep the question and/or problem in mind. Don't get lazy and give it up, but in a relaxed way retain your focus. Patiently trust. Wait without frustration or fear. Eventually, the door opens. The knot unties. The way re-opens. The means to get there appears.

I've not always found the waiting and trusting part to be easy. Indeed, the more complex the problem and the more pressing the need to keep moving forward, the more difficult it is, at least for me, to wait around for the answer without flipping out.

However, I've learned over the years that the flip-out only drains off energy and sidetracks creativity. It slows the progressive movement from darkness into clarity. The doubt that leads to frustration and impatience is based on fear, the fear that the problem may be unsolvable, or that even if it IS solvable, I am not capable of solving it.

Now that I know the dynamic, and also know that if I keep the question clearly in mind and patiently await the solution, the answer will always emerge, I feel one heck of a lot better. If I hit a snag, I go for a walk, or water the flowers, or just lay up and watch TV. Sooner or later, in its own time, there's that A-ha! connection. Then back to work.

Creative anxiety is healthy. It comes with the territory, you know? It can feel incredibly uncomfortable, even frightening, but if you remain in that zone without panicking, all will be well.

I trust I am articulating things you have already experienced. You have probably gone through these processes dozens of times along the way. But sometimes it helps to give them shape and form in language. The next time a creative block arises, the conscious linguistic recognition of the situation can prove helpful. I know it has for me, so I pass it along for whatever value it might have for you.

DS Divine Discontent, Creative Disobedience & New Pajamas

One of the energizing keys in your letter seems to me to be your statement, "I'm in the middle of a bad spell now, even as I'm cleaning house and changing ways."

Spiritual folks used to talk about "divine discontent," pain that is not neurotic or destructive, but which is healthy and creative. It's the pain that comes from inner shifts of perspective that signal growth — leaving the known, the familiar, the immediately and socially acceptable customs and codes, and venturing into the unknown, or to the next higher level of awareness or perception or creative endeavor.

When we outgrow one set of perceptions or peers or activities, it can be hard as hell to navigate through the changes the creative psyche keeps urging us to affirm. To our shock and surprise, we find ourselves utterly divided. The psyche says, Get new pajamas. But we hate to acknowledge that the old set of pajamas might be too small! We would rather cling to our present miseries than risk unfamiliar challenges, pains, and conflicts that new and therefore frightening conditions almost surely will bring.

That "anxiety and doubt" you mentioned cries aloud for inertia and its safety, while life-affirming creativity beckons you onward and upward — to seek and find that "light within" you mentioned. As you know from your own experience with yourself and others, that kind of positive-negative, affirmative-destructive conflict can be prickly indeed.

Last night Sonia and I watched a marvelous movie entitled *Himalaya*, about a primitive tribe of Tibetans hiking across the mountains to trade their salt for the neighboring village's grain. At one point, the old chief is dying. He tells the young new chief, "Every great leader begins with disobedience."

I rather liked that. I made it relevant to psycho-spiritual evolution.

To liberate ourselves, to lead ourselves into authenticity and stability, we have to see and break through our *parental* conditionings. And to become a genuine person, not just another representative of rigid social values, but a loving, kind, creative, self-actualizing individual, we also have to see and crack through the *social* constraints that oppress us as individuals and as whole societies.

That's what the buddhas and great psychotherapists have been attempting to help us do for ourselves, is it not? From Buddha and Socrates and Jesus, to Freud, Osho, Krishnamurti, Abraham Maslow, Eckhart Tolle and others, the great seers and psychologists have been helping us to "disobey" those parental/social constraints, to seek and find that "light within" you mentioned, and to live loving, creative, self-actualizing lives without regard for those who would condemn us for stepping outside of the norm and creatively leading the way into expansive new psychological, social, artistic and scientific domains.

I know all this may sound like a digression, but it's not. Creative disobedience, divine discontent, and one's own personal inner shift of perspectives often go hand in hand. It's entirely possible that your discontent, and the conflicts that are emerging, might be related to these things. When we grow, we're faced with change, and change toward the new brings conflict with the old — not only outside of ourselves (jobs, wives, institutions, etc.), but within ourselves.

What about those new pajamas?

CS Language and Music: A Complementary Unity

Happy to say, I thought about you and your letter all night. You raise good questions from the heart and about issues that are close to you. Like you, I too love words and music, and have found them to be profound sources of insight and wisdom —

words giving egress into deeper thought; music giving egress into expansive intuition.

For many years I regarded language and music as conflicting elements: reason and emotion. If I moved into the word, I felt confident about matters of self-discipline, control, analysis, rational discourse, etc. However, the passion and the fire in my soul found little or no expression; and if I gave my passions expression, then intense emotion tended to rise up and overwhelm reason, even to the point of self-destruction. If I relinquished the word and followed only the path of music, I felt the passions, felt the fire, reveled in sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, loved the flesh, tears and laughter, but had little or no sense of reason, discipline, direction or purpose. With reason alone, I felt like a dry emotional desert. Rather like Thomas Mann, I regarded the two domains as equally attractive, but irreconcilably contradictory.

It took many years for me to see that the two dimensions, or domains, could work *together*. Mind and intellect did not have to deny or repress passions and non-linguistic intuitions. Mind could *serve* music, and music could give power and humanity to mind.

Each could energize the other; each could help the other flower. They could work together, not as conflicting opposites, but as a complementary unity. At this point, I began to become a mature person, unified within and without, able to create without destroying myself or others, able to utilize all elements within myself to serve life, love and beauty.

SL Creative Genius: Streaming Tears of Happiness

To be sure, rather like some of Thomas Mann's characters (in *Dr. Faustus*, which I'm reading at the moment), I feel gifted but lame — gifted enough to be vexed by my lameness, while overcoming it by illumination, regardless of how others might

judge it. In moments when music flows through me like choirs of angels, I transcend myself in this high illumination, while never becoming a stranger to myself. I remain who I am, but I am lifted to my natural elevation through music.

As with so many artists, my pendulum swings widely between extremes of cheer and melancholy, power and impotence, triumph and despair. And I accept it. "The artist is the brother of the felon and the madman," Mann wrote, and I agree.

While these realms might frighten security-oriented bourgeois minds, I not only accept them, but embrace them. Others may call these extremes "madness," and such may be the case. I don't care. If that's what comes with the territory, whatever it may be called, I hold the pain and doubts as dearly as I hold the joys and triumphs.

Rather like Mann again, my nature creates a certain critical opposition to the world, to conventional morality, to the orthodox and mediocre life. I not only seek refuge in expansive thinking, great books and great music, but I also know that I can ascend to these heights myself. I am already predisposed to understand and relate to them. I am ready for them. The soil in which the music and thoughts and writings of others grow is the same in me as it is in them. Hence, the resonance.

But I don't stop there. I respond to their invitation, yes, and their works are often a refuge, but I also utilize them as catalytic springboards to generate my own beauty, not on their terms or in competition with them, but on my own terms, for the sake of extending my invitation to others and shedding my own light and love, even to one such as yourself.

Other artists and their works are food, nourishment for the soul, companions along the way. But ultimately I, like every artist, must sit alone, go within, and seek and find and express whatever is there. Sometimes it's difficult. Other times, it emerges like ocean waves frolicking in high winds.

It seems to me that all dedicated artists mine their own soul. "Genius" is not so much extraordinary talent, as it is the *fulfillment* of whatever talent is there. The *work*, released through self-transcendent illumination, is everything. It's all that matters.

Artists offer that which we might call the right and the true — that is, direct experience profoundly felt and known; inspiration; and primal enthusiasm untainted by sickly, fear-based criticism, prudence, reason's inhibitions, lethargy, inertia, despair.

Reality is whatever works, and truth is experience and feeling. Pour reality and truth into the music or the writing or upon the canvas, and you fulfill your innate genius, a genius that is your birthright. Genius is there already, waiting, eager to be enflamed, thrilled to serve the courage and direction of one who dares to leap into these morally ambiguous and psychologically dangerous waters. Its roses will thrill those who listen, read, or look through the same rose-light in their own eyes. That's the resonance I mentioned.

I like the way Mann caught the joy of the process in Chapter 25 of *Dr. Faustus* when he talks about the exuberance of an artist's giving him/herself over to the creative power — It is "a veritably gladdening, ravishing, undoubtful, and believing inspiration, an inspiration for which there can be no choosing, no bettering, no mending, in which everything is received as blessed decree, which trips up and bumbles, ruffling sublime shudders from pate to tiptoe over him whom it visits and causing him to burst into streaming tears of happiness. . ."

To one who serves creative energy, the challenge is not only to acknowledge and accept one's self, abilities, limitations and extreme moods. It is also to break through the age itself, the cultural epoch. Not easy. In a sense, creating is the easy part. The rest is difficult — how can one penetrate cultural values that embrace

greed instead of service, fear instead of courage, power instead of love, death instead of life, insanity instead of clarity; commercial interests that exploit only those arts that mirror the most violent and degrading, least imaginative, least graceful, least conscious minds; lazy minds that love the gross instead of the beautiful?

Nevertheless, I am quick not to blame the times, commerce, or the slothful mass-mind for anything whatsoever. *Genius exists in the willingness to serve one's own experience at the highest levels of which one is capable.* Getting it out there — commercial acceptance and success — is another matter. Sometimes a brilliant mind with a great vision can succeed in the marketplace (e.g. Ken Wilber), even as a mediocre mind with a merely widely shared set of conventional values can reach the Top 100. In the marketplace, who one knows is perhaps even more important than what one does.

All of these things come with the territory and must be accepted, even as envy and comparisons must be nipped in the bud, and self-acceptance elevated to the top of the ladder.

CS Discovering Your True Nature: Everything Is You

. . . . During those many years, I began to realize that my search for meaning and direction had been intense, noteworthy and impassioned, but somewhat misguided. I had made an erroneous first-step assumption. And, of course, if the first step is not quite right, then the following steps lead one off in a direction that may or may not prove fruitful.

My assumption was that meaning was "out there" and I had to search to find it, as if it were lying about in a field somewhere, and all I had to do was hunt around, turn over a rock, look behind a tree, ask questions of this or that authority, find a guru or

a teacher, follow their instructions, and meaning would appear to me. I would embrace it, feel whole and complete, and live happily ever after.

It came as a shock to me one day that *life in itself did not have any meaning*. There was no meaning "out there," whether in a god, or in a savior, scripture, tradition, philosophical system, or methodological technique.

I immediately fell into the life-negative despair that afflicted the Existentialists — e.g. Dostoyevsky (*Notes From the Underground*; Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*), Sartre (*Being and Nothingness*), Camus (*The Stranger*, various essays). If there is no meaning, no god, no goal or purpose in life, then nothing matters, everything is empty, all is permitted.

At that point for me, life seemed bleak indeed. I fell into sensual pleasures as ends in themselves, lost myself in music's passions, explored intoxications and oblivions of all sorts, and generally had a wonderful time being decadent, "disillusioned," and demented.

However, one day I ran across a man who enabled me to realize that this state of mind was not an end, a conclusion, a stopping point. There was more available, much more.

He said, "You're right. Existence has no meaning. It is its own end. A rose does not exist for some purpose other than itself. It celebrates its life and its presence by enjoying the sun and the stars and cool breezes and sweet rains. It lives, it sings its song, it celebrates and dances, and merges back into the earth. Life is not somewhere else. It is here. It is now, where there is no yesterday or tomorrow — where, in fact, there is no time. You must create meaning yourself, by yourself. There is nothing to search for, nothing to find, no questions to be asked, no answers to be given. In fact, the search and the questions may well be ways to avoid yourself and the fundamental issue."

"Oh? And what is the fundamental issue?"

"Going within. Discovering your true nature. And creating your own meaning."

"If I have to create meaning myself, then it's not authentic. It's a lie. It's just something personal and relative, something I fabricate. It's merely self-delusion."

"Is it? Perhaps it's the other way around."

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps anything outside of yourself that you adapt as your own is just somebody else's suit of clothes. You wear it for a day or two, then find another suit and try that on for a while. Maybe the questions that consume you are ways to keep your mind busy and occupied, giving you the illusion that you are solving a problem and getting somewhere in your understanding, whereas in fact you are simply treading water and remaining in the same place.

"One question leads to another and there is no end to it. Could it be that our questions help only to a certain point, and after that they deceive us? And what about beliefs? Maybe a notion of God's being out there brings you comfort and consolation. It makes you feel safe in this vast existence. With an anthropomorphic God who embodies your hopes and fears, you have an imaginary friend in the sky who cares about your personal welfare and will give you eternal life after death. Maybe these kinds of things — and there are many of them, are there not? — are the genuine delusions. Maybe the meaning you create out of your authentic self is the only reality. All the rest is self-deception. Could that be?"

"Good grief," I said. "You mean I'm alone?"

"You're alone only as long as you remain the victim of your own mind. Your mind separates you. It cuts you off from reality. It enslaves you inside your intellect. Transcend mind, and you are alone in a completely different sense."

"What do you mean?"

"As soon as you transcend your thoughts, conditioned perceptions, philosophical questions, and continual analysis of things outside yourself, you drop your mind. You liberate yourself from your attachment to the mind and its insatiable needs, and suddenly realize *you are no longer separate*. You are at-one-with all that is. You are at-one-with existence, with life itself, and life is perfect!

"At this point, you are alone, but not because you are separated from life by the workings of your mind. You are now alone because there is no egoic 'you' standing outside searching for answers, no mind-barrier between you and existence, no intellectually fabricated boundaries. You are alone, yes, but because *everything is you*. Nothing is not-you. As one great seer said, 'You are the world.'

"Unified with all that is, suddenly the flowers of existence shower down upon you, and you find yourself filled with love, joy, happiness and compassion. When questions disappear, *you* disappear. When you disappear, only then can you say you truly are. You lose yourself to find yourself. This state of non-being and being-all is your true self. This is your authenticity. All meaning, all joy, all of life's creative energies stream through you like rivers and waterfalls. You are no longer standing outside, searching, asking, wondering. You are at-one-with existence. This is what the mystics mean when they talk about liberation. This is what they are indicating when they say, 'You are god.' And you are!"

"But how. . . ?"

"Ah, my friend, that word 'how' posits a 'when.' There is no how, because there is no when."

"What in the world does that mean?"

He chuckled and said he had to go, but would reappear when I needed to talk with him again.

"Ask everything you need to ask," he smiled. " But I will not answer your questions. I will only dissolve them — and point you back to yourself. Farewell, for now."

Needless to say, for all of his gentle talk about questions being a manner of self-avoidance, everything he said only raised MORE questions. He had stirred certain things in me, touched certain points of resonance in my soul. He had awakened me to something within myself that I couldn't quite put my finger on.

With that conversation, I entered a new track on my journey. That journey eventually helped me merge language and music, and music and language. When I became an undivided, unified, whole person, language and music became one. When that happened, new wellsprings of creativity began to flow. Over many years — asking many questions, reading many books, listening to all kinds of music, gaining insights from everything I encountered — I continued to evolve from one level of consciousness to the next. Each new level dissolved old boundaries and gave birth to new insights, new language, new music.

I can see from your letter that these things have already been happening for you in varying degrees. Your searches have proven beneficial in a thousand different ways. And, as you said yourself, there is always more. In fact, there is no end to psycho-spiritual expansion. You can grow and grow and grow. Each developmental stage unfolds new meaning, new life, and new joy within yourself, and you can share it with others who are receptive to your presence.