

Chapter Ten

CREATIVITY III

The makers and lovers of beauty save us.

Gregory Corso

I live with death perched on my left shoulder saying, "Rejoice, live, love, laugh, celebrate!" And I do.

LU



O Interest and Meaning: How Does One Create a New Life?

Indeed, when you sensed ennui, you sensed accurately. The ennui has to do with the difficulties I am facing right now regarding meaning in my life. I've given my years to writing and music with varied and limited degrees of artistic realization or commercial success, and suspect I have reached the end of those paths. Depending upon my mood at any given moment, I refer to this state as "fulfillment" or as "burn-out." Either way, it's not easy standing at square one again.

The negative possibility suggests to hell with it. Eat, drink, be merry, lazy, irresponsible, hedonistically self-indulgent, and then die. The positive way suggests

accepting and transcending loss of youth and time, overcoming despair, resentment, depression and inertia, creating new interests, directions, and meaning, and regenerating life-affirmative energies that will fuel enthusiasm and creativity in daily life.

So, yes, I'm in a bit of a slump right now. It's rather like Byron's Manfred standing at the edge of the abyss, asking the question, "Should I?"

In addition to delving into new readings (in String Theory, cosmology, and astronomy), I've been going back to a treasure house of materials I haven't explored for a thousand years or more — Tchaikovsky, Chopin, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Byron. Each day I follow a thread. Each yields its own rewards and suggests new threads and spin-offs. One thing is leading to another (as I thought it might), and, to my hesitant relief, I am finding myself slowly becoming interested again.

And perhaps that is the secret inside many of the things I have been talking about for a while: How to generate interest. Interest blows ennui off the page. Interest generates enthusiasm. Enthusiasm opens new doors. New doors reveal new pathways. And on it goes: How to create a new life. It starts with that generation of interest. Now always easy, but not impossible, either, at least not so far.

. . . I don't think in terms of one day's mood, but in terms of broad spans of time. A dark mood, as you suggested, can be immensely fertile. I've been hanging out in the dark for a while now, and hope and trust I'm beginning to see light through the clouds. Maybe it's time.

Ah, well. Patience. Trust. Courage. And above all, gentle attention. Awareness is essential. Otherwise, one gets swept away in mind-fantasies, and consciousness disappears.

JK

The Key: Show Up

All's well here. I'm re-focusing on *Diamondfire*, the novel I was working on before all the busy-ness with *Blue Melody*, and am getting back into playing piano.

It's rather like trying to get that jet plane off the ground; takes a lot of energy just to get it moving. But in both the writing and the piano playing, the key to it is showing up, listening, and then following the music within. For a while, the showing up is the hardest part, but if one shows up each day and doesn't slack off or drop out, energy builds, and gradually momentum grows stronger, and eventually one is back at the levels of energy and intensity that it takes to get the plane off the ground.

For a time (one never knows how long) the situation can look bleak — will the energy and intensity EVER kick in? Lots of faith is required during that period. All I can know for sure is that it has happened in the past. That guarantees nothing in the present, of course, but it does give weight and hope to the process and helps one follow through on showing up and creating *the possibility* for ignition, momentum, and flight.

So hey, hey, lovely one. Let's both keep keepin' on! Soon. . . .

AS

Leisure Time, Above All

It makes me feel good to hear you say you are “getting back on the path of heart,” and that you are “loving your freedom and free time,” and how you “love the quiet and time to think again” after the traumas involving your recent divorce.

30 years. Also, it took many years for me to be able to write and play music without having to struggle with squeezing out a word or a thought or a musical phrase. Now, after years of work, the flow is good. I guess I'm a late bloomer.

Feels good to be involved in the work, which is play, and the play, which is the work. Had years of experiences. Now feel rich inside; I have grown immeasurably psychologically; I see into things better than ever before, and understand things that were absolute mysteries to me.

So, yes, I live with death perched on my left shoulder saying, "Rejoice, live, love, laugh, celebrate!" And I do.

JK Creativity Generates Life

Have you noticed? Creativity generates life.

When you write to me or to someone else, or when you paint, or sculpt porcelain objects, or write poetry, or love your children or your ethereal friend, you generate energy, interest, vitality. You create more than an object. You create yourself. You lose your ego-self in the playing, and thus find your authentic self. That true self is joy. It is independent of personal relationships. It transcends names, need, touch, fear, and possessiveness,. And it opens well-springs of love-energy that give one new life, new wonder, and the capacity to continue growing.

Normally, I don't offer many directives, as you know. But let me encourage you to read some of the people I have mentioned along the way — J. Krishnamurti, Osho, perhaps some of the Sufi masters. I urge you to do so. They are incredibly

You're moving fast and well these days, precisely because it's important for you to find your creative self again. I am convinced, through my own experience, that creativity, the act of seeing and hearing clearly, then bringing it through you while transforming it with your own sensibilities, is one of the most profound and effective ways in which to expand and deepen your capacity for love, courage, empathy, and further self-actualizing creativity.

The creative act is a self-creation, a life-affirmative gesture that opens your eyes and ears and helps you merge with the natural and human realities around you. Whether in joy or in anger, the act of seeing, absorbing, transforming and objectively rendering beauty raises you and all of humanity up to spheres of light, love, joy, laughter and new heights of wisdom. It deepens your own humanity and the humanity of all who come in contact with it. As you say, it makes the world “an even richer place to enjoy.”

That's why I feel so pleased when you say it is “important to me to find my creative self again. You see, not so long ago, I would have seen and merely enjoyed, instead of seeing and ABSORBING and enjoying, which I do now. Rather than simply view a mud bank with seals on it resting in the sun, I now *notice* their claw marks up that bank too, or focus on line of bird footprints under the shallow water. If one is going to write about it, one has to ingest everything, however small, because it is *all* important. In other words, the world has become an even richer place to enjoy.”

Words of wisdom, S. You speak words of wisdom.

Just yesterday I was reading Anais Nin's essay “On Truth and Reality” (in her book of essays, *In Favor of the Sensitive Man*). She was saying, “For me, the artist simply means one who can transform ordinary life into a beautiful creation with his or her craft. . . . I was referring to creativity in all its aspects. Not only the actual products of art, but the faculty for healing, consoling, raising the level of life, transforming it by our own efforts. I was talking about the creative will, which Dr.

Otto Rank opposed to neurosis as our salvation. . . . [Through Dr. Rank I realized that] no matter what disintegrating influences I was experiencing, the writing was the act of wholeness. . . . He shifted the whole problem of human life to the problem of the creative will, and he was counting on this creative will to find its own solutions. He was challenging my creative will, and having strengthened that, I began to alter my personal life. The change came from within; it was a force which could solve conflicts and dualities. That is why I give the artist such importance, because she possesses this power from the beginning.”

Today, you see how you are on exactly the right track. . . . You are in the process of opening up, letting the life around you touch your sensibilities, seeing it with your eyes, yes, but also seeing it *with the artist's observational eye* — empathic but detached, clear-eyed but enthusiastic, observant of details while noting the relationships of those details to the whole. This intensified way of seeing, hearing, touching and loving does wonders for one's sense of self-worth, dignity, purpose, and potential for the highest and fullest realization of your essential nature, whether that be lover, gardener, or artist.

SL I Am All things

I don't see myself in either/or terms — either ethereally transcendent (as I recently joked) OR lost in madness and depression. I see myself rather like a bird who can fly across the entire spectrum of consciousness, touching each level with love and understanding.

And so I can wallow in the mire of sensuality, yes, even the sleazy and tawdry and self-indulgent aspects. And wing up into clarity, reason, rational perspectives, logic, order, discipline. Fly still higher into creativity and the joys that come with it,

standing on the shoulders of darkland instincts and rationality below, winging still higher into the clear-light bliss of Higher Consciousness.

Each level is beautiful to me, human, and, yes, even sacred [just as are all the different kinds and generic styles of music (from cathartic rock, to complex jazz, into Euro-American classical genius, on up into Higher Consciousness bliss-music).]

I guess I'm just saying I am all things, I embrace all things within myself, and all things fulfilled constitute mental and physical health.

Happily, I spend most of my time in the rational-creative-awakened zones [but then its fun to dive down into the darkland rock 'n' roll depths once in a while too, wild, unleashed, ecstatic, with flaming hair, glittering eyes, and very loud music! L:-))] All of it — the entire spectrum — offers juice and grist for the creative mill.

SL Comparisons, Self-Defeating. Self-Acceptance, Essential.

In the area of creativity I pretty much understand myself, although it's true, that in moments of laziness or fear, I have been known to fall into envy and comparisons: If I can't be Bach, Chopin, Ken Wilber, or Osho, I am tempted to pick up my marbles and disappear into smoke, drink and dreams. At my most childish, such thoughts appear from the depths of my psyche like gnats. Only as long as I remain consciously *unaware* of their presence do they affect me. Meanwhile, thank you for your compassion.

I've learned along the way that comparisons are not only odious. They are toxically self-destructive (as Salieri and many others have discovered). No question about it, comparisons are self-defeating, while self-acknowledgement and self-acceptance are absolutely essential for continued creative development.

childish, a luxury, frivolous, self-indulgent, etc. Gathering and hoarding is deemed “good,” while creating beauty and giving it to others is deemed “foolish.”

We're all victims of that social ethos to some extent. Young people who are standing at the crossroads trying to decide whether or not to amass wealth or paint a picture have to wend their way through the resultant psychological complexities. In a materialistically oriented society, creativity comes laden with guilt and self-doubt. Odd, but true. Once one works through that maze, of course, then it's not a problem. Self-knowledge does wonders. That's the artist's first and foremost requirement: Know thyself! Exploring one's self through art is a great way to do it.

I think it's wonderful that you are looking into your creative potential. God knows, you paid your dues in the business world, made a heck of a success of it, took some major leaps, didn't always get the brass ring, but can now take pride in what you accomplished and in having dared to give it a go for even bigger and better things. You didn't settle for the familiar and the comfortable, but formulated new goals, and made the effort. For that alone, you deserve all kinds of credit. Huzza-huzza!

And look what a great time in your life it is now. You have money enough to do what you want, and energy and time enough to do it. You have an opportunity to follow a long-standing inclination of yours — to learn about service, creativity, and selflessness. That's what creativity is about — nourishing imagination, courage, conviction, and energy; diving into the depths and soaring to the heights; honing skills; and taking the leap into your own universality.

The process is not a taking, but a giving. Instead of reaching out to acquire as much as you can, you reach in and see how much you can give to others. You don't gather and hoard in the time-honored way of the world. You share everything you are and everything you have. The dynamic is completely different.

In the economics of business, if you take you have more. If you give, you have less. *In the economics of creativity, the more you give the more you have.* When you

disappear into the work, you emerge fuller and richer by virtue of the process and the sharing. The creative gesture takes you first within, for you are the mine *and* the gold. Then it takes you without — you are the refining process and the resultant product. Put it all together, and you are not indulging yourself. To the contrary, you are losing yourself in service to the creative act, to the aesthetic result, and to the people who receive your gifts.

That gesture is selfless. The process is one in which you learn how to transcend ego and its self-centered needs. It's ultimately a giving of one's identity to a much higher non-egoic reality that takes over your being. You *serve* it. You become swept away in its energy. The less you are egoically present, the more energy you have available to serve the work — writing a poem, an autobiography, a novel, or playing a comb and paper or a grand piano. When you bring the whole of your transegoic presence to it, voila! beauty is born. Same thing with photography and painting — where is the beauty? Whether you see it in light falling across snow or in your own mind as an abstract configuration, how can you bring it through you? How can you merge vision and technique in such a way that the resultant form will take the viewer's breath away?

Facing one's self, and then disappearing into the work, is not always easy. Inspiration is wonderful and so is talent, but more often than not perspiration is what gets the job done. That requires interest, of course — passionate interest. But it also requires discipline, and that requires courage.

It's not as though you just turn on a tap, and water pours out. Some days you cannot bear the thought of sitting down and transcending self and giving life and time and energy to the creative act. It's not always fun facing one's self, looking directly at your impoverished imagination or intellectual stultification or emotional flatness. And it's kind of scary losing egoic stability, or, more accurately, giving up egoic identity and placing it in service to writing, painting, music, sculpting, photography, whatever. One would rather be lazy and self-indulgent. One would rather follow a

boss's orders, or react to customers and their questions, or simply go out to dinner and get laid. Anything rather than confronting fears, limitations, needs, elusive aspirations, and presumptuous dreams.

So I stand in admiration of you. You have tremendous energy and untapped potential, both of which I have greatly admired over the years. For decades now you have been drawn to creativity. You have wanted to more deeply explore beauty, thought, and art, bringing into yourself ideas and sublime works generated by bright, impassioned people. That gesture, nourishing your own inner well-springs with aesthetic spirit-energy, is like preparing the soil and planting seeds.

And as your mind and heart begin to sing, and as the urge to create a work of your own becomes more insistent, the garden begins to sprout. Every day that you show up and do the work helps the plants grow. Pretty soon, wow, you've got a riot of colorful flowers and swaying trees. All of these things constitute elements of creativity, which is selfless service to beauty and to the spirit infusing the whole of existence.

There's also in creativity the nature of "play." The world all but buries our psyches and souls under an avalanche of dreary, suppressive, inhibiting words such as "duty," "responsibility," "the real world," "a hard life," "fear," "serious," "obligation," "obey," "don't rock the boat," "play it safe," on and on. . . . Scarcity values prevail, and I understand that. Some people live all their lives afflicted by them. They never outgrow them, even when they enjoy substantial bank accounts. Fear and fear-based values play a huge role in the world, no question about it.

Creativity, however, invites you to try things out. It welcomes courage, spontaneity, whimsy, testing the waters, doing things just to see what happens, making new patterns out of familiar elements, inventing new combinations of colors, sounds or words. Creativity generates frolic, daring imagination, experimentation, self-confidence, joy, euphoria. It welcomes the new. It celebrates invention and odysseys into the unknown. It cheers when you rock the boat. It gives Bravos when you find

yourself suddenly surprised and delighted with a fresh design in the painting, or a new thought that just bubbled up on the page from the depths of your psyche, or a new and absolutely spontaneous rush of sound-washes and melodic whoopee-do's suddenly appear from the piano. Creativity springs from our highest human needs — love, wholeness, intelligence, compassion, courage, community, fulfillments of potential, sharing, beauty, joy, creative freedom.

In a nutshell: Go for it!

I thought I'd sit down and offer a simple word of support — and here we are winging our way through a VERY long letter. But that's okay. I have enjoyed writing it and spending time with you in my thoughts. I hope and trust that my encouragements will give you added incentive in your writing, sculpting, videos and photography. I know that when you bring your fine mind and awakened heart to these activities, you will find ever-increasing joy as you plunge more and more deeply into the possibilities these media offer.

Drop me a note along the way, won't you? I look forward to hearing from you.

All the very best, L

SL Distilled and Intensified By Fire

When you mention the great value and necessity of uninterrupted creative solitude and the difficulty of carving out enough time away from social interruptions, I understand 100%. On the one hand, one does want and need to socialize in order to rest from the intense concentration creative work requires; on the other hand, quietude and spaciousness is essential for dreaming, wandering among possibilities, collecting thoughts and insights, bringing them into focus, then concentrating and

articulating them. A knock at the door killed Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." A telephone ringing at the wrong time can topple an empire. Another person's trivial prattle at the wrong time can shatter an emergent vision. As an artist, you can and must find ways and means to establish private time. Absolutely essential.

Then, within the framework of that undisturbed time, you now have the external physical and internal psychological tools necessary for astonishing creativity, particularly at this time of your life — you are at the perfect age: mature, but still young, emotionally intense, intellectually perspicuous, technically proficient. Were you to bring these passions of yours to the canvas, enabling your gorgeous sexuality to emerge in images and color, you might create some exceptional art. I think of Modigliani, for example, a marvelously erotic artist. I also think of D.H. Lawrence (although he did not perfect his painting/drawing skills, he nevertheless gave birth to some wonderfully expressive paintings).

This is such a good time in your life for making a serious push toward sustained, fiercely focused creative work, whichever media you choose — papier mache, yes, but also painting and writing. If you picked up your paint brush again, and started working with swashes of color, perhaps presenting intensely erotic energy-events mixed with suggestions of human forms and motions, I bet you would accomplish wonders.

Moving into my domain, in this instance in connection with music, I find myself drawn to some of Van Gogh's later works, not only "Starry Sky" and those magnificent "Cypresses," but a picture he did of tall trees outside of the mental institution where he was residing, and an even later painting of a place in a forest with *purple-magenta* trees. I also find myself drawn to some of William Turner's later canvases, great spheres of dark, swirling colors, or spheres of bright yellow-orange light. In these paintings, he left "realism" almost entirely behind and brought only motion and light and energy to the canvas. At this stage of their evolutionary development, these two painters are close companions of mine in music.

They found their own “voice.” They moved away from forms and images and color usages shared by others, and with ever-increasing competence and conviction painted with a kind of unbridled energy that gave form and structure to imaginative inner worlds distilled and intensified by fire. Other artists have followed a similar developmental road, of course, but Van Gogh and Turner, at this later time in their lives, did it in specific ways that thrill me personally. The uniqueness of their vision, the astonishing movement enlivening every object affect me directly — a writhing tree, a breathing house, a winding roadway; or the ocean's churning, or the swirling light of the atmosphere.

In my piano playing, I have moved away from conventional melody/harmony/ rhythms and from publicly shared compositional forms. I work now almost entirely with sonic colors, like splashes, or broad kinetic brush strokes, or dappled sunlight in the higher registers, or dark, roiling oceanic atmospheres in the deep bass range. I play with swirlings, or little points of light (like Georges Seurat), or great sweeps of churning wind. It's really quite something. The seeds were in my first CD, *Phantom Light*. The flowers are in the music I'm playing now.

As you recall, I went into the studio again a while back, but did not come out feeling satisfied. There were numerous accomplished moments, but on the whole, the gap between what I wanted and what I actually recorded was a bit too wide. A certain gap is inevitable with every artist, of course, but I need to get something better, fuller, richer. So I've been keeping at it, and feel the conceptual dimension cohering more and more.

Of course, the trick is to give the concept(s) full shape, form and energy in a recorded performance. That's not easy to do, because nothing is pre-composed, written down and/or memorized and repeated. Everything is improvised and unrepeatable. In writing, painting or sculpting, one can tinker, adjust, re-do, perfecting each word, line or shape. With improvised music, the inspiration, the presence, and the technical execution must be as close to perfect as possible within

the framework of each passing instant. Inspiration, riverflow energy, emergent form, and technical execution must happen simultaneously, in-the-moment. Not easy. I suppose that's why I stand in awe of Keith Jarrett's solo piano concerts. Ah, such a master.

The fact that you are also involved in this mysterious lifestyle called “the creative process” gives me comfort. I can talk to you about such matters and feel confident that you share some of my feelings and experiences. You know from your own involvement what I'm talking about.

Meanwhile, I continue on down the road, rather like Van Gogh and Turner, feeling evermore at home with the scope and depth of my evolving musical originality. Hopefully, I will return to the recording studio in the not-too-distant future and give it another go.