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DISCOVERING AND ADAPTING CREATIVE STYLE WITH COGNITIVE METHODS

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

ROBERT NORRIS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

June 2004

Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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ABSTRACT

DISCOVERING AND ADAPTING CREATIVE STYLE WITH COGNITIVE METHODS

June 2004

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Creativity is different for every person who utilizes it. Due to the unique nature of everyone's creativity, there exists no predominant method for developing creativity. The challenge, then, is in both determining aspects of a person's creative style as well as learning how to adapt one's methods to this individual style.

This thesis details my own struggle through this problem using my creative writing efforts as a point of comparison. In the text, I describe how Julia Cameron's book The Artist's Way¹ began my creative efforts but could not finish them because her methods were not specific enough to my creativity. I use various critical and creative thinking tools such as free writing, supportive listening, and critical analysis to derive aspects of my creative style. Then I make the next step by creating methods that responded to these aspects. I labeled these creative writing methods the Outline method, the Character-Only method, the Nonfictional Fiction method, and finally the Two-Stage method. The Two-Stage method was almost entirely founded on the ideas that Peter Elbow discusses in his book Writing With Power.² Using these methods, I arrive at a foundational structure for creativity that is both specific to my individual needs and comprehensive enough from which to base further activity.

It is my hope that readers of this thesis will be able to glean aspects of my creative journey for their own creative paths. The narrative is centered on my creative journey, but I hope that the reader will gain enough understanding of the creative person's mind so that their efforts can become more focused and fluid.

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PREFACE
THE CREATIVE JOURNEY

It's been two years since I first applied to University of Massachusetts, Boston's Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) Master of Arts program. In my time within this program I have undergone a great deal of personal development. Some of this development I can already perceive in my interaction with others. I feel like I have attained a broader perspective and have an easier time in seeing views other than my own. Paradoxically, I have also focused closer on my own perspective during this time. I feel much more in tune with my world and my self. For this reason, I am indebted to the faculty and my peers. The incredibly varied and interesting people with whom I have had contact with have confronted me with their different views. Their differing perspectives have opened my mind further than I imagined possible.

My experiences within the CCT program have enabled me to regain a sense of direction and sense of worth within my world. I entered the program citing a desire to prepare myself for a wide range of possibilities and careers, many of which I couldn't have enumerated even if you asked me to. My primary aspirations were to become a full-time writer or educator, but I knew that career change would be the theme of my life. I still hold to that assertion. But even though I can't say what my life path will be in precise terms, I now feel much more prepared for the unlit road in front of me.

Much of this feeling of preparation originates from my focus on the concept of creativity while in the CCT program. I have concentrated on this area of the program because I sensed the immense potential that its study holds for me. Creativity is a subject that has usually been described in very vague terms, as if it can only be framed in mist. I now understand why this is

so. The inherent vagueness in defining creativity is ever-present because the possible scope and influence of creativity is so broad. Creativity reaches every aspect of our world and cornering it into a one-sentence definition is inadequate.

A large part of creativity's identity problem comes from the close association it has with the concept of intelligence. In studying intelligence together with creativity, it becomes difficult to ascertain which of the two concepts is the dominant concept and which is the sub concept. It's almost indeterminable where one ends and the other begins. With this in mind, it is easy to see how some researchers have slipped into believing that creativity and intelligence are synonymous. But for pragmatic reasons, I think that it is unwise to equate the two terms. Creativity is a special use of intelligence. One can consider creativity and intelligence as encompassing the whole of human ability. By cultivating a focus on creativity, a person can tap into their fullest potential and develop their abilities.

The chapters in this thesis will attempt to define and explain areas within my conception of creativity, particularly in relation to my efforts as a writer. Each of these chapters magnifies specific aspects of creativity. It is my intention that in analyzing these different views of creativity I will show the reader a proactive and pragmatic look at creativity. I hope that the reader will not only take away a greater sense of how I look at creativity, but also how they themselves can look at it, too.

Chapter One provides the necessary foundational information for the reader to understand the relevance of my sources of research. This chapter will explain the major players in my research. The people mentioned in this chapter are those who most influenced my thinking on this topic. The sources are separated into two categories: teachers and researchers as well as creative practitioners.

Chapter Two explains the fundamentals of my conception of creativity. It involves the most important elements of how I look at creativity. This chapter is organized according to the chronology of my thinking and development. My path of understanding will be made clear and explicit here.

Chapter Three focuses on the personal aspect of creativity. It discusses the immense role that reflection has on promoting creativity. I explain methods of reflection that I found to be most useful for my creative purposes. Metacognition, or thinking about thinking, is incorporated into my discussion and will be related to my overall purpose in promoting creativity at the personal level. I will also describe my efforts to explore my creative style.

Chapter Four moves the focus from the internal dimensions of creativity to the outward interaction that creativity compels us toward. I emphasize that the nature of creativity begins on an intimate level but that its nature eventually drives us to publicly share our creative activities. I then discuss how the public sharing step is of immense value in refining and promoting the fruits of our creativity. I conclude my thesis in this chapter and briefly mention the most immediate steps I plan on taking to further my study of creativity.

CHAPTER I

INFLUENTIAL SOURCES IN MY RESEARCH

I'm a believer in the assertion that every person we meet has an effect on how we see our world. Each person we bump into on the street, each person we talk with, each person that reaches out to us all have an effect on the formation of our perception. Sometimes these people come to us via the printed word: the printed word is a powerful medium in this respect. One person's viewpoint can be transferred to literally millions of readers. The following chapter will explain the direct relevance of many authors on my research. These are all people who have written works that have guided my thinking in profound directions. This list is not exhaustive of all my sources, but they are the ones that most influenced my thinking among the many sources I encountered in my journey for greater self-understanding.

The sources I list in this chapter are separated into two groups. The first group encompasses teachers and theorists. These are people who observe the creative process and have achieved a broad perspective on the matter through this lens. Their perspectives provide insight into key pieces of understanding to which creative people adhere. This category of sources is important for the details they notice with their broad viewpoint on creativity.

The second category of sources I talk about in this chapter are creative practitioners. These are people who have participated directly in the creative process and can describe aspects of the journey that only participants can perceive. They speak of their personal experience during creative moments. They are important to this thesis because they provide another perspective on how the creative process works. They allow me to elaborate on the details of the creative journey in words other than my own.

Teachers and Theorists

My creative journey began with the work of Julia Cameron, who began her career as a screenwriter. At times, she felt frustrated at the limited success she discovered.³ But through a great deal of reflection, as well as trial and error, she arrived at a model for navigating her creativity. She began to teach others her methods in classroom settings. Her best-selling book The Artist's Way⁴ explains the approaches and techniques she used for teaching how to develop creativity. Her methods opened the doors to my understanding on how a creative person not only thinks but also how they act. Cameron's methods proved to be the impetus for all further activity within creativity. She provided the initial shove forward into a more creatively oriented perspective.

Shari Tishman was the next person to have had a major influence on my creative understanding and development. Tishman wrote The Thinking Classroom,⁵ which introduced me to the concept of thinking dispositions. This book advocates an active attempt to acquire positive thinking dispositions. A positive thinking disposition is a frame of mind that is more than just a mindset, but an attitude, that lays the groundwork for becoming a more efficient thinker.⁶ Dispositions encourage flexible and precise thinking.⁷ Tishman discusses how a person can adopt positive thinking dispositions by understanding the inner workings of their mind. She says that once a person understands their mind's different processes, then greater mental control follows. This greater mental control paves the road to higher mental ability.⁸

Tishman's ideas engendered a more reflective approach in my creativity. Her ideas helped me adopt a more thoughtful approach towards breaking down mental barriers en route to creative activity. Seeking positive thinking dispositions helped me in my creative journey

because it showed me how I might better mold my thinking to creative dispositions. Using the concept of thinking dispositions, I learned how to identify promotive thinking dispositions, such as thinking divergently and convergently, while suppressing negative dispositions, such as thinking destructively.

The next influential person in my creative development was Cornell University professor of English Barbara LeGendre. She talked about how she categorized her students into their respective creative writing styles.⁹ Some of these styles were more generative in nature and others were more revisionist. Using the knowledge of her students' learning styles, she was better able to respond to their learning needs. When a student was weak in one area, she directed them to focus on the weakness more, while still maintaining their current writing strengths. In this manner, LeGendre showed me that developing a person's creative potential rested on knowledge of personal style.

LeGendre also said that students could apply the same adjustments to their individual learning habits as she did for them.¹⁰ A student can learn what their creative style is by observing their own habits. Observations of their unique styles can be a guide for future techniques, which will develop weaknesses while continuing to encourage creative strengths.

After learning LeGendre's perspective, I began to observe my own creative style. I worked with my strengths and weaknesses in order to tap into my creative potential more. LeGendre's approach proved to be incredibly helpful for jumpstarting my creative production. I worked with a number of personally developed techniques that enabled me to gain a heightened flow within my fiction writing. However, my writing was still lacking what is ever-present in great writings: voice. I needed outside help to find an active technique for writing better fiction and nonfiction pieces. LeGendre's approach was sound, but I needed more ideas for finding a

new method of creative writing. I needed to find a writing technique that answered my weaknesses (such as the lack of voice) while continuing in my strengths.

Peter Elbow's techniques described in his book Writing With Power¹¹ answered such a need. He described his technique in simple terms but with enough flexibility that I could apply them to my fiction as well as my nonfiction pieces. Elbow said that a writer ought to divide his writing time into two distinct stages. The first stage is to free write. This is a time in which a writer writes on a topic without judging the words that come forth. Free writing proved to be an excellent method for me in not only generating content, but also voice. The second stage is to revise. This is when a writer refines the words from free writing into a format that is more accessible to the public. It is when a writer cleans up grammar, corrects errors in content, and organizes the words to make the most sense.

Elbow's method became the backbone for all my writing tasks. I consciously organized my time into the two stages and operated flexibly in this framework. Elbow's methods answered the needs of my weaknesses and encouraged my strengths in writing. I found that my voice was ever-present in my free writing. Revision was never discarded, only segregated.

The last major source I wish to mention is Arthur L. Costa who wrote the article "Teaching the Language of Thinking."¹² His ideas surrounding habits of mind rounded out my understanding of the creative process. Costa's idea of habits of mind bear a mark of similarity to Tishman's concept of thinking dispositions, but differ in scope. Tishman's thinking dispositions were very specific and centered on individual thinking methods; Costa's habits of mind were more global in perspective. They outlined how a promotive mind would look from a general viewpoint. Costa's habits of mind focused on general characteristics that should be inherent in any creative person's mind.

Costa provided the final check on whether or not my creative journey was going in promotive directions or in detrimental ones. Using his concept of an efficient and promotive-minded individual, I could perceive my habits of mind to see if they conformed to his model. His habits of mind helped me to get an image of how I ought to think so that I could live up to my highest creative potential.

Creative Practitioners

The thoughts and reflections that creativity theorists and teachers offered were useful for establishing a basis in understanding creativity's dynamics. However, I still felt like I needed the input of other creative practitioners to see if my creative journey was entirely unique or if other people's creative adventures bore a resemblance to mine. For this I reached out for the words of writers Susan Butler and Susan McBride Els, as well as musician Suzanne Clark, on the topic of their creative journey.

Susan McBride Els wrote her book Into the Deep¹³ with the idea that others might make use of her conception of creative journey as a writer. Els took a slightly mystical point of view on the process, but remained grounded in the practical benefit of creativity. Many of Els' experiences resembled mine. Reading her descriptive words about the process helped me to articulate my own process. Her struggles, her successes, and her failures all painted a clear picture of how she as a creative writer endured the ups and downs in creating literary works. This picture mirrored my own image in several key points and helped me to understand my creativity in greater detail.

Susan Butler was another writer that provided me with an immense store of descriptions about the creative writing process. She is a published author of adolescent fiction who also frequently tours schools and libraries in the Northeast United States. I found a kinship with much of what she wrote about how she produces her creative works in her Master of Arts thesis “A Teller’s Tale: Joining the Circle.”¹⁴ Butler eloquently described her personal observations about her creative process, which gave me a lens on creativity that I otherwise would have lacked.

Finally, jazz musician Suzanne Clark rounded out my list of influential creative practitioners. Her Master of Arts thesis “Building and Sustaining Connectedness to One’s Musical Creativity and Spirit”¹⁵ painted a picture of a struggling, frustrated, and frequently angry creative journey. The pain that many creative people talk about she also experienced. Clark’s thesis helped me to understand the levels of need that creativity serves for people. Using her testimony, I was better able to understand the reasons for my feelings of frustration in the quest of creativity. Clark’s description of creative tension and creative need enabled me to better understand why I continue in the creative journey. She revealed my motives in very clear and lucid terms.

All of the above sources contributed significantly to my creative understanding. Their ideas and descriptions of the creative process helped me to proceed through my own creative journey. Without their help I would still be in a struggling state without a fathomable idea of where I was in the creative journey or where I was going with it.

The next chapter will address the details on how my creative journey progressed while in the CCT Master of Arts program. I will begin to expound on discoveries I made about creativity while wrestling with my creative writing goals.

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING CREATIVITY

Creativity's Goal

Achieving the heights of creativity is as profound as it is difficult to maintain. In the midst of a creative flow a person feels centered on the present, wholly engrossed in the ideas coming forth, driven to engage in the process, and unified in spirit to the challenge. What I speak of is the optimal use of a person's creativity, when you become a conduit for the potential within yourself. I call this optimal creative moment the creative flow. This experience is unique to every person who experiences it¹⁶ and can happen to anyone. It is a smooth flow of creative thoughts without obstruction.

The goal of every creative person is to achieve this state of flow in relation to his or her creative task. I became aware of creative flow while endeavoring to write creative fiction but I have experienced this flow on other occasions in my life as well—I just did not see its unique qualities before. I overlooked this experience mainly because I wasn't focused on my creativity. I didn't trust or encourage it. I didn't take my time with creative activities. But much of that changed when I decided to break down my mental barriers obstructing my creative expression. This process of clearing away my internal obstacles opened the door to a great deal of inner inspection and reflection.¹⁷ It was through the close examination of myself that I discovered the creative flow's existence, essential attributes, and benefits.

There is great difficulty in finding and maintaining creative potential. Reaching the pure form of inner creativity is not an easy task if using only one's effort and intuition. Any creative

person can attest to the frustration felt when trying to force creativity out of its shell. I know that as a writer I felt this frustration when faced with writer's block. When I was blocked, I tried harder and harder to be creative. I read books filled with writing prompts, but all that came forth was babble that ended quickly. I tried to imitate the styles of other writers so that I could find my own voice. But all that happened was hours spent staring at a blank page. In all my effort, no worthwhile words came to my stories.

Creativity cannot be forced. A person cannot just say to themselves, "Today I will be creative." There must be some sort of strategy for being so. Sometimes this strategy will be seemingly haphazard, like an exploration of spontaneity; other times this strategy will be more systematic, as mine has developed. At any rate, creativity does have a recognizable form within each individual. It can be understood on an individual level. I have come to recognize this fact through the experiences and reflections of others and myself. The purpose for all of this investigation is to find useful methods for reaching and maintaining a creative flow. The results of my research speak to the challenges of writers, photographers, visual artists, or anyone involved in a creative venture. It also has many implications for the study of creativity itself. My audience is broad and varied, showing that this topic has large significance in our world today.

Developing an Interest in Creativity

My creative journey began in my first semester in the Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) Master of Arts program and continues to this day. But before discussing present reflections I find it important to take a step back to the past in order to orient this thesis to the

present. The first major creative discovery I came upon sprouted from the ideas of creativity expert Julia Cameron. The discoveries that occurred while using her methods became my first steps toward understanding creativity. Her ideas were the soil from which subsequent conceptions would grow.

Julia Cameron has devoted decades of her life in the kindling of the creative spirit in herself and others. Her book The Artist's Way¹⁸ is the result of those years of experience. In it, she declares that the use of creativity forces you to explore your inner self.¹⁹ Cameron sees creativity as a spiritual and personal journey—one that takes you into the furthest reaches of who you are and how you think. This journey takes place while using two main tools. The first tool is to write what is called Morning Pages and the second tool is to perform Artist Dates at regular intervals.

Morning Pages are directed journal entries that are written daily. The ultimate responsibility of the content of these Pages is left to the student, but Cameron offers ideas and themes to focus on while writing. Some of Cameron's ideas for writing may be lists of statements with which to react. Statements such as "I don't like it much but I..." or "My favorite childhood movie was..." or "If I could lighten myself up a little, I would..."²⁰ are just a few of such statements. The creativity student uses such prompts as a springboard towards elaboration on his or her ideas on creativity. The prompts initiate a stream of words that otherwise might not be given an opportunity for consideration. It's a method for making the student's opinions stare back at the student in a tangible form and to be forced to the forefront of consciousness, instead of relegated to the ignored parts of opinion.

Cameron offers ideas and themes to discuss in the Pages through mantras that the creativity student is directed to write repeatedly. These mantras are intended to get the student

thinking in more creative ways and to empower the student to feel confident in their creativity. A few especially poignant mantras: “My dreams come from God and God has the power to accomplish them.” Or “I am allowed to nurture my artist.” Or “Through the use of my creativity, I serve God.”²¹ The act of writing centers the student on the words and prevents distraction. As the student writes the mantras, he or she can think about the potential truth within the statement. The student has the opportunity to consider the efficacy of thinking with these statements. This philosophical thinking spurs on further reflection about how the mantras could impact current perception of personal creativity. It is a method for encouraging beliefs that Cameron believes must be ever-present in a flourishing creative consciousness.

On the whole, I found the Morning Pages to be an effective method for shining a spotlight on my views of creativity. I felt comfortable when writing them and held nothing back, as I knew that no other person would ever read them without my consent. The personal nature of the entries enabled them to become a mirror of my attitudes towards my creative life’s direction. Many entries in my Pages spoke about how my family and childhood shaped my thinking. On March 5, 2003, I followed Cameron’s suggestion that I write lists of “favorites.”²² I listed favorite movies, games, friends, accomplishments, and other things experienced as a child. One of these lists was listing the five people I most admire. Essentially, I was told to list my role models because I naturally try to act like people I admire. My five admired people included two relatives—my father and my granduncle, two authors—Dostoevsky and Shakespeare, and one historical figure—Winston Churchill. Out of those five admired people, I’d only met one—my father. I didn’t know him long since he died when I was four years old but I knew him long enough for him to become the supreme role model in my life. I also developed a sense of his life accomplishments from family members and acquaintances that knew him. The discovery that

my father is a major role model for me opened up a whole new realm of internal discovery that I hadn't considered before. I found that in describing my father, I was really describing how I perceived I should be. This was a major step towards understanding my attitudes towards creativity. I'll return to this subject in just a few pages, but my main point here is this: the Morning Pages were the first step towards thinking about creativity more promotively. I touched on parts of my creative mind long forgotten. They were the first step towards discovering the inner workings of my creative mind.

Artist Dates are the second major tool of Cameron's creativity-promoting methods. The Dates are weekly events, frequently of the individual's choosing, that are done with the intention of becoming comfortable with playfulness. They are times devoted to facing your creative obstacles through activity. The emphasis of these Dates is always on getting comfortable with yourself and with your uniqueness. Cameron said that as children we knew how to be creative; over time we forgot how to be so.²³ So, naturally, these Artist Dates are playful in a childish way. Many of my own Artist Dates were nothing more than a solitary walk along the beach; other Dates were a trip to the ice cream shop; and still others were going to a concert by myself. Sometimes the Dates were nothing more than a playful activity. I remember buying stickers to put on a few of my notebooks. I also took scraps of material I had in my drawer and made bedroom decorations out of them.

Many times I felt silly while doing an Artist Date. But this silliness leads up to Cameron's point about why a creative person must do Dates. Going to the ice cream shop or buying stickers made me feel embarrassed, but in feeling this emotion I had to stop myself and ask why I felt embarrassed. There certainly is nothing wrong with doing such things. In fact, as a young boy I thought that doing such things would be all that I would do with the freedom of

adulthood. I thought about my embarrassment during the Dates and discovered that my sense of shame was irrational. There was no need for feeling embarrassed doing Artist Dates. In fact, I should feel pride for having broken down the stoical walls many adults like myself have built up against living as relatively carefree as a child.

The Artist Dates also train you to act creatively in your own way. They are times devoted to employing and experimenting with creative ideas and for developing creative personality traits. I learned on my Dates to allow myself to be playful, to indulge in silliness, and to appreciate what my surrounding community offers. These are not dominant traits in my personal style, but they are important ones. Before performing the Artist Dates I largely ignored such traits. The Dates forced me to expose them and give them breath. Cameron's designs are focused on getting back in touch with your inner child. I like to think of it more as a re-centering on who I have always been.

Both the Morning Pages and the Artist Dates were methods for recognizing the large value that uniqueness offers my creative life. These techniques gave me permission to respect myself as an artist in ways that I had forgotten. Adulthood had shrouded my creative self behind a veil of extreme practicality and structure. In other words, I couldn't see beyond the mundane—I couldn't imagine much of anything beyond the reaches of what already existed in my life. In my writing, this translated into an inability to write about anything that I hadn't already read about or experienced. I had difficulty tapping into my imagination. I couldn't get into any creative flow because I kept lapsing back into describing what did happen, rather than what could have happened. In my professional life, I couldn't imagine having a job that I created myself—the job had to be created before I applied. This extreme practicality didn't allow me to think beyond the newspaper classifieds section into more entrepreneurial or

backdoor methods for finding a new career. My overly practical frame of mind became a stumbling block to my creativity. I couldn't transcend or create a new path for myself.

Cameron's methods opened the doors for me to let my inner individual uniqueness emerge and to make brave steps forward into the unknown reaches of my creative mind.

Creative Blocks – “The Censor”

During this period of inner discovery, Cameron spoke of an internal villain to watch out for. Cameron called this internal villain “the Censor.”²⁴ She described the Censor as being the compilation of all the voices in your head that seek to deprecate, devalue, or doubt your creative abilities.²⁵ You could think of these voices as the hecklers of your mind—jeering you and trying to shame you back into the mundane. The Censor attempts to thwart any, if not all, of your most unique interests and methods. It is a side of your mind that Cameron most wants to subvert and/or eliminate from the creative mind.

The origins of these self-deprecating thoughts often are many. Discovering these origins was the task, primarily, of the Morning Pages. Writing out the mantras and the personal narratives about my creativity allowed me to purge and analyze the words of my Censor. On February 28, 2003 I wrote:

I'm anxious about writing—anxious because I'm afraid of it. Why? Why am I afraid? I'm afraid of failing and of believing so much in myself to be able to become an artist. My practical side keeps calling me a fool. How can you do that? You're a moron! Everyone is rolling their eyes at you. You are no good and no one is going to want to read, let alone buy, writing from you. You're nothing but an average writer. You're not an 'expert' in anything. That's what my practical side keeps saying. It's harmful and it's hurtful.

After seeing the words of the Censor on paper, I could see that they were usually unproductive. I realized that my Censor spoke what seemed like reason—it just wasn't reasonable for creative thinking. I decided to analyze the Censor further in order to find the root of it. I did this with the intention of defusing it before it could do any more damage.

I discovered in this analysis that my perception of family role models was a significant mental base that my Censor capitalized on. It's important to understand that role models do not teach based on the reality of who they are, but by how they are perceived. I remember a Nike commercial from the early 1990's that starred the NBA basketball star Charles Barkley. The commercial showed him alone on a court doing what he does best—dribbling and dunking the ball in the hoop. During this ad, Barkley looked directly in the camera and said, "I am not a role model." This statement was in response to controversy over his actions as a star. Children all over the nation admired him for his basketball talent and for his personality. They wanted to emulate him and the fact that he was sometimes brash and disrespectful of authority figures stirred up some controversy. Many said that some kids were adopting Barkley's negative traits. Charles Barkley's statement of, "I am not a role model" was directed at his critics but, more importantly, to kids. I interpreted Barkley's statement as saying that everyone needs to be his or her own person. He is who he is, and no one else can ever be him. So don't follow his path—follow your own.

Negating some role models is not so simple, though. I have found that shaking my role models is difficult because they are not the example of real people, but my image of them. Take, for example, my father. My father died when I was very young, so he couldn't possibly lead by example (at least, not on a day-by-day basis). But my perception of him lives on. This perception started out being an oversimplification of his character. He was a doctor—a

profession that I consider very stable and lucrative. Though this profession can certainly be creative, I haven't seen it that way in the past. My perception of my father's profession was that of listening to the patient's aches and pains, then applying what he has learned to the patient's needs. This requires a great deal of intelligence, but from my perception everything he did was done in the mundane. He didn't develop new medical techniques or new medicines. Creativity was lacking in my perception of him. Through reflection, I managed to purge this oversimplification of my father and to think in more broad and accurate terms. I discovered that my father was a creative person in his own right and this has been a big step for me to take.

Shifting my sometimes-fictional perception of my father is more difficult than that of a living person because I haven't had the luxury of someone turning to me and saying, "I am not a role model." Or for him to say something more productive like, "I am a creative person." To understand that the father I emulate was creative shakes the foundations of how I have perceived him in the past. He didn't transcend creative boundaries in my mind and this fed the censoring voices in my head when I tried to be creative. But that would soon change. Since role models exist on a perceptual level, I found that I had the power to eliminate the negativity that role models like my father served me.

I re-shaped the image of my role models, like my father, mostly through the Morning Pages. I wrote down descriptions of these models and then read what I wrote. I read from the perspective of a person trying to encourage creativity. Using such a mental lens, I could begin to break down the words I was using and see their flaws. I saw that people whom I admire have led very creative lives in their own style. Not all of these role models are as flamboyantly creative as, say, comedian Robin Williams or playwright William Shakespeare, but they were creative in their own right. My father was creative as a doctor when he used his personality to make

frightened patients calm; he was creative by incorporating new ways of alleviating pain; and he was creative in how he dealt with his kids. In realizing that creativity exists in my role models I was able to defuse much of my Censor's power. This ultimately began a change in my creative identity. I grasped the breadth and multiple expressions that creativity can exhibit. My recognition of creativity's scope resolved conflicts between role models and being a more creative person.

Cameron's Morning Pages and Artist Dates teach a person one way to manipulate role models and to avoid thinking the negative thoughts of the Censor.²⁶ The deep reflection and self-analysis encouraged by her techniques helps one to defuse negative thinking through understanding. Analyzing the words of the Censor as they came out in my Morning Pages and noting resistance to playfulness in Artist Dates leads one to understand creativity better. This greater understanding lends a measure of control over one's mind.

This is an activity in metacognition, or thinking about thinking. My metacognitive self was sufficient for me to have a measure of control over the negative thoughts of my Censor. Whenever a discouraging thought surfaced, I could readily identify it and either suppress it or manipulate it to avoid any additional negative thoughts. Discouraging words stemming from my own perception could be addressed and adjusted.

Julia Cameron's methods were certainly a great asset to my creative development. But I still wasn't fluidly producing creative written works, which was my primary creative goal. The blank page of writer's block still stared at me frequently with its wide-open and blindingly white eye. Cameron's methods opened my creative doors, but I could not walk through them. I felt like there was something missing in my method of creative inquiry. The Morning Pages and Artist Dates were not enough to specifically define my creative path. I needed direction that

would help me in more specific ways for my writing and my creative style. I decided that I needed to know more about my idea of creativity in order to harness its power.

The Core Elements of Internal Creativity

Unfortunately, there exists no predominant definition of creativity in the research.²⁷ Creativity is a dynamic concept and is difficult to encapsulate in words alone. There are many ways that a person can define the term creative thinking. You could take a philosophic approach and say that it is what God and man have in common.²⁸ Or you could think of creative thinking as being an aspect of intelligence.²⁹ You could also look at creative thinking as being the ability to produce something novel and useful.³⁰ There is any number of possible explanations of creativity.

These are valid explanations of creative thinking, but they weren't helping me in my own creative journey. The explanations were too broad for me to implement any specific approaches for development. I needed to discover a theory of creativity that would be more focused on my own experiences. So I began examining the observations I made of myself, as well as those of other creative people, to find unique perspectives on the nature of creative thinking. I also noted the work of creativity researchers and relevant philosophers. Through this all, I have come to believe in a manageable understanding of creativity that proved very useful for my needs.

Creativity's Tension

I began my inquiry into the nature of creativity with a focus on finding commonalities across sources. The first commonality I discovered across my spectrum of sources was that there exists a tension within the creative mind. There was little consensus on which forces established this tension, but the existence of a push-pull tension was rarely contested. This tug of war between forces must eventually be reconciled if creativity is to occur. Creativity researcher D.W. MacKinnon said that a successful creative practitioner must be “both artist and scientist.”³¹ The “artist” and the “scientist” are extremely different from each other but they must meet somehow.³² These are two sides that are at odds with each other in style but are unified in purpose.

Philosophers have also mentioned a duality within a person's mind. Gaston Bachelard said that there is a “dual situation: experience, divergence, poetry, on the one hand; experiment, intellect, science, on the other.”³³ Just as MacKinnon discovered in his creativity work, Bachelard theorized that there is more than one frame of reference working within our minds. He said that there is more than just poetry in our imagination and more than just scientific knowledge in our intellect.³⁴ We have many faculties that are forever competing and cooperating with each other with the purpose of reaching our full potential.

Fiction author Susan Butler said, “Another way of conceiving this duality of the creative mind is as a ‘bridge’. A bridge between openness and focus; between words and sensory experience; between the creative and the critical; the conscious and the preconscious.”³⁵ The tension in a person's creativity is interwoven within consciousness. This tension is generated through a dual nature within our creative minds.

Upon looking at descriptions of creativity like those above, I arrived at two ways of thinking about these poles that generate creativity's tension. I describe the two sides as opening-up and narrowing-in, or divergence and convergence. I believe that these terms adequately explain the dynamics of a creative person's frames of mind. Together these two poles form the first building block on how I think of creativity.

Opening-up, or divergence, at the most basic level is the process of opening up your mind to possibilities other than what may initially occur to you. In order to avoid confusing this matter with multiple interpretations, I use the Webster's dictionary description of diverge: (1) branch off in different directions. (2) Take different courses or way (of thought; of life). (3) Differ from a typical form.³⁶ Divergence, then, is the ability to formulate new options out of current realities. It is flexibly expansive. It is when you extend your ability to see things that do not exist yet, but that might. Many different perspectives are given a voice in this thinking style without threat of judgment. If ideas were a river, then divergent thoughts would be the tributaries extending out of the main river: out of one idea, comes many.

But soon enough these multiple perspectives must be judged according to their merits. It is at this point when a creative thinker shifts to the second pole of creativity's tension that is called convergence. To use Webster's dictionary again, the term converge is defined: (1) incline towards each other, as lines; tend to meet. (2) Intersect.³⁷ This is creative evaluation. When thinking convergently, attention is focused on the ideas at hand and they are creatively analyzed. This analysis narrows your focus as you seek to eliminate unhelpful or unnecessary parts of what your divergent thinking gave a voice. You wade through irrelevant information to find the heart of the matter. It is a chiseling away and fusion of the bulk of ideas that your divergent thinking process generated. Ideas are also synthesized during convergence into more powerful ideas. To

return to the river analogy, if ideas were a river, convergence would be multiple streams returning to and strengthening the main river.

At the simplest level, I consider divergence as generative and convergence as revisionist. Divergence opens us up and convergence analyzes information so as to better understand them. Every creative person needs these two skills in order to reach (and exceed) their full potential. Sometimes you must open out to find more connections and other times you must narrow in to find the best connection.

Delving Further Into Convergence and Divergence

My sources exhibited a loose agreement that both convergence and divergence play a part in creativity, but the emphasis of these different sides ranged widely. Some creative people favored imaginative forms while others preferred the qualities of a more methodical mind. For some people it was the side of divergence that was transcendental³⁸ and for others it was convergence.³⁹

I considered whether or not I should value one thinking style over the other. But I quickly realized that both sides have their strengths and can be utilized in any creative activity to the benefit of the creative person. Deciding to use only one, or to shut out a certain one, seemed like folly to me. A creative person needs to use every mental ability available in order to produce worthwhile expressions.

I came to realize that it was the blurring, or confluence, between convergence and divergence that was the most important factor in creative thought. The ability to work in either style is important, but it is when the two poles' strengths are blended that true creative ability

emerges. Using this realization, I decided that the stream of creative flow is constantly shifting its concentration between sides. The exact composition of divergence and convergence within creativity shifts frequently, but never consists entirely of one or the other. Creativity's composition exists in a spectrum with convergence on one side and divergence on the other.

Creativity's fruition is born out of the push-pull confluence between these two poles. The push-pull between the two sides is where the tension within a creative person comes into play. A person's inner creativity is in a state of constant flux. This occurs as a reaction between the internal and the external world. A creative person is constantly adapting to the situation at hand. It's a tug-of-war between sides that strengthens creativity and extends it further. Without this struggle, or tension, creativity can't achieve the dynamic, adaptable qualities that it needs for success. Becoming adept at navigating the push-pull tension within the mind enables one to shift perspective from one point of view to another. It generates the raw energy of innovative thinking that is unique in every individual.

But the confluent element is most important aspect in this dichotomy. It is the supreme point because this is the aspect of creativity that helps one transcend current limitations. Thinking with only one creativity style will tend to produce static ideas that will not extend ability very far. The ability to shift between divergence and convergence addresses the need for adaptation in external situations. As one moves from convergence to divergence, elements of convergence remain, though diminished. The same holds true for divergence in the realm of convergence.

As an example of confluence between divergence and convergence, when I try to write a short story I might use what I call the Trait Pairing Method. In this writing method, I take the example of a few very different people who I have met as a starting point for a story's main

character. I'll take the dominant traits of very different people and try to reconcile them into one personality. Maybe one person I know is an especially gregarious and flamboyant person. I will open up to think about a person who would contrast well with such a character. Then I try to incorporate the opposing traits into one person. There are a myriad of unusual pairings that can form an interesting character. I might think to pair gregariousness with a melancholic streak; or I might pair the flamboyance with timidity to authority. The process of linking different traits is primarily an act of divergence, though elements of convergence remain. I am opening up to new pairings that I might never have considered before but I am still sifting through data in a convergent style.

Once I have an interesting trait base, the focus of my creativity shifts to a more convergent centered style of thinking, while still holding onto elements of divergence. I will focus in on the trait pairings and try to determine how the two traits can be reconciled in one character. For the gregarious/melancholic pairing, I might say that his gregariousness is an escape from the oppression of his melancholy. Or the pairing may be a result of a very talkative father and a sad mother. For the flamboyant/timid pairing, I might reconcile the traits in a need for acceptance. The character may see flamboyance as a way of being accepted in social situations and timidity for acceptance in business matters.

Through all my divergent and convergent thinking, there exists a blend between the two. Even during my more divergent activity I use convergent elements. While trying to think of interesting pairings for gregariousness I open up to new possibilities but I am also focusing in on the specific elements of gregariousness. Gregariousness involves being very social, talkative, and outgoing within a group. When pairing, I am thinking about what trait may contradict these specific elements. Even though divergence is the dominant thinking style, convergence is still

present. Similarly, when I used convergence to reconcile the seemingly contradictory character traits I use divergence, too. Uniting different character traits into an explanation for their origin involves a focusing in, but also an opening up. Finding an adequate explanation for the contradictory traits existing in a single character involves zooming in on the definitions of the traits. In the gregarious/melancholic trait pairing, I would need to determine possible origins of gregarious and melancholy separately. A gregarious person may have grown up with talkative and social siblings. A melancholic person may have admired a pessimistic philosopher. I can unite these two traits with a measure of divergence. I will open up to the possibility that the pessimistic philosopher was a sister, or that there is more than one role model that the character based their personality on. There are numerous possibilities of how seemingly contradictory traits can be reconciled.

The important message I am trying to deliver in this example is that in every step of the way, a creative person shifts their focus to either thinking style but neither style is ever completely shut out. Creative people find themselves somewhere between the pure forms of convergence and divergence in any creative activity. It is impossible to reach a pure state of convergence or divergence—these poles exist purely in theory. A creative person will oscillate between these two thinking styles interchangeably and fluidly. One side will never fully overpower or succumb to the other.

It's clear to me that convergent thinking fuels divergence, and vice versa. The lines between the two modes of thinking are still perceivable but they become more and more blurred as the creative process continues. The blurred interplay between the two modes of thinking develops a creative person's thought, perception, and conceptualization of whatever their subject

may be. Utilizing the tension between these two poles is the first step towards utilizing creative methods to their fullest extent.

The Personal Nature of Creativity

My interpretation of creativity shows creativity two-dimensionally and this is appropriate since creativity lies entirely within the individual. Musician Suzanne Clark said, “Developing a connection to your innermost self is a key ingredient in accessing and sustaining your creativity. Self-inquiry, self-assessment, and self-understanding are the basis for building a bridge inward.”⁴⁰ This bridge of knowledge about ourselves that Clark speaks of is what connects our identity with our creative potential. It shows the personal and individual nature of creativity. Creativity can emerge from within a group but it is not the group itself that is producing creative ideas: it is the collection of individuals that all contribute a part to a collective idea.

An external event, person, or thing might serve as an inspiration of creativity—jerking some internal element to the forefront. For example, a writer may be staring at a blank page with a pen in their hand. The page and the pen may spur on creativity, but they do not possess any inherent creativity. Creativity is imbued by the individual. The whiteness of the page or the quality of the pen may inspire this person to create, but it is not the external thing that produces the creativity—it is the creative person himself. External things and events can influence creativity but will not be the cause of it. The creativity in all creative tasks ultimately comes from within individuals and their ability to manipulate and refine their surroundings. Creativity is blended with the creative person’s personal perspective.

Creativity has deeply personal elements that are frequently discussed by creative people. Writer Susan Butler said, “When I write, I strain to hear the inner voice.”⁴¹ Another writer of fiction and non-fiction named Susan Elms furthered Butler’s position by stating, “Writing stories is

listening deep to our own truth and discovering its universality.”⁴² The act of creation is built on knowledge of one’s own perspective. It is this unique inner voice that gives validity to creativity.

Creativity begins with the individual and extends itself from personal elements. In the spirit of creative focus, one needs to look inward first for creative insight. A creative thinker must navigate his own inner complexities in order to harness their creative potential. One must learn enough about his individual perspective in order to surrender to creative impulses. In looking back at my first steps in learning about creativity, Julia Cameron’s methods adhered to a belief in the individual nature of creativity. Her Morning Pages were focused entirely on the creative student’s perspective and opinion base; the Artist Dates were activities involving virtually no one else but the creative student. Both of these techniques advanced the individual’s perspective and positively contrasted it with the external world. Cameron’s Pages and Dates were as useful as they were because they centered one on what is distinctive in the individual self.

I read again the maxims that Cameron expounded on in The Artist’s Way and discovered that Cameron’s individual approach could form the basis for a great many different techniques. Every creative technique must start by conforming to an individual style. I soon began to think beyond the lessons I learned in Cameron’s The Artist Way into realms beyond the scope of that book. I remained centered on the personal nature of creativity encouraged by Cameron and focused on the action of writing, rather than the thinking of writing.

I found out quickly that when the cognitive blend of divergence and convergence is acted upon in the external world, creativity becomes three-dimensional, real, tangible, and observable. The creativity that Cameron encouraged is potential—it isn’t until this potential interacts with

the outside world that it becomes accomplishment. So a person who wants to write would focus first on individual creative style, and then proceed forward into methods adjusted for such a style. Imagination is the nourishment for accomplishment, but it is only the fruits of a well-written story or well-thought out creative process that is proof of potential.⁴³ If creative accomplishment is to happen on a transcendent level, a person must extend out from not only thinking creatively, but also to acting creatively. Accomplishment spirals one back into self-understanding, and this refined self-knowledge produces further accomplishment.

The next chapter will discuss activities that I used to advance my writing ability. Many of these activities cycled me back to a heightened metacognition. I will describe how this occurred and the metacognitive techniques I used in order to further develop creative possibilities.

CHAPTER III

WORKING WITH OUR CREATIVE SELF

The previous chapter explained my understanding of creativity. I explained that creativity is the interplay between divergence and convergence, between imagination and focus, and between opening up and narrowing in. I mentioned that the tension and balance between these seemingly opposed mental abilities produces the fuel for creative potential. A person learns how to guide their creative energy through knowledge of their individual self. This self-knowledge empowers the individual to understand the nature of their creative potential.

I also began the assertion that experience with the outside world improves the creative capability of a person. Creative flow occurs when a balance is struck between one's creativity and the nature of the external activity. Conscious effort is then superseded by a natural and confident focus; intuition is superseded by deep understanding. There is symmetry between creativity, motivation, and the demands of the activity when achieving a creative flow. The ultimate goal of all this inward wrangling is to achieve a stasis between the inner world of creativity with the external world of action. It is when creativity is matched with tasks in the outside world that it becomes fruit bearing.

But not every creative act is appropriate to each person. A person could be creative as a writer, a scientist, a painter, a private investigator, or any number of occupations and tasks. The possible applications of human potential are endless. Determining how to match one's creativity with activity becomes the next big question to answer.

Determining Creative Style

Reflection is the first step for discovering a match between individual creativity and a creative activity. Through reflection of past dispositions, one can begin to consider the personal characteristics of creativity. Creativity can have an affinity towards subtleties or towards distinctions; it can be more inclined towards organization or to spontaneity; it can have a wildness about it or it can have a calmness in it. Just like personalities must be paired to make a romantic couple, the nature of one's creativity must be paired with appropriate activity. It is through the close examination of one's self that a particular creative style can be discovered. Reflection and metacognition are crucial in order to develop it to the point where real flow and accomplishment can be achieved.

Creative writing professor Barbara LeGendre believes that every creative writer has a particular style that must be acknowledged in order to develop ability.⁴⁴ She learned to analyze the writing habits of her writing students and place them into a number of categories. Using these categories, LeGendre broke down her students' styles of writing so as to better understand their strengths and weaknesses. Having this knowledge about her students' styles enabled her to become a better teacher than if she didn't think about these styles. She was able to teach to her students' individual weaknesses, while encouraging them to continue in their strengths.

One of LeGendre's categories, for example, was Focused writers. This type of writer managed time well and revised very well, but had difficulty in knowing when to begin writing. A Focused writer often started writing before they had enough material with which to work. They rarely went deep enough into their subject to reach an adequate amount of complexity. LeGendre altered her teaching focus for these students by telling them to wait before writing.

Slowing a focused writer down proved to be the most important thing to teach them because by slowing down, the student could spend more time on development.

Another type of writer LeGendre described was Inclusive writers. This type of writer could perceive levels of their subject very well, but could rarely revise or delete. They accumulated so much material that they could not adequately revise for clarity. LeGendre reacted to these students' needs by forcing them to make time for revision and then guide them through the revision process.

LeGendre found that students could learn their own creative style and guide themselves accordingly. They can respond to their own weaknesses and strengths. Once armed with an understanding of their own creative style, they can encourage their strengths by writing rough drafts in the style that is most comfortable to them. Then during revision, the student can focus on points of weakness that their style engenders so as to negate its impact on the creative work. In other words, students can learn how to strategize their thinking patterns to correlate with their actions. They can then transcend their current creative boundaries and refine their ability to be creative.

I have used two methods for determining my own creative style. The first is personal journaling and the second is supportive listening. Personal journaling was the first method I used, but I do more than just write what has happened in my day and what I thought about the day. I have found success in using a perspective switching technique in order to better analyze my thoughts. When I journal, I look at myself as both a participant in life as well as a narrator. In a sense, I alternate my viewpoint from inside my life and from outside of my accustomed perspective. I become an actor as well as an observer of my self in this way. Switching between

perspectives is a reflective technique that helps to understand how creative methods can be developed.

The language of my journal entries frequently slips from the first-person into the third-person. I don't always write with words like, "I think that..." or "I thought that..." I speak directly to myself, as if the person holding the pen were someone altogether separate. On March 14, 2003, I flipped between the two tenses in a journal entry. I wrote, "I've been using a slight avoidance maneuver with myself. You need to dig deeper. You need to return to roads you may already have traveled." The matter-of-fact part of my mind stated matters as I saw them that day in the first sentence; the second and third sentences ordered me to action. I switched between speaking as the artist and as a coach. There are times when the coach speaks and other times when the student speaks. I am less clouded by my biases in this duality of perspective.

Journaling in a perspective switching technique or otherwise should reveal the benefits and drawbacks for current creativity methodologies. If this is performed regularly, soon enough one should see patterns of style developing. These patterns should be immediately labeled. The labeling is necessary in order to make it possible to work with it. Labeling places a framework around thinking patterns so that it becomes possible to focus on developing that certain aspect of cognition. Researcher Arthur L. Costa said, "Thus, when we create labels, we structure our perceptions."⁴⁵ Labeling creates a scaffold from which to build understanding regarding our mental workings. These labels don't need to be technical psychological jargon. They can be arbitrary names. The important thing about this activity of labeling is that the creative person can easily grasp the mental concepts that the name embodies.

In the fall of 2003, I remember journaling that being creative made me feel secluded from others. I journaled for days on this dilemma but just went in circles. I didn't understand the

feeling well enough to build on it. Finally, I decided that in order to find the root of this feeling I needed to convert it into something I could name.

I needed to get in touch with this emotion so I decided I would label the feeling by writing a short story about it. The story was built around a character named Nick who felt these same feelings. Nick embodied the feelings that I was experiencing and became the label of my emotion. I fleshed him out by giving him a history and disposition that might explain his secluded mindset. I described an entire scene with him working with his seclusion on a day spent at a public pond. The following is an excerpt of this story:

Tomorrow I go back to work. I don't want to think about it. I'd rather stay immersed in the warm and deep covers of Walden Pond, of the fiction this water lets me believe. I feel free and more myself when I am here. I am free to immerse myself in the warm waters of my own thoughts. This pond is a pond of forgetfulness for me. It rinses out all that muck that I let accumulate in my brain. The muck comes back quickly when I go back to reality, but at least I get some relief. I can be my own island for a while at Walden. I can float underwater and pursue any adventure I like without fear of humiliation. I can sink to the bottom and merge with the green moss that almost no one else sees. I can think of myself as a mere shadow, like that daring fish I could barely make out amidst the green water underneath the surface.

In looking at this excerpt, I can see that the roots of my feelings of seclusion within creativity revolved around my fear of losing the esteem of those in my community. I clearly enjoyed the risk and satisfaction that I explored while being creative, but I held myself from exhibiting creative tendencies to others because I feared a level of ostracization. By using a short story as a journaling technique, I was able to step outside of myself and take a different view. This different perspective gave me the ability to reach out to my inner demons and to negate their power over me. I gained an external point of view from my own feelings of seclusion and less than ideal mentality. Consequently, my mental dilemma dissolved and I was

able to leave them behind me. The labeling of my secluded feelings made it possible for me to understand it well enough to move on.

Allowing another person to read your journal entries, though revealing, can be helpful as well. The feedback you can receive from others is extremely valuable for unblocking yourself from creative activity (as in the above short story example) or for determining better creative methods. Feedback gives an outside frame of reference that can help analyze a creative style from perspectives not considered before imagined by the creative person. A teacher, counselor, fellow artist, or close friend can all assume the role of feedback giver.

The feedback giver should be able to not only observe your actions as you create, but also participate in supportive listening with you. The reasons for observing your actions while creating are fairly obvious: the feedback giver needs to perceive you in action in order to comment on your strengths and weaknesses. This is very important, but the supportive listening part is arguably even more important. Supportive listening is a sharing exercise meant to reveal your attitudes, opinions, and reasons for performing your art as you do. In order to perform this exercise, the feedback giver and creative person must set aside at least five minutes (though more is preferable) in which only the creative person talks. While the feedback giver listens, the creative person talks about their creative methodology without stopping. The listener does nothing except focus on the words being spoken. Interruptions are not permitted. When the allotted time expires, the feedback giver repeats in his or her own words what the creative person said. The creative person can then see his or her perceptions from an outside point of view. This activity forces the creative person to dig deep into their perception of creativity. Exchanges like this can help a creative person better understand their reasons for creating as they do.

I made a significant discovery using supportive listening. A class I was in was using supportive listening in order to gauge our status in a semester-long project. When I spoke, I made statements such as, “I’m having a hard time deciding what to write,” and, “I feel confident in the flow and organization of what I have written,” and also, “There are days when I do nothing on the project because I just can’t seem to get beyond a blank screen.” These statements showed me that my strength lay in revision of already-created material. My weakness was in the formation of this material. It was an uphill battle to generate rough drafts, but a downhill coasting while revising. The discovery that I find greater joy in the re-shaping of written works than in the birth of a new composition was of immense importance to my writing’s development. This realization proved to be a major stepping-stone in my creativity’s style.

Based on the knowledge of my creative style, I began experimenting with different writing techniques that were conducive to my strengths and weaknesses. The first method I attempted was the method Stephen King described in his autobiographical book On Writing.⁴⁶ King starts the vast majority of his writing projects by first shutting the door to his study. In doing this, he shuts out the outside world and focuses on his own imagination. Then he sits down, boots up his computer, and lets words simply find their way onto the page. King finds it easy to put new words onto the page and sees no reason to perform elaborate rituals to find inspiration for his stories. He said, “Good story ideas seem to come quite literally from nowhere, sailing at you right out of the empty sky: two previously unrelated ideas come together and make something new under the sun.”⁴⁷ The stories simply come to him and he transcribes his story ideas onto the computer screen. King continues a writing project in this manner until it is ready for public perusal and subsequent revision. He then opens the door to his study and invites in his wife and other people he respects to tell him what they think about what he composed.

I admire Stephen King's work, so I attempted his methods. But I quickly discovered that I hadn't the ability to simply pull ideas out of the sky like he can in his creative process. King's method may work for someone who has a strength in generating new words, but since generating new words is my weakness I had difficulty. Consequently, I wrote nothing using King's method.

Using the knowledge that my creative style's weakness lay in generating new words, I altered my approach to writing. I shifted to an Outline method in which I wrote out a very sketchy version of a story—sometimes in strict outline format—with the idea that I would flesh out the details later. This method opened up the doors to a large quantity of words, alleviating my weakness in writing, but the words were lacking in vitality and energy. The following is an excerpt from a story called "Prison" that I ceased writing as soon as I discovered the weakness of its words:

Jon woke up in his warm double bed. He had a bad dream and reached for Emma. He expected to touch her tender skin and soft hair but all he touched was a cold bedside table.

There was no sleeping Emma next to him. He has been kept from her for weeks now. Jon was placed in a holding compound for the enemies of Bruce Anderson. The site was beautiful. It was well maintained by the prisoners. "Guests" as Bruce and the supervisors like to call them.

The grounds and set up of the compound is similar in operation and appearance to a commune. Only those that are invited in don't leave until given permission. There is freedom to do anything you like within the compound, so long as you don't ask to leave or hurt someone else.

Writing this story using the Outline method was easy, but as soon as I read it over I wanted to tear it to pieces. The narrative felt forced and dry. It was far from the standards I set for my writing. It revealed that any creative method I adopted must possess a certain level of unpredictability for not only the reader, but for me as well.

I reacted to the failure of the Outline method by deciding to focus entirely on characters in order to produce an interesting plot. I adopted a Character Only method. In this technique, I started any story by describing the details of its main character. I intended to develop the plot later—after the character had been sufficiently described. I wrote the following story excerpt about a frustrated writer utilizing this method:

Just sitting here now. Not producing. Not typing. Not even thinking. Dreamless. Pointless. No—not pointless. Only without direction. The fingers twitching again. They have so much desire and energy but not direction. They don't know how to act in this state. So they tap to an unknown and discordant rhythm. Like an unheard primal song not heard of for millenia. The pulses of the twitching reminds me of thin branches stuttering with the wind outside my study window. They move randomly with the breath of the changing weather. Those tree fingers are moving firmly, quickly, almost angrily. What could they be angry about? They don't need to do anything but keep on keeping on. I, on the other hand, must move my fingers in the right way to survive. Control is necessary; control is life-saving.

My study is growing dim. The day's eyelids are closing slowly, light slowly departing. I think to myself that I ought to go flip the lights on to cover up the darkness. But I stay rooted. I must work. I don't deserve the luxury of artificial light. I'm a writer and I must produce. There, now I have a whole sentence written. "Once more into the twilight of Azarean Michel went." Hmm. I don't like it. Boring. Without spirit. Without a heartbeat. Vitality is so hard to put down on paper.

As with the Outline method I had little trouble getting words onto the page. The Character Only method also me closer to my goal because I felt like my characters were beginning to emerge as believable entities. But I still felt like I was not achieving a depth of feeling enough in my characters. I also found that my plotlines were not flowing out of the description of a character. So this method also proved a failure for me because my characters were still not deep enough and my plots were virtually nonexistent.

At this point, I decided that I needed to return to a more personally focused method. I decided that I would think of interesting times in my life that I could fictionalize. I call this method the Nonfictional Fiction method. This method used actual events in my life and converted them into a fictional story. The fictionalization was done by changing names, aspects of the environment, and exaggerations here and there. Here is an excerpt from a story called “Knock, Knock” that used this method:

Knock, knock.

I knew who was there. Beth knew who it was, too. But if you were to ask us how we knew it I don't think that either one of us could answer. There was a certain tone in the knock—it was thick and ripe with tension. There was an insistence in the rapid succession.

Knock, Knock.

Beth looked at me; we stared at each other holding our breaths. I could feel my pulse rising to a dangerous, red crescendo.

Knock, Knock!

The knocker knocked in such a way as to give us the feeling that he was raising his voice saying, I know you're in there, now open this door!

Beth felt compelled to check the door. The front porch light was still on from my entrance. She quietly crept to the front door and peered in the eyehole for a couple seconds. She turned around with a perplexed look on her face and shrugged to me in a manner communicating the message that whoever was knocking had either gone quickly or was hiding out the view of the eyehole. Either way it creeped me out. I felt like I was in some really bad teenage suspense or horror movie. You know—the type of B-movie where the boy goes over to the head cheerleader's summer house to hook up and gets sliced and diced halfway through the foreplay. The boy never wins. Even if the slasher wasn't on the other side of the door, if the knocker really was who I thought it was I wasn't about to have a very pleasant night. I mean, really—if they are hiding from the eyehole, they aren't looking for Halloween candy.

This method made me feel like I was on to something. The characters and action in the story proceeded naturally from each other. It was easy to make the story believable because the major events in the story really did happen. The problem I found using this method was that I was bored when writing it. I already knew what was happening and couldn't be surprised by the

characters or the plot. I eventually lost interest in what I was composing. This loss of interest led to a degeneration in the quality of the narrative. I realized that any method I use for creative writing must remain interesting to me. The Nonfictional Fiction method was failing in this important aspect and so I had to use a different creative method in order for me to keep me on a path of creative development. I sought a method that could speak to my weakness in producing a quantity of words, while still encouraging powerful emotions in not only my readers, but also in myself.

The Two Stage Model For Writing

I soon discovered the book Writing With Power,⁴⁸ written by University of Massachusetts English professor Peter Elbow. The methods Elbow described in this book proved an effective match to my creative style's attributes and also satisfied my goals for maintaining emotion in my writing. Elbow's book advocates a two-phase model for writing both fiction and nonfiction. His first phase is always the free writing phase. Free writing is an activity a person uses to transcribe thoughts. During this activity, there are basically two implicit rules to abide: a person must never stop writing and there must be no judging of the work. Occasional drifts from the topic happen, but eventually the free writer returns to the topic at hand. A person attempts to stay on their topic as much as possible so that useable material can be put on paper. The focus is not to produce a bunch of babble but to generate written material for later development.

I remember the first time I free wrote. It was in class and our instructor told us to free write for ten minutes before starting our session. He gave us the topic, "What do I want to get

out of this class?” At first I was hesitant to believe that I could actually write for ten minutes without pause. But I quickly discovered a wealth of words and ideas that I didn’t realize were just waiting for me to pick up and express. The significance of this event was that I found that I could write anytime, anywhere if I would just stop judging the words as they came out. Prior to the discovery of free writing I struggled with producing words of my own. Free writing taught me that I did have the power to write thoughtful words whenever I needed to. It was the letting go of judgment while generating words that allowed the floodwaters to flow and words to spill onto the page with ease.

Elbow’s second phase for writing is to revise. The revision phase is described as the time when the writer analyzes, organizes, and streamlines the free writing.⁴⁹ He or she takes his or her time with each word to make sure it advances the purposes of the written work. It is the time when a writer trims away the fat, so to speak, in order to make the written work suitable for public consumption. Readability and clarity is the primary goal of this second stage.

Elbow concedes that a writer will alternate between the two phases so that adjustments and expansion of certain areas can be done.⁵⁰ Deciding on how and when this alternation should occur is largely based on the particulars of the environment surrounding the written work’s production. If a written work must be completed in just a couple of hours, then the writer will only have time for one or two shifts between free writing and revising. When there is more time to finish the work, then the writer can indulge in more cycles between stages as well as have longer breaks in between.

The central concept in Elbow’s method is that the free writing stage and the revising stage should be separated whenever possible.⁵¹ A person who is free writing must not allow revisionist thoughts to enter their mind. To do so would invite judgment, which is, of course, the

thing that a writer must avoid during the free writing stage. Conversely, during the revision stage a writer must be very discriminating and invite judgment into their thinking. Elbow explains that these stages use very different thinking styles that are rarely compatible together.⁵²

Elbow's two-stage method for writing has provided the necessary framework I needed in my writing methods. It effectively alleviated my weakness in generating words in the free writing stage; it allows my strength in revision to flourish by giving it a devoted time to work; and it maintained my voice in the narrative as well as interest in the action to keep the reader and myself interested. Using this method, I wrote the story "Those Hands" in its current form. The following is an excerpt from this story:

I'm not over Glenn. I suspect that I never will be. He meant too much to me in our thirty-three years together. Those years passed by too quickly. I can remember the first day we met each other with clarity. It was up on Mount Lemmon, near the village of Summerhaven. I was twenty-one at the time and going to school at the University of Arizona. Two of my friends and I (what were their names?—I can't remember them anymore) went up to find the snow. It was a hot February and we sought relief from the heat up in those cool trees. We could see the white snow from the hot valley below and yearned for its touch.

I drove my yellow Datsun up the scary, mountainside road past Windy Point. We laughed and giggled the whole drive up about nothing really. I was such a silly girl back then. We rolled our windows down and could feel the cool air flooding the interior of the car. Just thinking of that cold air gives me goosebumps thinking about it. It was such a clean feeling after coming from the dusty heat of central Tucson.

We pulled over before reaching Summerhaven. Snow was abounding up there and we couldn't wait any longer. We yearned for the fun that the cold, white powder promised us. We jumped out of the car and leaped into the snow with big smiles on our faces. My friends ran further down a gently sloping hill but I didn't follow. I remember laying down in the cold whiteness making a snow angel and feeling like one. It was then that Glenn came up to me.

All the pieces of a good story—plot, character, and voice—were allowed to build out of my creative style using Elbow's writing methods. I felt like I had finally found a method that

effectively answered my creative style's needs. I continue to use this method in current writing projects. I might adjust the specific time allotments and goals of the two stages of free writing and revision, but the structure will likely remain the same. I know that I have found a suitable method that will continue to help me achieve my writing goals.

The more I considered the efficacy of Elbow's writing methods, the more I began to see the similarities and differences in approach with his method and Julia Cameron's method. Elbow's and Cameron's methods are similar in that they both acknowledge judgment's effect on creativity. Cameron labeled judgment by calling it the Censor. She described the internal Censor as a hindrance and obstacle for a creative person. Every negative and discouraging thought was to be avoided and suppressed. Elbow also acknowledged the Censor, or judgment, and sought to avoid it during free writing. But he takes a different approach to it in the end.

Elbow differed from Cameron because he saw that judgment could, in fact, be utilized during creative activity. Judgment is the centerpiece of revision and revision is necessary for the efficacy of any written piece.⁵³ Elbow sought to control the power of judgment by sequestering it into its own stage. He utilized the negative energy of judgment. The revision stage is a conduit, an invitation if you will, for negative thoughts. These negative thoughts would get in the way during free writing but in their own stage they are a great help. The negativity of judgment is converted into useful work within Elbow's two-phase model. Elbow tries to control the part of every creative person's psyche that Cameron tries to negate. Elbow's methods provided the flexibility to harness my mind's strengths and converted obstacles into strengths.

However beneficial I found Elbow's two phase model to be, there were times when I found it difficult to switch between the very different mindsets of free writing and revising. Ever so often I fall into the trap of judging my free writing, or of using the revision stage for the

expansion of ideas. Elbow gave little advice on how a person can change and maintain their frames of mind while composing. The only thing that he said that had an effect on my mind shifts was that a person should set the work aside for a time and then come back to it.⁵⁴ I needed help in finding out how to switch and maintain my mindsets between the two phases more efficiently.

Beneficial Thinking Dispositions For Advancing Creativity

Shari Tishman's book entitled The Thinking Classroom⁵⁵ talked about attaining and maintaining beneficial thinking dispositions. Tishman defines thinking dispositions as “abiding tendencies toward distinct patterns of thinking behaviors.”⁵⁶ Thinking dispositions are unique ways of perceiving and understanding the world. They are mindsets and attitudes that can help a person attain their goals. These goals could be intellectual, creative, physical, or emotional. Tishman believes that dispositions, plus ability, are what defines performance.⁵⁷

The first step for every effective thinker is to learn a vocabulary of thinking words so as to describe what is happening during cognitive activity. For example, a person might learn the words “dissent” and “concede” so as to become a more effective debater. Or a person may learn the difference between the words “hypothesize” and “theorize” in order to become a better scientist. A writer could learn the words “meditate” and “opine” in order to describe a character’s musings. Once a person has knowledge of thinking words, he or she can begin to practice with the thinking methods described. As one works with various thinking methods, the mind’s potential rises because it learns how to break down the mental activity into more and

more detail.⁵⁸ This concept is closely related to Arthur L. Costa's idea (which I mentioned previously) that one must label their cognition in order to build on it.

Looking back, I realize that I began this first step in a simple way when discovering characteristics of Cameron's Censor. Cameron's description of the Censor was a method of attaching a word to a thinking style. Thinking with the Censor is a thinking disposition in and of itself. It is not a beneficial thinking disposition but it is a disposition nonetheless. It was in learning the word "Censor" that I was able to begin thinking without it. The separation of my negative thoughts from other thoughts is where my creative journey began. Without that first step of sequestering my Censor I couldn't have moved forward.

Tishman continued to describe thinking dispositions by citing a few examples of good thinking dispositions. There are plenty she could have listed, but she called attention to five that contribute to effective thinking in particular:

- 1) The disposition to be curious and questioning.
- 2) The disposition to think broadly and adventurously.
- 3) The disposition to reason clearly and carefully.
- 4) The disposition to organize one's thinking.
- 5) The disposition to give thinking time.⁵⁹

Upon close examination, I feel that the first two thinking dispositions fit in nicely with Elbow's free writing stage for writing. The free writing stage is when a person is permitted to be curious and questioning. A person is also trying to think broadly and adventurously during this time.

The third and fourth dispositions listed above work with the revision stage. It is during the revision stage that one is working for clarity, precision, and organization. The need for a logical and lucid sequence of ideas is key in this stage.

The final disposition works well with my notion that one should journal and engage in supportive listening and reflection in order to determine creative style. Without allowing thinking time, I would never have arrived at what methods should be utilized in response to my creative needs. This last disposition permitted the other four to burgeon into the methods I now utilize in my creative writing. Had I not given myself thinking time, the other four would not have occurred for me in my creative journey.

So creative people must be in constant, intimate contact with themselves in order to advance their creativity. The vocabulary of metacognition empowers the creative individual to practice developing beneficial thinking dispositions. These thinking words strike me as operating the same way as LeGendre's labeling of her students' styles. Understanding thinking words and practicing with them empowers a person to understand their cognitive processes with greater precision. Consequently, a person can learn to strategize their actions according to their thinking tendencies.⁶⁰ A person can switch between thinking dispositions in practice with these thinking words, just like LeGendre's students could with their writing styles. With this knowledge, an individual is able to learn the ability to strategize their mental patterns in order to suit the creative task at hand.

Good Habits of Mind Benefiting the Creative Journey

What all of this leads up to is that good habits of mind spurs powerful action. Creativity researcher Arthur L. Costa said that a people possessing good habits of mind would evolve into effective thinkers⁶¹—thinkers who are able to recognize the most advantageous mindset and be

able to switch to that mindset with ease. He said that a person who employs good habits of mind would have five key characteristics:

- 1) *Inclination* towards intellectual patterns.
- 2) *Valuing* the most effective intellectual patterns.
- 3) *Sensitivity* in knowing when to employ certain intellectual patterns.
- 4) *Capability* to carry out intellectual patterns.
- 5) *Commitment* to continually reflecting and improving their intellectual performance.⁶²

The first two of these characteristics—*inclination* and *valuing*—emphasizes the fact that a good thinker will seek out new methods for delving deeply into their thinking. Good thinkers will challenge themselves to find mental challenges and not shy away from difficult mental obstacles. They will try to find out why they have problems thinking in a certain way and won't be discouraged when it takes time to do so.

The third and fourth characteristics—*sensitivity* and *capability*—point to a good thinker's understanding of when to employ certain intellectual patterns. It shows that such a thinker will be able to carry out these intellectual tasks and can perceive a mental problem early enough to defuse it. They will possess a large toolbox of thinking abilities that can be applied to a great variation of thinking tests and situations.

The final characteristic that Costa attributes to good thinkers is that they will have a commitment to continually reflecting and improving their intellectual performance. This means that they will enjoy and indulge in metacognition constantly. This thinking on thinking serves as the impetus for further development of their mind's abilities. It also aids in the maintenance of what they already possess. It is easy to forget how to think in a certain way if the thinking method is no longer being used. But if a person is continually utilizing their mind's abilities then this atrophy of mental capability will not become a factor.

Costa is pointing to the fact that the best way to become adept at managing different mindsets is to first adopt beneficial habits of mind.⁶³ Good habits of mind revolve around developing an appreciation for thinking about your mind's activity. This appreciation is a very effective path to greater mental strength and knowledge. Knowledge of thinking styles and constant metacognition is the fuel for this building.

CHAPTER IV

WORKING WITH OUR CREATIVE WORLD

In the last chapter I showed why metacognitive activity is crucial for determining creative style. I said that metacognition establishes a measure of control over our inner creativity because it opens the doors for understanding our individual strengths and weaknesses. Moving forward with this knowledge, we can better harness and develop our abilities. The knowledge of our creative style helps us to devise better methods for tapping into our imaginative powers.

I found that Peter Elbow's two stage writing process adapted well with my creative style. His process worked with my love for revision and my trepidation to generate new words. Other people with different creative styles may fare better with other methods. Achieving a creative flow depends on finding what works with each personal creative style.

Shifting To an Action Oriented Concentration

This being said, I still exhibited resistance to constant practice for quite a while. I wrote down lots of story ideas in my journal, but for every half dozen story ideas only one would actually be attempted. I found a great deal of difference between hypothetical story ideas and tangible print. Making the leap into a new habit of continual practice became the last major creative push.

There comes a time when a creative person must stop thinking about the past or the future and center themselves on the present activity. I think that becoming overly concerned with the

internal elements of creativity can be just as detrimental as not thinking about them at all. This is because too much reflection diverts considerable opportunities for learning through doing.

But it is important to remember that journaling habits need never be fully discarded. Journaling can (and should) remain a prominent part of creativity at any stage. The shift I am considering here is a matter of concentration. The shift is away from merely talking about doing things and onto actually doing them. Our internal world is where creativity is founded, but it is external activity where individual creativity can be best honed and sharpened. Action within creativity is crucial for achieving the levels of potential that reflections only describe.

There is a tremendous store of knowledge that can be found only through action.⁶⁴ The knowledge that one can gain through action lies in the volatility of the external world. Questions never considered before and directions unanticipated are things that can be gained through doing. Such unpredictable elements cannot be found through metacognition.⁶⁵ Metacognition is a very controlled set of circumstances and doesn't involve much that cannot be predicted. A mind is a closed community of thoughts and experiences, while the external world is filled with unknown elements.

The difference between understanding and knowing how to act in the world is significant. In pondering this concept, I am reminded of when I learned how to ride a bike. Everyone told me how to ride one—all you have to do is to jump on, pump the pedals a few times, balance yourself, and you are on your way. But even though I understood how a bike was ridden, I couldn't do it on the first try (or the second, or the third...). It was only in the practice of getting on a bike that I learned how to operate one. Just like learning to ride a bike, the differences between understanding how to be creative and actually performing it are huge. Insights about creativity are very helpful for orienting one's self before creative activity. But the true learning

takes place in action. The act of doing something creative necessarily involves unknown elements that can only be found in interaction with the external world. It doesn't matter how controlled you are as a person, the external world will keep moving in its own ways.

Knowledgeable Surrender

In order to shift from the world of reflection to the world of action one must knowingly surrender to his or her own creativity. This knowledgeable surrender is born out of a mixture between self-understanding and comfort with uncertainty. In a knowledgeable surrender, a person reacts to the external world with their inner self. Writer Susan Els said, "I must first perceive the dynamic balance of the spirit that moves over the waters of the soul. Then I must trust myself to the breath of that spirit. And let myself be breathed."⁶⁶ Knowing the nature of our creative spirit comes from reflection; knowing how to use this creative spirit entails a measure of surrender to it.

I remember one particular moment when I fell into such a knowledgeable surrender. It was when I was writing a personal narrative about a particular moment of my history. The piece I was writing was about a scary moment when my girlfriend and I had an unexpected and unwanted visitor. The moment was highly charged when it happened because we weren't sure what would happen next. Bodily harm was one possibility, so both of us were nervous. This energy was something that I wanted to capture in words. I knew from prior experience that over-analyzing words as they come out deadened the life in a narrative so I just allowed my mind to pick words seemingly out of the blue. I closed my eyes and didn't even look at the monitor as I typed. An outside viewer may have thought that I was resting had they not looked at my face.

But I was far from unconscious—I was in a state of total focus. I surrendered to whatever words my imagination thought appropriate at the time. Now that I look back at the piece, I see that the energy of the moment was translated. That moment proved to be an important breakthrough in my creative journey.

Knowledgeable surrender to creativity is like making your mind still. But letting go in this manner is not a passive process.⁶⁷ The mind is highly aware of what is happening around us while creating. Stilling the mind in a creative setting is not a matter of letting go *of* focus; it is a matter of letting go *to* focus. I've found that knowledgeable surrender is frequently the last step towards achieving a creative flow.

The experience of creative flow is an acquiescence to the flow of the creation itself. It is the moment when a creative person can transcend their creative boundaries and contribute to their surrounding community. A creative flow can be attained by letting yourself focus on the present activity. To find true focus, one needs to concentrate on doing the task at hand in a knowledgeable way.⁶⁸ Effort without knowledge of one's self is like a man stumbling around in the dark—seldom will the goal be reached in the easiest way. It will almost always be fraught with struggle and obstacles that don't fully capture creative essence. Knowledgeable effort keeps thoughts centered on actually doing the task at hand.

There are multitudes of ways in which focus can be fostered. No single way holds a monopoly on engendering focus. In the example I mentioned above, I found that my focus was fostered through desire and interest. I wanted to write the personal narrative because it brought back a perspective of myself that I had long abandoned. In the time between the described moment and when I wrote the story a lot had changed in me. Writing about my past brought back my discarded perspective on the world. I became interested in this old perspective and

enjoyed reveling in it. It was fun to think in ways that I used to. I stayed wholly focused on the task of writing my narrative down because I had enough desire interest in the words I was writing.

There was also an element of risk involved in writing about this particular event. Much of what I was writing was highly personal and I didn't want everyone to be able to read about it. I risked revealing parts of myself that I didn't want the general public to see. But the greater risk was in keeping the emotions I wanted to express all bottled up inside. The act of writing was an act of release. Not releasing such a thing could stunt my personal growth. So I wrote. I thought of a compromise to alleviate the risk about revealing too much to the general public: I changed a few names and altered a few details and descriptions in order to mask the story as a fictional story. But the raw emotions and perspectives that I needed to put down in print came through. The risk kept up a tension that riveted my attention. Knowing about the involved risks helped me experience a heightened focus.

One could look at the concept of a knowledgeable surrender as a form of listening—a form of listening to what is hidden deep inside your imagination or history. Writer Susan Butler said, “I often think of the creative process in terms of a ‘topography’ of mind. I envision myself sitting very still at the edge of a body of smooth water, waiting as patiently as a fisherwoman for something to surface from the deep.”⁶⁹ A focused creative person will concentrate on how their imagination is reacting to the needs of the external activity. In effect, creative listening is a very active process—one in which a person is the conduit between thought and action.

Pulling It All Together

A person's potential, his or her ability to relate to the task at hand, and their personal creative style all make a big difference on the dynamics of the creative experience. The creative process begins with reflection because one must be in tune with themselves in order to tap into the personal nature of creativity. Then, creative style must be identified and worked with in the form of activity. Creative style fuses personality, uniqueness, and interest within the act of creativity. Finally, a creative person needs to learn focus and the sound of their imagination's voice in order to attain a measure of creative flow. A creative flow elevates a creative experience from barely noticeable to highly charged. It forms the relationship between a person's self and the external world and makes creativity fluid and profound.

It is not the unpredictability of the outside world that guides the creative process. What guides the creative process is our inner selves. One could describe creativity as a series of personal choices about external events. These choices are guided by what we desire to achieve and express. Even amongst the unpredictable world, we are always in control of our own creativity. Our inner self is the constant source of inspiration. External events can trigger inspiration from within us, but do not spawn it. Creativity exists only within the individual. External events are merely there to react to. All creativity starts from within and sprouts out from there. The value of external events lies in the refinement and enhancement of creativity. It's like the relationship between a knife and a wet stone. Does the wet stone cause the knife to sharpen? Can the knife sharpen itself? –No. The wet stone is there to refine the ability of the knife to cut, to reach the height of its potential. In the same way, external events can only

sharpen our creativity. They make our creativity better able to handle future tasks, but are never in control of our creative choices.

More Yet To Be Discovered

I feel that I still have much to pursue in the study of creativity. I have only scratched the surface of how knowledgeable surrender works. In order to learn more I intend to continue to develop good habits of mind so that I will continue practicing my creativity. I also need to read much more on the topic. There exists a wealth of books and knowledgeable people who can help illuminate my search for creative development further. Reading more about the topic should lend more details on the relationship between convergence and divergence within creativity. It could prove to be highly enlightening to discover new ways of differentiating between the poles of tension within creativity. I also will need to reflect even more deeply into the nature of my unique creativity. This reflection may come through more free writing, fiction writing, or in general conversation. I can't anticipate where the next big realization will occur—I can only stay open to it when it comes.

I am very excited to continue the study of this fascinating topic. It has such breadth that I am at times overwhelmed. But when I return to the use of my own creativity I am reminded of the beauty in its use. The more I seek creativity, the easier it comes to me. Simplicity comes in the form of mastering the many elements involved. As I learn more and more about the inner workings of my mind I am finding that my writing has improved. It has become much clearer to me when I need to switch my method of thinking to adapt to the writing task at hand. It's also clearer to me that there are no absolute thinking styles in creativity. There is only blending.

The creative self speaks only in whispers. We, as creative people, must learn to tune in and amplify its images so as to tap into our creative potential. Elements from our past and future must be quieted through reflection. We then need to determine the way that our creativity will express itself by figuring out our creative style. Finally, we must focus on what our imagination speaks. Author W. Timothy Gallwey said, “As one achieves focus, the mind quiets. As the mind is kept in the present, it becomes calm.”⁷⁰ When I am focused on my writing and my mind is still, I am listening intently to my self, and I like what it says.

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