

Flying to the moon and beyond –

being a highly creative person in a world that doesn't understand

Being highly creative is not for the fainthearted. It is definitely a mixed blessing. Confronted with its challenging aspects of rejection, being misunderstood, not belonging, whilst battling your inner demons of worthlessness, doubt and inferiority, there seem to be two choices: conform to the norm, and hide this gift away in the depth of oblivion, or express it and be lonely. Either way, you will feel cut off. Cut off from yourself and the incredible potential you carry within you. Or cut off from the rest of the world around you.

So, what is the blessing, you may ask?

Using your creative energy is plugging into the current of the universe, connecting you to your heart and soul, into dimensions of existence that are mystical, heart warming and fulfilling. Having first experienced these states as a teenager, through listening and practicing music, I learned to label them much later as ecstasy and trance. Both states are more commonly known to be reached through religious or spiritual practice, in shamanism and ancient tribal ceremonies. Or through drugs, both drugs for healing and hallucinatory ones.

These states of consciousness, as I was to find out, are an important aspect of being highly creative. I was traveling through Europe at the young age of 16, and having landed in Amsterdam, was offered to try some hashish. Here was my chance to explore further what I had already experienced in music. Everybody told me how it made listening to music and dancing, as well as colours, much more intense. When I took it, it was a let down. I felt that what I was able to experience without was more powerful – perhaps because induced by myself. I told people around me. Nobody heard me. How could they? They had no idea what I was talking about.

How do you get into a state of ecstasy and trance without drugs? I knew there was music, I didn't know about all the rest, like shamanism etc. This was to become an exploration of a lifetime, in conjunction with my artistic endeavours.

Being highly creative is a unique way of being in the world, one you wouldn't want to miss once you've tasted it. I am writing this in the hope of inspiring those of you with the same gift. It is neither easy nor simple. It is perhaps the greatest challenge of your life, but also the greatest blessing, that brings with it rewards you couldn't dream of – ever.

Are you highly creative?

How do I know I'm highly creative? I was 45 when I found out, when once again I

went to see a neuropsychologist to help me evaluate my professional way forward. I had already had a successful international career as a classical musician and a second one as an artist, painter and sculptor. The test I did with the counselor showed me to be highly creative, with a result that less than 1 in 1000 people the same age achieve. The counsellor also told me that this was one of the most difficult gifts to have and to come to terms with in today's world. That didn't really help.

Here I had been thinking I wasn't particularly creative, perhaps because my creative efforts were never acknowledged or appreciated. I remember knitting some pretty farout clothing and wearing it, but also thinking this was just teenager stuff. I also remember doing a maths exam, at quite a high level, shortly before the Matura, the final school exams in Switzerland. I managed to work out one of the examination questions in my head, and came up with the right answer. It was marked wrong, because I hadn't shown my path to solving the problem on paper, I had just put down the end result. This made me feel like a complete failure. I was obviously unable to do things the way they were supposed to be done.

At the time, when I was growing up, there was generally no awareness about people being highly gifted, highly sensitive, creative etc. The concern was more for those who were under average. Even now, when I tell friends that I'm highly gifted, they tend to think: lucky you! People often don't understand the challenges involved, nor the pain and suffering. It has taken me most of my life to realize that, in fact, I am extremely gifted – through no merit of my own, I may add, for it was given to me - and therefore very different from my teachers, and that this is absolutely ok, and that I deserve to be appreciated, acknowledged and loved for who I am.

One way to know if you're highly creative, is to do a test. Another way is to look at your life. Are you somebody who has had different careers? Who needs new challenges as soon as you've mastered one? Who needs to do things differently from others, your own way? Do you have trouble doing things the way you're asked to do them, and to repeat doing something in exactly the same way?

Do you have extreme emotional ups and downs? The kind a bipolar person experiences, where you don't sleep because you're in a state of high and wanting to create, or deep depression, when nothing makes sense? Being in a relationship with a bipolar man for 7 years, I learned a lot from the way he handled, or I should really say, couldn't handle his creative energy. It made me realize that this could have been me, had I not found a way to constructively express my creativity.

In a phase of creative flow you can be the happiest person, in a state of trance, which can take you to the heights of ecstasy. In a stagnant phase, on the other hand, you can feel thoroughly depressed, incapable and despondent. People can become suicidal at this stage, not seeing where and when the creative juices will flow again. I have come to

see both aspects as being equally necessary and valid parts of the creative process. Every creative process has its ups and downs, its stagnating and flowing phases. There are no shortcuts and we need to experience both. For highly creatives, they are just so much more intense, stronger and therefore more challenging than for others. Ominous and threatening, really. The good news is, there are ways to deal with it, without becoming mental.

Besides conventional methods to establish your degree of creative talent, there are those more unorthodox and perhaps controversial means, which helped me greatly in recognizing who I am. I will share two of them here.

One is your blood type. A lot of research was done by the US doctor Dr Peter J. D'Adamo and others, who found that health can be connected to eating right for your blood type. Besides suggesting a diet that would be beneficial, he also found different ways of dealing with stress, according to your blood type. When I read that type B does best by being creative, I found another confirmation and validation of who I am. For anyone type B, creativity plays a central role in their lives, though I don't know about being highly creative.

Another way I investigated life and its laws, was numerology. Like astrology, this is an ancient art that goes back thousands of years to a time when our ancestors were more connected to their gods and the universe, on an instinctual level, whereas today we tend to connect more through the head, through science. Humans, then, felt themselves to be part of the world around them, as one. In this way of exploring the world we live in, I found that, if you have a double 1, i.e. an 11 in a prominent place in your numerology chart, chances are that creativity is a key element in your life. If you have more than one 11, then you could well be highly creative - I have 3.

Creativity: intelligence and driving force

The math incident not only illustrates how highly creative people are different and feel inadequate, but also an important aspect of creativity. Most people, when asked what being highly creative means, would probably answer: someone who is highly artistic, someone who is a prolific creator of art or craft. But that is only one of many different ways creativity can be expressed. Being artistic, per se, is not an act of creativity, unless you create something entirely new, that did not exist before. Otherwise it is an act of artistic expression, a skill like talking or doing sports, one that can be learned and practised.

In a test to establish whether you're highly creative, you will be asked to answer questions like: do you know what an elephant, lapse and vivid have in common? Finding the answer to this question is a creative process, just like doing my math

problem. So, being highly creative is actually a form of intelligence. Intelligence being defined here by the connections in your brain. The more we connect and make new connections, the more intelligent-creative we are.

If creativity is a form of wiring in the brain, this means it is also a special way to perceive the world around us. Being highly creative in this sense means being able to change perspective easily. We can look at things in many different ways, not just the one we - and everybody else - are used to. By looking at our world in a new way, reality actually changes, it becomes different. While this may seem an awesome ability, it can also be quite disconcerting. Things are not fixed as they are for most people. And talking to someone for whom reality is one perspective only, can be a highly disturbing experience, you are actually living in different worlds.

Creativity is also a form of energy, a force of nature. As such it is part of the human condition, of who we are intrinsically: we create new cells in our bodies every single day of our lives. On a less physical level, creativity is an energy we can connect with, like love. As we have seen, it can transport us to the highest heights and lowest depths. In itself it is not positive or negative. It is pure energy and up to us to channel it. If we don't, it can go stale and create havoc. We can create „healthy“ cells in our bodies or „sick“ ones.

Dealing with this mixed blessing

When I was a teenager, I was wondering one day what would happen if I closed my eyes while driving on my little moped, on a stretch of road that was completely straight. No sooner had I thought this, than I put it into practice - and woke up in hospital. I don't remember getting there.

I have often wondered about this. Until I started writing this article, I actually hadn't considered creativity to be a form of intelligence, therefore connected to my head. I don't know where I would have located it, but definitely not in the head.

Looking back, I remember feeling under pressure, depressed, lost. From my present day perspective, I realize that some of the pressure was this energy wanting to be expressed. I didn't know how to, so I tried to switch my head off. I thought there was something wrong with me, and I wanted it to stop. We had only just moved to Switzerland at the time, and my parents were going through issues that ultimately led to their divorce. This meant they were busy with their own problems. There was no one to turn to.

If we look at creativity as being a form of energy, and being highly creative as having lots of this energy, we can understand how this can be a blessing or a curse. It will depend on how we learn to use and channel this energy. To do so, on a practical level,

an important question will be: how can we create a conducive environment for ourselves? What are the conditions we need to manage this gift and ideally to thrive in?

There are, in my opinion two equally important factors. One is space. Space means time to yourself and a physical space to create. You need it when the urge to create grabs you. And, once you're in the flow, you need it to follow where this creative energy takes you. In this space, you're in your own inner world. People who are not like you cannot understand the vital aspect of this part of you, this absolute necessity for time and space. Nor can they fully understand the richness of the inner world of a highly creative person, and how fulfilling and rewarding it is to spend time there.

Because being highly creative means constantly looking at things in new ways, it is exhausting. It is also destabilizing. One can easily get lost. I have found structure, besides space, to be the other key element to dealing with this gift. Create structures for your days, for your creative processes, for ways of dealing with difficult situations. And don't question them when you're in the midst of a situation, feeling like you don't know what to do. That is when our creative brain will want to kick in most: to solve the problem. Stay within the structure, and allow things to sort themselves in the background. This will leave some of your (creative) energy for other necessary things, like daily life, and will help keep you grounded, as well as connected to yourself.

Sticking to a form of structure, to a routine to some extent, will enable our brain to restructure, regroup itself. Many inventors and scientists find the solution to their year long (re-)search to come in a moment of being busy with mundane activities, like taking a shower, driving a car, going for a walk. My strategies include: writing, going for walks, physical exercise, in the summer going to the lake, into the water. Do it, even if you don't feel like it.

Besides space and structure, what else can help us create? For me, things need to be tidy, and organized. When I go through my flat or studio, I need everything to be in its place. Why? Because if it isn't, that triggers ideas of what I could/should be doing. It distracts me and takes up my energy. The same is true for day to day chores. They need to be structured in such a way they don't interfere in my mind. Any kind of problem or issue in my relationships, money, practical questions, will take up my creative energy, and there won't be any, or less, left for those projects and activities that are vital to me. I have come to accept that this is part of life, and that doing chores is also part of who I am.

Besides all this, you also need others. Here's another paradox: because you require lots of space and time to be on your own creating, and because you feel lonely as a result of this, you really need others, in a more existential way. You need friends to ground you, appreciate what you do, support you and cheer you on. These relationships usually take many years to build. Unfortunately, that is by no means a guarantee. I have lost many

best friends after years of building the relationship. In times of stress, trauma and grief, it would seem, they have felt threatened through the extreme demand on their time and emotional support. It is too intense, too demanding, too close. The pain that comes from not being understood and abandoned, is another aspect highly creatives have to come to terms with. It can be helpful to find communities of like-minded fellow-creatives. Today's world offers this much more than when I was growing up.

Composition and improvisation – principles of creation

In my artistic expression, structure helps me not to get overwhelmed by too many ideas at once. It also lays the ground for me so I can actually finish a project. Without it, there is a risk of starting a million things with all the ideas I have in my head, and never seeing an end result. This is especially important if you want to make a living from your creative energy.

In classical music I had expressed within the given structure of music composed by others. When I started to paint, there were so many possibilities: where do I even start? In the beginning, I gradually developed a style, where I created my own structure: taking a basic form, which would pop into my head before starting the picture, as a starting point, I developed lines and shapes from it. This gave me a point of reference for each painting to come back to and expand from, and it was actually a lot like composing variations on a theme in music.

When, many years later, I started composing, I again needed some form of structure. I went to sessions of free improvisation, after which I felt lost and unfulfilled. I finally found my way of creating music: picking an element of composition first, like a series of harmonies, or a rhythmic figure and then using that structure to improvise in. Sometimes I would write down the compositional elements, the skeleton, other times I just had it in my head.

I will not elaborate on all of the techniques I developed, but I kept this basic principle for my rather varied artistic creation. I am sharing this so you can see how the principles of space and structure are applied in a creative process, so you can observe the creative brain at work. I must add, that this is a successful way of functioning only after you've learned your craft and the necessary skills. Rather like learning a language with its grammar, phonetics etc., internalizing it completely, and then using it to create poetry slam, lyrics or other creative texts.

Later, I discovered an interesting effect my paintings have on people, when they look at them: a friend, looking at the first painting done in my latest technique, said this looked like when she used to be on drugs as a young woman. Another person who bought a painting, said that it enabled her to see between realities, like lifting a veil that separates one dimension from the other. She was able to delve into several dimensions

at the same time.

I realized then that I had come full circle. I was now about 50 years old, and had finally managed to translate my experience in music as a teenager, with trance and ecstasy, into visual art. I had found a way to induce this state in others - without drugs.

Last but not least: since creativity is energy. When you feel under pressure, unable to release, go for a walk, do physical exercise. This will get your ideas and creative processes flowing again. But don't overdo it, or you won't have anything left to create.

The inner pulse of creation

There's much to be learned about creative processes through looking at how works of art are created, as we have seen above. There is also a lot to be understood by examining the way nature creates. One of the things I came to understand over the course of a creative life, is that every creative process has its own inherent intelligence. Look at your project as you would at a living being, a plant or a tree. There is a seed that is planted in the right soil for it to grow. It then needs nourishment, and the right conditions to thrive in. It also needs time. No amount of willing a seed to grow will change its inherent timing of when it's ready to come above ground and flourish.

We can take the creation of our human body as a blueprint for how we create: there is conception, gestation/pregnancy, being a baby, a child, a teenager, adulthood and old age. Each period has its own benefits, inherent intelligence, and needs. There is no point in sending a baby out into the world on its own. It will die. The same is true for anything we create.

The right timing is a key element to creation. There's always a good reason why your project isn't moving forward. Perhaps you need to rethink the nature of your project and make some alterations. Perhaps you're missing an important bit of information, or you're lacking a certain skill. And sometimes we don't know why, it just needs time, like the seed in the soil, to germinate.

Creativity doesn't necessarily stick to your wishes and ideas, it comes uninvited. Many times in my life, I have felt like finally things are working out, I can relax, only for life to kick me and force me to move on. This, of course can be challenging. Whereas others spend many years in the same job or the same relationship, I seem to end up building them, only to lose them when I think I've got it. Could this be something innate to highly creative people? It's as if we have this in-built creator mechanism that can't settle for repetition and easy going. We are built to create. Over and over again.

Co-creating with life

The most important lesson I learned in order to survive, was that life has its own rhythm, its own inherent intelligence, and I need to trust it. It is taking the creative process up another level of complexity into life itself, but treating it the same way you would any other (artistic) creative process. What I learned, is that cooperation works best. I call it co-creating with life as it is.

This may seem frustrating at first, but actually, it's liberating not to be the sole responsible creator. I can let go, I can hand over to something greater than me, a force that has many more options, is far more creative and intelligent than I will ever be. This greater intelligence, whatever you'd like to call it, manifests through us and our lives. The inner pulse of our lives is the interface between me, the individual and unique instrument of creation, and this universal energy. My inner pulse is connected to the greater pulse of life, that of the universe. When they pulsate synchronistically, we experience true magic. Suddenly things materialize, there's serendipity.

If I can tune into this inner pulse when creating, whether life or art or business, I will feel connected to the greater pulse. Just as music with its beautiful melodies, catchy rhythms and harmonies is held together by its inner pulse, so are we. It is what gives us our unique drive and purpose. This pulse is connected to the world around us, to others and to life itself. Co-creating through this connection enables ways of getting us to where we want to go that we could never imagine in our wildest dreams.

To the moon and beyond: trusting life and yourself to create what matters

Typically for a (highly) creative person, there are many different threads woven into the fabric of one's life. I have shared one of them above in my story of being high on music as a teenager, then taking hash and declaring I want to find ways of being high without drugs. And then, more than 30 years later, realizing I had found several of them. Besides my paintings, there was also music. The music I compose, can induce those other states of consciousness. Like the regular beat of a shaman's drum, there are repetitive elements in my music that induce these states.

Let me share another thread of my life to illustrate the complexity of the co-creating process in the life of a highly creative person. It is my story of how life took me by the hand, and together we went to the moon and beyond. I achieved more than I ever would have imagined possible.

Music, when I was 15, was an inner home for me. When playing and practicing classical music on the piano and the flute, I slipped into my own world. One moment stands out to this day, and has proved to be a kind of undercurrent of my life. It was thinking: "How do you create this kind of music? The kind I composed by others - all

men and dead by the way?" It seemed the greatest mystery, rather like imagining myself flying to the moon. It wasn't that I dreamed of becoming a composer, there was just this question wanting to be explored. Was this a first hint at my creative potential, unbeknown to myself? While my life unfolded, I forgot about it entirely.

I studied languages first, and only later music, and finally became a professional musician, with a successful career, performing and teaching internationally. The while, something unexpressed prompted me to start painting and sculpting. Thus began my second career as an artist, before giving up performing altogether. I had achieved all I wanted on the flute.

In the early nineties, after exploring my creativity and artistic expression through art, I felt ready to start creating in music. I envisioned myself recording what I was playing and using that, rather than the traditional method of writing down music. This is indeed possible now, but not in those days. It would take another 10 years.

Meanwhile, I forgot about music... Until 2001 a former colleague asked me, whether I would take over her piano class. She wanted to go on a sabbatical. I had not been active as a classical musician for years, and she was asking me to take on a piano class, although I was a flutist. This was quite mysterious. The job proved to be a real gift from heaven: it offered me the chance to participate in an improvisation workshop for pianists, offered through the music school. When I got the flyer announcing this workshop, it felt, as if I had waited all my life for this moment. I just knew I had to go there.

After the course, I needed to find the right equipment to record my improvisations. I was not familiar with e-pianos, keyboards and synthesizers, but after trying out many different instruments, I finally found the right one. Turned out, the project was on hold again, because I didn't have the means to pay for it.

A year later, my new boyfriend asked me to come to a trade fair with him. I wasn't really keen on going, but went along because it was something to do together. There, amidst skis and pots and pans, I discovered a stand selling keyboards. Out of the 4-5 models on display, one of them was the exact one I had chosen a year before. Excited, I showed it to him. And, there and then, he bought it for me!

I now had my instrument, but no clue as to how to operate it. Life weaved some more magic into this story through the visit of my oldest musician friend, a highly successful violin player. After we had enjoyed a good meal, she surprised me by wanting to play some music together. It had been several years since I had been active as a flutist. Somehow, I mustered the courage to tell her I'd rather play the piano, though I certainly wasn't up to her professional standard on this instrument. After playing a Schubert sonata, my friend suggested I needed to pursue my piano playing. This meant a lot to me. I contacted a violinist I'd worked with, who agreed right away, and she also

organized a cellist for us to form a trio.

Overnight, another one of my dreams had come true. I would be playing chamber music on the piano - as a teenager I had seen myself as a pianist, rather than as a flutist. What's more, it was absolutely amazing how well I could play these difficult trios, in spite of the fact that I had not practised all those years. I now played better than ever, and it filled me with tremendous joy.

We began to improvise, using my keyboard, which, apart from helping me gain more experience improvising, also enabled me to get to know the technical aspects of my instrument. After about a year, I wanted to move on to something more professional. The violinist didn't, unfortunately. She was not a professional musician.

Lonely and very disappointed, I sat down at my keyboard, thinking: "This means I have to continue on my own". And this is the moment when I finally started composing. A few months later, I had completed and published my first CD with my own music. This was in 2004.

There were more mysterious threads woven into this story that allowed me „to fly to the moon“, composing my own music. But for the purpose of what I'd like to share, let me continue.

Life, and a kind of universal intelligence, had guided me, inspired me and helped my life unfold in a totally unpredictable way, full of magic and mystery, to this point. It had more in store for me.

About 10 years later, I became seriously ill. This made me doubt everything I had done in my life so far. Shouldn't I be healthy and well, having achieved what I had? Having led a creative and spiritual life? I had learned to know myself, I had followed my intuition, and I had co-created with life. What was „missing“?

The answer came from inside: I was meant to learn to love who I am. I had learned to love others unconditionally, but not myself. I now learned that loving myself means: loving who I've become, what my life looks like, the choices I've made that brought me here, including everything I don't have. Loving myself has become my daily practice. It has opened up a whole new life. For the last 10 years I've been coaching professionals up to C-level executives in crisis, having lost their job or facing health issues.

Life has made me use a whole new part of my potential that I didn't know I even had. It has taken me beyond the moon.

I would like to add that at the moment that I'm publishing this article, I'm ready for my next creative journey. Being asked to write this article to be published in a book on creativity several years ago, was the seed to my next adventure. I've started writing a book on the topic and getting involved in the highly gifted and highly creative community to share the experience of a lifetime.

Create what matters

Are you already a creator? Or have I wet your appetite to start creating? Would you like to know where to go from here?

Knowing yourself is the first key element to creating what matters in your life. Find out what inspires you and determine what it is you'd like to create. Then allow your intuition and inspiration to guide you.

Understanding that you are this unique instrument through which the universe creates, will, hopefully, enable you to feel how important your creation is. Even if there are millions of other people out there doing something similar, only you can bring YOU into the world. You are an absolutely unique instrument of creation. No one, and I mean no one, can do what you're doing!

If creativity is powerful, it is also neutral. Love can guide us as the highest form of intelligence and energy. Loving who you are, could be the most important decision you ever take. The world needs you to do your thing, to express what is important to you.

Together, let us join our creative forces to build a world of togetherness, understanding and co-operation, with what's around us, the world we live in and each other.

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