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Independent Study & Mentorship

Mr. Speice 4A

7 September 2017

### **Research Assessment #1**

**Date:** Sept., 7, 2017

**Subject:** Getting The Creative Process Started Again

**MLA Citations:**

Burstein, Julie. "4 Lessons In Creativity." *Julie Burstein: 4 Lessons in Creativity* | *TED Talk*.

TED, Feb. 2012. Web. 08 Sept. 2017.

Gilbert, Elizabeth. "Your Elusive Creative Genius." *Elizabeth Gilbert: Your Elusive Creative Genius* |

*TED Talk*, TED, Feb. 2009

**Assessment:**

Getting back in the groove of something after coming off a high from a major success can be hard for anyone, but it seems to be more of a challenge for a person involved in the making of the arts. Artists are afraid that their biggest successes are behind them and are nervous their later work will never be accepted by society. In fact, this is something I am currently struggling with right now, coming off a from a successful piece of work and jumping right back in for an even bigger challenge. I believe I can speak for a lot of creative people in the world when I say it is daunting. As I am now studying the field of Television Screenwriting and Production, it is more important to me than ever to reflect seriously on past works and look towards how I can improve. One weakness of mine was letting my insecurities and desire to be successful overwhelm me sometimes, resulting mediocre work. I realize that for this year I need

some new inspiration and better my creative process. By working on my own creative process, I can become more skilled in developing ideas of my own into stories and eventually works that can be translated on-screen.

To better understand how to further develop creativity, I watched the TED Talk “Your Elusive Creative Genius” given by Elizabeth Gilbert, the author of “Eat Pray Love”. Honestly, this was the most fascinating and inspiring talk I had ever seen. It was amazing how I could relate to Gilbert and made me feel like I wasn’t alone in the creative process. One of the lines that really stuck with me is that having creative genius creates unbelievable pressure on artists that “...is just a smidge too much responsibility to put on one fragile, human psyche...it creates all these unmanageable expectations about performance...”. This was a line that got me spot-on and I realized that it is society that creates these unbearable prospects to live up to, and this ultimately leads to many people’s creativity and sense of confidence disturbed. If artists were less worried of human reaction, they would be more successful in the long-run because it doesn’t feel like a burden they have to carry with them. Gilbert’s advice on defeating this struggle is to “Just do your job. Continue to show up for your piece of it, whatever that might be”. I found this surprisingly to be incredibly inspiring because she reminds her audience that the weight of the world is not on their shoulders and it is okay to fail because it’s not that big of a deal. Overall, I felt a newfound sense of hope after watching this because it got me excited again about what I could create without focusing on worries of the notion of failure. I know if I can teach myself to not let fears get the best of me, I can improve vastly in my writing and directing for the future.

Julie Burstein’s TED Talk “4 Lessons in Creativity” further develops the concept of letting go of self-doubts and control in order to embrace creativity. One thing she said that I thought was very profound was that artists is push up against their limits and even go past them helps

them find their own voice. This makes me realize that I may not be good at everything I do in my life, but I can look at it from another angle and challenge myself to discover who I am. By taking on new experiences and going outside my comfort zone, I can learn more of my pros and cons and find my place. Overall I realize that while I am doing a similar subject this year in ISM, I will face so many new sets of obstacles that it will make me question some of my choices, but ultimately help me in this journey of self-discovery.

While this may not be typical research-based assessment, I did find that watching these TED talks and learning how to embrace creativity was deeply impactful and instilled a lot of wisdom on me. The first step in creating any story is inspiration, and by finding ways to let that come more freely to me will aid me in being better able to construct stories and connect with my own work more. I feel like my future will challenge me both physically and psychologically, but in the end will reveal knowledge about myself I never knew before. All in all, the lessons that are communicated through these talks are not just for filmmakers and storytellers, but for all people who wish to express their creativity and fulfill their life's work to have an impact on the world.

**Burstein, Julie. "4 Lessons In Creativity." *Julie Burstein: 4 Lessons in Creativity* | TED Talk. TED, Feb. 2012. Web. 08 Sept. 2017.**

**Transcript:**

00:12

On my desk in my office, I keep a small clay pot that I made in college. It's raku, which is a kind of pottery that began in Japan centuries ago as a way of making bowls for the Japanese tea ceremony. This one is more than 400 years old. Each one was pinched or carved out of a ball of clay, and it was the imperfections that people cherished.

00:42

Everyday pots like this cup take eight to 10 hours to fire. I just took this out of the kiln last week, and the kiln itself takes another day or two to cool down, but raku is really fast. You do it outside, and you take the kiln up to temperature. In 15 minutes, it goes to 1,500 degrees, and as soon as you see that the glaze has melted inside, you can see that faint sheen, you turn the kiln off, and you reach in with these long metal tongs, you grab the pot, and in Japan, this red-hot pot would be immediately immersed in a solution of green tea, and you can imagine what that steam would smell like. But here in the United States, we ramp up the drama a little bit, and we drop our pots into sawdust, which catches on fire, and you take a garbage pail, and you put it on top, and smoke starts pouring out. I would come home with my clothes reeking of woodsmoke.

01:48

I love raku because it allows me to play with the elements. I can shape a pot out of clay and choose a glaze, but then I have to let it go to the fire and the smoke, and what's wonderful is the surprises that happen, like this crackle pattern, because it's really stressful on these pots. They go from 1,500 degrees to room temperature in the space of just a minute.

02:14

Raku is a wonderful metaphor for the process of creativity. I find in so many things that tension between what I can control and what I have to let go happens all the time, whether I'm creating a new radio show or just at home negotiating with my teenage sons.

02:36

When I sat down to write a book about creativity, I realized that the steps were reversed. I had to let go at the very beginning, and I had to immerse myself in the stories of hundreds of artists and writers and musicians and filmmakers, and as I listened to these stories, I realized that creativity grows out of everyday experiences more often than you might think, including letting go. It was supposed to break, but that's okay. (Laughter) (Laughs) That's part of the letting go, is sometimes it happens and sometimes it doesn't, because creativity also grows from the broken places.

03:24

The best way to learn about anything is through stories, and so I want to tell you a story about work and play and about four aspects of life that we need to embrace in order for our own creativity to flourish. The first embrace is something that we think, "Oh, this is very easy," but it's actually getting harder, and that's paying attention to the world around us. So many artists speak about needing to be open, to embrace experience, and that's hard to do when you have a lighted rectangle in your pocket that takes all of your focus.

04:07

The filmmaker Mira Nair speaks about growing up in a small town in India. Its name is Bhubaneswar, and here's a picture of one of the temples in her town.

04:20

Mira Nair: In this little town, there were like 2,000 temples. We played cricket all the time. We kind of grew up in the rubble. The major thing that inspired me, that led me on this path, that made me a filmmaker eventually, was traveling folk theater that would come through the

**Comment [1]:** After hearing this, I had to pause and really think about this statement. I think what she means is letting go of control because it restricts creativity.

town and I would go off and see these great battles of good and evil by two people in a school field with no props but with a lot of, you know, passion, and hashish as well, and it was amazing. You know, the folk tales of Mahabharata and Ramayana, the two holy books, the epics that everything comes out of in India, they say. After seeing that Jatra, the folk theater, I knew I wanted to get on, you know, and perform.

05:04

Julie Burstein: Isn't that a wonderful story? You can see the sort of break in the everyday. There they are in the school fields, but it's good and evil, and passion and hashish. And Mira Nair was a young girl with thousands of other people watching this performance, but she was ready. She was ready to open up to what it sparked in her, and it led her, as she said, down this path to become an award-winning filmmaker. So being open for that experience that might change you is the first thing we need to embrace.

05:37

Artists also speak about how some of their most powerful work comes out of the parts of life that are most difficult. The novelist Richard Ford speaks about a childhood challenge that continues to be something he wrestles with today. He's severely dyslexic.

06:00

Richard Ford: I was slow to learn to read, went all the way through school not really reading more than the minimum, and still to this day can't read silently much faster than I can read aloud, but there were a lot of benefits to being dyslexic for me because when I finally did reconcile myself to how slow I was going to have to do it, then I think I came very slowly into an appreciation of all of those qualities of language and of sentences that are not just the cognitive aspects of language: the syncopations, the sounds of words, what words look like, where paragraphs break, where lines break. I mean, I wasn't so badly dyslexic that I was disabled from reading. I just had to do it really slowly, and as I did, lingering on those sentences

**Comment [2]:** While I already know being open to new experiences is important, I never have really thought of translating stuff that is happening in my life into a story. I think this is a great strategy to create more meaningful work.

as I had to linger, I fell heir to language's other qualities, which I think has helped me write sentences.

06:53

JB: It's so powerful. Richard Ford, who's won the Pulitzer Prize, says that dyslexia helped him write sentences. He had to embrace this challenge, and I use that word intentionally. He didn't have to overcome dyslexia. He had to learn from it. He had to learn to hear the music in language.

07:16

Artists also speak about how pushing up against the limits of what they can do, sometimes pushing into what they can't do, helps them focus on finding their own voice. The sculptor

Richard Serra talks about how, as a young artist, he thought he was a painter, and he lived in Florence after graduate school. While he was there, he traveled to Madrid, where he went to the Prado to see this picture by the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez. It's from 1656, and it's called "Las Meninas," and it's the picture of a little princess and her ladies-in-waiting, and if you look over that little blonde princess's shoulder, you'll see a mirror, and reflected in it are her parents, the King and Queen of Spain, who would be standing where you might stand to look at the picture. As he often did, Velázquez put himself in this painting too. He's standing on the left with his paintbrush in one hand and his palette in the other.

08:26

Richard Serra: I was standing there looking at it, and I realized that Velázquez was looking at me, and I thought, "Oh. I'm the subject of the painting." And I thought, "I'm not going to be able to do that painting." I was to the point where I was using a stopwatch and painting squares out of randomness, and I wasn't getting anywhere. So I went back and dumped all my paintings in the Arno, and I thought, I'm going to just start playing around.

08:50

**Comment [3]:** The entire story that comes after this statement makes me realize that I probably won't be good at everything I do in the television and film industry. It is okay to improve on weaknesses, but I need to recognize when something isn't working and journey on to find something new.

JB: Richard Serra says that so nonchalantly, you might have missed it. He went and saw this painting by a guy who'd been dead for 300 years, and realized, "I can't do that," and so Richard Serra went back to his studio in Florence, picked up all of his work up to that point, and threw it in a river. Richard Serra let go of painting at that moment, but he didn't let go of art. He moved to New York City, and he put together a list of verbs — to roll, to crease, to fold — more than a hundred of them, and as he said, he just started playing around. He did these things to all kinds of material. He would take a huge sheet of lead and roll it up and unroll it. He would do the same thing to rubber, and when he got to the direction "to lift," he created this, which is in the Museum of Modern Art. Richard Serra had to let go of painting in order to embark on this playful exploration that led him to the work that he's known for today: huge curves of steel that require our time and motion to experience. In sculpture, Richard Serra is able to do what he couldn't do in painting. He makes us the subject of his art. So experience and challenge and limitations are all things we need to embrace for creativity to flourish.

10:23

There's a fourth embrace, and it's the hardest. It's the embrace of loss, the oldest and most constant of human experiences. In order to create, we have to stand in that space between what we see in the world and what we hope for, looking squarely at rejection, at heartbreak, at war, at death. That's a tough space to stand in. The educator Parker Palmer calls it "the tragic gap," tragic not because it's sad but because it's inevitable, and my friend Dick Nodel likes to say, "You can hold that tension like a violin string and make something beautiful."

11:09

That tension resonates in the work of the photographer Joel Meyerowitz, who at the beginning of his career was known for his street photography, for capturing a moment on the street, and also for his beautiful photographs of landscapes -- of Tuscany, of Cape Cod, of light. Joel is a New Yorker, and his studio for many years was in Chelsea, with a straight view downtown to the

**Comment [4]:** Rejection and limitations seem to be the experiences I learn from the most because they are so poignant in my mind, I should start to see them as a learning experience more often than a bad thing.

World Trade Center, and he photographed those buildings in every sort of light. You know where this story goes. On 9/11, Joel wasn't in New York. He was out of town, but he raced back to the city, and raced down to the site of the destruction.

11:56

Joel Meyerowitz: And like all the other passersby, I stood outside the chain link fence on Chambers and Greenwich, and all I could see was the smoke and a little bit of rubble, and I raised my camera to take a peek, just to see if there was something to see, and some cop, a lady cop, hit me on my shoulder, and said, "Hey, no pictures!" And it was such a blow that it woke me up, in the way that it was meant to be, I guess. And when I asked her why no pictures, she said, "It's a crime scene. No photographs allowed." And I asked her, "What would happen if I was a member of the press?" And she told me, "Oh, look back there," and back a block was the press corps tied up in a little penned-in area, and I said, "Well, when do they go in?" and she said, "Probably never." And as I walked away from that, I had this crystallization, probably from the blow, because it was an insult in a way. I thought, "Oh, if there's no pictures, then there'll be no record. We need a record." And I thought, "I'm gonna make that record. I'll find a way to get in, because I don't want to see this history disappear."

13:03

JB: He did. He pulled up every favor he could, and got a pass into the World Trade Center site, where he photographed for nine months almost every day. Looking at these photographs today brings back the smell of smoke that lingered on my clothes when I went home to my family at night. My office was just a few blocks away. But some of these photographs are beautiful, and we wondered, was it difficult for Joel Meyerowitz to make such beauty out of such devastation?

13:37

JM: Well, you know, ugly, I mean, powerful and tragic and horrific and everything, but it was also as, in nature, an enormous event that was transformed after the fact into this residue, and like many other ruins — you go to the ruins of the Colosseum or the ruins of a cathedral someplace — and they take on a new meaning when you watch the weather. I mean, there were afternoons I was down there, and the light goes pink and there's a mist in the air and you're standing in the rubble, and I found myself recognizing both the inherent beauty of nature and the fact that nature, as time, is erasing this wound. Time is unstoppable, and it transforms the event. It gets further and further away from the day, and light and seasons temper it in some way, and it's not that I'm a romantic. I'm really a realist. The reality is, there's the Woolworth Building in a veil of smoke from the site, but it's now like a scrim across a theater, and it's turning pink, you know, and down below there are hoses spraying, and the lights have come on for the evening, and the water is turning acid green because the sodium lamps are on, and I'm thinking, "My God, who could dream this up?" But the fact is, I'm there, it looks like that, you have to take a picture.

15:09

JB: You have to take a picture. That sense of urgency, of the need to get to work, is so powerful in Joel's story. When I saw Joel Meyerowitz recently, I told him how much I admired his passionate obstinacy, his determination to push through all the bureaucratic red tape to get to work, and he laughed, and he said, "I'm stubborn, but I think what's more important is my passionate optimism."

15:38

The first time I told these stories, a man in the audience raised his hand and said, "All these artists talk about their work, not their art, which has got me thinking about my work and where the creativity is there, and I'm not an artist." He's right. We all wrestle with experience and

challenge, limits and loss. Creativity is essential to all of us, whether we're scientists or teachers, parents or entrepreneurs.

16:10

I want to leave you with another image of a Japanese tea bowl. This one is at the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. It's more than a hundred years old and you can still see the fingermarks where the potter pinched it. But as you can also see, this one did break at some point in its hundred years. But the person who put it back together, instead of hiding the cracks, decided to emphasize them, using gold lacquer to repair it. This bowl is more beautiful now, having been broken, than it was when it was first made, and we can look at those cracks, because they tell the story that we all live, of the cycle of creation and destruction, of control and letting go, of picking up the pieces and making something new. Thank you. (Applause)

**Comment [5]:** Wow, such a real statement. We all have creativity, it's just that some people are able to turn creativity into meaningful work.

**Gilbert, Elizabeth. "Your Elusive Creative Genius." *Elizabeth Gilbert: Your Elusive Creative Genius* | TED Talk, TED, Feb. 2009**

**Transcript:**

00:12

I am a writer. Writing books is my profession but it's more than that, of course. It is also my great lifelong love and fascination. And I don't expect that that's ever going to change. But, that said, something kind of peculiar has happened recently in my life and in my career, which has caused me to have to recalibrate my whole relationship with this work. And the peculiar thing is that I recently wrote this book, this memoir called "Eat, Pray, Love" which, decidedly unlike any of my previous books, went out in the world for some reason, and became this big, mega-sensation, international bestseller thing. **The result of which is that everywhere I go now, people treat me like I'm doomed. Seriously -- doomed, doomed! Like, they come up to me now, all worried, and they say, "Aren't you afraid you're never going to be able to top that? Aren't you afraid you're going to keep writing for your whole life and you're never again going to create a book that anybody in the world cares about at all, ever again?"**

01:19

So that's reassuring, you know. But it would be worse, except for that I happen to remember that over 20 years ago, when I was a teenager, when I first started telling people that I wanted to be a writer, I was met with this same sort of fear-based reaction. And people would say, "Aren't you afraid you're never going to have any success? Aren't you afraid the humiliation of rejection will kill you? Aren't you afraid that you're going to work your whole life at this craft and nothing's ever going to come of it and you're going to die on a scrap heap of broken dreams with your mouth filled with bitter ash of failure?"

01:50

(Laughter)

**Comment [6]:** Wow, this is me. After I face success I get this fear of never doing better than that one instance.

01:52

Like that, you know.

01:54

The answer -- the short answer to all those questions is, "Yes." Yes, I'm afraid of all those things. And I always have been. And I'm afraid of many, many more things besides that people can't even guess at, like seaweed and other things that are scary. But, when it comes to writing, the thing that I've been sort of thinking about lately, and wondering about lately, is why? You know, is it rational? Is it logical that anybody should be expected to be afraid of the work that they feel they were put on this Earth to do. And what is it specifically about creative ventures that seems to make us really nervous about each other's mental health in a way that other careers kind of don't do, you know? Like my dad, for example, was a chemical engineer and I don't recall once in his 40 years of chemical engineering anybody asking him if he was afraid to be a chemical engineer, you know? "That chemical-engineering block, John, how's it going?" It just didn't come up like that, you know? But to be fair, chemical engineers as a group haven't really earned a reputation over the centuries for being alcoholic manic-depressives.

03:05

(Laughter)

03:07

We writers, we kind of do have that reputation, and not just writers, but creative people across all genres, it seems, have this reputation for being enormously mentally unstable. And all you have to do is look at the very grim death count in the 20th century alone, of really magnificent creative minds who died young and often at their own hands, you know? And even the ones who didn't literally commit suicide seem to be really undone by their gifts, you know. Norman Mailer, just before he died, last interview, he said, "Every one of my books has killed me a little more." An extraordinary statement to make about your life's work. But we don't even blink when

**Comment [7]:** It does seem to be the pattern, creative people seem to be more pressured and judged more harshly as how it pertains to someone mentally.

we hear somebody say this, because we've heard that kind of stuff for so long and somehow we've completely internalized and accepted collectively this notion that creativity and suffering are somehow inherently linked and that artistry, in the end, will always ultimately lead to anguish.

04:05

And the question that I want to ask everybody here today is are you guys all cool with that idea? Are you comfortable with that? Because you look at it even from an inch away and, you know -- I'm not at all comfortable with that assumption. I think it's odious. And I also think it's dangerous, and I don't want to see it perpetuated into the next century. I think it's better if we encourage our great creative minds to live.

04:29

And I definitely know that, in my case -- in my situation -- it would be very dangerous for me to start sort of leaking down that dark path of assumption, particularly given the circumstance that I'm in right now in my career. Which is -- you know, like check it out, I'm pretty young, I'm only about 40 years old. I still have maybe another four decades of work left in me. And it's exceedingly likely that anything I write from this point forward is going to be judged by the world as the work that came after the freakish success of my last book, right? I should just put it bluntly, because we're all sort of friends here now -- it's exceedingly likely that my greatest success is behind me. So Jesus, what a thought! That's the kind of thought that could lead a person to start drinking gin at nine o'clock in the morning, and I don't want to go there.

05:23

(Laughter)

05:24

I would prefer to keep doing this work that I love.

05:26

**Comment [8]:** True, it seems easier to complain and let anguish get the best of you, but when you get that creativity through living it's better mentally and helps you feel empowered.

And so, the question becomes, how? And so, it seems to me, upon a lot of reflection, that the way that I have to work now, in order to continue writing, is that I have to create some sort of protective psychological construct, right? I have to sort of find some way to have a safe distance between me, as I am writing, and my very natural anxiety about what the reaction to that writing is going to be, from now on. And, as I've been looking, over the last year, for models for how to do that, I've been sort of looking across time, and I've been trying to find other societies to see if they might have had better and saner ideas than we have about how to help creative people sort of manage the inherent emotional risks of creativity.

06:10

And that search has led me to ancient Greece and ancient Rome. So stay with me, because it does circle around and back. But, ancient Greece and ancient Rome -- people did not happen to believe that creativity came from human beings back then, OK? People believed that creativity was this divine attendant spirit that came to human beings from some distant and unknowable source, for distant and unknowable reasons. The Greeks famously called these divine attendant spirits of creativity "daemons." Socrates, famously, believed that he had a daemon who spoke wisdom to him from afar.

06:47

The Romans had the same idea, but they called that sort of disembodied creative spirit a genius. Which is great, because the Romans did not actually think that a genius was a particularly clever individual. They believed that a genius was this, sort of magical divine entity, who was believed to literally live in the walls of an artist's studio, kind of like Dobby the house elf, and who would come out and sort of invisibly assist the artist with their work and would shape the outcome of that work.

07:17

So brilliant -- there it is, right there, that distance that I'm talking about -- that psychological construct to protect you from the results of your work. And everyone knew that this is how it functioned, right? So the ancient artist was protected from certain things, like, for example, too much narcissism, right? If your work was brilliant, you couldn't take all the credit for it, everybody knew that you had this disembodied genius who had helped you. If your work bombed, not entirely your fault, you know? Everyone knew your genius was kind of lame.

07:46

(Laughter)

07:47

And this is how people thought about creativity in the West for a really long time. And then the Renaissance came and everything changed, and we had this big idea, and the big idea was, let's put the individual human being at the center of the universe above all gods and mysteries, and there's no more room for mystical creatures who take dictation from the divine. And it's the beginning of rational humanism, and people started to believe that creativity came completely from the self of the individual. And for the first time in history, you start to hear people referring to this or that artist as being a genius, rather than having a genius.

08:21

And I got to tell you, I think that was a huge error. You know, I think that allowing somebody, one mere person to believe that he or she is like, the vessel, you know, like the font and the essence and the source of all divine, creative, unknowable, eternal mystery is just a smidge too much responsibility to put on one fragile, human psyche. It's like asking somebody to swallow the sun. It just completely warps and distorts egos, and it creates all these unmanageable expectations about performance. And I think the pressure of that has been killing off our artists for the last 500 years.

08:59

**Comment [9]:** I've never thought of it like that before, but now that I have it makes total sense. As a filmmaker, I should disassociate myself from genius so I don't expect myself to live up to that pressure.

And, if this is true, and I think it is true, the question becomes, what now? Can we do this differently? Maybe go back to some more ancient understanding about the relationship between humans and the creative mystery. Maybe not. Maybe we can't just erase 500 years of rational humanistic thought in one 18 minute speech. And there's probably people in this audience who would raise really legitimate scientific suspicions about the notion of, basically, fairies who follow people around rubbing fairy juice on their projects and stuff. I'm not, probably, going to bring you all along with me on this.

09:42

But the question that I kind of want to pose is -- you know, why not? Why not think about it this way? Because it makes as much sense as anything else I have ever heard in terms of explaining the utter maddening capriciousness of the creative process. A process which, as anybody who has ever tried to make something -- which is to say basically everyone here --- knows does not always behave rationally. And, in fact, can sometimes feel downright paranormal.

10:11

I had this encounter recently where I met the extraordinary American poet Ruth Stone, who's now in her 90s, but she's been a poet her entire life and she told me that when she was growing up in rural Virginia, she would be out working in the fields, and she said she would feel and hear a poem coming at her from over the landscape. And she said it was like a thunderous train of air. And it would come barreling down at her over the landscape. And she felt it coming, because it would shake the earth under her feet. She knew that she had only one thing to do at that point, and that was to, in her words, "run like hell." And she would run like hell to the house and she would be getting chased by this poem, and the whole deal was that she had to get to a piece of paper and a pencil fast enough so that when it thundered through her, she could collect it and grab it on the page. And other times she wouldn't be fast enough, so she'd be running and

running, and she wouldn't get to the house and the poem would barrel through her and she would miss it and she said it would continue on across the landscape, looking, as she put it "for another poet." And then there were these times -- this is the piece I never forgot -- she said that there were moments where she would almost miss it, right? So, she's running to the house and she's looking for the paper and the poem passes through her, and she grabs a pencil just as it's going through her, and then she said, it was like she would reach out with her other hand and she would catch it. She would catch the poem by its tail, and she would pull it backwards into her body as she was transcribing on the page. And in these instances, the poem would come up on the page perfect and intact but backwards, from the last word to the first.

11:43

(Laughter)

11:45

So when I heard that I was like -- that's uncanny, that's exactly what my creative process is like.

11:52

(Laughter)

11:56

That's not at all what my creative process is -- I'm not the pipeline! I'm a mule, and the way that I have to work is I have to get up at the same time every day, and sweat and labor and barrel through it really awkwardly. But even I, in my mulishness, even I have brushed up against that thing, at times. And I would imagine that a lot of you have too. You know, even I have had work or ideas come through me from a source that I honestly cannot identify. And what is that thing? And how are we to relate to it in a way that will not make us lose our minds, but, in fact, might actually keep us sane?

12:28

And for me, the best contemporary example that I have of how to do that is the musician Tom Waits, who I got to interview several years ago on a magazine assignment. And we were talking about this, and you know, Tom, for most of his life, he was pretty much the embodiment of the tormented contemporary modern artist, trying to control and manage and dominate these sort of uncontrollable creative impulses that were totally internalized.

12:53

But then he got older, he got calmer, and one day he was driving down the freeway in Los Angeles, and this is when it all changed for him. And he's speeding along, and all of a sudden he hears this little fragment of melody, that comes into his head as inspiration often comes, elusive and tantalizing, and he wants it, it's gorgeous, and he longs for it, but he has no way to get it. He doesn't have a piece of paper, or a pencil, or a tape recorder.

13:17

So he starts to feel all of that old anxiety start to rise in him like, "I'm going to lose this thing, and I'll be haunted by this song forever. I'm not good enough, and I can't do it." And instead of panicking, he just stopped. He just stopped that whole mental process and he did something completely novel. He just looked up at the sky, and he said, "Excuse me, can you not see that I'm driving?"

13:38

(Laughter)

13:41

"Do I look like I can write down a song right now? If you really want to exist, come back at a more opportune moment when I can take care of you. Otherwise, go bother somebody else today. Go bother Leonard Cohen."

13:56

**Comment [10]:** Don't let your anxiety and fear your ideas are all gone get the best of you. Work hard and live freely.

And his whole work process changed after that. Not the work, the work was still oftentimes as dark as ever. But the process, and the heavy anxiety around it was released when he took the genie, the genius out of him where it was causing nothing but trouble, and released it back where it came from, and realized that this didn't have to be this internalized, tormented thing. It could be this peculiar, wondrous, bizarre collaboration, kind of conversation between Tom and the strange, external thing that was not quite Tom.

14:26

When I heard that story, it started to shift a little bit the way that I worked too, and this idea already saved me once. It saved me when I was in the middle of writing "Eat, Pray, Love," and I fell into one of those sort of pits of despair that we all fall into when we're working on something and it's not coming and you start to think this is going to be a disaster, the worst book ever written. Not just bad, but the worst book ever written. And I started to think I should just dump this project. But then I remembered Tom talking to the open air and I tried it. So I just lifted my face up from the manuscript and I directed my comments to an empty corner of the room. And I said aloud, "Listen you, thing, you and I both know that if this book isn't brilliant that is not entirely my fault, right? Because you can see that I am putting everything I have into this, I don't have any more than this. If you want it to be better, you've got to show up and do your part of the deal. But if you don't do that, you know what, the hell with it. I'm going to keep writing anyway because that's my job. And I would please like the record to reflect today that I showed up for my part of the job."

15:28

(Laughter)

15:32

Because --

15:34

(Applause)

15:36

Because in the end it's like this, OK -- centuries ago in the deserts of North Africa, people used to gather for these moonlight dances of sacred dance and music that would go on for hours and hours, until dawn. They were always magnificent, because the dancers were professionals and they were terrific, right? But every once in a while, very rarely, something would happen, and one of these performers would actually become transcendent. And I know you know what I'm talking about, because I know you've all seen, at some point in your life, a performance like this. It was like time would stop, and the dancer would sort of step through some kind of portal and he wasn't doing anything different than he had ever done, 1,000 nights before, but everything would align. And all of a sudden, he would no longer appear to be merely human. He would be lit from within, and lit from below and all lit up on fire with divinity.

16:25

And when this happened, back then, people knew it for what it was, you know, they called it by its name. They would put their hands together and they would start to chant, "Allah, Allah, Allah, God, God, God." That's God, you know. Curious historical footnote: when the Moors invaded southern Spain, they took this custom with them and the pronunciation changed over the centuries from "Allah, Allah, Allah," to "Olé, olé, olé," which you still hear in bullfights and in flamenco dances. In Spain, when a performer has done something impossible and magic, "Allah, olé, olé, Allah, magnificent, bravo," incomprehensible, there it is -- a glimpse of God. Which is great, because we need that.

17:10

But, the tricky bit comes the next morning, for the dancer himself, when he wakes up and discovers that it's Tuesday at 11 a.m., and he's no longer a glimpse of God. He's just an aging mortal with really bad knees, and maybe he's never going to ascend to that height again. And

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**Comment [11]:** Sometimes moments of brilliance come, but when they go away it's important not to fret in realizing that you're only human.

maybe nobody will ever chant God's name again as he spins, and what is he then to do with the rest of his life? This is hard. This is one of the most painful reconciliations to make in a creative life. But maybe it doesn't have to be quite so full of anguish if you never happened to believe, in the first place, that the most extraordinary aspects of your being came from you. But maybe if you just believed that they were on loan to you from some unimaginable source for some exquisite portion of your life to be passed along when you're finished, with somebody else. And, you know, if we think about it this way, it starts to change everything.

18:07

This is how I've started to think, and this is certainly how I've been thinking in the last few months as I've been working on the book that will soon be published, as the dangerously, frighteningly over-anticipated follow up to my freakish success.

18:21

And what I have to sort of keep telling myself when I get really psyched out about that is don't be afraid. Don't be daunted. Just do your job. Continue to show up for your piece of it, whatever that might be. If your job is to dance, do your dance. If the divine, cockeyed genius assigned to your case decides to let some sort of wonderment be glimpsed, for just one moment through your efforts, then "Olé!" And if not, do your dance anyhow. And "Olé!" to you, nonetheless. I believe this and I feel that we must teach it. "Olé!" to you, nonetheless, just for having the sheer human love and stubbornness to keep showing up.

19:03

Thank you.

19:05

(Applause)

19:07

Thank you.

**Comment [12]:** Favorite part. "Just do your job" Don't work to be impactful or inspiring, just do your work the best you can. By having this lax attitude, you can get more confidence in yourself and making an overall more relaxed artist.

19:08

(Applause)

19:11

June Cohen: Olé!

19:13

(Applause)

