

This letter will be part of Chapter Seven in my upcoming book on creativity (*Psychoanalytic Visions: From Chaos to Control to the Unfolding of a Creative Mind*) to be published by Karnac, London, in 2016.

A Letter to Pierre Boulez, 1984

Dear Pierre,

I want to share with you some of my reactions to your lecture on creativity here in Los Angeles, which was so very rich in ideas. You were putting to rest in a compelling way some ongoing myths about the creative process and warning us of the perils of thinking that we know something about it. You were so right when you said from the start that we can be "right on" or "way off" in trying to analyze it and/or explain it. A while back, I wrote a paper on the evolution of a painting, trying to understand the motive behind all of the choices, and I am still not sure if I was *right on* or *way off*! I am certain that my interpretations were greatly limited by my psychoanalytic orientation and my own motivated blindness. But one has to start somewhere...and I wouldn't care to try to do it better.

You suggest that the value of analyzing other composers is to find oneself in the work. One cannot help but project oneself into aspects of the work that may not have been critical for the composer, like the case you described of your analyzing Debussy's intervals, which were important to you, but may not have mattered to him. I did some research years ago that seems to validate this notion. I studied the relationship between musical taste and personality and found that, by and large, people like what is similar to them or what reflects them. Musical analysis may also provide an opportunity for a composer to find himself. You suggest that amplifying and deepening the understanding of a part of the work allows for an understanding of the mechanism of invention. I would add that, in the same way, this mechanism of invention may belong to the one doing the analysis rather than to the composer - another way of finding oneself in discovering what one can do with one's mind and tools.

The three steps the composer goes through - not knowing, knowing, and not knowing again when the work is finished - are very suggestive to me. The composer ends up not knowing because he cannot explain the irrational aspect of his solutions. "He would be in despair if he knew" you added mischievously. I gather that this despair would have to do with the recognition that the finished work represented all that one did. You would like to feel that a part of you that you don't know very well has contributed its hand. This may provide the mystery you alluded to.

When you claim not to like the obvious, you were confirming this view, weren't you? And now I am discovering something about *myself* in trying to understand and analyze what *you* said!

You talked about being suspicious of your "instinctive" solutions. I think part of my interest in doing paintings *to* your music is that I want to stretch the limits of mine. I want to see what happens to my painting as a result of trying to follow solutions that are, in a way, alien and unknown to me and, in another way, so very compatible. You have done and keep doing your stretching, and it would be a great change for me to allow someone else as a mentor of sorts, for my own. In my work with creative people, both individually and in groups, I am the agent for their stretching. So far, none has performed that function for me in the art world with the exception of my only teacher, and his function was somewhat different. He was there for me as a resource, as a background object saying "Yes, go ahead, make a fool of yourself...get into trouble," and I was lucky indeed.

I so agree with your idea of the double mirror of imagination and technique. For me, they have always gone hand in hand. My teacher allowed me to find my own path while he helped me with technique as I needed it. This is not the case at all in most art schools. As you probably know, they seem to stress discipline in order to eventually free the imagination. By the time the students have developed the techniques, their imagination has dried up. Composer Mel Powell had a similar experience with composition - he had a few very difficult years trying to find his own freedom after he became a craftsman. To become an autodidact after learning the tools and studying the past, as you suggest, becomes quite difficult for those who, while studying the great, demand such greatness from themselves. To become an autodidact means that one has to know what one knows and at the same time, acknowledge that in terms of oneself, one knows nothing. That is the only place to start learning by oneself - becoming very hungry again. My work with artists who cannot find such freedom to learn revolves around their reluctance to become aware of these needs, this hunger. It shows up in particular in their relationship to me, but the work is surely the counterpart. Acknowledging their need of me allows them to also need something from and for the work.

It was nice to hear you say, "a good composer is a thief." I wrote a statement about stealing from others and from myself for an exhibition of some painting collages this year. I agree that many creators expect complete originality of themselves and don't allow themselves to feed from someone else. This is also related to an unwillingness to need. I once read some program notes

on an interesting piece by a New York composer, Corigliano, who stated whom he had taken from throughout the piece, from beginning to end, and with no apologies. I loved it! You took from Klee's lectures, and I will be taking from you, and so it goes. I am aware, however, that there are different ways of stealing something. Superficial magical appropriation won't produce anything of value, since the artist won't have found any personal truth in what he's feeding from. You had to understand the structure of Mallarme's poems to be able to do what you did with them. You stated that the sources of inspiration could be many, "from a model to a sunrise", and that all sources, cultural or not, are valid. Each composer, each artist, has his own process, and the first inspiration may come in a different way for the same composer. This is such an important point since so many have tried and keep trying to generalize about the conditions of inspiration or the sources. I enjoy your description of how you started playing with the notion of resonance of the different instruments and the things you could create with that, ending up with the conception of time. This underscores the idea that one never knows where one is going when one starts, which may be a surprise for those who are impressed by the lucidity of your compositions and believe you distill everything down from an overall conception perfectly worked out ahead of time.

You also talked about how much freedom one starts with. Constraints seem to have a paradoxical effect on freedom. As you mentioned, Donatoni seems to love them (two oboes, great)! The less choices, the more stretching, I suppose. I tend to agree when it comes to my own work. I often start a painting with an accident that gives me a "no choice" starting point: I've got to make *that* work! Pretty soon your music will be my restraint, my no-choice position. And your lecture today is my constraint now, which keeps me up late, but this is freedom - to allow myself to *just* respond to you.

I enjoyed your wish for the work to be unfinished and your notion of the spiral form, a wish I share for my painting. Room to continue, space to go on, freedom to expand even more. I suppose the unconscious fantasy is that you cannot destroy the work no matter what you do to it. As many artists, I play with construction and reconstruction, chaos and control. I guess there has to be great relief to confirm that despite all our aggression, the work will continue to be alive and, in our case, ready to be continued. As you say, "darkness to start and will end in darkness." In the middle is where the exploration is taking place. We go through the labyrinth and we know we are lost. Yet, we remain in it, in spite of the hunger for a solution, for knowledge, and in spite

of the pain. But the labyrinth affords us a myriad of mini steps that can be exquisite and can offset all the pain, all the waiting.

Finally, someone raised the issue of time in music and painting and you talked about how the background of Klee's painting conveyed to you the notion of time, because it seems random and accidental, as opposed to the figures he adds later on. This was unclear to me, especially since I, and other artists, work on figure/ground at the same time. I'm also unclear because it is an issue I have been struggling with for some time, and will have to struggle with again when I follow your music. I have developed a slide show of paintings in evolution and what happens to paintings over time - an attempt to disclose what went into it and when. You hinted about being aware of the figure/ground relationships between different instruments and how you will be using this awareness. How is this related to time? I would love to hear some day what you discover with that.

Thank you again for your ideas, for your music, for your conducting, and for being such a wonderful trigger for me. Will let you know of my developments with my stealing from you: *what* I stole, what I'm learning from it, when I will have it... or it has had *me*.

Warmest regards,

Desy