The Widening Stream: the Seven Stages of Creativity

Introduction

What is the nature of the creative process? And how do we understand what is needed to fully engage this fundamental human activity? Most of us are drawn to participate in some form of creative expression, such as artmaking, writing, dancing, cooking, or any of those daily activities that ask for a transformation of materials and energies. The urge to create—to use our minds, hearts, and hands in unison; to work with materials; to express ourselves and our observations, our deepest longings, our greatest aspirations, our joys and sorrows—is one of the most basic of human impulses. Every person holds the potential to enter the stream of discovery and invention. Each of us contains a vast wealth of inner resources that invite us to participate in the process of creation.

Many people long to fulfill their creative potential, yet reliable guidance is hard to find. Most current books on creativity fall into one of two categories: self-help books, which provide a limited, oversimplified, and idealistic view of the process; and books on the psychology or philosophy of creativity written by specialists in the humanities or sciences, which are highly complex and not easily accessible to the average reader. Over the years, however, several classic works have assisted me immeasurably in understanding and developing the ideas found within these pages. Among these noteworthy investigations of the creative process are Rollo May's thoughtful and descriptive *The Courage to Create*, written from the perspective of modern psychology; *Art & Fear* by David Bayles and Ted Orland, an insightful series of observations on artmaking, designed for artists and students; *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg, an instructive contemporary exploration of

creativity viewed through the lens of the writer's craft; and the undeniable tour de force of this small body of guidebooks, Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, which has inspired generations of readers.

The most significant contribution to my ongoing inquiry into the nature of creativity came from a comprehensive anthology titled *The Creative Process: Reflections on Invention in the Arts and Sciences*, edited by Brewster Ghiselin, published in 1952. Though outdated in language and tone (with some essays dating back more than a century), and lacking more recent insights from the field of transpersonal psychology, it remains a primary source on the development of the creative impulse, rendering most contemporary treatments incomplete and imprecise by comparison. Consisting of a series of collected essays by a notable group of artists and scientists (including Albert Einstein, Vincent Van Gogh, Carl Jung, D.H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats, Henry Miller, and Katherine Anne Porter), the principal value of this book lies in the rich diversity of voices heard throughout its pages, and the striking similarity among contributors' observations on the evolving stages of growth within the creative process. Reading it provided me with the stunning realization that creativity, perhaps the most ingenuous and liberating impulse arising within us, contains clearly identifiable stages of development.

And this seems to be a universal experience. Since my first encounter with Ghiselin's book over thirty years ago, I have repeatedly witnessed the unfolding of these stages in my own work as a photographer, heard similar insights reported by students and colleagues, and read numerous accounts by artists and scientists of their congruent views on the organic, developmental steps of creativity and innovation. In this respect, *The Creative Process* provided a touchstone for my observations, and I am deeply indebted to its wisdom.

The Widening Stream, in turn, was conceived as a synthesis of the perspectives found in these preceding books, and intended to provide an accessible overview of the stages of the creative process. Since I know of no other book that fully outlines these universal, evolutionary steps of creation, I have tried to offer both the results of my own experience and a summary of the collective understanding of many who have gone before me. My intent is to help guide individuals through the

process and, at the same time, acknowledge its inherent mystery. I walk a fine line—a veritable razor's edge easily dulled by clamorous best-selling voices that promise instant success and life-changing eight-week transformations. The deep resonances of the creative impulse unfold over the scope of a lifetime, challenging our propensity to reach for the quick fix, the easy answer. I will not, cannot, oversimplify the topic and reduce it to a mere recipe or formula. Creativity must remain an inquiry; it defies logic and arises from a deeper region than the ordinary mind's domain, forever eluding our systematic Western mode of thinking. Through these pages, I wish to open a rich field of exploration in which readers may discover their own unique paths, their own successes, joys, and challenges. This book exemplifies the Zen-like finger pointing toward the moon, offering a means of awakening and investigating one's own creativity—without claiming to hold the answer to the luminance of the moon itself.

The ideas developed throughout the book are deeply related to my own working questions as an artist, teacher, and seeker; many evolved from an especially rewarding and challenging class, titled *Photographic Tools and Creative Expression*, which I taught at Hui Noʻeau Visual Arts Center in Maui, Hawaiʻi. It was an unusual class: most of the students were older than college age and were prepared to work passionately toward realizing their creative aspirations. Most had faced the vicissitudes of life enough to have cultivated both diligence and humility. In twenty-five years of teaching art, I have all too often observed and lamented one unfortunate result of declining standards in education: many students initially view the creative process in an overly simplistic manner. They enjoy some success with the early stages of the process, which ask for spontaneity and freedom of expression. But they often shirk from the rigorous work involved in the later stages, which requires self-discipline, an unflinchingly sincere, and evolving self-knowledge, and a long-term commitment to themselves and their chosen medium.

Moreover, it is truly surprising to me that many young artists believe that they already, and seemingly by instinct, fully understand the process of creativity. It is not viewed as an inquiry; rather, they feel capable of accomplishing it through their ordinary mind alone, without the enlarging dimension of the deeper parts of their nature. This is a reductionist attitude—one that is

unfortunately promoted by many popular books on creativity—in which students attempt to bring larger truths and ultimately unknowable dimensions of being down to their level, squeezing them into their own still-limited framework in order to understand them.

One of the many paradoxes of creativity is that we cannot know it fully, yet we can deeply experience it within ourselves. The creative process, as with all natural processes of growth and evolution, proceeds along a lawful line of development but does not always follow a linear progression. Like a river's journey, it contains broad currents of free-flowing movement, meandering streams that fuel its course, vigorous rapids and spirited falls, passages through perilous narrows, areas of inert stagnation, clear pools of polished stillness, and finally, a place of union with the sea, merging with the source.

The Widening Stream examines the full development of the creative process through seven definable and equally important stages. These cannot be grasped by the intellect alone, divorced from experience. Each stage requires our full attention, and each asks for its own particular blend of the energies of our bodies, minds, and feelings. It is only through a wide and deep engagement with the process, undertaken with a sense of "not-knowing," that we may begin to understand it. The stages merely serve to help us locate our place, find our way. Lacking taut boundaries, they should be viewed as a continuum in which each stage anticipates the next, seamlessly blending from one into the other in a natural, evolving process. As signposts, they mark our progress much like the definable passages in our lives from childhood through old age.

This book is divided into two parts. The first traces the seven stages of the creative process and how their secrets unfold as a result of an individual's work and discoveries. This part is intended to function as a tool for navigation, assisting individuals toward a deeper exploration of the evolving stages, providing hints for direction and offering guideposts that move the reader closer to penetrating the mysteries of creation. Each chapter ends with a "creative practice," consisting of questions for self-examination along with explicit tools, exercises, and suggestions to help readers realize each step of the process. The second part elaborates on the creative impulse with a more in-depth look at three guiding principles of creativity.

The exercises have been tested through extensive classroom and workshop use. Throughout my teaching career, I have seen these tools prove their value to many individuals. Some have grown out of my own experience, some were given by my teachers, and some were offered by my students and peers. They are meant as suggestions and as guides for self-discovery—and to help shake loose the spontaneous, wild mind. Many of the questions and exercises are designed to help liberate the self from habit or formula, to open the door to fresh insight or unexpected discovery, and to encourage a connection with the largesse of one's deepest Self. My intent is to rouse your heart and mind toward authentic expression. If these exercises do not awaken your creative imagination, or burn as a homeward beacon, then please fashion your own tools out of your intuition, inclinations, and life experience. Experiment and explore—find the path to your center.

E.B. White, in his revision of William Strunk's marvelously lucid book on writing, *The Elements of Style,* comments on the creative impulse:

> *Who can confidently say what ignites a certain combination of words, causing them to explode in the mind? Who knows why certain notes in music are capable of stirring the listener deeply, though the same notes slightly rearranged are impotent? These are high mysteries…Writers will often find themselves steering by stars that are disturbingly in motion.*

This is all I ask: that you, the reader, may steer toward the constellations formed by the stages and principles outlined in this book, always keeping in mind that the guiding lights that illumine the creative process, helping us find our way home, are ever shifting—but only disturbingly so if we maintain a fixed standpoint or a formulaic approach. If we are fluid and open, inviting new experiences and challenges, we may discover the navigator within who is capable of sensing and knowing, in some primordial part of ourselves, the direction of land though still many miles beyond our current horizon.

While my own experiences and perspective grow from a sustained involvement with the visual arts, this book is for anyone wishing to examine and engage the creative process. To become

an artist of life is an aim worthy of our humanity. Cooking, gardening, relating with others, addressing the challenges of our occupations, teaching, waiting tables, and advancing one's business can all be creative acts. The specific nature of one's activities is not nearly as important as how they are approached. Can we approach life itself as a creative challenge, through the medium of whatever it is that we do on a daily basis? This question forms the central inquiry of the book.

I did not plan the content of these pages, nor did I fully intend to write a book; it simply appeared. It began as a short series of working notes to my students, then became an urgent necessity as words and ideas flowed in rapid succession, often with startling organizational integrity. This process mirrored the twelve weeks of the class; one chapter for each session. Every week I committed to deliver a new section to my students. Without fail, the installments proceeded and grew in size and scope, until one day I realized that a book was forming. Much of the text revealed itself in my mind fully formed; there was little of the usual struggle of defining what to say, how to say it, and in what sequence. It seemed to emerge organically—as if I were giving birth to something that had been incubating for many years. Furthermore, my direct experience of the creative process as I endeavored to describe it in words made for an intensely interesting and enlivening inquiry.

I have tried to maintain the boldness, elegance, and energy of what Natalie Goldberg calls "first thoughts," discarding or expanding on the original material only where it seemed necessary for clarity's sake. It was a delicate balance: I questioned how to effectively edit the book while respecting the vitality of the original impulse. In addition, I needed to find a means of giving structure to the shades of variation in the progression of the process within each chapter. The metaphor of water presented in the title offered an evocative means of unifying the book's content, and was extended to subheadings throughout Part One.

When I was off track, or in search of additional clarification, my dreams often revealed inadequacies and how to resolve them. For example, when I felt as if the book was nearing completion, with nine sections behind me, I dreamt that I was the father of twelve children. How strange, I thought; having twelve children is almost unheard of today. However, in the dream, my

family only felt whole with all twelve offspring. As soon as I willingly accepted the responsibility for that number of children, the chapter headings for the remaining three sections appeared. In retrospect, I see their necessity; the book would not have been complete without them.

The writing proceeded in its own time and place. Wherever I happened to be, or whatever I happened to be doing, phrases, thoughts, and insights would appear with great clarity and directness. Following the completion of this book, and much to my surprise, delight, *and* dismay—since I had hoped to put my pen aside for awhile—I received spontaneous insights in the form of concepts, titles, and chapter outlines for subsequent books in a series. The process seemed to have its own integrity and its own life; my only choice was to willingly submit to its organic development.

Thus, *The Widening Stream* was born as the first in a trilogy of books on the evolutionary unfoldment of creativity and awareness in the individual. A profound sense of release accompanies these essays. I am touched and amazed by what I have been privileged to learn over the past three years of intense writing, in my search for lucidity of thought and clarity of expression. In the classroom, it has been frequently observed that teachers, through their inquiry and example, are those who learn the most. So too, I now believe, with writing. These thoughts and impressions have been gestating in the core of my being for some time—and their birth was imminent. I honor and acknowledge the many gifts from within, and feel humbled by the moments of grace that informed and guided me through this undertaking.

My wish for you, the reader, is that these insights may ignite your own creative gifts, fanning them into a blazing conflagration of authentic transformation; that there will be no turning back for you once you hear the thundering voices of spirit; that you will be shattered into fullness of being through your soul's longing; that you will discover with unshakable conviction that you have some indispensable thread of awareness to weave into the fabric of the world; and that your guiding lights will show you the way to grow gracefully into who you already are.

A Personal Account

Sometimes it feels as if all the elements of my life have lined up, conspiring to help me realize this endeavor of writing a comprehensive book on creativity. A lifelong passion for the arts, a propensity for teaching, a long-term investigation of the creative process as an artist and writer, and the resonating gifts offered by my own teachers have provided a solid, durable matrix for the unfolding of these ideas. Yet, by themselves, these ingredients form an incomplete picture, lacking the essential fusion, the one unexpected, stunning moment that brought my understanding sharply into focus, and that felt strangely at the time as if I were being given a keen lesson that would help others as well as myself. I wish, therefore, to share a deeply transformative experience that served to awaken a period of intense creativity and provided me, once I could move beyond my paralyzing fear, with a powerful opportunity for growth and helped prompt me to write this book.

At the age of thirty-three, I suffered an impact injury while chopping wood that could have cost me my life. A small branch, approximately three-quarters of an inch in diameter and over three feet long, with a fractured tip, flew up and struck me in the face, directly under the eye. Thankfully, I lived; tragically (especially for a photographer), I lost the vision of my right and dominant eye. It was the most traumatic and disabling event of my life—and by far the most enlightening and life-enhancing.

I did not realize the seriousness of the injury at the time of the accident. In the emergency room, the physician on duty urgently consulted an ophthalmologist. At that point, I understood that my eye had been seriously damaged, and I became terrified of the possible consequences. The doctor emphatically informed me that I needed surgery immediately to see if the eye could be repaired. I implored him to do his absolute best to save my vision—that I was a photographer and needed my eyes. Fears of a completely altered life entered my mind. Would I ever be able to drive again? To photograph? To live a normal life? Would I be disfigured? He then said something that has burned itself into my memory of that day. He said calmly and with great assurance: “You will be as good a photographer with one eye as you were with two.”

After seven or eight hours in surgery—in which the surgeon removed the fragments of wood, repaired my crushed eyeball, tried to repair my massively torn retina, and performed cosmetic surgery to rebuild the lost tissue on the right side of my face—I was sent to the recovery room. Combinations of antibiotics were administered to prevent infection of my brain, which could have resulted from the foreign objects in my optic nerve. Mercifully, I never consciously knew that my life was in jeopardy, since by the time I woke up, the risk of infection had diminished substantially.

The next week was pure hell. I underwent multiple tests and examinations to determine whether any useful vision could be returned to my eye. I had no light perception whatsoever due to the retinal damage, and was told that I would not see at all with my right eye for the rest of my life. Medical technology was many years away from transplanting a retina, and mine was far too damaged to repair. My doctor explained that the risk of sympathetic ophthalmia, in which the good eye follows suit with its injured neighbor and also loses the ability to see, was far greater than the chance of seeing out of that eye ever again—and that it should be removed.

My darkest hours of self doubt followed upon receiving his diagnosis. Many questions arose for me about the role of fate, or accident, in our lives. Was this event fated? Or was it simply an accident? Could it have been avoided? I recalled an acute memory of a night when I was nineteen years old, contemplating my unknown future and feeling much hope and promise, in which an intuitive feeling persisted—one that I could not shake from my consciousness at the time—that I might someday lose an eye. When I reached my friend and longtime teacher, Nicholas Hlobeczy, he said simply, "Thy will be done."

My mother, my girlfriend, and a select group of friends gathered at my home prior to the second surgery, with a bottle of excellent Armagnac, to drink a poignant toast to the thirty-three years of vision my eye had faithfully provided me. I did a small series of self portraits of my damaged face and eye, and went to bed wondering if I would—or could—ever again feel like a complete human being.

I dreamt that night of being inside a medieval castle, with two arched entrances through which the light was streaming with a palpable force and energy such as one feels in the great cathedrals of Europe. Unexpectedly, one of the massive wood doors, the right one, began to close from the top down and to dim the light until it stopped on the floor, closing completely the arched entrance, reverberating with an echoing sound that spoke with authority and permanence. The sound was chilling. I went over to the door, and it was no longer a door or an opening; it had become simply a stone wall with no passage to the outer world.

The very next morning, I checked myself into the hospital to have my eye surgically removed. After settling into my room, several hours before surgery, I was asked if I wanted a sedative. "Not yet," was my answer. It felt important to experience this moment as fully as possible. My anxiety was mounting. I didn't know what to do or where to turn. I decided to take a walk to the hospital chapel to try to digest the experience. I never knew such depression, fear, and despondency—it was completely paralyzing. I was scared to death of the future—and of the finality of the soon-to-be-performed surgery.

Then, in the chapel, came a moment of realization, in a burst of insight, that changed my attitude toward this event and gave me great strength and an unshakable sense of courage. A question unexpectedly arose in my mind: If I cannot let go of something as relatively insignificant as one eye, one small part of my body, what will happen when I have to completely let go of my entire body, when I die? If I cannot withstand *this* shock, I will never be able to gracefully and consciously withstand the moment of death. This experience was a kind of test—a foretaste of letting go. From that moment on, my experience of losing my eye changed—and the fear and depression never returned with anywhere near the same intensity.

Quite to the contrary; after the realization in the chapel, the entire experience of having the eye removed, of learning to see again, and going through the inevitable psychic transformation, became my personal creative quest. A quest that, more or less, I welcomed, and of which I tried to make the best possible use. Something had changed in me. I felt less under the dominion of my ego, and more open to life, to people, and to the changes inherent in our lives. I learned much about myself

from questioning why such a massive injury had been the necessary catalyst to deliver me to the threshold of this new state of being.

A transformation had occurred on many different levels, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual, due to the ongoing effects of the injury. It served to break down many of the unquestioned and crystallized attitudes my psyche had developed as an armor; and provided an opportunity for renewal, for a regathering of my energies under different conditions.

First, I needed to relearn ordinary physical tasks: driving a car, pouring liquids *into* a glass, avoiding collisions with doorways or people on my right side, safely crossing streets, discovering where I needed to sit at a table or in a restaurant in order to see my companions and not just the wall, and acquiring a different sort of respect for my one and only good eye. It gave me the opportunity to prune my life down to the essentials, and to give up superficial interests and nonessential activities. One central goal was added to my life's purpose: to die seeing, on both a literal and metaphorical level.

As I learned to face the challenges of living with one eye, I received help from an instructive guidebook: *A Singular View: The Art of Seeing with One Eye*. Written by Frank Brady, an airline pilot who lost an eye when a large mallard smashed the windshield of his plane, the book is an important reference manual for the newly one-eyed, full of helpful hints and tricks for navigating through the process of learning to see with reduced capabilities. But for any interested reader, it returns the act of seeing to an art, to regarding human vision as an intentional activity, one full of potential and with perceptual possibilities we have long forgotten or glossed over. The imperative of learning to see again is an unusual opportunity for an adult; most of us, though genuinely appreciative of our vision, thoroughly take the act of seeing for granted and are mostly untrained in the banquet of gifts that seeing offers.

Observe carefully a young child in the act of seeing and note the sense of wonder, joy, and curiosity that accompanies this adventure. A child can become completely absorbed in examining the world through vision—through any of the senses, for that matter. Seeing is truly a form of magic, a perceptual pleasure, a source of real learning and questioning, and a doorway to invisible worlds. As adults, we have much to relearn.

I offer here the initial realizations gleaned through the process of recovering my vision in the several years following my accident.

We do not see through our eyes alone.

Photographer Edward Weston described the process of his own creative work as "Seeing through one's eyes, not with them." And Walt Whitman wrote in *Leaves of Grass*, " I am not contained between my hat and my boots." In other words, we see through our entire body. To focus only on the seeing of our eyes is misguided, and represents a common fallacy. Every cell, every part of our body is a sensitive receiving apparatus, and all are connected to the eyes. I remember sitting on a beach years after the surgery, on the island of Kauai, looking at the different colors in the world around me, and feeling each color, locating with precision where the particular hue resounded in my body. It was symphonic, the way in which colors touched different inner regions, and stimulated different thoughts, emotions, and sensations.

When I am attentive, I can sense, especially on my right side, when something or someone is there, and can sense the amount of space separating me from the object or person. I am surprised while driving to realize that I do not always need to look on my right side. I simply seem to know or feel when something is there. But this requires great care; it happens only when I am attentive. Otherwise, my lack of finely tuned depth perception causes clumsiness and errors of visual judgment. Attention is the key. I can sometimes sense the character or thoughts of another person by loosely resting my gaze on them, and staying within my own body, which provides insights and empathetic realizations.

I have consciously experimented with this phenomenon in order to understand it. Probably the most vivid impressions came on a number of occasions while riding the subway in Manhattan. I discovered that by empathetically looking at individuals on the train, I could place my attention inside their body, so to speak; to feel and sense their posture and weight with my own body, and understand what that posture felt like, from the inside out. From feeling the weight and shape of their posture, other realizations about what they may have been experiencing in that moment

presented themselves. This division of attention, where we maintain a measure of our awareness within ourselves while simultaneously directing some toward and into the object of our perception, stimulated many key experiences for me. It was a remarkable discovery. My understanding was no longer limited to looking at the outside of things—the inner world is within the capabilities of our seeing.

It is the brain that sees, simply making use of the eyes.

The brain, as I have learned, is a remarkably adaptive instrument. Over the course of six or eight months after losing binocular vision, the brain learns to adapt to the monocular cues of perspective, such as the way objects appear to change size in relation to distance, and the way motion is perceived relative to space (for example, bushes in the foreground appear to be passing by faster than mountains in the background as we walk or drive), and depth perception is slowly regained.

I also discovered that other senses—especially hearing— become sharper and more acute when I need to locate objects or persons on my right side. Although I suspect that my physical capacity to hear has not increased at all, sounds are now more within my field of awareness, as I must depend on them to drive, walk, and navigate through space. I now have difficulty getting around adroitly and being attentive in noisy environments, or having background music or the television on while engaged in activities that require judgments of depth and spatial relationships.

Listening and seeing are interrelated, as are all of our senses. Our physical vision perceives the light reflected from objects and our hearing perceives the vibrations of sound that emanate from, or are reflected by, objects or people. I believe there is a reciprocal relationship between all of our senses that can be encouraged and developed if we wish—and this is true for all sighted, partially sighted, or nonseeing individuals.

Seeing is a direct experience and represents a way of knowing.

This may be stating the obvious, but we do see what we want to see. What we call "seeing" is generally a reflection of our inner dialogue, which is constant and unceasing. Our inner dialogue

tends to support our particular world view, our image of ourself, and our subjective beliefs. We know too much; we can name and provide a label for everything under the sun. We have our own agendas, our predisposed attitudes, and our own cultural biases. We rarely see the world in a fresh way or question the numerous and often unconscious filters that influence the nature of our perception.

Moments of real seeing are beyond the labeling propensity of the mind, beyond what we think we know. Seeing is a step into the unknown and requires some degree of intention and awakening. Real seeing—of ourselves, of others, and of the world—contains three defining characteristics: simultaneity, a direct perception in the present moment; objectivity, seeing things as they are, as best we can; and impartiality, freedom from judgment. For most of us, governed by our subjective attitudes and cherished opinions, such moments of direct perception are rare and depend entirely on our inner state of mind, feeling, and body. But they are possible. Most of us have experienced moments of inner accord in which, by chance or intentional effort, we are open, sensitive, and wholly present. The first step on the Buddhist eightfold path is "right seeing," which serves as a fitting foundation for our journey. In my mind, "right seeing" implies not only a positive, life-affirming attitude, but also a genuine effort toward direct, conscious perception.

The nature of our perceptions is relative and depends on our state of awareness and state of being. Suspending the internal dialogue, maintaining a dual attention that embraces both ourselves and the perceived object, and trying to be fully present to the moment in front of us are exercises that assist in the process of seeing.

Seeing is an exchange of energy that takes place between ourselves and the perceived objects of our attention. In losing the sight of my eye, I learned to depend to a greater extent on efforts toward self-awareness and connecting with my own body and feelings. I clearly observed how the objects of my perception registered their impressions on my being and stimulated widely varying inner sensations and feelings. Although I do not fully understand this process, perhaps the larger potential of seeing is found in these moments of self-awareness and the recognition that all

impressions we receive register themselves within us. Seeing comes from within ourselves, not from the vague "out there" of the outer world.

To paraphrase D.M. Dooling, founding editor of Parabola magazine, Do we really wish to see? We associate the possibility of heightened awareness with renewal, a sense of joy and awakening, and the magical quality of direct perception. This Dooling claims is true: when awake, we see the world with infinite compassion and kindness, as a reflection of its inherent divinity. But, she goes on to explain, there are two ends to this stick. Seeing the world as it really is also brings us into contact with suffering, inequality, and the conditions inherent in our world, not all of which are life-enhancing and affirming. But can we afford not to see things in this fashion? Can our planet, and all of its residents, continue with the distorted perceptions of reality stemming from our lack of real seeing, and by extension, real caring?

Seeing can be cultivated, indeed must be, if we wish to live full and productive lives, sensitively receiving and richly giving to ourselves and others. It must always be born in our hearts and minds that *we* are the primary medium of the creative act—not film or clay, paints or words. Learning to see, learning to be, and learning to come into accord with the deeper sources within and without—these are, undoubtedly, the greatest challenges given us, the most potent tests of our creative aspirations and capabilities.

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After two years of diligently relearning to see, I felt the imperative to photograph again. I had done some casual picture-taking, but I hadn't worked on a sustained project for several years and was anxious to get back to work. I was considerably out of touch, however. I needed a challenging project and a kick in the pants to renew my once-passionate involvement with photography.

One morning I woke up and inexplicably knew that I must go to Hawai'i. I was drawn to the volcanoes of the Big Island—and sensed a potential for creative work in this location. As I experienced the land, culture, and traditions, I felt surprisingly enriched and nourished, well beyond

any measure of my expectations. The ancient mythology, still vitally maintained by many contemporary Hawaiians, added a subtle yet potent depth and mystery to the culture. Most importantly, I felt that the transformative nature of the landscape, due to Kilauea Volcano, closely paralleled the major upheaval I had experienced in losing my eye. Thus, the project rapidly took on an urgency and intensity, drawing me back again and again, over a period of several years.

In my initial photographs of the landscape, particularly in Volcanoes National Park, I found myself making images that represented the process of death and rebirth. My camera continually led me to a place known as Devastation Trail, where the white skeletons of the top branches of dead *ʻohiʻa* trees are revealed—as the solitary, haunting remains of the Kilauea Iki eruption, which fountained nineteen hundred feet into the air, completely covering the floor of an *ʻohiʻa* and fern forest with molten ash. The white, bleached branches are everywhere, testaments to the destructive force of Madame Pele, the Hawaiian volcano goddess. Yet, in the midst of the ash-covered landscape, new growth of *ʻamaʻu* ferns, young *ʻohiʻa* trees, and *ʻohelo* berry bushes are breaking ground and creating the floor of what will someday be a new forest, built upon the ruins of the old.

Every image that I made bore witness to the phoenixlike nature of the Hawaiian landscape. It wasn't until printing many of the images that I recognized the obvious metaphor—that these white, bleached branches looked exactly like the stick that extinguished my eye. What I was seeing reflected in this landscape of powerful destruction and new birth was my own fragile process of recovery and healing. The place and my self were one and the same. It was not merely metaphor, or autobiography, or geography; it was all of these at once. I was a part of the place and the place was a part of me. After this realization was firmly established, I was able to complete that project and begin work on my current interest: the cultural landscape

In that body of work, titled *Hawai'i: Landscape of Transformation,* I have tried to integrate two often contradictory aims: the photograph as document, and as metaphor. I wanted to maintain the integrity of the landscape and convey a sense of place, and at the same time suggest symbolic content through the transformative nature of the volcano—seeing it as being deeply related to my own life experience. These photographs served as a profound form of release, offered a way of

digesting my experience, and provided a way of working through my ongoing process of transformation and healing.

The inspiring presence of Hawai‘i continued to beckon me. In January 1991, I took a leave of absence from my long-term position as Chair of the Photography Department at the Art Institute of Boston to serve as the first Executive Director of the Hui No‘eau Visual Arts Center on Maui. In 1993, I was invited to become part of a team of four artists commissioned to photograph the island of Kaho‘olawe, sacred to the Hawaiian people and used for ordnance training by the U.S. military since World War Two, for a book and traveling exhibition.

The island offers great contrasts, between the sacredness of the ancient cultural sites and the terrifying damage created by modern weapons. The photography proceeded slowly because of the unique conditions presented by the island's natural and man-altered features. I had never before seen or experienced a place that contained such subtlety of natural beauty and such powerful, seemingly untouched ancient shrines—nor one that had been so thoroughly devastated by military technology and modern attitudes.

The resonating challenge presented by turning my lens toward Kaho‘olawe became a stringent, personal test of the many lessons I had learned through losing an eye. I needed once again to find the right balance between active intent and surrender, between self-confidence and humility, governed by a deep trust in the integrity of the creative process. Simply stated, my hard work created the conditions for the process to unfold, and helped open me to the guiding visions and synchronous moments that arose from a deeper place than my ego's desire or its habitual nature.

The underlying question that informed a new way of working was how to allow meaning to emerge out of my direct experience of the island—to listen and see, to stay in the moment, and not to rely on my past accomplishments, preconceived attitudes, or photographic formulas. In a very real sense, I felt that we as artists were merely the lenses through which the island could speak. I sensed the possibility of making images that integrated in a single gesture the massive destruction with the underlying sacredness, a subtle and pervasive energy that I couldn't quite grasp, that remained elusive to my understanding. These images found their way through my lens only after I ceased

grasping and relinquished my desire to use the island as a means toward furthering my own strictly personal ends. Due to the continuing importance of Kahoʻolawe to the people of Hawaiʻi, it was clear that something much larger was at stake.

Kahoʻolawe taught me a great deal about "right seeing" and the necessity of staying open to the process itself, rather than seeking results. The dark sacredness of the land challenged us to go beyond our artistic intent and individual styles as photographers. In respect for the power of the island, I learned finally that higher energies should not, cannot, be called upon merely to serve our own creative, personal needs. Rather, we stand humbly in service of a larger purpose. Though creativity may nourish us profoundly as it makes its way *through* us, we are the vehicle, not the destination.

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More than fifteen years have elapsed since that moment of impact, which seized me with an abrupt intensity and force; a seemingly purposeful blow, it was a literal whack to the side of the head that took from me part of my sight. The reverberations of that event continue to this day. A tidal change has taken place in me from deep within; I feel it has affected me on even a cellular level. I am attracted now to the deep, volcanic contrasts of life, death, and rebirth, and the possibilities inherent in destruction for renewal and regeneration. The wounding of the land, its sacredness, its need to heal is more than a metaphor for me. It is true on the level of our planet, and it is true within my own experience. The earth is no different, in this respect, than you and I.

We are as we respond. Like is attracted to like, as metal filings to a magnet. We see what we are. Vision persists beneath our thinly disguised masks. We resonate with that which corresponds to our being. It can be no coincidence that I wish to photograph conditions of strife and contradiction, as well as those places on earth of sacredness and transformation (either due to natural forces or to the influence of humanity). I am surprised and not surprised that this interest persists.

Our linkages arise from within. The implications of losing an eye, the transforming energies of that event, are still vibrating in me—and perhaps they always will.

I would not wish to change the course that my life has taken.