

## ***Teacher and Composer in the University***

**The Dilemma of Self-Regulated Creative Work  
in an Institution**

**John Cousins**

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"It doesn't matter what activity anyone chooses. If you take any activity, any art, any discipline, any skill, take it and push it as far as it will go, push it beyond where it has ever been before, push it to the wildest edge of edges, then you force it into the realm of magic. And it doesn't matter what it is that you select, because when it has been pushed far enough it contains everything else."

Tom Robbins

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### **The Teacher's Position**

A teacher must be a concerned participant rather than a professed expert, and it is with this background and belief that these ideas are offered. Personal experience is the teacher's training ground; concerned thinking about a problem should never be divorced from one's own personal stake in the outcome.

Although this article is concerned with teaching electroacoustic music in the University, it covers a much wider field than teaching methods, objectives, and other pedagogical matters. It looks at the subject at its source, and so must be concerned with aesthetic, ethical, social, political and moral repercussions.

The WHY and WHAT of a problem are just as important as the HOW. If you do not really understand the nature of what you are dealing with, and come to grips with the motives behind your attempts to think and feel it through, then any solution is going to be of limited value.

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"Deep in the creation of a work, the composer undoubtedly forges for himself a **psychology of short-term infallibility**. Without this provisory compass - 'I am absolutely right' - he would hesitate to venture into virgin territory. This is a sane reflex which allows him to reach the end of the unpredictable periplus which lies between him and the completion of his work.

Nevertheless, he must be able to judge the distance he has covered along the way, to keep track of his co-ordinates, in short, to make sure that he does not stray from his path. I would not suggest that the final result should be exactly identical with the initial intention - what begins as a portrait may end up as a still-life. (Henry Miller gives a brilliant description of the genesis of a masterpiece in the story 'The Angel is my Water Mark!' from *Black Spring*. I would at least like to quote this passage: 'You may say it's just an accident, this masterpiece, and so it is! But then, so is the 23rd Psalm.' Every birth is miraculous - and inspired. What appears now before my eyes is the result of innumerable mistakes, withdrawals, erasures, hesitations; it is also the result of certitude...The world of real and counterfeit is behind us. **Out of the tangible we have invented the intangible.**"

Boulez

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## The Creative Process

**The creative process** in people occurs when they attempt a codification of their most deeply felt, intuitive insights regarding themselves and the world in which they live; using whatever medium they wish to employ, or find at their disposal.

**Its Value** lies not only in the production of work which gives a real and honest sense of these insights, but also in the growing and changing that results from attempts at such production.

**The Teacher** takes responsibility for supporting and guiding those who find themselves embarked upon creative work.

If you believe in the old saying 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink', then you will agree there is no sense force-feeding the beast in order to ensure that it will never be thirsty!

All the horse requires, is access to water. It will make up its own mind when and how often to partake.

You could say, the horse won't drink unless it is properly motivated. It will only imbibe when it needs to.....that is, when it is thirsty.

You could also say that the drinking habits of the horse are naturally self-regulated.

This fact is an example of organically intact, and wholistic bonding between an impulse towards action, and the action itself. It is a natural complement of need and response, forming an event.

We accept unquestionably the simple cause and effect/impulse and action link, embodied in such an event.

One of the reasons for this, is that we understand the action to be a natural, and completely acceptable response to the impulse. When one is thirsty, one drinks. It is almost an involuntary relationship. Drinking quenches thirst, food satisfies hunger, sleep banishes tiredness.

One of the characteristics of these complements is that at their fundamental level, they are prime experiences for us all. We are not taught to be hungry, sleepy, or thirsty.....we are those things. We do not need to be taught to eat, sleep, or drink.....we do them in response to an experienced condition. The sucking and swallowing of the baby is involuntary action precipitated by the experience of hunger/thirst.

**The need for creative expression in a human being, is of this involuntary kind.....and its natural complement is creative action.**

Just as we automatically find within ourselves the appropriate response to thirst, hunger, and tiredness, so are we capable of finding the response to our need for creative expression. The mechanism for it is a part of our being human. We cannot be human, and not be capable of both the creative impulse, and action towards fulfillment of that impulse.

If one experiences the human condition, then one also experiences creative need, because those factors which make the human experience unique from all other experience are the very factors which ensure a sensibility enriched with a creative dimension.



It is critical in the teaching of creative activity, that the organic link between impulse and action is taken into account, because the idea of 'self-actualisation', although it may have been over emphasised to some extent, is still central to the creative act.

**For an act to be creative, it must hold subjective significance for the person undertaking it.**

The way this significance is established and maintained, is through the organic relationship of the process with the person.

This means that the person must be the prime source and energiser of the process.

### Motivation

The essential element in ensuring an organically intact process, is motivation.

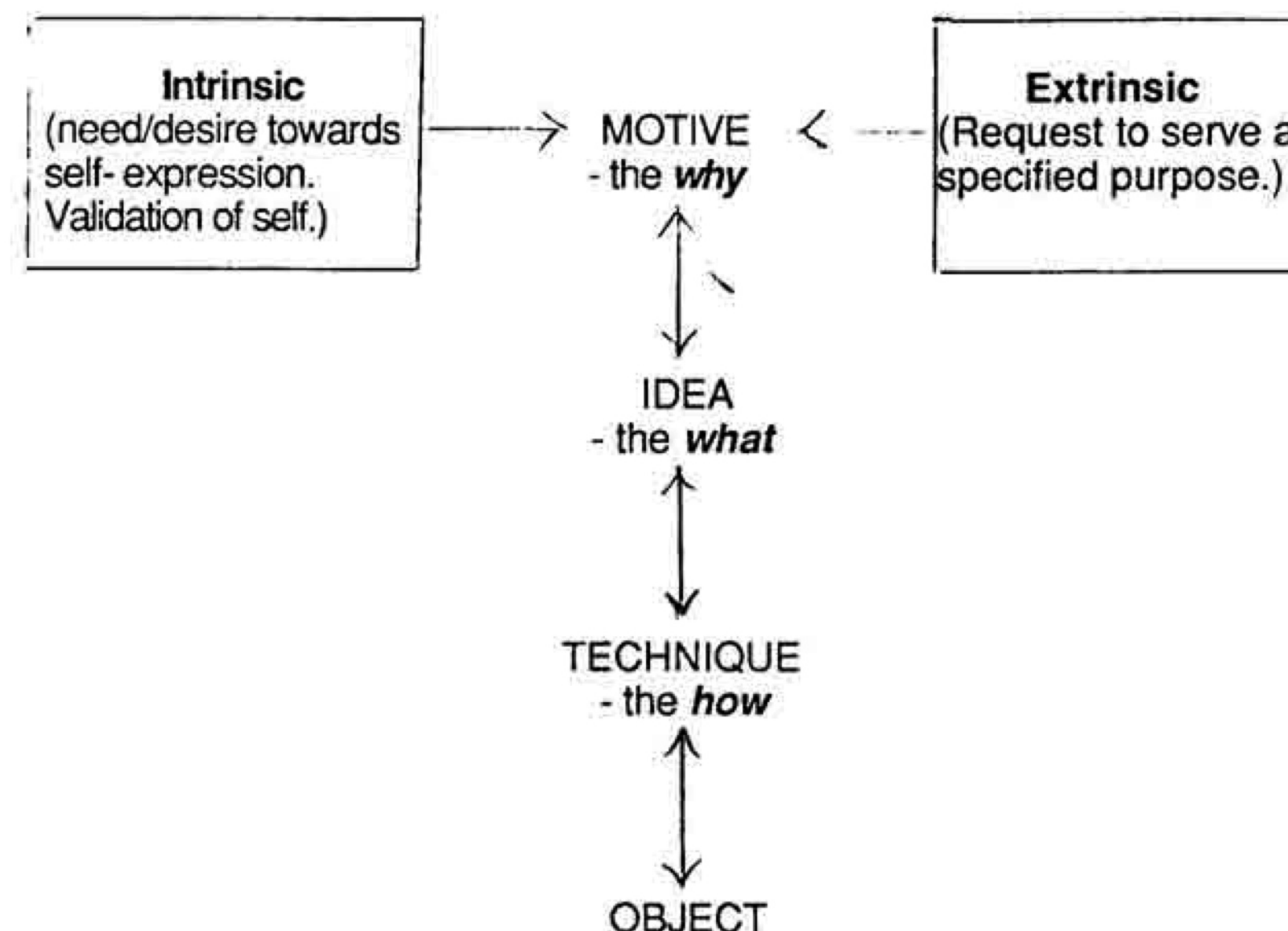
By this I mean the reason why a person chooses to act upon his/her creative impulse.

Let's look at the role of motivation in the creative process, as being the factor which forms the foundation for action on the part of an individual.

**Motive:** Factor or combination of factors that determine the direction of an individual's behaviour; that causes, or influences action.

As stated earlier, the teacher of creative activity should be concerned with the 'why' and the 'what' as much as the 'how' of that activity. Particularly in the case of the beginner, support and encouragement, allowing proper motivation is necessary. The feeling of "I want to do something but I do not know what it is" in the would-be artist is the beginning of a creative 'head of steam' which must be sustained through the trials of gaining a clearer idea of what it is that the person wants to do.

### The Process of Creative Activity



In the above diagram I have identified two polarities of motive for creative activity. These polarities seldom exist as clearly defined either/or states. It is possible (and quite common) for combined motives to exist. A fundamentally extrinsic initiation of a work can be encompassed and embraced by the intrinsic response. However, there is an essential difference between the two areas, no matter how much one may overlap the other.

**Intrinsic** motivation springs from a desire/need to embark upon a course of action for its own sake, for no other reason than to realise an internal requirement in the form of an object or process of some kind, the final form of which often cannot be predicted.

All the decision making relates to the intrinsic causality inherent in this kind of motivation.

**Extrinsic** motivation responds to a request from outside of the subjective needs of the person, to prerequisites already extant. The ultimate polarity here is a set of predetermined parameters to which the maker obliges.



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The composer who learns to break the screens of taste, of discretion, of over-folding criticism, of specialism, will certainly move nearer to an explosion of his or her senses. Berg dared to absorb the powerful present offered to him by Schönberg, and alchemistically to blend it with his past, and those things he most loved. He became one of the greatest composers of our century; in my opinion the most original so far.

Michelangelo said, "No man is complete unless all of his senses are made to work to their maximum". 'All of his senses' and 'made' are important. It takes courage to dare, to be that open, to reach out for so much. Already, in 1982, there are artists with the capacity to become a mountain. But mountains were built during huge conflicting movements of mass and matter. The challenge to the modern composer is as dangerous as reaching a hand into an erupting volcano to hold primaevial magma close to one's own body.

Time moves on; ideas form; minds bend; worlds change; Artists are born; they grow...or they fail. It is in the nature of things that most fail.

Edward Cowie

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### Impulse and Action

Many seemingly extrinsic motivations are actually invitations to respond to the internal motive to make an object. Commissions with broad parameters, or with the creative personality of the artist in mind, are of this sort. Most artists usually ensure that some aspect of their work fulfils their inner demands - no matter how 'objective' the specifications of a particular external requirement might be. If they do not do this then it becomes difficult for them to produce the work. Even money and a livelihood are sometimes not enough of an incentive. The artist must still gain 'personal satisfaction' from what he/she does.

There is a difference however, between personal satisfaction and genuine creative expression. One can gain a great deal of fulfillment from the most prosaic and prescribed activities. But the job of creative artists is always to respond to inner necessity. They must then acquire the ability to relate this to

any external prescription they may encounter. They must keep this intrinsic motivation alive, no matter how stilted or seemingly prosaic the circumstances of a particular project may be.

It is important to remember that to be effectively motivated the context must be 'real'. It must have relevance to the person's idea of what is important.

In the case of creative expression it must be relevant to the intuitive state of the person concerned.

If we work inwards from the object, it is clear that each step is initiated by the one before it:

..... For the work to exist, there must be skill - technique.

..... For technique to exist, there must be ideas pressing to be realised.

..... For ideas to exist, there must be a genuine initiative to express.....to 'say something'.....which is itself the secret of being human.

Within the continuum of the process, these stages are in constant flux but, they must all be present if the process is to be complete.

One of the greatest difficulties facing the creative artist, is to ensure that all of these stages are related to one another as directly, and organically as possible, so that distortions between one stage and the next are minimised. Of course, it is impossible to achieve complete fidelity between the stages. This is because the full significance of being a human being can never be completely defined. The response to the urge to define it immediately predisposes the end result towards incompleteness.....the result can only ever be an attempt to state a personal attitude towards the human condition, rather than a definition of it.

Passing through these stages is a little like approaching the speed of light. One can get close to it but the closer one gets, the more impossible it becomes to proceed any faster. The essence of the human condition is pure universal sensation. It cannot be replicated, it can only be implied.

However, it is still true that the relative success of the attempt is measured by how palpably the essential nature of the original state, is extant in the final object.

It is as though the interfaces between one stage and the next possess intrinsic distortion factors. The further one moves from the source (towards the object) the greater the pressure from these factors to distort and blur the







their own ways of doing things at the same time.

I do not agree.....for the following reasons:

Ready made skills represent a life raft; they are a way of circumscribing the necessary confrontation with the problem. They encourage in the student a response that is characterised by doing anything rather than finding out what is necessary to be done. This camouflages the real objective and often prevents the student from full commitment.

If a set of skills.....ways of manipulating the materials of the medium.....are learned in isolation, and away from the influence of the complete continuum, nothing is gained. In many cases a great deal is lost, because there is an inclination to bend the idea stage so that it fits the already formed skills.

In other words the process works inwards from a general base, rather than outwards from a specific one. I point out that this is quite different from an organically virile process being influenced from the outside.

Often aspiring creative artists suffer from a lack of creative 'identity'. The most important thing they need is time to find a language which is 'of them', and support from their teacher while they are doing this. The fact that creative artists must be initiators is inescapable. They must find within themselves, the wherewithal to begin.

### **True motivation and self-regulation**

The search for their expressive selves nearly always requires a period of trial and error. It can often be a difficult and protracted time. It usually results in a number of procrastinations, false starts, and various lunges at making something. These numerous failures to make the first step - to actually do something, are important in building up enough 'internal pressure' in the person so that something has to happen. Then the person either gives up (perhaps to try again at a later time), or some aspect already tried and discarded becomes the real beginning.....often not recognised as such until the work is well towards completion. All of the technical needs are stumbled upon (or not) and the idea is nearly always far from fully realised. This is what one would expect.

The important thing is that the process has been initiated from within the individual. He or she has established an internal credibility and has experienced the sense of 'short term infallibility' which is required of any creative artist. Once this has been experienced and responded to with action, then the beginning of a real creative technique has been made.

Once the first work is complete, detailed criticism is offered by the teacher -

both technical, and aesthetic. Of course the final decision about any alterations in the work is always left to the person who made it!

There is a great distinction between the period of preparation - before the first work is made - and afterwards. It is important to criticise an extant work, no matter how under-realised it may be. However, the 'pre-production' period needs complete support and therefore should be free from any kind of external interference. In fact the imposing of external evaluation at this stage, invalidates the very attitude the teacher wishes to foster, namely, the belief by the student in the actuality of the process.

Once there is an object extant this functions as an impetus towards the next work. As each subsequent work is made, the drive towards objectivity is begun, with the accompanying emphasis upon a more completely realised idea.

Because of the initial grounding in trial and error effort and the resultant development of inner confidence, the momentum of work is maintained despite the growing 'perspective' on things.

So, beginners are encouraged to be creatively self-reliant - to trust their own ideas, and to realise that technique is actually part and parcel of the impulse itself, as much the result of will and confidence, as any kind of prepared facility. They are taught to embrace the indecision, sense of failure, and inevitable frustration inherent in the process as simply the way things are when you attempt proper creative effort. Consequently they may eventually become fully contained artists with the goal of technical excellence always underpinned by the conviction and force of their own creative ideas.

They are taught to understand that a sense of doubt and unsureness in what they are trying to say, and sense of travail in the attempt to say it, is in fact what being a creative artist is all about.

However, the environment of teacher and student must be of a certain kind, if this process is to happen. The conditions providing for best results are those that I call actual.

By actual, I mean a context that presents real goals to the student.....that enable him/her to believe that the effort required will produce needed and desired rewards .....that are relevant to, and, in the final count, regulated by him or her - a context that places ultimate accountability on the student.

In contrast, a contrived context is one where the forces engendering motivation are seen by the student to be put in place for reasons not properly intrinsic to his/her creative welfare; reasons that are seen as artificial, reflecting a posture, rather than a real stance.



The students must be allowed to inhabit their motives fully. They must be encouraged to 'let go' completely, so that they might find out, in the manner of a fully experienced situation, what it feels like to confront their particular creative impulses. If a truly actual context can be achieved, then the problem of 'assessment' is removed. In actual contexts, motivation provides the student with a personal benchmark of assessment.

If a person is motivated to commit full effort to a situation, to contribute complete belief to an activity, then it is superfluous for somebody else to inform him/her whether they have succeeded or failed.

The awareness of success or failure is embodied within the attitude held by the person. If their belief in the activity is complete, they will automatically gauge their effort and its result, using criteria that spring from their own sense of creative appropriateness. In this way properly motivated people assess themselves as an integral part of engaging in the activity. It is an unavoidable repercussion of an actual context.

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The noticeable thing in New Zealand society is the body of people with their inner resources atrophied. Seldom have they had to reach inward to grasp the thing that they wanted. Everything, from material requirements to ideas, is available ready-made. From mechanical gadgets in the shops to sensation in the films they can buy almost anything they fancy. They can buy life itself from the film and radio - canned life.

And even if they tried to reach inward for something that maybe they couldn't find manufactured, they would no longer find anything there. They've dried up. From babyhood they have had shiny toys put in their hands, and in the kindergartens and infant rooms bright pictures and gay material. Why conceive anything of their own? There has not been the need. The capacity to do so has been atrophied and now there is nothing there. The vast expanses of the mind that could have been alive with creative activity are now no more than empty vaults that must, for comfort's sake, be filled with non-stop radio, and their conversation consists of a list of platitudes and clichés.

Sylvia Ashton Warner

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## The Will and Self-Confidence

**The will:** In this context, the will is important in transforming genuine motivation into action.

The attitude of many people in game contexts illustrates this.

In Rugby Football for example, the full-back will often show courage in the face of oncoming opposition which can only be explained by his inner confidence that he will not only catch the ball, but will not sustain an injury. His catching of the ball is an act of will. His belief in the actuality of the game allows him to transcend his normal responses, the circumstances of the game being totally real for him.

At that moment, the game means everything to him. He has chosen to put himself into this particular situation. His belief in its importance produces the will to succeed, which engenders complete confidence. This confidence makes him invincible.

He enjoys the complete 'protection' resulting from his attitude of 'short term infallibility', and in most cases succeeds completely. He is protected by his own confidence. By overcoming his fear, he has psychologically defeated the opposition. They have been 'neutralised' to the extent that they too believe him to be invincible.

His skills of ball handling and physical co-ordination, gained from many hours of training, must be present along with his commitment. He must be able to do what he is willing to do. However, without the strong desire.....almost need.....to experience the game, the player is not likely to spend the required hours in training. He will only succeed if the skills are gained within the context of deeply motivated conviction.

In creative activity the situation is much more complex. It could be said that the opposition in this context is in fact the artist. Unlike, say, the mountaineer, whose will is pitted against physical obstacles - against the mountain - against some concrete object, creative artists pitted their will against something much more difficult to deal with.....against the impossibility of transforming everything they know but cannot say, everything they are, into an actuality.....into something which allows them to grasp that impossibility in a more succinct, meaningful way. They are committed to making a model of their emotions, feelings, their entire intuitive identity, using whatever forces they can muster.

So, making a work of art is much less prescribed than climbing a mountain. It *depends* upon not being prescribed. All possibilities are available. Artists do not know where their preferences may lead. They may well finish up in



uncharted areas. They should finish up in uncharted areas. They embark upon a process of discovery; not a process of conquering a specific territory.....but of discovering new lands - or seas - or spaces - or.....

What artists need most in preparation for this journey of discovery is the ability to cope with unpredictable situations. They need to be mentally unable to imagine the possibility of getting lost.....i.e. they must be supremely confident in their own ability to survive in unknown territory. The best preparation for this (the only preparation) is to put artists into this experience as often as possible. The more it is experienced and overcome, the more confident they will become.

All the skills in the world will be of no use to them if they cannot function under the stress of the unknown; and even if they can, then those skills will still be of no use, because each unknown is unique in its demands for a solution. That is the definition of the unknown.

The only preparation is the knowledge that this is not the first time the artist has been in a spot, and as they managed to solve the others.....so they will solve this. So they *will* solve this.

This is why the methods they use must spring from the unique demands of the situation. They have to be ultimately flexible in this regard. Attempting to impose even one favourite solution on the situation will leave them stranded. They have to be the owners of a nomadic ingenuity....able to adapt and thrive under extreme contrasts in context. Of course the most important mental attribute is the ability to never give up.

All these attributes make the artist a very different being from the purely physical discoverer. Although the physical side of making a work is very real, it is an act....it requires action on the part of the artist....the action part is probably the least important...it will occur automatically if the required will, trust and self-confidence are present.

If this will is not strong enough, the artist fails. It is only the will that provides the energy required to forge the technique that causes work to come into existence.

But the actuality of the creative situation can often elude beginners. They must be helped to believe that the challenge they set themselves is real. This requires them to be taken seriously. Their ideas must be accepted as the basis for their effort. It is for them to find out if they will produce work or not - on their terms and for their reasons.

How then, does this procedure mesh with the nature of the Institution?

## Self-Actualisation and the Institution

The conditions under which creative activity is taught in educational institutions are far from ideal.

To be precise, the demands of the institution for justification and evaluation of all of its courses produces an immense obstacle to the generation of real creative confidence in the students.

The conflict is obvious. The nature of creative activity demands that prime responsibility for themselves as creative artists be taken by the students. The nature of the institution demands that students' work be assessed by a qualified person to ensure that adequate standards of achievement are maintained. Remember that most of our students of creative activity are relative beginners. They should not be expected to produce work by the end of some arbitrarily chosen period, but this can mean that there may be no 'work' extant, to be evaluated.

In creative activity you cannot pretend that this is the real thing, and then remove the disguise to reveal the entire thing as patently unreal.

There is no way people are going to respond with their complete belief and full commitment to a challenge that they feel is important to them for their own deeply felt reasons, when they suspect that their belief, commitment, and all their deeply felt reasons will count for nothing within an institution concerned primarily with putting them through a system of quality and quantity monitoring.

The usual reply from the institution to such a situation is: 'If we don't monitor them how do we justify their presence in the institution? If they want to indulge in these important challenges, let them do it in their own time, and at their own expense.'

However, the presence of creative options in the Music and Fine Arts Schools within most tertiary institutions indicates that they are not prepared to insist that beginner artists 'get on with it on their own' away from the institutions. As we offer courses of instruction in the creative arts within our institutions - composition, painting, sculpture etc., then we must in fact teach the creative arts.....not some substitute made necessary by a mentality which insists upon its pound of flesh for every dollar spent. If we respond to this demand for justification by making certain that what we teach provides us with the evidence we require, we run the risk of putting the creative cart before the horse.

Not only will the beast become confused due to our continually insisting that it drink, but it will also be completely disoriented through being forced to push,



instead of being encouraged to pull.

Now let's look in more detail at the problems faced when we try to make creative options in the University system, more wholistic.

As stated already, the relationship of motivation with idea and technique is interdependent. They all develop relative to one another. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to delineate amongst them. It is also undesirable, and in ideal circumstances, unnecessary.

Ideally, we want to provide a situation where genuine motivation leads to a work process that is intrinsically regulated, that is, the artist develops attitudes and skills which in combination with his/her drive to produce work, are organically self-perpetuating.

If one compares the ideal context with the existing one, some interesting points emerge.

In an ideal situation, teacher and student come together through mutual agreement that this will be a profitable contact for both. This requires a period of 'trial' on the part of the student,.....and teacher, until some kind of mutual 'rapport' is achieved. To this extent, the essential element of the relationship is at a personal, intuitive level. It relates to a basic 'trust' being established between both, in the myriad of ways that any relationship is established.

Once the commitment is made, an attitude of fellow artist and friend is established between the two, a supportive context that should continue to grow and evolve in a unique manner, dependent upon the nature of the two participants.

The difference between this relationship, and a normal friendship lies in the fact that the 'objective' of the relationship is focused upon the production of 'work'. The entire context is framed and informed by this fact.

Hence, both people need to be involved actively in the production of work.

Generally what occurs in the end is that either or both, slowly (or quite suddenly) leave the orbit of this mutual influence, and continue to evolve independently. This can produce strong reaction from both teacher and student. But this is normal and is to be expected by an experienced teacher who must learn to 'let go' when the time comes.

During this 'mutual, supportive period', many 'judgements' and criticisms will be made... in both directions. But in all cases these judgements are within the supportive framework of the 'relationship'. They are themselves 'intrinsic' to the teacher/student trust, and never used in a context outside of the

relationship.

The time duration of such a mutual contact cannot be predicted, and the uniquely individual complexion of each student/teacher dynamic has to be followed through very much in the same way that a work must be pursued to its final form.

In the present situation however, things are far from ideal. There are a number of steps we are forced to take which, in my opinion, limit the effectiveness of our teaching.

(1) There can be no real choosing process between teacher and student.....as entry to the offered courses is gained via prerequisites which must be selected from options already present in the undergraduate programme.

(2) The teacher/student relationship may never even reach the initial trust level. For all kinds of reasons, one may not suit the other.

(3) Even if a relationship can be established, the time factor is externally and arbitrarily controlled. A 'course' has a particular duration, at the end of which some kind of 'judgement' has to be made.

This produces enormous difficulties if a satisfactory liaison between teacher and student is desired. As stated earlier, each situation is unique, so the rate of development of each relationship is unique. Forcing on this some kind of artificial hiatus removes the essential element of self-regulated support.

Demanding the production of work by a particular date, and judging that work on some kind of comparative scale, requires dissection of the creative personality of the student; it implies a punitive attitude, because the resulting opinion of the teacher has an impact on the life situation of the student outside of the confines of his creative effort; that is, the teacher exerts power over the student. Consequently, the student is affected by the opinion of the teacher in a way that severs the trust, which has been established on the basis of support.

When a teacher puts forward a judgement of a student's worth in this manner, he/she is in effect removing the essential element needed for any real learning to happen, namely, confidentiality. The dynamic between student and teacher needs to be intrinsic to their relationship and influenced only by them, and the works produced.

It is difficult to resist the requirements of such inexorable forces as money, and pragmatic plausibility. Already, the only answer to the sceptic lies in dogged insistence upon the application of wholistic mechanisms in the



teaching of creative activity. In all of our educational institutions the smothering of these mechanisms in the name of ease of evaluation, and monetary justification, is complete.

As Picasso puts it: 'We have been deceived, but so well deceived that we can scarcely get back even a shadow of the truth...'

Of course, the truth is not a quantity which institutions need be concerned about. It is conveniently indefinable. It is also not of much use!

And yet, as so many of our socially concerned experts mutter as they soothe the fevered brow of society, 'the problem is, people are alienated from themselves and each other'. 'They are mentally and emotionally frustrated...fundamentally unrealised.'

As I said at the beginning, I believe the value of fostering the creative process in people lies not just in the production of work, but also in the growing and changing that this process brings about in people.

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A picture is not thought out and settled beforehand. While it is being done it changes as one's thoughts change. And when it is finished, it still goes on changing, according to the stage of mind of whoever is looking at it. A picture lives a life like a living creature, undergoing the changes imposed on us by our life from day to day. This is natural enough, as the picture lives only through the man who is looking at it.

At the actual time that I am painting a picture I may think of white and put down white. But I can't go on working all the time thinking of white and painting it. Colors, like features, follow the changes of the emotions. You've seen the sketch I did for a picture with all the colors indicated on it. What is left of them? Certainly the white I thought of and the green I thought of are there in the picture, but not in the places I intended, nor in the same quantities. Of course, you can paint pictures by making up different parts of them so that they go quite nicely together, but they'll lack any kind of drama.

When you begin a picture, you often make some pretty discoveries. You must be on guard against these. Destroy the thing, do it over several times.

In each destroying of a beautiful discovery, the artist does not really suppress it, but rather transforms it, condenses it, makes it more substantial. What comes out in the end is the result of discarded finds. Otherwise, you become your own connoisseur. I sell myself nothing.

Academic training in beauty is a sham. We have been deceived, but so well deceived that we can scarcely get back even a shadow of the truth. The beauties of the Parthenon, Venuses, Nymphs, Narcissuses, are so many lies. Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon. When we love a woman we don't start measuring her limbs. We love with our desires - although everything has been done to try and apply a canon even to love.

Picasso

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#### - To Find a Solution

It could well be that until we can produce not just thinking, but also nobody-but-themselves feeling people from our educative systems, things will not improve.

If 'real learning' is to be achieved in our creative options, then we must find a way to approach the ideal. Otherwise we are enacting teaching situations that are in fact anathetical to the desired objectives.

An attempt to move closer towards the ideal creative teaching and learning situation can be seen in the way Electroacoustic Music Composition is taught at the University of Canterbury.

1) No official first or second year courses are offered. They are replaced by a positive encouragement to all students to investigate the medium of electronic sound in their own time, and with the help and support of myself, and assistant teachers.

2) A third year course is offered. It is entitled 'Electronic Music Project' and is worth six undergraduate credit points. Entry to this course is restricted to those who have already spent at least one full year working in the EMS. They need to have shown that they possess the motivation and talent to enter into a fully-committed creative relationship with the medium.



This restriction is printed in the University Calendar. It is a 'real' prerequisite, rather than an academic one.

Up to twenty first year initiates are taken on at the beginning of the year. They are introduced to the studio in pairs - one hour per week. The teaching is generally shared with two assistants, both of whom are graduate composers in the medium, and who know the studio well.

The attrition rate is high. By mid-year, usually only 50% are still working. By that time, the introductory period is over, and each person is allocated a two-hour time slot of their own. At this point, (if they have not already) they must begin to face their own creative dilemmas. This experience usually produces another drastic reduction in numbers, so that by the end of the year, only about twenty percent of the original number remain. (i.e about 4 people).

This means that maximum studio time is available to those who continue into a second year. They also have access to the facility after hours.

What emerges from this is a studio used as a research facility, rather than an educative one; that is, the emphasis is upon genuine creative activity, rather than a more surface familiarisation with the medium of electronic music. This can be achieved very easily within the normal lecture/demonstration format and does not fill the studio with students who have no real motivation or talent for creative work.

We are trying to develop depth, rather than breadth; quality, rather than quantity.

This necessarily means that the number of students eventually graduating with a strong emphasis on electronic music composition is small. However, those that do are more likely to carry on composing in the medium. They are already creatively committed individuals.

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### **A Poet's Advice to Students**

A poet is somebody who feels, and who expresses his feeling through words.

This may sound easy. It isn't.

A lot of people think or believe or know they feel - but that's thinking or believing or knowing; not feeling. And poetry is feeling - not knowing or believing or thinking.

Almost anybody can learn to believe or know, but not a single human being can be taught to feel. Why? Because whenever you think or you believe or you know, you're a lot of other people: but the moment you feel, you're nobody-but-yourself.

To be nobody-but-yourself - in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else - means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.

As for expressing nobody-but-yourself in words, that means working just a little harder than anybody who isn't a poet can possibly imagine. Why? Because nothing is quite as easy as using words like somebody else. We all of us do exactly this nearly all of the time - and whenever we do it, we're not poets.

If, at the end of your first ten or fifteen years of fighting and working and feeling, you find you've written one line of one poem you'll be very lucky indeed.

And so my advice to all you people who wish to become poets is: do something easy, like learning how to blow up the world - unless you're not only willing, but glad, to feel and work and fight till you die.

Does this sound dismal? It isn't.  
It's the most wonderful life on earth.  
Or so I feel.

e.e. cummings

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### **Case Study**

The following are extracts from interactions with a past student who took the third-year course. This particular student is selected because of the fairly complete documentation on her, and because she illustrates clearly the points on motivation, the will, and technique, made earlier.

This student has not continued to make electroacoustic music, although I think she may eventually become involved again in the medium. However,



she illustrates the kind of courage and tenacity that marks highly motivated people, and if nothing else, she now fully understands the reality of creative work.

At certain points in the year, I handed out memos which described my role as a teacher, and where I fitted into the assessment aspect.

### **Memo 1**

- general thoughts on this kind of assessment

This is based upon my own subjective opinion of where you are at the moment.

You must know that I could well be partially or completely wrong in this opinion. You should take the comments in the spirit in which they are offered: viz an honest attempt to be of assistance to you.

In coming to these conclusions I have used three criteria as a basis:

- 1) Motivation
- 2) Ideas
- 3) Technique

Obviously, all three are interdependent, and, as I am sure you realise, the prime requirement is a strong sense of motivation, desire, need, whatever, to keep you long enough at the task so that the others (ideas and technique) can emerge.

### **Memo 2**

I think it would be a good idea to begin some kind of regularisation of response to your individual reactions to work.

I propose that each of you produce some kind of report which will at least make possible the development of a dialectic between us regarding the task in hand, its difficulties etc. This should enable a more specific self assessment to take place.

I suggest a weekly report for the rest of the term. In it you should describe details of your work process, however protracted and difficult or non-existent it may be.

Diary form, or notes to which you want to talk or whatever, in short, any form of communication is in order. This requirement is of course parallel to actual composition.

JEC

326 ASSESSMENT  
XYZ

25 June

I feel you have an extremely strong motivation. Up to now it may not have been given full reign because, for various reasons you felt ashamed of that unidentifiable urge to say 'something, but I don't know what'.

I feel you are still confused, and still coming to grips with the reality of not knowing. However, if you can sustain the present ambiguous state for as long as necessary, you will, I believe, produce work which is really of yourself.

Because of your present struggle, your ideas and technique are not crystallised. They will emerge as your 'head of steam' becomes greater and greater..... (in fact I think this is already happening).

I think you are the type of person who cannot move in the areas of ideas and skills, unless fully motivated.

26 July

Dear John,

I've been putting off writing this but tonight I feel as if I can. I spent tonight in the studio and really enjoyed myself. The last couple of times I was there I didn't seem to do anything and didn't really want to be there. Ever since I began spending time there in the weekends and at night, when I have an unlimited time and can relax with what I'm doing, I begin to really enjoy my time there. In all honesty these times are the only times I can completely focus on anything. When this didn't happen I became really annoyed with myself.

I think your judgement of me not being able to progress without strong motivation is probably true. Or perhaps my motives have to make sense to me. If I had to work hard at something which didn't particularly interest me, just to get good marks, for example - I wouldn't.

As far as the equipment in the studio goes, it doesn't really bother me, perhaps because I'm not trying to do anything very difficult. But I feel as if I could work things out if I want to. I get a real kick out of being surrounded by the sounds I make. I find the concept of sounds much more exciting than notes.



At the moment I seek to get more and more bits but most of it is stemming from one idea, although the idea alters as I come upon new sounds. I'm pretty sure I'll get something together soon. I tried doing something with my own writing but I hated it. My writing is okay for me because I can see it in context but on tape its frozen and out of context. My words belittle my feelings - the intensity goes. It's really interesting all the same to have a hunk of machinery spout your insides at you. I think it perhaps makes you more aware of what you do feel.

When I took the portable tape recorder out the bulk of what I got on tape didn't really inspire me. There are just a few isolated sounds which I may use. I'll have to take it out again.

I think I have too many ideas of what I'd like to do and keep jumping from one to the next. I still haven't come to grips with actually structuring a piece or putting things together. Perhaps if I could stick to one thing I would.

XYZ

14 September

At the moment I have got my material worked out and I'm hoping it will come together into some sort of coherent structure. I'm using some sounds from the gong, my own voice, clarinet and hopefully vibraphone. I really like the vibraphone sounds but I think I'll have to do another recording before I can use it. There's one other piece of material and that's a 'laugh'. I recorded a friend at the beginning of the year and it still makes me laugh. But I played it to the security man last night and he wasn't too impressed. He wanted to hear the four speakers going at once and was intent on having me play him some Beethoven.

The text, or should I say the few words I'm using are very simple and could be relevant to anyone but have a special relevance to me. I've experimented a lot with the sounds but have decided I prefer the natural sounds with some use of the ring modulator and filter. The material as it is makes sense to me but it is not a piece of music as it is and doesn't have any structure. Certain things seem obvious in putting it together but I don't know how coherent it will be for anyone else. Haven't decided how much of a consideration that should be. I think the words will definitely help to structure it.

XYZ

P.S. Its a competely different feeling when you can see that things

are going to fit together in your own mind. It gives you a sense of direction. Its also quite different from just appreciating the sounds for their own sake.

Memo for XYZ 15 September

Thanks for your note. It was useful in letting me know more of your work in hand.

- you say.....'certain things seem obvious in putting together the sounds, but I don't know how coherent it will be for anyone else. Haven't decided how much a consideration that should be'.

- I think it is no consideration at all. It is true that one hopefully is as much 'outside' as 'inside' the idea, and can therefore see it as it actually is, while still retaining the relationship with the idea that necessitates action. However, at the beginning of your struggle to find a technique, the important thing is to focus entirely upon the idea, and listen to your intuition. Listening to your intuition can often mean relaxing. It is often as much a relaxing into the flow of trial and error, as a definite act. Or should I say, the act lies in opening to the decisions which you are making at the precognitive level.

Don't think that the opinions of others will lead you to a better piece.....you are the only one that knows how it should go.

All you can do is to put the sounds together in such a way as is meaningful for you. To do this you must beome totally absorbed with the sounds.... totally preoccupied, carried away with them.....so that they eventually convince you of their rightness.

You are correct when you differentiate between a succession of sounds and a 'structure'. Remember that really, any work can be seen as just a succession of sounds - the quality which makes it a 'piece of music' is extraordinarily elusive, and must be based upon your personal preferences.

JEC.

21 September

I spent hours in the studio in the weekend and by the time last night was over I was annoyed and depressed with the whole thing. I think I was in there far too long. I was sure I knew what I was going to do with my material and I really thought the piece would be well under



way when I had all that time. It seems to take me such a long time to get anywhere. I've had these sounds for quite some time now and have listened and listened to them. But in the weekend I kept trying new things. One of the big time consumers has been slowing things down. I've decided that I like a lot of my material at a much slower speed. You can hear a lot when its slow that wasn't there before. Also it suits the atmosphere I want to create and the words. The low frequencies appeal to me also but I'm a bit afraid of everything merging and lacking clarity.

Last night I was finally ready to start putting it together. The recording wouldn't go right because I wasn't really thinking straight. So I gave up - really annoyed and disappointed with myself. It just seemed the right time to put it together when I was so saturated with the sounds.

XYZ

28 September

Dear John,

I had yet another frustrating night in the studio on Friday. As soon as I realised two of the speakers weren't going I was so annoyed. I tried to ring you but you weren't home. I think I'll have to learn something about the mechanics of the equipment because as soon as something doesn't go I feel completely hopeless. I think I may be a liability because when that happens I just want to smash all the equipment up. I was really psyched up to get my piece done and so disillusioned when I couldn't. I really do need 4 tracks.

One thing that amazes me is the way in which I'm always thinking my material is all worked out and ready to be put onto the 4 track, and then I find out it isn't at all. But last Wed. I know I made a lot of progress. One bit after another just seemed to fall into place really quickly. I just had the 3 two track machines going and was experimenting - mixing different bits together and got quite a shock. As soon as that happens you immediately discard all the other material even though its taken hours of work.

For some reason I can't just bang everything together. Not long ago I was sure that the material made sense to me as it was and that there was no great need to put it together. But now I can see that it should be made into a whole. After Wed. all I wanted to do was get it together because it was so clear and seemed so easy - but now I don't feel that same urgency. Perhaps I will if I can get things going right again.

I really do hope there are no more stages to go through. The whole time when I was just experimenting with sound sources I had an idea what I wanted to do but the idea would gradually be transformed by the sounds. Having an idea helps with choosing the sounds and the transformations of those sounds. At some stages the idea was all important and at other times I wanted the sounds for their own sakes. Then you think you can see how to integrate the two but when you come to do it you find that you don't have any idea. Now the only problems I can see are a section in the middle of the structure where I haven't quite decided what to do - I suppose it will take me a couple of weeks to decide - I certainly hope not. And then there's getting it onto the TEAC. It would be much simpler to do a 2 track piece but near the end I have 5 and 6 layers of sound.

I think that one of the most exciting aspects of working in the studio and one reason why you keep going back is the exploration of the unknown. Each time I go in I can never predict how I will feel coming out again because I never really know what is going to happen. The times when I predict I'm always wrong although I can never see that I will be wrong. You are always exploring new territory, even just listening. Whatever my piece may sound like, or mean, or not mean to anyone else I can only feel good about it because through doing it I have had a whole wealth of experiences and insights. Another aspect of this work which really appeals to me is the fact that it is a completely new medium to me and I have no predetermined ideas about it and haven't been forced to have any. It is a completely different thing to experience through your own exploration with absolutely no demands or suggestion from anyone else. I think this has been an invaluable opportunity for me. When I first started in the studio I think there was a certain amount of fear involved, although I didn't know what I was afraid of because I didn't know what I would experience or was supposed to experience. Now I can see that I am so pleased that for once I have found out for myself. Enough of this philosophising.

XYZ

1 October

Dear John,

FINI

Hope you like it or hate it or something.

XYZ

N.B. This note was followed by a criticism session - not recorded.



8 October

Dear John,

I'm going to fix up my piece. When I said I was finished I was finished in the sense that I had followed my ideas to their conclusion and that was all I was concerned about at the time. Even though I'd been thinking I would be finished for days I was quite shocked when I actually did.

One thing I've realised from last week is that I can't ever imagine myself finishing a piece unless I was really strongly motivated. Now that I have a little more perspective on things I think there must be something strongly directing how a piece should go together. You could put the material together, or put it together in the right way. Most things I do I literally throw together but with this that didn't seem to be an option. Although this piece is about that Janet Frame book my real motivation was a dream.

Although I was sure I couldn't do a piece about this dream I found I was, and in some ways it was easy because it is all still so clear in my mind. I just hope I don't have to be this strongly motivated to do every piece. I really feel that the ordinary me was pushed aside for a couple of weeks to enable me to get this done.

I really feel as if I've learned so much this year and that I've been lucky to have the opportunity. Perhaps if I hadn't had this opportunity this year, to broaden my mind a little, I may never have realised certain things myself or had the opportunity again.

I feel that I have so much to thank you for. I'm not thanking you for my piece, because I did that, but I never would have done it on my own if I was shown the studio and left to it. The fact that you are prepared to give of yourself and are really interested in your students is a stimulant in itself and a change.

XYZ

8 October

XYZ

I feel that your attitude has become more and more focused as the year has progressed. As I said in an earlier note, I think your motivation to compose has always been strong, but deeply buried in your 'inside'.

It seems that you have been able to harness it fruitfully, and I believe you have not only learned a great deal about the creative process as it relates to you, but have been able to produce a work.....no matter how flawed it might be. You have shown that you can apply yourself with the kind of concentration necessary to break through the technical difficulties, and I am sure you have made a valuable beginning to your search for your own language of expression.

JEC.

#### Case Study. Points to be made.

- 1) Technical learning is integrated fully with the process. Devices are discovered in the context of expressive need.....how much it is necessary to know and apply at any given point in the process.
- 2) Support (i.e. belief in the student by the teacher) translates directly as 'I could not have done this without you (the teacher)'. But: the work has obviously been done without the teacher.... in the sense that no actual compositional help has been given.... only support via belief.
- 3) Looking for approval from the teacher still occurs...but it is a natural response to an awareness that the teacher is interested in the outcome.... because the teacher has demonstrated belief in the ability of the student to succeed.
- 4) No evidence of compositional interference...she has struggled with her own creative dilemmas alone. Hence her success is completely hers. Her will has succeeded.
- 5) Even if no work is made.... the reality of the experience teaches the student what a true creative experience is like....what it feels like. This enables them to understand the process better, and to be supportive of others engaged in it, both as teachers, and as audience/viewers etc.

#### Conclusions:

It must be already clear, that I have concluded that the requirements of the University, make it impossible for me to teach Electroacoustic Music Composition here within the normal course structure of the institution.

Hence, I have taken the first two years, and instigated a 'NON-University' course of work, within the University. i.e. the work is entirely unofficial. Students do not 'enrol' and they do not 'pass' or 'fail'...in the normal sense.

The de-regulating of the environment for work, actually allows an wholistic



context to occur.

As, I am sure you know, wholistic procedures are not renowned for quick results, or for short term justification. They are based upon a 'help yourself' policy...which itself is based upon real motivation within the person.

However, there are still some problems. The overwhelming influence on students runs counter to their experience in the EMS. They must perform. They must produce. They must provide evidence that they are learning. They must submit to monitoring and external assessment. It is difficult to split one's personality in this way. However, in our present society, wholistic and organic learning is still alternative.....just as wholistic healing is.

You have to learn to swim against the stream and balance the one with the other if you undertake an alternative method of doing anything.

In my own case, I have been able to teach this way, because I experience a unique context here. I am solely in charge of the EMS. I need answer to nobody else. I am able to pursue this course because I am not faced with the need to compromise. Also, the number of students, up until this point in time, have been manageable.

But, as a recent visitor from USA said to me the other day: When you have 200 or more eager beginners, the principle of 'access for all' becomes a physical impossibility.....resulting in the removal of a naturally selective method of choosing, and a completely wholistic base for work. However, if numbers are a problem then I seriously suggest a first come, first served basis is fairer than any other kind of selection.

The solution to the question of where such teaching should occur is also a complicated one. One would like to say: In the community...where the artist/teacher is accessible to all who want access.

However, the University resembles the society at large in that attitude towards creative activity which insists on putting it out of the area of the real and necessary, and into the area of the fanciful and unnecessary. I still think, though, that a lot more efficient use could be made of our teachers of creative work, if they were allowed to live and work in the community as artists, doing and presenting work in their community. They would then be a real example to others in the community who do want to act upon their creative impulse.

However, what is obviously needed, is a very fundamental change in attitude throughout society towards creative expression at all levels. I cannot see, at the moment, any other way of making progress there, except by subverting the present context in the way I have described.

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Someone who is fulfilling his own ambitions does not need to listen to other people - he must be willing to accept the risk that is everpresent when one converts dreams to reality, and he must be prepared to give each one of his dreams the chance to succeed. If he follows anyone else's standards, he won't discover new horizons. What matters is to evolve one's own standards, not to allow oneself to be coerced by any outside attitudes, and above all, to find one's own goal within oneself.

Reinhold Messner

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