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# How To Be Creative in a Mad World



How To Be Creative by Jessica Davidson

A Free Your Pen Guide © Jessica Davidson

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# How To Be Creative

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# How To Be Creative in a Mad World

*"I love my creative life more than I love cooperating with my own oppression."*

- Clarissa Pinkola Estes



The world has lost its mind. When I say 'the world', I mean the human world – what we are pleased to call 'civilisation'. The natural world is doing its best to keep us alive, despite our efforts to undermine its ability to do so. We're testing our Mother's patience and a climatic arse-kicking of apocalyptic proportions is heading our way. Probably.

The only way to respond to such rampant insanity and myopic destruction is to create. I'm not suggesting that everyone bury themselves in artistic creation: paint a pretty picture so you don't notice the destruction on your doorstep; write a novel so the stories you tell replace the reality outside your window. No, creativity isn't about denial or running away.

## **Born Creative**

Creativity is usually described as the making of something new, original or useful. It's seen as an expression of individuality and imagination, a way to connect disparate ideas which surprise, shock or reveal something previously unknown. Creativity is a skill which can be taught. More importantly, it's something that can be used to make money and achieve wider influence or recognition. Develop your creativity and you'll be more productive, sell more stuff, get more friends, and earn more money.

Is that really what creativity is about?

Creativity has been hijacked by our corporate culture and put to work building shiny surfaces and glittering baubles. We're drowning in new, improved 'stuff' and dying of thirst for lack of real water.

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

- e.e. cummings

Everyone is born creative. Children create constantly, but their natural creativity is neutered in the name of conformity. As we grow up we're expected to find a place in society where we can be productive – pay our taxes, consume, and make more little consumers. Conformity to such a culture is an act of violence against the self and the soul.

Our culture doesn't value creativity unless it's connected to something that makes money. When creativity is attached to money, power and ambition, it becomes distorted. It becomes destructive. Our culture isn't creative, it's a cannibal.

## **Uncreative Art**

Creativity doesn't necessarily have anything to do with creating art – whether music, paintings, films, books, or whatever. You can live creatively without ever picking up a paint brush or writing a novel or strumming on a guitar.

Even if you do create art, it can be done in an uncreative way. You can paint without being creative, or write without being creative, and so on. Hollywood churns out films that are staggeringly uncreative. The world is choking on bad TV, bad novels, and bad films.

By calling a bad film 'uncreative', I don't mean that it's poorly executed. Much of what we would recognise as 'bad art' is expertly done. But the best and truly creative films, books and TV shows have something else – a spark, genuine originality, a feeling of connection with the audience, a sense of deeper meaning and relevance.

**When something is done creatively, it connects.**

## **What is creativity?**

Anything can be done creatively. You're creative if you connect with the world and the people around you. Through mindful presence the inner and outer worlds are joined in mutual meaning which gives rise to joy. By listening to the voice of your soul, the inner spring that nourishes your being, that joy can be shared in a spontaneous passion for life.

So creativity is a state of mind, an attitude and a way of living and being in the world.

*"Everybody can be creative. Whatsoever you do, if you do it joyfully, if you do it lovingly, if your act of doing it is not purely economical, then it is creative. If you have something growing out of it within you, if it gives you growth, it is spiritual, it is creative, it is divine."*

- Osho

## The Creative Life

True creativity is always transformative. You know when you're being creative because you're open to change and curious about life. To be creative means to make the world a better place by your simple presence and joy.

As you think, so you become. As you create, so the world becomes.

The ultimate act of creativity is the creation of a soul. Creativity fuels soul growth and self-knowledge. To create is an act of self-revelation and joy, a celebration of life and being alive. It's an act of love.

To live a creative life means to be a master of your own being, to be self-possessed. A creative person doesn't have to be an artist.

A creative person need only be awake.

To be awake and creative is to be self-aware. A creative person isn't easily bought or sold. They share themselves, their 'juice', their truth, vision and aliveness. They share their love.

Anything that's done creatively becomes sacred – it becomes an act of worship and a source of grace. A cup of tea made mindfully and with joy is consecrated. A smile is a creative act if it comes from the depths of your soul.

## 15 Qualities of a Creative Person

In his book on the creative process, *Fearless Creating*, Eric Maisel identifies fifteen active qualities that you need if you want to be creative:

Existing	Meaning	Affirming
Loving	Doubting	Rebelling
Dreaming	Committing	Looking
Thinking	Encountering	Learning
Choosing	Acting	Stopping

These qualities are verbs – things you must *do* if you want to be creative. This can be a challenge, even in perfect conditions. We live in a culture which is far from perfect, but the only way to change the world is to change ourselves.

Change begins in the darkness of your own soul. It's up to you to do the work to bring your truth into the light and share it so that others might benefit, whether this is through your art, your cooking, your service, or your smile.

The following pages look at each of these qualities and build a picture of what it takes to be creative in a world gone mad. And we start with **Existing**...

# Existing



Do you know you're alive?

It seems like an obvious question. Descartes summed it up in his famous statement, 'I think, therefore I am.' There's no way you can doubt your existence because the very fact of your doubt proves it.

Do you appreciate the fact that you are alive, or do you subsist?

The tragedy of many lives can be measured in passivity. The mind-numbing

routine of work in a soulless office followed by the desperate grasping of distraction and oblivion through television, the pub, computer games, and Facebook.

Stagnation, boredom.

Endless repetition of meaningless activity is not proof of existence. Active engagement with life is.

**If you want to be creative you must choose to live consciously.**

It may be easier to conform, to follow the masses and refuse to think for yourself, but in doing so you put a gun to your head. Either through laziness or fear you refuse the challenge of confronting the reality of being human and being alive, thereby guaranteeing misery and failure.

The creative person will always choose to engage with existence. To bring anything new into existence means giving it attention and committing to giving it life.

Nothing can live fully without consciousness.

# Loving

Love is a condition of relatedness. True love is a recognition of the fundamental unity of all life. To be alive means to be in relationship – to yourself, to other people, to the earth, animals, plants, water, the sky...

Even though unity is the inherent nature of life and love is our natural condition, we must act on it in order to realise it.

## **Love is a verb.**

Love and relationship are actions. If you want to connect to a person or your creativity, you must act on that desire to make the connection real.

A refusal or inability to connect leads to isolation. It's a rejection and denial of love and life, and a manifestation of hatred. Love withheld is hatred in action. Hatred builds walls. Love tears them down.

So if you want to be creative you must connect with ideas and inspiration, with life and other people. You must love your characters, love colours, love the smell of ink, love the ingredients of the feast you're planning, love your garden...

Allow your love to burn through every obstacle that would prevent you from creating or living.



# Dreaming



Imagination is the essence of creativity. When we create we inspire and enchant ourselves, and hopefully others. If you want to be creative you have to create the right environment to allow your imagination freedom to roam.

Dreaming means opening to experience and expanding your sense of self to include possibilities you may never have imagined. When you dream you are embarking on an inner adventure, seeking out the new and surprising.

This exploration isn't without risk – who knows what you will discover? Are you willing to follow where your imagination leads? Only in following a dream can you reveal the depths of your own self-deception and be reborn through disillusionment into wisdom and growth.

## **Truth is meaningless without dreams.**

Creativity is impossible without structure, so your dreams must be grounded and given form if they are to live. Unfortunately (or fortunately) this changes them. A story written down is never quite as numinous or perfect as the story glowing in your overwrought brain.

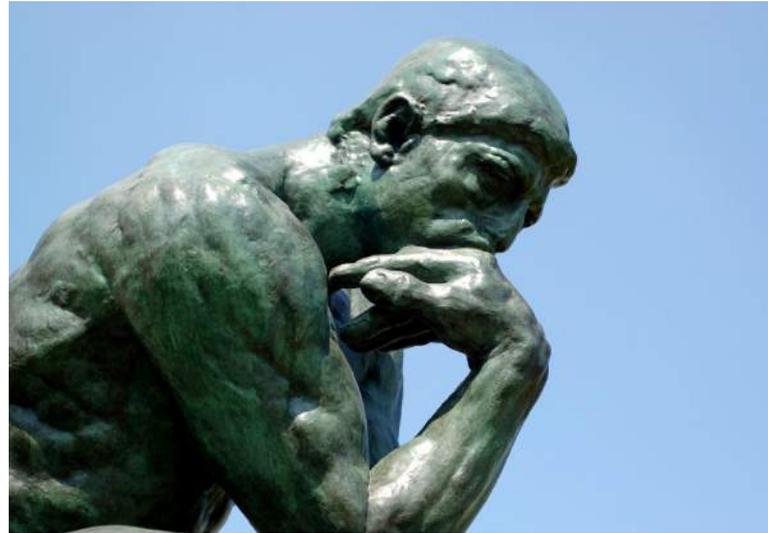
But the fact remains: if you refuse to allow your dreams to be challenged through the process of incarnation into form, you will never create. Your dreams die with you leaving nothing but a slight smell.

So let your mind off the leash to tumble through unimaginable vistas, and when it returns bearing gifts, don't forget to write it down.

# Thinking

Creativity involves much thought. Most of the work of writing involves thinking: questioning, investigating, exploring and researching, turning the idea round and round, interrogating it from every angle.

There are many different ways to think, but if you want to be creative you must allow intuition and feeling to influence and guide your thoughts. Pure rational analysis is fine for certain activities – maths, mainly – but won't get you far in real life.



Rationality can tell you *how* to live: how to pay your bills and keep the wheels turning, but it can't tell you *why*.

Likewise, the remembering and regurgitating of facts isn't thinking. A well-stocked brain is all well and good, but can you *do* anything with all that information? What's Google for anyway?

Real thinking is about connecting and making sense of disparate facts. Creative thinking is about making connections between things in novel ways. The only way this can be done is by thinking for yourself. If you follow the crowd your creativity will be limited to the tried and tested, and what is acceptable to yourself and others, and the market.

To become fully yourself you must define yourself apart from the group; you must be willing to go out on a limb and challenge yourself, push beyond your comfort zone.

You don't know who you are until you come up against a limitation, either in yourself or in the group/culture, and have to find a way through it. This may mean leaving old parts of yourself behind as your thinking takes you into uncharted territory.

Can you think against yourself?

# Choosing



Sartre said we are condemned to be free. But you could say we're condemned to choose.

Having big brains frees us from being driven by instinct, but our consciousness only makes it *possible* for us to be free. We're only free if we act on it and make a choice.

It's impossible to live without making choices and each choice we make closes down another possibility and limits our freedom. Moreover, because our

knowledge and perspective are limited, we're faced with the possibility of making the wrong choice.

But you can't not choose.

Every choice has consequences, defining who you become. Your life, and your creativity, are shaped by the choices you make. You're defined just as much by what you reject, or the path you don't take.

In our consumerist culture, choice is held up as some kind of holy grail simply because it represents freedom. We think because we can choose between a variety of products, we're free. But choosing between endless varieties of beans or condiments is not real choice. It's an illusion.

Real choice is driven by real needs and real conflict.

To marry, or not. To love, or not.

To live, or not.

To create, or not.

# Meaning

What's the meaning of life?

We all have our favourite answers to this question, but it's a mistake to think meaning exists out there in the world somewhere, just waiting for you to discover it. Of course, you *can* take your sense of meaning from outside yourself, in family, career or accomplishment, but this leaves you wide open to disappointment and disillusionment.

Whatever you invest with meaning has power over your life. If you invest meaning in something outside yourself, you render yourself powerless. You'll constantly be thrown back on yourself and never feel like the master of your life.

Meaning puts your life and experience into context. It's built from the narrative you create in your head, the stories you tell yourself about who you are and why you live as you do.

To be creative and live creatively, this process of contextualisation, of making meaning, must be engaged with deliberately. It must be willed. To make a meaningful life you must have self-knowledge.

Socrates said the unexamined life isn't worth living. A bit harsh, I think. I would say the unexamined life is a tragic life.

You're not making meaning when you live passively – drifting from one experience to another with no attempt at understanding. This can only lead to chronic boredom and a kind of living death. You become a cipher for every empty sentiment the culture throws at you. A puppet. An automaton.

If something is meaningful it's worth engaging with. If it's meaningless, it's worthless.

**Being creative is always meaningful.**



# Doubting



If you're creative then you're paying attention to the world around you and exploring your inner world looking for inspiration and passion.

But the more you look, the more you will doubt.

You can't take anything at face value. You must penetrate the surface of life to find the truth. Like a good scientist, doubt is essential for intellectual rigour. You can't test your ideas without it.

An inability or refusal to doubt will lead to gullibility and fanaticism. Your friends will look at you askance and it'll cripple your ability to be creative. But doubt is scary. It undermines your sense of security. How are you supposed to do anything if the ground beneath your feet keeps lurching?

The ability to live with doubt and uncertainty is a sign of mental health: what Keats called 'negative capability'. You may not know exactly what to do, you may not have all the facts, and the facts you do have keep changing. The outcome of whatever you do may be unknowable, but still you must act. You must *do* something.

Doubt isn't the problem. Not knowing isn't the problem. It's not possible to know everything about any given situation. You will always not know something. Trouble is, you don't know what it is.

**You must act despite your doubt.**

You must create despite your doubt. There's no other way.

Image: [mihalorel](#)

# Committing

Committing to being creative means you care. It's an investment in yourself, in your future, in the process of creating, and in others.

You are entangled with your inspiration and passions, like two quarks linked across time and space, pulsing with the dance of life.

Failure to commit is a refusal to live consciously or in any meaningful way. It's an admission of defeat and an act of symbolic suicide.



Commitment means living creatively even when it's hard, even when you would rather put your head back under the duvet and hide, even when the people with whom you would share your creative juices ignore or reject you. It means learning new skills and practising. It means living outside your comfort zone more or less permanently.

Commitment means taking action on behalf of your inspiration and creativity. It means remaining open to inspiration, incubating ideas and giving your work room to grow and take possession of your life.

Image: [anoldent](#)

# Encountering



Encountering means confronting life and yourself.

This isn't an aggressive confrontation with lots of bared teeth and frowning. It's non-demanding – more like an embrace. But not clinging, not a death grip.

It's about giving your creativity space to breathe, holding it in your mind and letting it be.

You do without doing.

In terms of writing: **you allow the writing to write itself.**

But don't be fooled into thinking this is easy. It is essential to be open to possibilities and curious about life. When you encounter, you let life lead you where you need to be. You're not in charge. Who knows where you'll end up?

Encountering means being willing to be changed by the encounter. It's not half-hearted or limp. Being creative means being intense, burning with life. You want be creative because you love life and want more. Your creativity is an embodiment of your passion for life.

If you want to be creative you must say a full-throttle YES to life and your creativity.

# Acting

To be creative you must act. Creativity is meaningless if it isn't acted upon and made real.

If you do nothing, you've got nothing.

## **You become what you do.**

In the face of the immensity of the universe and overwhelmed by your own smallness, it's easy to believe you're insignificant. You work to create a life worth living only to turn up your toes and die just when it starts to get interesting.

One hundred or a thousand years later, who gives a damn?

But life isn't lived in the future or the past. It is lived now, and that's where you find your significance, your meaning. Instead of retreating in fear into nihilism and despair (however well disguised), you *do* something. Something positive and life affirming.

Acting is an answer to despair, because doing something positive is always better than doing nothing.

By acting on your creativity you give voice to your human potential. It's an act of embodying what it means to be alive and to be you, here and now. A refusal to turn away from yourself, your life or your creative work.

Your actions are the only things you own. Your actions are the ground on which you stand.



Image: [Chris Zielecki](#)

# Affirming



Being creative means being you.

Who else are you going to be, if not yourself? Whose life are you going to live, if not your own?

Affirming means saying yes to being here and being alive.

To be creative you must make manifest who you are through your creativity, and you do that by giving voice to your unique vision of life.

What's the point in writing something anybody could write? If you don't tell *your* stories, who will?

Of course, first you must find your stories, and your voice. You must know yourself. How is this done? By exploring, thinking for and against yourself, and by affirming through living. To know yourself you must push beyond your comfort zone and allow yourself to grow.

True individuals are often attacked for having the guts to be themselves. It's ironic that a culture in awe to individualism finds it so hard to honour the real thing. The status quo prefers conformity: a pre-packaged selfhood that's safe and deadening.

**Say no to the cowardice of conformity.**

Say no to the fear of life and of difference.

When you affirm you stand alone and let the crowd rush ahead into its own confusion. And when they've had enough of distraction, and doing what they're told leaves them empty, they turn to those among them who are still alive on the inside, those who had the balls to affirm, and they ask: *what happened to my life?*

Affirm or die.

Image: [Mr E](#)

# Rebelling

True creativity happens right on the edge of rebellion, on the edge of chaos. This is where life functions at its best: at a point of dynamic equilibrium. Always changing, always transforming into something else.

It's impossible to be alive and avoid transformation. Life always seeks to renew and expand, spread out and master new frontiers.

Resistance to this process leads to stagnation which may seem secure and safe. But too much security is deadly.

Equally, too much chaos is destructive.

To be creative means to stand on the line between these two, because you are alive. And because you're alive, you will be tapped into truths others may not want to hear. You see something that fires you up – an injustice, falsehood or hypocrisy – and you have to act. To keep quiet is to condone by silence.

If you want to be creative you must be a pain in the arse to people who should know better.

Of course, rebellion always happens in a context. Your rebellion will not look like mine because our lives and circumstances require different approaches. What is risky and crosses a line for one person, may be seen as nothing special to someone else.

Choose your battles carefully. Some things are not worth fighting for. Your rebellion must serve life.

True artists and art are often seen as dangerous because they have the capacity to wake people up, to remind them they're alive and free. Make sure you're not the one dozing.



# Looking



To be creative you must pay attention to the world around you. Creativity is born out of an interest in life and other people.

Turn your gaze outward.

Search out the telling detail, and be ready for the moment the mask drops and the truth is revealed.

People watching is a favourite inspiration, but sometimes it's depressing. You see individuals locked inside their own bubbles, insulated from life by mobiles

and earphones, fleeing the inner void through social networks built from empty bytes. Our globalised information webs look interconnected, but how many of those connections are genuine?

The socially networked gaze isn't interested in the world. It is solipsistic – narcissism substituted for love. Round and round we go with ever increasing fragmentation. No real growth. No real change. Just distraction and boredom.

True introversion reveals the world reflected inside. The outer and inner mirror each other.

To be creative means not turning away from reality, inner or outer.

Don't be afraid to really look at the world – it can be a scary as well as a magnificent place. You must be able to stand what you see.

When creating, it's not enough to simply hold up a mirror to reality – how will people know what you're trying to say if they're not really looking in the first place?

Real vision comes from this willingness to hold reality in your gaze, no matter what is revealed, and seek out the shape of events before they unfold. In this way your creativity can reveal a way through the madness back to the heart of a life worth living.

# Learning

To be creative means to be open to life and curious about what's going on and why.

If you want to create something meaningful you must educate yourself: demand to know everything there is to know, whether about the world around you or the world inside you.

Don't rely on the establishment or status quo to provide you with an education, as they tend to teach only what they want you to know.



Seek out the hidden and taboo, the forbidden thing which *must* be spoken or understood.

Shun ignorance. It closes down your options and makes you vulnerable to manipulation and control.

## **Knowledge is Power.**

Use every resource at your disposal. The internet is fantastic but unless used wisely can tend toward superficiality, feeding ignorance until it swells into a gargantuan dunce's hat.

Slow down and think about the information you gather on your little educative jaunts. Knowledge is only powerful if you know how it all connects up.

## **True wisdom takes time.**

So use the internet by all means, but remember it's just one resource. Don't forget books, magazines and libraries, and the best source of learning – other people.

As long as you remain curious and open you will always learn regardless of the resources at hand, and you will always be creative.

# Stopping



So we come to the end and it's time to stop.

To be creative means to recognise when you're not being creative, and be able to do something to rectify that situation.

To change and move forward you must stop whatever it is you're doing (or not doing) that doesn't serve either you or your creativity.

Stopping links all the other active qualities of the creative person, making it possible to leave behind unproductive behaviour and negative thoughts, opening the way to freedom through active creativity.

So, in no particular order..

- Stop fantasising and ground your dreams
- Stop thinking unproductively and create
- Stop wallowing in nihilism and live
- Stop agreeing with everyone and doubt
- Stop doubting everything and have faith
- Stop floundering in ignorance and learn
- Stop drifting passively and make meaning
- Stop rejecting and love
- Stop closing your eyes and look
- Stop denying life and affirm
- Stop vacillating and commit
- Stop following the crowd and rebel (but *not* without a cause)
- Stop sitting on the fence and choose
- Stop avoiding your creative work and encounter it
- Stop sitting about and act – create something!

## A Free Your Pen Guide

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