



THE ON — ING . SERIES

On Creating

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*To all my creator friends,
musicians, artists, poets,
designers, sculptors, dancers,
writers, and everyone else in my
life whose simple presence brings
beauty to my surroundings.*

*And to Alex Grey, for somehow
being able to paint the very
image that has been inside my
head my entire life. Giving me
something to look at that
reminded me of who I was, and
what I was capable of. His art
has always looked the same to my
eyes, no matter what state of
mind I was residing in.*

So what happens to a person who becomes aligned in time — are they perfect? Are they different from the person standing right next to them? No. I'm still me. I'm still the same person I was forty-two years ago when I entered this world, still the same residual effect of my environment, sitting comfortably between all the mistakes I've learned from and all the successes I've reached.

One achievement that has narrowly avoided me is a collegiate education. I'm working on that now, late in life — and that's all right. We don't get to choose the timing of things, the why or the when or the how; sometimes the most we can do is let them happen, the way the old Vedanta speaks of *lila*, creation as a kind of divine play rather than a problem to be solved.¹ What excites me is the prospect of studying at Maharishi International University, the school the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi founded in 1971 around what he called Consciousness-Based education² — an institution built less on the currency of reputation than on a wider love of humanity, on the belief that an education should grow the whole person and not just the résumé. That I didn't spend my time elsewhere feels, in hindsight, like a gift. Beautiful synchronicity.³ And I get to come in on the ground floor of noetic science as a dreamer rather than a scientist — *nous*, the old Greek word for the knowing that arrives whole, before reason has a chance to assemble it.⁴

Until then, what do I do? This. This is what I do — I create.

There exists a reality in which technology has to be restrained by the human mind before any order is restored, and that has been a real hurdle for me. The Greeks kept one word, *techne*, for both craft and art — the chisel and the statue were the same kind of knowing — and Heidegger warned that our machines are a way of revealing the world that carries a danger and, folded inside that same danger, a saving

power.⁵ The saving power is simple: the tool only ever amplifies the hand that holds it. So I treated it as a brush, never a voice. I plugged in thirty years of independent research — papers, document files, notepad scratches — and at first the result was a mess. It took me the better part of two weeks to get it under control, to build an environment that understood what my brain was trying to say, word after word, sentence after sentence, until my voice finally came out the way it was always meant to be heard. That was not submission. It was the pairing of brush and mind — Zhuangzi's old cook, whose blade never dulled because he cut with the grain of the ox and not against it, the hand and the tool at last become one.⁶ The thinker hated the pen, the writer hated the cello, and the musician hated the brush.

Part of using a brush people aren't used to is showing them you're still human underneath it all. In *On Forgiving* I wrote that I had removed myself from my own equation — that there was no more "I." Let me put the I back for a moment, because here the I is the whole point. I can philosophize all day long, and at the end of that day I'm still a husband, still a father, still a family member and a friend. Still human. Whatever the brush happens to be, there is always a person holding it.

And this, for whatever it's worth, is how I actually talk. Most people don't listen at this register, so for most of my life I have "dumbed it down," translated myself into something easier to receive. This is how I actually think, too — and because of how most people are willing to listen, I have spent the better part of my years being quiet. Not for any lack of something to say. The room simply wasn't built for the frequency.

There's an artist I know who lives and loves to create; her muse is just the way she sees the world, and her brush is a brush. I know poets who have only lately been given permission to sing, because for years no one wanted to listen — the way Emily Dickinson filled her drawers with poems the world refused to hear until she was gone.⁷ Plato had a name for what the crowd misreads in people like them: he called the poet's madness no sickness at all, but a gift of the Muses, a divine manner of seeing.⁸ So when they call you crazy, hear it correctly. That is not crazy. That is being an artist.

And still, I carry my fears. Sometimes I worry this is exactly why I'll never be a poet — not without years of the practice I never got. Words I've read hundreds, even thousands of times come out of my mouth mispronounced, wrong in the ears of the people around me. A sign that I have more to learn? Of course. If my whole life has been spent inside books, then the work of carrying what's in them out to other people was never going to live in pen and pad alone. But it also shows me one of the quiet shortcomings of my own mind: I absorb the feeling of a thing, its sentiment, its meaning, without needing to keep the details for long. And because I never gave myself to school until now, no institution ever tested me on any of it. I've only ever tested myself — by refusing to stop learning. Does that make me less of an artist? Not for a second. It makes me human. I built these pieces word by word, line by line, then took them apart with a thesaurus and put them back together a dozen times over, and somehow they still land just short of what I'm trying to say.

But here is what I'm actually trying to say. The thoughts in our minds did not always have words to hold them. Thousands of years ago, before the vocabulary ever arrived, we knew only the one resonating language that ran between us — the world itself as sound,

what the old Vedic seers called *Nāda Brahma*, the primordial vibration gathered into a single syllable.⁹ Then, somewhere, we splintered it. At Babel the one tongue was confounded into many, and we have been translating ourselves ever since.¹⁰ Where did we go wrong? If you ask me, I'll have to check my sources before I answer — thirty years is a long time to wait, after absorbing it all, before you can put it back out into the world exactly the way it came in.

And yet the truth underneath all of it is that creativity has always carried the same timeless resonance, no matter the medium, no matter the muse. We make because we were made. Tolkien said we create still by the law in which we ourselves were made¹¹ — each of us a small maker in the image of a larger one. The instrument is incidental. The resonance is not.

Love.

Love of self, love of others, love of life.

The one word that joins all creation in the sky and stays long after the body has gone back to the earth. Dante ended his whole journey on it — the love that moves the sun and the other stars.¹² Paul said it more plainly still: prophecies fail and knowledge fades, but love never does; of the three things that remain, it is the greatest.¹³ And long before either of them, Diotima told Socrates that love is the longing to give birth in beauty — that every made thing, every poem and child and cathedral, is love reaching for something that will outlast us.¹⁴ That is why we create. Not to be remembered, but because love insists on taking a form.

The amount I've learned in this one lifetime can't be put into words. So I'm going to spend the rest of it getting my brain onto pages.

The only thing I ask is this: when you read these words, don't stunt your own growth because the medium doesn't yet make sense to you. The medium never was the point. Just be — rest in the bare awareness that comes before the labels arrive, the same stillness I wrote toward in *On Seeing*.

Create, and inspire others to create.

It's the only thing that spreads the message of joy, happiness, and love — by resonating with what makes us human, and becoming timeless.

Notes

1. *Lilā* — in Vedānta, the understanding of creation as divine play, spontaneous and purposeless in the best sense.
2. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi founded Maharishi International University in 1971 in Fairfield, Iowa, developing Consciousness-Based education toward the full development of the individual and the welfare of humanity.
3. C. G. Jung, *synchronicity* — a meaningful coincidence of inner and outer events not bound by ordinary cause and effect.
4. *Nous* — Greek for the intuitive intellect that grasps a thing whole; cf. William James on the “noetic quality” of mystical states (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902).
5. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954): *techne* once named both craft and art, and quoting Hölderlin, “where the danger is, grows the saving power also.”
6. Zhuangzi, “Cook Ding cuts up an ox” (ch. 3, *The Secret of Caring for Life*): mastery as moving with the natural grain, knife and hand as one.
7. Emily Dickinson published almost nothing in her lifetime; nearly eighteen hundred poems were found and given to the world only after her death in 1886. Among them runs the insight that what the crowd calls madness, the discerning recognize as the deepest sense.
8. Plato, *Phaedrus*: among the forms of divine madness (*mania*) is the inspiration the Muses grant the poet — a gift, not an affliction.
9. In the Vedic tradition, *Nāda Brahma* — “the world is sound” — holds that all creation arises from a primordial vibration, gathered into the syllable *Om*.
10. Genesis 11:1–9: humanity once shared a single language until, at Babel, it was confounded and scattered into many.
11. J. R. R. Tolkien, *Mythopoeia*: “we make still by the law in which we’re made” — the human as sub-creator; cf. the *imago Dei*, Genesis 1:27.
12. Dante, *Paradiso XXXIII*, the closing line: “the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.”
13. Paul, 1 Corinthians 13: love bears all things and never fails; of faith, hope, and love, the greatest is love.
14. Plato, *Symposium*: Diotima teaches Socrates that love (*erōs*) is the desire to give birth in beauty — the root of every creative act.

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