

## On Creativity

By Daria Halprin

My experience with creativity began very early in my life, influenced by three figures, all of whom infused and linked their work with the creative process. The home I grew up in was an experimental meeting ground for artists and psychologists exploring the impact and possibilities of the creative process on the human experience.

With my mother Anna Halprin I danced and performed, with my father the environmental designer Lawrence Halprin I was immersed in the landscape of nature and urban environmental design, with Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt Therapy, psychology and acting became personally and professionally fused.

In the 1960's I was part of an artists group working in a gestalt therapy laboratory with Pearls in San Francisco and at Esalen. His approach was very much like an artistic process. He worked with complex psychological material in the most creative way, having us embody our own emotional, psychological lives as if a creative endeavor and enactment. A living theater of real life experiences, all of us at times seemed more like actors than clients. Memories were relived in the here and now. Dilemmas were re-lived as drama. Parental relationships transformed into compelling scenes in a play. Life events retold as story. Neurosis and anxiety, woundedness, emotional upheaval transformed by creativity. The therapy room became a stage upon which we were to act out, sing out, dance out and narrate our autobiography. That early exposure turned me on to the inherent connection between creative enactment, psychology and the possibility that therapy could be transformed into a practice in embodied creativity itself.

By the late sixties I took an unexpected turn into the world of acting and film. That catalyzed a radical breakdown during which I lost all sense of connection to my own body and creativity. At first I blamed my life as an artist for the breakdown. I renounced creativity as far to dangerous and out of control. In my world then, art makers broke down barriers, unleashing new forms of beauty - broke hearts, minds, bones, relations - unleashing struggle and pain we just didn't know what to do with. Creativity trumped mindfulness, and kindness. What I barely noticed was that I continued to write poetry every day. I kept dancing because that was actually the language I knew how to speak. Working my way slowly and painfully back to health, I slowly and at times with trepidation, stepped back into my life as a dancer and art maker, this time with dance and art making forging my healing path. Creativity, art and healing became intricately linked for me again.

I recovered my voice in poetry, I mended my forgotten body in dance, I painted images of brokenness, rage, grief and shame. Creative encounter was my medicine. My work as a therapist and teacher has grown out of those years and very personal experiences. Watching Fritz work a therapy of here and now enactment, and my own journey back to a creative life in the studio became the ground for discovering processes to make creativity and art as a healing force accessible to others.

For me creativity has always been grounded in art making, but also became interwoven into the very fabric of my life, a way to work through things, to generate change, to communicate, to commune and to build community. I'm interested in sharing that kind of creative process where the experience of art-making is not only to make art but in the making a way to self reflect, to heal, to improvise, take risks, to collaborate, to work with challenges, to feel alive and embodied, to perceive the world in new and sensitized ways, so that we have opportunities to creatively express the fullness of our human experience with all its pain, joy magic and mystery.

When I step into the studio, something immediately shifts. I become more aware, open to possibilities. I welcome risk taking as a way to expand and experiment. I can dance just about anything. I am dreaming awake when I paint. When I write poetry I am making sense and meaning of things. The most troubling is transformed to something useful, interesting, beautiful. I feel the world in myself and myself in the world.

There are times when creativity has seemed completely out of reach, stuck, impossible, gone forever, someone else has got more of it, is better at it. If I stay with it, the process becomes an invitation to meet the blocks, act things out, try things out, grapple with, suspend judgement, play, be surprised, express the inexpressible and breakthrough into new territory. In staying with it until there is a breakthrough creativity has served me as a metaphor for how to stay with other things in life. Creativity is a teacher, a training in life long learning. There are times when you have to just wait for it and times when you have to fight for it. - and, as Jack Kerouac said, there are times you just gotta pick up your club and go hunt it down!

Daria Halprin  
Founding Director Tamalpa Institute  
[www.tamalpa.org](http://www.tamalpa.org)