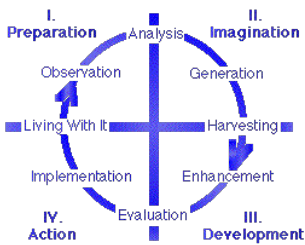


Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)
Irish novelist, playwright, poet



the Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu
and Shiva



Popular discussions of creativity often omit the difficult parts of the creative cycle as if we must be afraid of them.

Art responds to the mess in varied and creative ways: horrific, heroic, poignant, whimsical, satirical, elegant. At first I grabbed the obvious examples of chaos response that were direct and hot, but I was seeking answers to my own inertia and I wanted more than overt depictions of catastrophe. In the other column are some stimulations to pursue in the light of this idea of the mess...

“The confusion is not my invention. We cannot listen to a conversation for five minutes without being acutely aware of the confusion. It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. It is not a mess you can make sense of... What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be a new form; and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. *To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.*” Samuel Beckett

The creative process has always been an arc, in which the actual *making* is only part. The 3 part cosmology of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva tells us creation is inextricably joined to destruction and conservation. In the west we cite entropy, the gradient for all things to move toward lower states of order and we set against that the life force. It is natural for us as living beings and maybe particularly as artists to extoll the part of the process that is making, but it is not wise to pretend the other parts of the cycle don't exist. In our culture it seems especially uncomfortable to inhabit the disintegration part of the cycle or the periods of transition between cycles when creation seems absent.

I think chaos and the creative cycle of art are closely linked. Beckett speaks to that and invites us to look unflinchingly into the mess, not to build a wall around it, or figure it out, nor surrender to it and become like the mess itself. He tells us we need to work in that space.

I have been stuck lately, trying to escape the other parts of the cycle which then become like a great hole of absence between one creation and the next. But influences like Beckett ask me to look into that in-between that is not vacant at all, but a different presence. Instead of digging in my heels I have tried to let go, and I get some experience of fey freedom and energy that has been bound up by all the desperate holding on.

I think that energy is a taste of what shamanic practice is about, not just outrageous appearance or drugs. Behind the performance there is the authentic seeking of patterns of meaning that are masked by the chaos and unseen in our routine or cynicism or despair. The struggle with the chaos we experience in the microcosm of our studio laboratory may be what art making is about after all, and I think it is our path to find a living relationship with the mess.



Käthe Kollwitz



Pablo Picasso



Hannah Höch



Sue Coe



Kara Walker



Sankai Juku, Butoh