ALLOWING CREATIVITY
K.P. HONG

How are iron and wood, or clay and human flesh, elevated to mediate the human spirit or reveal what so ordinarily remains concealed? How do shapes suddenly acquire meaning, or wood and unsheathed strings gather the intricate voices of the heart and give them flight with timbre, volume, and melody? How do stones cast such profound philosophical sorrow in a commingling of matter and spirit, or pulse at the touch of our glance, as somehow greater than the dialectics of any sculpting process? How does a dancer’s leap summon us to imagination and the flowering of spring? Everything is alive.

If we glimpse into the heart of creativity, we may recognize the impoverished notions of body, self, and world that our culture holds as true. Case in point, our body is not a mere thing among other things of the world, an object that we own and inhabit, a separate presence that at times imprisons and interferes with our deepest needs for freedom. Rather, we are not other than the body, neither within the body nor somewhere apart from it. We do not have a body, a bloodless abstraction or measurable space that we inhabit. Rather, we are our bodies, a form of oriented space and time and the very condition for experiencing life. Far from our body being a “soft machine” of a mechanistic Cartesian/Newtonian worldview, it is the lived-body—the space we are, the space we live, the lived-space from which we orient toward the world. We quickly assume that this lived-body must, therefore, be the subjective body—the imaginary, the mentally experienced and not objectively real body. But what is not scientifically objectifiable is not necessarily nor merely subjective. The lived-body is neither objective nor subjective. It remains prior to and beyond our notions of subjective and objective.

Consider a time in your life when you may have learned to play a musical instrument and stayed with it long enough to become accomplished. In playing the guitar, every note and chord may initially seem to buzz, or the piano technique seems to go nowhere but to artistic space—seemingly unrelated materials—overstep their material and philosophical boundaries in the act of creative performance. And in that unencumbered freedom, it is—as many musicians and artists claim—the music that is being played through you and not vice versa. Surely, it could not happen without you, and yet there seems to be no separate you doing this. There is just the creative performance. But don’t you have to be somewhere?

If anywhere, you are perhaps present in the very act of allowing. So much of Western thought is thoroughly committed to the self as grounded in aching wrists and arms. Yet over time, with much continued study, your technique gets better and sound becomes clearer, until the very chords and scales become the natural language of your fingers. The hands carry and enact an embedded embodied epistemology that exceed our Western discursive formations. The guitar and your hands feel neither two nor one, as they commingle in the music that flows effortlessly. Inspiration, expression, and artistry are not experienced as three separate events but realized as a single spontaneous act of creativity. Hands, wood, metal, the will. Hence, the self is typically experienced either willfully or passively, and allowing feels too subtle to presence the self. Allowing surely is an act of choice, but it remains more attentive to the quality of being than to the act of doing; more an event of appropriate relationship and regard than actively manipulating or interfering with what is happening. We either willfully act to make music happen—shaping every note and phrase to our criteria—or when every attempt to willfully control the situation fails, we throw up our hands and resign ourselves to passivity. Yet in resignation, we actually withdraw into a subtle but willful passivity, willfully holding back and willfully ignoring or...
denying a situation. Both passivity and activity are grounded in the willful self. But in allowing, we neither aggressively assert ourselves nor actively withdraw. Allowing occasions a more elusive and understated sense of self, one that is distributed and commingled in the creativity of guitar-artist-music, working together but not indiscriminately fused. Not-two and not-one.

Such allowing offers a different form of participation, perhaps not unlike that found in practices of meditation, contemplation, and forms of transformative spirituality that speak of surrender, letting go, acceptance, a paradoxical “doing-of-not-doing” (wei wu wei). While we may will ourselves to paint and play music, we cannot will creative inspiration or self-transformation. But by allowing what is to be, we choose to participate in a different manner epistemologically; trusting, waiting, and not interfering with larger powers and processes that may creatively appropriate limitations into new possibility. In allowing, the self finds freedom not apart from the limitations of form and situation, for such freedom could only be partial. Rather, from within the limitations of form, allowing discovers a deeper source for freedom and creativity.

**DANCING TO LIFE**
**BY MORGAN CHANG ‘11**

How would you feel if in the middle of a very long plane trip, your captain turned on the autopilot and fell asleep? Or if, during the opening credits of a movie, the screen went black and you spent the next two hours in darkness? No one wants to miss what might potentially be entertaining, inspiring, or (in the case of a mountain-top) life threatening. Yet I personally spend almost every day unaware of how I got from one destination to the next, oblivious to what I may have passed along the way. Finding a routine is part of being human: it helps us to organize the long trip of life and enables predictable outcomes. But once we’re “in the zone,” how much are we missing of the present moment?

This summer, I began to dream of a way to inject some spontaneity into life and into the Macalester community, which seemed in dire need of excitement. This dream was combined with another pet-project: danceOUT, making dance more public, more accessible, and more integrated with everyday life. Inspired by “Improv Everywhere”, a comedy troupe based in New York that stages unexpected public acts, I organized a “flash dance” performance on Bateman Plaza. On a sunny day in October, a cue from the DJ Club sent 20-30 people into a joyful frenzy. Since the event was passed through word-of-mouth (in order to keep it secret), even I did not expect the number of people who came to dance and watch, taking five minutes out of their regular lives to change the routine and experience life in the moment.

The question I asked myself immediately after was, did it change anything? Were people different that day? Did they proceed to do something extraordinary in their own lives? There is no way for me to know, and I realize that whether or not people changed their lives does not imply the project was a success or failure. In those few minutes, something was different. People did do something extraordinary, by expressing joy through movement rather than walking blindly to their next task. Whatever bystanders may have thought about our dancing abilities or level of sanity, their attention was caught by the impulsive breakout. If a small-scale dance can do that, then many small-scale acts—wearing a new color, taking a new path, letting go of restriction and stress—could lead us out of our autopilot funk for good. According to one of my favorite sayings, “stifling an urge to dance is bad for your health—it rusts your spirit and your hips.”

Sometime before we all turn into machines, before our joints stiffen and our hips rust, sometime before we hit the grave, we should stand up and dance.

**EVEN MY ROOMIE LOVES RUMI**
**BY DANI HUDRLIK ‘12**

For years I had heard about the Sufis, only in passing, but never knew anything about them. I had also always heard about some poet named Rumi, though I knew nothing about him either. I checked out every Rumi book available in the Macalester library, and got to work.

It turns out that the Sufis are mystics who come out of the Islamic tradition. Jalal al-Din Maulana (1207-1273), known to many—especially in the West—as Rumi, played a large role in the development of Sufism as it is known today. One particular reason for Rumi’s fame is that he made the spinning dance known as whirling a standard part of Sufi practice (think of the Whirling Dervishes). Rumi was also a prominent poet, who wrote thousands of lines of poetry.

Rumi’s influence extends far beyond Sufism, Islam, and even religion in general. Paramount psychoanlyst, Erich Fromm, (1900-1980) was interested in the “liberation of the human psyche from patterns of thought that hinder self-actualization”, and he saw Rumi as a precursor to his own understandings of the human psyche. Rumi’s poetry is at times sensual, and Rumi likens his closeness to God to that of an intimate sexual lover. Thus, some of Rumi’s poems are exhibited in the book The Erotic Spirit: Poems of Sensuality, Love and Longing (Sam Hamill). Gay rights activists also look to Rumi’s very close friendship (and probable homosexual relationship) with another Sufi, Shams al-Tabriz, Georg Hegel—whose works later influenced Marx and Engels—also read Rumi with great interest. On top of that, Rumi embraced an egalitarian and ecumenical viewpoint. Rumi was wholly Muslim and wholly Sufi, but he also recognized that he didn’t have to turn from his faith or compromise his viewpoints in order to engage in interfaith understanding. Today’s proponents of interfaith dialogue look to a variety of thinkers and spiritual leaders, including Rumi, who said “the Lamps are different but the Light is the same”.

It seems that Rumi and his works connect with such a wide variety of people in a wide variety of topics. I too have come to love and admire both Rumi and his poetry, and throughout this newsletter are a few of my favorite poems of Rumi.

Photo from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rumi
**NANOWRIMO**  
by Joshua Smith ‘12

For the past two Novembers, I have participated in what is known as National Novel Writing Month, known more affectionately as NaNoWriMo. The goal of this event is for people to write an entire novel in the month of November. While these novels are not long (the official goal length is 50,000 words) they take a lot of time and effort. While NaNoWriMo is a competition, there are no real prizes. If you complete your novel by submitting it to an online word validator on the official website and meet the 50,000 word deadline, you gain access to the “prizes” for this competition. This year the prizes consisted of a 30 second video of the staff of the non-profit organization that puts on the event clapping and congratulating you on your victory, some web badges that you could post to your favorite website showing that you had indeed achieved victory, and a printable winner’s certificate. That’s it. The prizes aren’t spectacular, yet each year, more and more people participate in and complete NaNoWriMo. This year 200,530 people from all over the world participated, and 37,479 people were declared “winners.” But why do people devote a large portion of their life in November to writing a novel that likely no one other than themselves and a few of their close friends will read, with the most tangible prize being a printable certificate?

While I cannot speak for everyone, I imagine that most people do it for a reason similar to my own. I do it because it feels so good to have created something from scratch, to have made something from nothing, and to have accomplished something that so few people have done. I still remember the feeling that I experienced last year when I finished writing. At the beginning of the month, I heard my friend talk about how she was participating in the event. I thought she was crazy. I asked her how she thought she was going to be able to write a novel while at the same time going to college. All I remember her doing was shrugging her shoulders and saying that it was going to be fun.

Somehow, I believed her, and I began a journey of my own. It was a hectic experience managing classes, activities, work, and writing, but I really came to look forward to the time I spent writing. Writing allowed me to express my thoughts and beliefs through the characters and actions in my novel. I found myself giving my characters philosophical internal dialogue, debating within themselves topics that I had once held inside me. I was giving those ideas their voice. Anyone who would read my novel would gain an understanding of the way I viewed the world, and that was exciting.

In the end, I managed to pull it off. I wrote a novel. I realized after the fact that even though I had been working against a deadline, it had not been someone else’s deadline. I was holding myself to the writing, and there would have been no consequences if I had failed. That in itself was exhilarating. I had spent time doing something purely for myself, and done something that I had never done before, something that I had not been sure was even possible; and that made it all the more glorious.

Too often we spend our days devoted to working towards deadlines and goals to benefit others, or if they do not benefit others, facing the negative consequences to ourselves in low grades on papers that we wrote. NaNoWriMo managed to break this pattern for me. I am by no means an English major, nor do I particularly like writing, but NaNoWriMo allowed me to do so many things and express so many views and ideas about the world, that I cannot imagine not having done it. To me, I did what I thought was impossible. Is there something in your life that you can strive after for your own sake that you think is impossible? For the purest joy can come from that which we can imagine and then make real.
At the current moment, students are participating in a forum called Build a Better Mac. They are working intensely on discovering ways to bridge divides that exist in our campus community, while reconsidering the intentions brought to our education. It goes without saying that Mac students are well accomplished. We excel in academics while serving our local and global communities; we demonstrate talent in the arts, and we approach relationships with the goal of deepening understanding. While bringing praise to these abilities, I wonder if there are other aspects of our identities—standing beyond the norms and standards of accomplishment—that yearn for greater cultivation.

At a formative point in our lives, educational role models remind us that in order to succeed we should strive for A’s and showcase our talents whether they come to life in music, sports, or other interests. Celebrated accomplishments offer a sense of stability; these successes allow us to make definitive statements such as, “I am a good student,” or “I am a good girl/boy.” Though academic accomplishments are a natural part of self-development, our relentless pursuit of these standards may distract us from moving beyond standards to realizing that which burns with life within us, something—if I dare call it a “thing”—that all beings require to feel fully accomplished, accepted, and complete. So, I want to ask: what type of reassurance are we really looking for in our accomplishments as children and as we mature? And, might we become more attentive to meeting our deepest yearnings as we educate each other?

Too often, our educational experiences become integrated into a narrative about personal gauntlets. Staying up till 2:00 am, taking five classes and having an internship are ways that we may demonstrate our merit. In striving to build ourselves into something better, we lose intimacy with the miracle and wonder of simply living as we are. The self-critiquing instinct, encouraged by good grades and ever-elevating achievements, covers up an integral aspect of our selves, which asks the world one simple question: Do you love me? This question touches the heartbeat of my infinite searching. Though for each person, this question is wonderfully personal and touching.

It is only when we truly feel embraced, touched by life and its manifold intricacies, that we may carry out both our local and global work with clear intentions. In asking and answering, “What is love, am I loved, how do I bring love to the world,” we may realize that unity is the ultimate affirmation of our very being. Social injustices then become more than situations to analyze and solve, but wounds of separation that we must heal. We all have highly driven voices that constantly object, “You won’t be able to accomplish as much following this lovey-dubbie philosophy.” Yet, the love I speak of has nothing to do with philosophy or disengagement from life’s trials; it is with us as we proceed through the muck of hormones, hegemonic influences, and sheer uncertainty that are all part of the Macalester experience. In addition to learning how to manage stress, manage multiple commitments, and accomplish more, we must also learn to offer this love that meets people in all places with an unforgettable embrace—and in this embrace, the whole world truly becomes one!