

CHAPTER V  
TEMPORARY PARALYSIS OF THE IMAGINATION  
AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

"'Writer's block'," writes Joyce Carol Oates, "is a temporary paralysis of the imagination caused by the conviction, on an unconscious level, that what the writer is attempting is in some way fraudulent, or mistaken, or self-destructive."

In Chapter VIII I will illustrate how people have stopped themselves from writing because some part of them believed their writing was dangerous. Here I want to present you with a theory and technique which will relieve "temporary paralysis of the imagination."

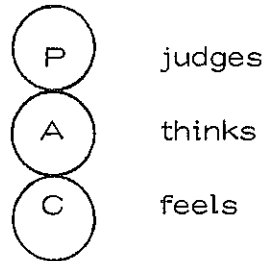
What you need is a way of looking at the writing process that is compatible with all the parts of you involved in that process.

"Well, what parts?" you ask.

Parts of you that judge, think, and feel need to be orchestrated in a way that fosters your writing. Let me help you divide writing into two distinct phases so you will be more creative, as well as more effective. Phase I will be Exploratory, Phase II will be Crafting. They use different parts of your personality.

Eric Berne, M.D., developed a theory of personality which isolates various parts of us so that we can employ those parts most appropriate to our goal: the part of us that judges he labeled Parent

(P), the part that thinks is Adult (A), and the part that feels is the Child (C).



### Phase I - The Exploratory Phase

In the Exploratory Phase, let us choose the following parts of our personality:

- the Nurturing Parent, to keep us safe while writing
- the Adult, to focus on writing
- the Free Child, to intuit, create, charm, delve, investigate, astonish, bring together disparate elements

### Phase II - The Crafting Phase

For this phase we will choose other parts, to help us refine our writing if we want to share it with the world:

- the Critical Parent, to limit, discriminate, and choose the best expression
- the Adult, to focus on structure as well as content
- the Adapted Child, to be willing to forego more immediate pleasure and stay put until the task is done

Here's a visual picture to see how these parts of our personality may be segregated, confined to their appropriate phases:

Exploratory - I

Nurturing Parent

Adult

Free Child

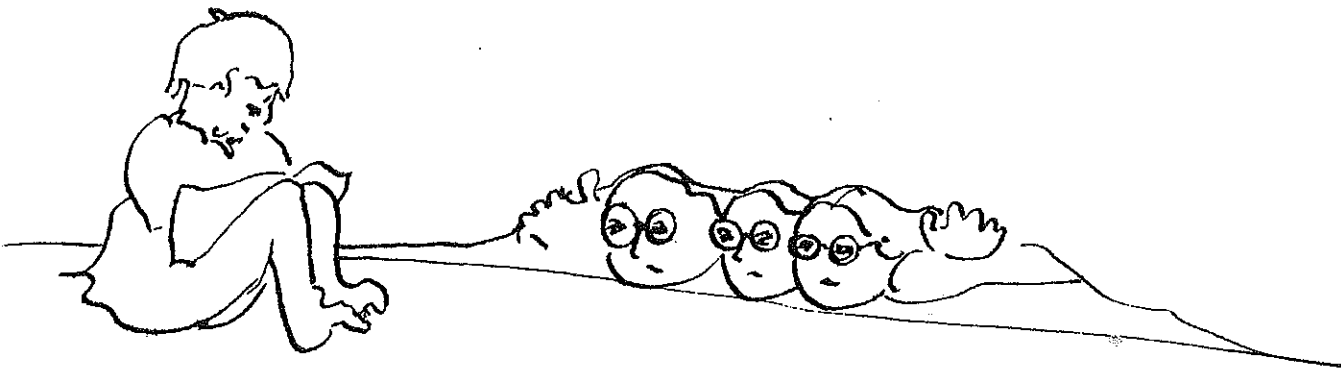
Crafting - II

Critical Parent

Adult

Adapted Child

We must not allow the characters in Phase II to intrude into the Exploratory Phase. I will show you how to send them away, assuring them that they are vital later for crafting in Phase II.

Nurture or criticize?

Our Parent can either nurture us, keeping us warm and feeling safe, or it can keep us from harm's way by warning us of pitfalls, suggesting better ways, telling us "that's not good enough," and criticizing us. What a blessing it can be both nurturing and critical. The trick is to have it be appropriately nurturing or critical, supportive or discriminating, in the service of a joyous and productive life. People who use only their Nurturing Parent are mush. Those who

are only critical are abrasive and self-stymying. It's the collaboration of both of these valuable parts of us that we need to bring forth the best expression of ourselves.

Maurice Sendak, whimsical author and illustrator, says he does not believe

that the kid I was grew up in me. He still exists somewhere, in the most graphic, plastic, physical way . . . . I communicate with him -- or try to -- all the time. One of my worst fears is losing contact with him . . . . at least once a day I feel I have to make contact. The pleasures I get as an adult are heightened by the fact that I experience them as a child at the same time.

The child in Sendak is an important collaborator: "This dual apperception does break down occasionally. That usually happens when my work is going badly, and I reject it. Then I become depressed. When excitement about what I'm working on returns, so does the child. We're on happy terms again."

"... what I found, not what I was looking for"

Phase I is an exploration into the creative process. It is more characterized by "let's see what happens when I write," than by making something happen. The artist-psychologist Desy Safan-Gerard says, "Creativity -- like communication -- is a process of discovery,

and the end product is usually quite different from what the person or persons had in mind." She is impressed by Picasso, who "talked about the absence of planning; an attitude of exploring without trying to reach a specific goal. 'When I paint, my objective is to show what I found, not what I was looking for.'"

Our "Parent," the part of us that judges, learned how to form its opinions from those people who brought us up and those who later influenced us. To a great extent we inherit a whole belief system from our parents and teachers. We incorporate their way of looking at the world as we grow, or at least those beliefs that we do not reject. Fortunately, we can continue to update our storage of Parent messages all our lives, hanging on to those messages that serve us well and discarding the outdated, worn-out models of our universe that no longer fit.

Most writers are stopped when their "critic" enters Phase I. Here the Critical Parent is miscast. It needs to be sent away with assurances that it is vital in Phase II for crafting. "A creative person," writes Ira Progoff, "does not become creative by analyzing but by unfolding. If you had a tulip and you wanted to know what color the flower was going to be, you could cut the bulb open and look inside. But you would destroy it. Or you could nurture it and wait and see what the color will be." Get your Nurturing Parent to protect your Free Child while your Free Child creates in the Exploratory Phase.