



## What's So Wrong With Wrong?

By [Georgia Keighery](#) ArtsHub | Friday, June 20, 2008

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I am now in my tenth month of living in Indonesia, on the island of Borneo - in East Kalimantan, in fact.

I have been a theatre actor and playwright in the small world of Sydney's independent theatre scene for some years. I also fancy myself, on my good days, as a writer - though I've not been so brave as to put the word "real" in front of the word "writer" just yet.

But there you have it. And now I am here. I wrote to my dear friend Jeremy a few weeks back about the process I am going through as a writer over here, detached from my home, but somehow closer to my art, as I am afforded the luxury of writing every day - all day, if I see fit. I wrote to him about how confronting I have found it to spend so much time with myself; how me and my own idiosyncrasies no longer have anywhere to hide; and how I have found myself facing myself for the first time, and it seems inescapable now.

It's hard to explain without sounding crazy, and perhaps that's exactly what it is, but given time alone and total submersion in a world to which you are distinctly alien, you tend toward a lot of thinking. I have begun to teach myself to meditate, I bought dance classes on DVD and now spend part of each day throwing myself around my Borneo Bungalow, sweating and panting to an African Dance class delivered by an American. Where am I?! And, more importantly, what am I doing?!

I'll tell you this much for sure: I swing, from moment to moment from believing that I am nigh onto enlightenment, to knowing that I am moments away from being certifiably insane!

Anyway, to Jeremy, I wrote, in part: "Oh this probably sounds hippy and flaky the way I say it, but what I'm trying to say is that I think I am learning to lose my fear of being wrong - because I understand, in theory, that being wrong is the point at which you learn. And I'm letting go of the notion that being wrong 'means something about me'; all that it means is that I am asking the question.

"Does this make sense at all?! Sorry if I'm blabbering. Anyway, it feels like another turning point, which is great. The interesting thing is that, in this book I was reading last night, the Dalai Lama writes about the intersection between scientific and Buddhist modes of investigation. He writes: 'Just as the seasoned goldsmith would test the purity of his gold through a meticulous process of examination, so the Buddha advises that people should test the truth of what he has said through reasoned examination and personal experiment.

Therefore, when it comes to validating the truth of a claim, Buddha accords the greatest authority to experience, with reason second and scripture last... So, one fundamental attitude shared by Buddhism and science is the commitment to keep searching for reality by empirical means and be willing to discard accepted or long-held positions if our search finds that the truth is different'!"

Joseph Chilton Pearce was quoted in *The Artist's Way* as saying: "To live a creative life we must learn to lose our fear of being wrong". I read this quote months ago and it has rolled around in my mind like a hard toffee does in your mouth. And I believe it. I do.

A scientist doesn't begin an experiment with a fear of his hypothesis being wrong. A Buddhist doesn't enter into meditative contemplation with a fear of realising the falsity of his previous thinking. A great artist doesn't begin a painting with a fear of it "not looking right"; they all go into their examinations of life and the world with the express hope of coming closer to reality. Having your hypothesis proven incorrect is just as wonderful an outcome as having it proven correct; both outcomes prove a truth, and if you can let go of your ego's desire to be right then you can see that.

But the thing about being wrong is that it isn't marketable! It isn't salable, and it doesn't look good on a profit margin report!

In this day and age where happy, "right", smiling faces are what sell home loans, who wants to be wrong? Wrong is ugly. Here, in a space and time where my "empirical observations" and artistic dalliances look almost exactly like insanity, what happens if I am wrong? What happens if I am not broadening my horizons as a writer and as a human, and am indeed gazing foolishly - and way too closely - at my own navel? What if I am merely driving myself mad with self-indulgence, and I am not becoming a better writer at all but simply disappearing up my own psyche?

The process of learning dictates that you have to spend some time looking bad! You can't learn something new if you want to look good; you have to be ready to pick up your new interest - your new guitar, your new dance lessons, your new-found singing voice, your learner-driver's handbook - and suck at it for a while! That's par for the course of learning.

It's the same with recovery, or with dealing with the messy business of facing your own fears and shortcomings; it is simply not pretty! Of course the moments when you learn are the very same moments when you grow and expand. Of course the mess you make is the clearing of debris to make space for new things. Of course the mud you get on your face from flinging your own mess around is actually quite purifying - but none of it looks good. It doesn't match a party dress, it doesn't get you into exclusive events and it wouldn't sell anything - except perhaps as the "before" shot in a detergent ad.

And always, always there seems to be that voice - that hollering Critic in the balcony of your mind, throwing tomatoes and yelling: "That looks ridiculous! You're a mess! And what if you're WRONG, you idiot!?"

How exactly do you answer that? "I look bad, I appear to be a mess, and I can't say for sure, but think I am in the process of growing"? That sounds the same as the advertisement for a derelict house that reads "Renovator's Dream" ; it doesn't make you want to buy!!

After I had sent the email to my friend Jeremy, I was overcome by a clear realisation that the reason I had said it sounded flaky and hippy was because it was! I felt a real and burning desire to find the hitherto undiscovered button on my Hotmail account that would let me "unsubscribe" my drivel-laden message. I mean honestly, who did I think I was?! What was I even going on about? What the hell was the point of what I was writing? How could he possibly read that message and not shake his head thinking: "Oh dear, she's gone mad in Borneo. She's become a woman who reads the Dalai Lama and thinks she gets it"? And wouldn't he be right? I am that crazy

woman.

All of a sudden every story of every friend who ever went overseas and returned with dreadlocks and a love of tribal weaving flooded into my head, and I thought: “My god, I’m a cliché. Even worse than that, I am a cliché of mental and artistic instability!”.

Here is where I get to the part where I’d like to wrap up this little piece of writing neatly. Here I’d like to offer you a pretty, succinct “point” to everything I’ve written in the above paragraphs. I’d like to wind this up nicely with a flowery moral that makes you smile a little and nod your head in calm agreement. I’d like this bit to make you say “Ahhhh, yes. So very true, and so very well said; I’d buy that!”

But the thing is this: I don’t have that sort of ending for you. I don’t have any answers. All I can do is declare my belief in the beauty of being wrong. All I can do is stand for those of you who are messy; to applaud the unclean exploration of things. The only thing I can show you is that I am messy, and unrefined, and thoroughly “in process”. And - if I’m honest - the best way I can truly do that is by flamboyantly and unabashedly defying the “rules of good writing” by failing to end this properly!

Yes, it’s wrong. Perhaps I’m a little nuts. And no, I don’t mind at all.

