

On creativity as a lifeboat



Musician, actor, artist, and model Okay Kaya discusses finding balance while on the move, the importance of listening to your body, and moving different creative outlets forward simultaneously.

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As told to Lior Phillips, 1561 words.

Tags: [Music](#), [Process](#), [Inspiration](#), [Mental health](#).

A lot of creatives rely on adopting rituals, but at the same time you are constantly on the move whether performing or for new projects. How do you find a balance there?

I've been very much in motion without thinking about it too much since when I started out, which is I guess almost 10 years ago now. I think it had to do with my age, because I was in my early twenties then. It's changing a bit, but I do think I've adapted for better and for worse. I feel like I can work everywhere and write songs on airplanes and record in friends' bedrooms.

It must be useful to not have to stop whatever you're doing to work out your creativity. Does that leave you with any preciousness for your craft? Is that concept even in your art and in your work?

Until I have a conversation with someone about it like we're doing now, I don't have a lot of words for the creative process. It's something that I do all the time, that I want to do all the time, maybe have to do all the time, a bit compulsively. It's also what keeps life precious in a way, but it's this shifting orb. It is the thing that is precious and giving, but also can be quite depleting and frustrating.

When you're young, it comes more fluidly because you're not hampered by knowledge of the industry. You don't realize what's at stake. But then as you focus on practice and process, it can become more academic. Listening to your work, it feels like you have that strength but still find a purely creative inspiration.

You have to. It's fortunate to be able to sit down and amplify something through oneself, and that can be esoteric in many ways, spiritual, but I like to base it all also in just the human experience of being alive and having to eat food, sleeping or not sleeping, these kinds of mundane things. I guess I like to think a lot about really boring shit. [laughs]

The whole nexus of boredom and creativity is fascinating. Well, maybe it's just trying to pass off procrastinating as creativity, but I find when I'm truly bored and able to rest that I can tap into creativity.

Yeah, totally. And if that's what happens once your body rests and resets, then you're never really bored. So it's a bit of a blessing by your body.

You have so many different practices. Do you ever wonder what might have happened if you were to have chosen only one art form over the others?

I have. I've been pulled towards work that I can do alone a lot, or it's more contemplative, which is music and

the more visual aspects of the practice. I was talking to a friend yesterday, and we were talking about how it's very common now to be a "multi-hyphenate" kind of artist. He was mentioning that that's also based on necessity in terms of being able to financially have a career. Making songs that mention the word yeast infection, maybe I have to do a bit more modeling to [make a living]. I would easily just write about the yeast infection, but...I'm completely fine with doing lots of things!

Looking at your Bandcamp page, you've described your new album as "a concept album about consciousness." That's particularly interesting considering what we've been talking about. But at the same time, the record felt so physical and very in the moment, very visceral, which makes sense considering you're in constant motion.

Yeah. But I do wonder whether I would need a bit more routine in my life just to add a bit more balance. I go on these crazy tours where I'm traveling all over the place and there's a lot of transference of energy between myself and the people who come to see the shows, and that's really inspiring. But then the next few months, I try to just lock myself away again. I'm wondering if there's a more balanced way of doing that, but I'm not sure. It's working for now. It's just quite extreme.

I love the word that you used: transference. You're amplifying your work, and then those lyrics are going to be sung right back at you. That transfer is happening in a massive way, and then you're going to be living your life.

It all moves like this wave. It just doesn't stop. But the minute it's out, I'm a bit like, "Well, what else do I have to deal with? What else is funny to think about?"

Does creating music help you unlock your creativity in your acting or visual arts or modeling? Or when you get stuck creatively, does that only apply to one realm, or is it all-encompassing?

I'm not sure. I haven't actually felt very stuck creatively or sonically. And when I think about it in hindsight, it's just been on the forefront of my mind and what I think about. That has meant that I haven't really thought about a lot of the other things that I do. But I think knowing that I have this thing that I can come back to that is interesting for me in my time here on Earth is healing for me, and makes me able to go out and do a lot of other things. It's a bit of a lifeboat. So it helps having creation in music, but I don't know if it's implemented in the other practices. It's like I have a sweet little invisible cat on my lap that I can stroke in the real world.

What are the things that you do every day to make sure that you are as open as possible with yourself, with your work? How do you keep your brain out of the gunk and the darkness?

A lot of body movement stuff I think has been helping a lot. Really weird strength exercises. It keeps me out of the gunk, but I also make a lot of stuff when I'm gunky. And that's what keeps me out of the gunk again. Health is really important for everyone, so I guess these little routines and rituals where you grab a little sweat and feel your own breath [are important]. And reading. I just read a lot of fiction. I can lose myself. I think that was my escape in my upbringing as well.

What's your music listening like on a daily basis?

It's all over the map. I really enjoy making mixes and playlists. Right now, I'm hung up on this song from 1997. It was a huge pop song in London and it's so fucking good. Cornershop, remember them?

"Brimful of Asha"?

"Brimful of Asha", yeah. I've been listening to it four times a day. Sometimes I get a bit upset when I'm doing a lot of creation or recording, especially because then I can't listen to that much music. I feel a bit robbed after a while.

Is it that you're worried that what you're listening to would seep into your own work? Or just that you'd be distracted?

I get hyper-focused. I'm a bit sensitive to sound, so I can't work with sound six to eight hours and then just listen to music because it overstimulates me and makes me less happy. There's a fine medium of stimulation that my body and brain wants.

It's very hard to constantly have that stimulation around you all the time. People don't notice what's happening to their system and they're irritable, and you're like, "Okay, well, how loud are your headphones? Are you wearing AirPods?"

I fucking hate AirPods. It's living inside your brain. It's that close.

It seems obvious, but having that understanding is really important. It's part of putting boundaries onto your consumption. You don't have to listen to every album, read every book, listen to every podcast.

Yeah. There are just so many options. It's just a lot of listening back to the body for what it actually wants. It's a hard practice, probably harder now than ever, because all of these easy satisfactions are so readily available and they do make us feel good. But sometimes I like a good podcast, even if they get in the way of my music listening time.

Your "Brimful of Asha" time.

Yeah, sorry, it's my "Brimful of Asha" time. Do you listen to music with lyrics when you write?

Most of the time I can't listen to anything. But when I do, it depends on what I'm writing about, what I'm feeling.

Certainly. Sometimes if I match music with my moods or feelings they cancel each other out, like a battery thing. Listening to pretty severe black metal can feel like therapy or something. And that's pretty funny. Like crawling out of a hole by digging deeper and getting to the other side.

Okay Kaya Recommends:

[Lyset fra sjokoladefabrikken](#) (The Light from the Chocolate Factory) (2020)

[The Headphone Masterpiece](#), Cody Chesnutt (2002)

Twitter account [The Sunny Side of Franz Kafka](#)

[The Listener](#), Tove Jansson (1971)

[Björk and Robin Wall Kimmerer, Artists on Writers, Writers on Artists](#)

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Vocation

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