

SECRETS OF CREATIVE PEOPLE



SECRETS OF CREATIVE PEOPLE

Yvonne Rogers

Published by Yvonne Rogers
© Yvonne Rogers 2014

ISBN: 978-0-9929765-0-7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Designed by Angela Scott
UCL Creative Media Services

Printed by Belmont Press
Northampton

SECRETS OF CREATIVE PEOPLE

Contents

Want to be more creative?	2
Being creative means being digital	3
Creativity in a nutshell	3
The power of social milieu	4
Case studies: a chef, a winemaker, a choreographer and an artist	5
Ben the Chef: “The Rollercoaster Mouthful”	6
Adam the Winemaker: “Creating Within Constraints”	10
Simon the Choreographer: “Wrestling With Ideas”	12
Johann the Artist: “Creating Through Participating”	15
Food for thought	18
10 takeaways	19
Bibliography	20
Acknowledgements	20

SECRETS OF CREATIVE PEOPLE

Want to be more creative?

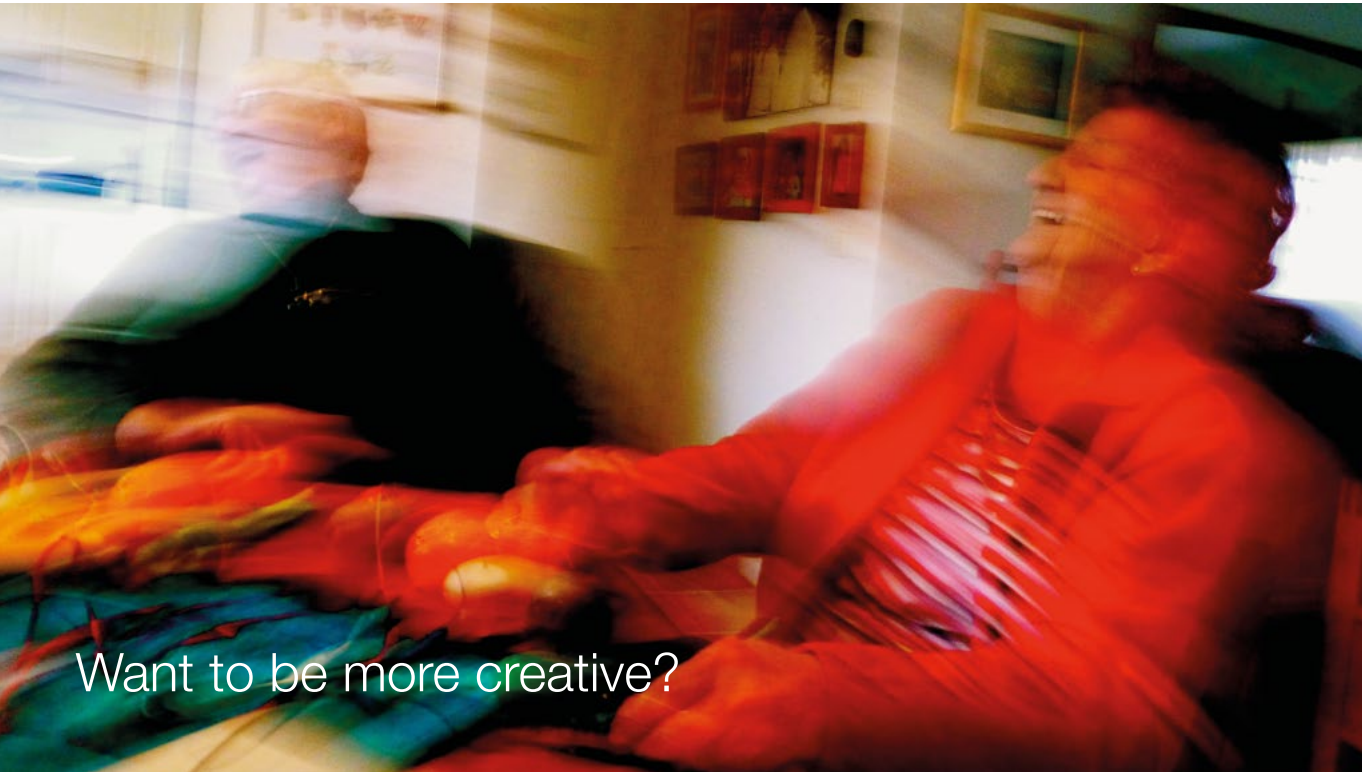
Creativity is an aspiration many of us have and want more of – whether it is at work or in our dreams. But we can't all be the next Pablo Picasso, Michel Roux, Vaslav Nijinsky or Albert Einstein. What will it take for us to be more creative – especially for those who have had it beaten out of them at school and further stifled at work?

There are a plethora of manuals and self-help books on creativity, expounding the virtues of intuition, dedication, imagination and daring to be different. They offer

advice on how to reach new heights and ways to free up one's creative impulses, through instilling a creative confidence (Kelley and Kelley, 2013) or creative culture (e.g. Maisel, 2000). The wisdom proffered is in the form of can-do know how: start by being deeper, more mindful, and connecting with your inner and outer selves; then be more ambitious and let your guard down more often. In doing so, contravene rules and norms, think the non-obvious and dare to cross boundaries.

I take a different tack.

Instead of offering up more 'out of the box' guidance, I explore the necessity of marrying creativity with 'being out there'. By this I mean understanding the importance of having a diversity of relationships with others through words, acts and collaborations. Successful creativity arises from sharing, constraining, narrating, connecting and even sparring nascent ideas with others, both in the flesh and through the web of social media. The secrets behind creative people manifest themselves often in the way they play out their collaborations in the context of their work.



Want to be more creative?

Being creative means being digital

How do creative people become and continue to be successful in their work? How do they manage, adapt to and navigate their professions against the backdrop of an ever-changing and often fickle digital world? How much is in their control and how much is down to fate?

As well as understanding how to keep generating new ideas, creative people are aware of how to find and keep their place in the digital milieu. This involves fathoming out how to make themselves stand out in a world where everyone is vying for each other's attention.

As part of my dream fellowship (funded by the EPSRC) I questioned and explored what this new form of social creativity entails. My journey took me off to the creative industries. Here, I focus on the conversations I had with four highly creative and successful ones: a chef, a winemaker a choreographer and an artist. I was privileged to spend much time in Australia, South Africa and the UK hanging out with them in their studios, farms, kitchens, parks, cars, schools and homes - walking, talking and wondering. As I was soon to discover, understanding more about their

creativity was not about getting inside their heads but outside of them; getting to grips with the synergies and interdependencies that take place in their rich tapestried social worlds and professions. From our encounters, I have tried to capture and distil some of the essence of their creative beings - the interactive ingredients if you will – that they use to keep ahead of the game while continuing to remain at the cutting edge of their creativity.

Creativity in a nutshell

Creativity according to Margaret Boden (2004) is the “generation of novel, surprising and valuable ideas.” A creative idea can be a concept, a poem, a joke, a dance, a recipe, a scientific theory and so on. Artefacts that are created are equally diverse: including pottery, computers, cars, sculptures and cakes. The creative process involves being exploratory, breaking the rules, being unpredictable, and even outrageous. She suggests that creativity can happen in three main ways:

- (i) making unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas that make sense but have not been considered before
- (ii) exploring conceptual spaces enabling someone to see something they had not seen before
- (iii) transforming a space allowing someone to think of something they could not have thought of before

David Byrne (2012) writes about the insight that dawned on him slowly during his glittering career: “context largely determines what is written, painted, sculpted, sung, or performed.” While ideas, personality and passion are very much at the heart of making, for something to feel and be recognized as creative, depends as much on external factors – the space, the performance, the audience, the feedback, the size, the shape, the mood and so on. The internal and external have to connect – where creators (musicians, artists, chefs, choreographers, etc.) and their audiences (collectors, buyers, fans, readers, etc.) intermesh in terms of their influence on each other and the creative ideas they generate, share and mould.



Margaret Boden



David Byrne @ Future of Music Policy Summit 2006 by Fred von Lohmann¹

The power of social milieu

Social media and the internet have become the glue that binds creators and their audiences; tweets, blogs, reviews, likes, thumbs up, thumbs down, are the pervasive currency of influence. Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other emerging social media apps have changed how artists, artisans, and other makers think, work and run their businesses. In the space of a few years, many have become tech-savvy, understanding the significance and power of digital connecting. Instead of following a linear sequence of phases of creating, along with marketing/promoting

and selling, where the quality of their work is defined through professional critics, many are now deeply embedded in an interconnected world of suppliers, bloggers, reviewers and the Twitterati – in perpetual touch and in tune with each other's works, thoughts, and ideas. At the very least it helps them keep abreast, be noticed, and promote new projects. An artist can post a tweet and instantly millions of followers read and then retweet it. It can also be very damning. A critic can post a tweet rubbishing a show that can have a devastating impact on an artist's career.

The stakes are high.

The stories of Ben, Adam, Simon and Johann included in this booklet show how they manage and master their creative professions. Each case study is presented in terms of an introduction to who they are, their online presence, their creative process, what makes them distinct, where they get their inspiration from and finally, my attempt to distil some of their essence.



Case studies: a chef, a winemaker, a choreographer and an artist



Ben the Chef: “The Rollercoaster Mouthful”

Ben is in his 20s and has been cheffing since his teens. He has worked in a number of temporary restaurants, including launching Roganic with Chef Simon Rogan and then his own make-shift outdoor spaces, such as StrippedBack. He represents a new generation of chefs who are breaking all the rules, has a passion for thinking out of the box, being the maverick, and using social media to grow and benefit his learning process and business.

Online Presence: Twitter Mad

Ben is an avid Twitter user, tweeting several times a day about his latest ideas, his discoveries, his observations, his dishes, the next big thing, his views and anecdotes about his family and social life. He has nearly 22,000 followers over 4 accounts – Ben Spalding, ChefBenSpalding, StrippedBackUK and NoRulesUK, with his

latest concept @2MinutesLDN about to go live. Following Ben is like being part of the family. You feel you are vicariously living inside his kitchen through his comments, snapshots and quips. After a while you get to feel like a special friend. Whenever there is another venue, another menu or another special event, Ben will notify his followers on Twitter. Not surprisingly, they often get booked up straight away. There are many reviews, articles, videos and interviews with him online. His biography is there for the taking. The foodie blogs are plentiful and give Ben the feedback and buzz he needs to move onto his next new creation.

Ben is also constantly on his mobile phone, talking with his 86 + suppliers, who will let him know what they have on offer that day. It might even be a secret supply of mushrooms that the supplier has

only enough for him. If that is the case, it is really special and Ben will work up a dish around them.

The Creative Process

The secret to Ben’s creative cooking is choreographing surprise that lets the diner deconstruct a dish and discover what is hidden. He never stops thinking about how to achieve this, never gets complacent and detests copying or imitation. He is always storing ideas, squirreling them away, experimenting and connecting. He uses unexpectedness in his dishes a lot – this is key to the intensity of subsequent pleasure. “I love the playful aspect of what I am doing now, making people question what’s going on...I love making things that don’t look like they should be, turning bread and butter, and salad and vegetables into something divine.”



He thinks about everything, but a key idea is transforming the taken for granted aspects of a meal and making them become talking points during the meal; examples include using pebbles from his local beach as butter dishes and spreading the butter on them like a wave; making the menu like an underground tube map of courses to represent that the meal is a journey. Ben hires chefs that have the same passion as him and want to be part of the vision. He listens to them, breaks them down and rebuilds them and leaves them no choice but to create their own new dishes that are incorporated into the menu - contrary to traditional restaurant cooking practices, where the head chef is maestro. He is also a perfectionist, throwing dishes away if they don't meet his high standards. He tells his staff to plate food as if they have put their mortgage up against it. Everything has to be the very best it can be when it is plated; this is his leitmotif that he applies to everything he does.

Distinctiveness: Evoking Childhood Memories

One of Ben's most well-known signature dishes is his chicken on a brick. It took a couple of years for his initial idea to cumulate into a dish that was finally served up at a groundbreaking London restaurant in 2012. It started with him and a fellow chef having a cheeky cigarette outside a pub on a night out and them both noticing the shape of the house brick that had been placed there as an ash-tray. It occurred to them that the brick could also serve as a plate that diners would lift up and lick food off. How outrageous is that? But what could that be? He stored the idea

away in the back of his mind. Then about six months later, out of the blue, it came to him. He knew about the technique of cooking chicken in Tuscany - which is under a foil-wrapped brick - and started doing some research about it. He then spent several months experimenting at home and changed the dish 'brick on a chicken' to become 'chicken on a brick'. Reversing the idea came in a flash. Then the details and experiments of how to achieve it followed in subsequent months. He spent weeks thinking about the health and safety issues of serving food on a brick. Finally, he came up with a beautiful glaze for the brick and then coated it with chicken liver mouse and salad. He was not sure whether people would eat it as he imagined but when he trialed the dish in the restaurant it was a huge hit. The diners obliged his whim leading them to remember

childhood memories of licking spoons and bowls used when baking cakes: "You've got 40 to 50-year-olds, really high end professionals in what they do and they were just licking the brick...I want to do playful, fun. I want to challenge people. I want to take you back to childhood in a tasteful and delicious way without making you queasy...."

Another distinctive dish that has received much acclaim for is his '50 ingredient salad'. It comprises a delicate assortment of 50 salad pieces that are beautifully plated - having more of an appearance of an artwork rather than a bowl of tossed leaves. The pieces are tiny, for example, a wisp of fennel, a sliver of radish, and a shard of celeriac. The salad ingredients are mixed as a collaborative effort that the chefs enjoy doing together, talking about





the best combinations and amounts to use: “We have to tweak it all the time. For example, we’ve got raspberry on our current one. There’s no point in putting a whole raspberry on there, because that’s obviously too much. It wouldn’t make sense, so we have to break the fruit down into small, little pieces.” For a side salad to take centre stage such that it becomes a talking point is a stroke of creativity.

Where Does He Get His Inspiration?

Ben is always thinking about what to create and how; he is constantly looking around him for new ideas, whether walking along the beach, in a 24 hour supermarket at 3.00 a.m, going to a creative performance or sitting on the bus. Objects, themes, moods, and tastes will pop up as he goes about his everyday life. He likes to transform what is seemingly boring, plain and taken for granted into something exciting and divine. He also forages wherever he goes and experiments with his spoils with much fervour and passion. He cooks like an alchemist, trying to break down, boil up,

and conjure up new flavours, sensations and tastes. If he is feeling intense he might create an intense dish. If he is feeling angry he might select different ingredients and materials than when he is chilled. Hence, a dish often reflects the state he is in; he also marries this with the constraints and the environment he is in. He is constantly on the web looking up what others are making and what methods they are using, he also spends time just browsing and surfing while keeping up with the magazines such as FOOL in Scandinavia (<http://foolmagazine.com>); all the time looking at what both the critics and the many foodies have to say about him and his food. Many foodies’ writing echo the sheer delight and wonder they had when eating his food. It sometimes feels they are reliving the meal through their photos and words. Often they tweet while still in the restaurant, after each course, it provokes a palpable buzz. In the long run, it gives Ben a sense of what works and reminds him why he signed up for life to please guests who trust him to eat his spontaneous cooking, for which he is so grateful.

Essence

The secret to Ben’s success is in making the dining experience unexpected, amazing and playful. Central to this is the combination of tastes, textures, shapes and colours. Furthermore, having a story behind each dish that is revealed to the diners, and subsequently written about by them online, can enhance the dining experience and then afterwards, by triggering and sustaining evocative memories. Central to his creative process is choreographing surprise. His ultimate goal is to create “a rollercoaster mouthful” that can knock diners for six. Glowing praise in the form of blogs and tweets also provide the fuel for Ben to up his game even more in being daring in his creations: “Someone tweeted me last night saying what a thoughtful and unforgettable meal. When you see those words, you just think, wow! That has touched someone in that sense.” Critical reviews also fire him up so long as they are written in the right vein. Reciprocity is key.

Adam the Winemaker: “Creating Within Constraints”

Adam is a top winemaker in South Africa who has worked at the Mulderbosch vineyard for the last few years. Before that he was the head winemaker at the prestigious Klein Constantia vineyard. Towards the end of his time there he was given the chance to create his own brands alongside their top brand. He then took his nascent brand Marvelous to his current wine farm, where they give him creative time and space to experiment and further conjure up new brands.

Online Presence: Telling Stories

Adam has a considerable social media presence and is well connected – a website, videoed interviews, LinkedIn, Facebook, many online reviews and articles about him, his brand of wine and his methods. All of this helps to establish him as a winemaker with pedigree – which helps

make his new wines stand out from the rest of the competition. He realizes that without a brand that is recognizable and memorable you are nothing in the world of wine. But there is more to it than that. You need to create a compelling story that keeps developing just like a good wine – that people want to read more about when they buy and finally drink the wine. To create this ongoing story, he tweets about the grapes, the harvest, the weather, his travels, his discoveries and his ideas. This also gives a live glimpse into his life as a winemaker and the risks and processes he works with. The context and the stories for his new wines unfold and grow as he, likewise, waits for the wines to mature. This way of marketing and revealing slowly to the world about his forthcoming wines and how they are different is key to laying the ground for their success.

But it can't be any old story. It has to be convincing and enticing. As Adam regaled poignantly: “For example, consider a winemaker starting up in Sicily. It is such an evocative place. You say the word Sicily and what do you think of? You think of anything from the ancient mafia to any number of other things. You can drink this wine, tap into Sicily and its story. Now consider the same winemaker starting up in Slovenia. The quality of the wine could be better than from that produced in Sicily, even knock the socks off you, but it is never going to be a successful brand in the same way because what comes to mind when most people think of Slovenia?” But perhaps if Adam went to Slovenia and discovered its hidden secrets he might be able to create a great new story...

The Creative Process

Winemakers have to work within many more constraints than a chef. The reputation and staying power of a brand is based largely on its consistency and quality. Therefore, winemakers have to experiment within boundaries. The trick is to work out how to be more creative in this context. It is so competitive in the wine world that Adam creates a new wine in reverse: starting from what the market wants back to combining and fermenting the grapes he has available at that time for a new wine. The key is how he creates and tells the story behind that process.

With wine-making, there is only one opportunity to hit the jackpot each year, say, have the best Pinot Noir or Chenin Blanc that everyone wants to buy. But unlike other professions, such as cooking, dance or art, you have to wait a few years before it is ready to see if it tastes as good as hoped. Hence, the feedback loop from creative idea to final product is very slow. With cooking, if a dish does not work out the chef can create another one the next day. With wine making, so much depends on how the grapes ferment and the wine matures over the years. So everything is done at the beginning to increase the chance of a good wine being the end result. There are a number of possibilities and Adam constantly juggles with these and thinks about how they will interact and combine to produce the perfect wine. These include: selecting the type of and combination of grapes; the additives (e.g. yeast, wood) and how much and when; the containers and techniques to use for fermenting (such as carbonic maceration where carbon dioxide is added to the





bunches of grapes that have just been picked and placed in a sealed container to give the wine a different style), and knowing how much of the grape juice to bleed off. There is also the specialness of the grape and where and when it is picked. Adam has built up special relationships with a number of grape growers in the region so he gets the pick of the best. The more secret, ancient and rare the grape block the better because you have something that other winemakers don't and hence can make a story about it.

Where Does He Get His Inspiration?

Adam is always thinking every moment of the day about what he sees and tastes. He uses his everyday experiences to generate news ideas about the details, the methods and the evolving stories of his new brands. He also gets inspiration from collaborating with others. For the last few years he has been working with a grand chef in South Africa, called Peter. It works both ways. They have a common goal and their conversations help them to come up with the perfect pairing. For Peter, it helps him imagine new ways of thinking about food in relation to wine. For Adam, it helps him with his process of visualizing the wine. Both tweet about their double act and the pairing of the wine and food. Just like wine takes time to make so, too, does the story about its creative process and provenance require time and thoughtfulness to make it stand out.

Distinctiveness: Visualizing and Perfection

Visualizing the wine, how it will be drunk and the processes involved in creating it are central. This involves thinking through

what style of wine to make, how it might fit with what different people want, namely the wine drinker, the diner, the sommelier and the marketing people. *"It is a process of visualization. You think of something you would like to produce, a style of wine. And that is based on what marketing tells you. That is based on interfacing with the consumers at wine shows, talking to sommeliers and just travelling. So you gather lots of knowledge as to what people want. But the process of discovering what someone might want is through understanding what they don't want or like (such as too sweet, too bitter, etc)."* People buy wine based on its name, what stands out and what brands they remember when looking at a wine list. Just as Ben wants his dishes to be perfect and to be able to create a roller coaster mouthful, Adam wants to create a wine that *"everyone thinks tastes better than anything else."* It is, likewise, a form of creative perfection.

Despite the years of planning how a wine will be branded when confronted with time-pressurized decisions, he also has to think on his feet. Some decisions are made in the moment based on a combination of instinct, taking a gamble and prior experience. For example, this year he had very little tank space available (as it was a



bumper crop for most of his growers) and yet several vineyards were ready to pick at the same time. He had to decide in the moment on which vineyards to co-ferment based on the probability of it working out and based on the particular varieties and the origins of each block. He will also think about how that will interact with other innovations such as using acacia wood instead of oak for the barrels.

Essence

The secret to Adam's creative winemaking is combining the art and science of producing a great wine alongside developing and telling an equally compelling story about it. Some vineyards may have the prized grapes and conditions to make a great wine – but they also need the name, the place, the history, the family-run farm – that will provide the distinct story about the makers and the making. Each time Adam comes up with an idea for a new wine he thinks about how to tell a good story about the new brand. He pays considerable attention to detail, for example, he spends a lot of time thinking about the label on the bottle the font, the colour, the logo, the positioning. While the wine does not have to be very different from other vintages (but it still needs to have quality and a name, such as Pinot Noir, that people recognize) the brand needs to have a distinct story that must appeal and stand out from the rest. Social media, in the form, of interviews, magazine articles, blogs, and Adam's string of tweets, provides the context for this to be revealed.

Simon the Choreographer: “Wrestling With Ideas”

Simon is a choreographer whose work spans live performance and dance, screen and web-based materials, video, installation, studio-based teaching and writing. He traverses the globe, working between the UK and Australia. Simon also teaches dance and choreography in London.

Online Presence: Deep Thinking

Simon has a longstanding online presence including his own website, YouTube and

Vimeo accounts (where he archives all his filmed performances), a blog and two Twitter accounts. One of his Twitter accounts is a joint collaboration with another dancer, whom he has worked with for many years exploring male friendship, power and responsibility. The act of double-writing echoes the duet form of their choreography and dance performance. His writings and edited videos provide both a record of his works and thoughts but also a glimpse into the ideas and creative

processes he wrestles with in his work. He is not interested in curators who wax lyrical in programme blurbs or critics or bloggers who write reviews about his performances at a superficial like/dislike level. He does, though, think deeply about those who have really thoughtful responses to his work. He also treasures those who come with fresh eyes to his performances and who speak from their raw experience of watching a performance and their reflections of what it really means to them.



The Creative Process

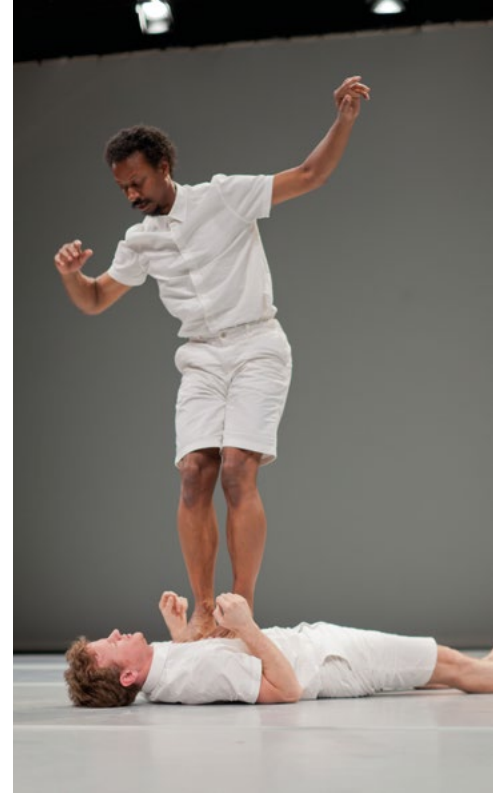
Simon starts a work by thinking about what is there in a dialogue with a dancer, asking all the time, probing deeply and in doing so letting associations come to the fore. “The associative stuff is where the work starts happening.” He argues that you need to keep digging down and trying out different ideas.

Traditionally, dancers have to interpret their choreographer; they will typically show the dancers a sequence of moves that they then have to learn and remember. The dancers need to be able to remember the parts and reconfigure them quickly for when the choreographer in subsequent rehearsals asks them to modify parts of the dance in a different order. In contrast, Simon views the relationship between being a choreographer and a dancer as a series of dialogues between the two where a meeting of body, mind and soul takes place. The goal is to generate the conditions that will ensure a performance is very much alive. So, rather than following the desires or wishes of a choreographer with a dancer, he views the conversation between them as being more equal, where, a dancer might lead first and then the choreographer takes over, followed by the dancer taking this on board and seeing things differently from their first idea. He sees this way of negotiating as a form of searching for meaning that is at the heart of creativity. Both choreographer and dancer are improvising but also framing the dance enough so that it takes on a life of its own.

Dancing is extraordinarily constrained by the body. Dancers can't add more legs or arms or grow another foot in stature to change their shape. However, they can use the power of imagination to extend a viewer's perception to not see their bodies as arms and legs moving in patterns but to see them as an embodied entity moving through space and time in various shapes and forms. By drawing out the ways a dancer approaches the edges of control and their distinctive tropes the resultant dance can become beautiful, rich and distinctive. A creative choreographer will be in tune with these aspects and be able to embrace them, exploring with the dancer how to put them to the test.

Where Does He Get His Inspiration?

Simon takes inspiration from other performers, choreographers, as well as the works of writers, artists, composers and poets. For example, he draws from the choreographer, Deborah Hay, who emphasizes that one should not let your creativity get in the way but “let it have the lightest of touches.” He also follows the wisdom of Peter Brook, the theatre director, who talks about holding onto ideas tightly until you know it is time to let go of them and then letting them go lightly. This wrestling with an idea as deeply as possible to find ways in which it can work is central to what he does in his dialogues with others and himself. But when he or a collaborator understands the idea to be diminishing the work he needs to let it go gently and move onto the next one. That can be hard but a revelation.



Distinctiveness: The Difficult Meeting Place

The tendency for choreographers is to project what they want to be there rather than discovering an emergent theme through having a series of internal dialogues and external conversations with others. To help break this impasse, he tries to get his students to move beyond their first ‘great idea’ that springs to mind because they will fixate on it without developing it any further. He questions if it might prevent them from reflecting on their work and looking at themselves. He will sometimes use humour to help students understand their own biases and limitations, to underlie the point so they will learn the importance of letting go of it.



Simon often asks a dramaturge to say what they think is going on in his work. Traditionally, the role of a dramaturge in theatre and opera companies is to create a workbook for the director and actors/performers and to work closely with the director prior to rehearsals. But nowadays dramaturges have been given more responsibility for tracking the possibilities for meaning in a work.

Simon uses them to reflect on what he imagines and what they see. This dialectical process however is never clear. It is within this ambiguous space that his rich, complex, chaotic, simple and affecting choreography comes to be.

Essence

A central question Simon constantly asks, that is at the core of his creativity, is: *“what is it that interests me about the physical action from the inside that also interests others from the outside?”* He tries to treat all his ideas the same and through repeatedly answering this question each time in different contexts considers whether his ideas are interesting and what they suggest further to explore. Embracing this process as a dialogue with others – his fellow dancers, his students and the critics - leads to deeper explorations, which in turn enable Simon to continue to create acclaimed striking performances.

Johann the Artist: “Creating Through Participating”

Johann is a practising artist and a professor of fine art at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts in Cape Town. His public sculptures have been exhibited world-wide and have won a number of prizes and awards. Growing up in South Africa, questions of power relations in society underlie much of his work, forcing the viewer into a position of choice in their engagement with his artworks. His work has been concerned with the effects of apartheid and the pervasiveness of violence that continues in its wake. Central to his exhibitions has been the presence of interactivity as he tempts his viewers to interact with his sculptures even as they realise such interactions are suggestive of aggression and complicity in violence.

Online Presence: Cataloguing and Curating

Johann has a website, with links to videos of his work, reviews and interviews. He doesn't tweet or blog in the way the others do. Instead he uses his online presence to curate and digitally catalogue his shows and works over time. An important part of his work is the physical catalogue that accompanies his shows, which he spends considerable time writing and assembling. The content that goes in the press releases and other publicity are also core to how he promotes his work. Ideally he tries to have a show every two years. Often there is a two-year lead for a new show, where he brings his ideas about the individual pieces together in order to see how they connect. All his works are intended to pose questions for the viewer to answer and interpret.

The Creative Process

Johann often works in collaboration with a range of others, including art teachers, school children, photographers, catalogue makers, leather makers and welders. He often searches for the best people to help him out with his projects. It is important that when he outsources part of the creative process to others that they do the very best in what they are good at – be it taking photos, using welding machinery, doing wood joinery, and so on.

For example, the Community Bag Project was concerned with exploring issues that are often not spoken about openly, including violence, stereotyping, discrimination, racism, and xenophobia. Johann engineered it to be essentially a collaborative way of making art. To enable this to happen, he worked for several months with art teachers and school children from a number of different schools in Cape Town and local leather artisans. He first asked the teachers to draw their own stories about violence



through designing two faces of a punching bag. The teachers then held workshops and asked the children in their classes to draw and create collages/cutout of what they had experienced. A range of personal stories were explored, including the children being robbed, a friend being murdered, being threatened by gangs, seeing shootings, and experiencing bullying. A representation of the two-sided designs was given to leather makers, who then transformed the drawings into two-faced leather punching bags. The outcome of the project was a deep delving into a difficult topic that is normally not talked about. The children were delighted and very proud of their designs being transformed into beautiful leather punching bags and then exhibited at a public show in the city as well as other cities in South Africa as well as possibly overseas.

Another example of a joint community project he has started on will involve school children in exploring themselves using different physical materials, such as mirrors and wooden playing cards with photographic transparencies or slides embedded into them. The concept



behind the selection of slides is that they should provide the viewer with a unique insight into how these children “see themselves” and how they would like “to be seen”. This will be achieved, not by including photographs of themselves or selfies, but rather by photographing a specific number of objects, environments and people whom they see as having a particular influence on shaping their personalities and lives. The approach is in stark contrast to most social network sites (e.g. Snapchat, FaceBook, Instagram, WhatsApp) where many of the images bombarding the end user can be banal and not carefully considered.

These forms of active collaboration are intended to provide the participants with a voice and in doing so enable them to go through the motions of a creative process themselves. Handing over the creative process to others in this way can be largely unpredictable and down to chance as to what they choose to reveal, select and express. It provides alternative interpretations leading to a different narrative and insights, than if Johann had worked solely by himself on the project. However, Johann also wants the end product to be of as high quality as possible and so he tries to maintain a degree of control over the whole process – for example, in terms of which designs he selects to be made up as the punching bags and what colour leathers to use that the artisans have.

Where Does He Get His Inspiration?

Johann is inspired by artists, who also collaborate with other people and in the process take on their contributions

and creations as part of a larger project they oversee. For example, the Chinese dissident artist, Ai Wei Wei, who also relies on the viewer’s participation, chance and the absurd.

Johann is also inspired by the latest computing and manufacturing technologies. He is very interested in how they can be used to transform and shape his work - in ways he has not been able to achieve using other tools and methods. He has always been fascinated by what can be achieved by using computer-aided design and manufacturing techniques, noting how the impact that CAD/CAM has in shaping our future is predicted to be as substantial as the impact of the Internet on our present situation. It also provides him with a foundation to take his research and skills to the next level. He has just completed setting up a new Digital Fabrication Workshop consisting of a large CNC flat bed router (wood, aluminum, plastics), CNC plasma cutter (steel, stainless steel, bronze, aluminium) and small laser cutter utilized for teaching and conceptualisation. The reason he decided on the CNC machines is because they are industrial size and are not constrained by size and material choice in the way 3D printing currently is. He uses them to create large sculpted pieces out of wood and other materials. He has also used laser cutting and 3D printing to create unusual designs, such as writing and cutting out words in leather pieces. Mastering the CAD software can be very time-consuming, especially learning new languages such as CNC machine language, but just like programming, can provide new opportunities and constraints from which to mould and create materials.

Distinctiveness: Capitalizing on the Latest Technologies

As part of his Community Punching Bags catalogue, Johann chose to use the latest shiny memory clip to upload the accompanying videos and material. The idea was that rather than place a DVD in an envelope at the back of the catalogue, that often remains unopened, he would clip one to the front of each catalogue, making it highly visible and affordable. Moreover, during the opening he could walk up to some of the visitors and attach it to their clothing as an ice-breaker. This idea popped out to him during a conversation with us – a flash of inspiration – and from that moment on Johann set

about working out the details of making the memory clip to be integrated as part of his catalogue, including sourcing the thinnest and most aesthetic one on the market. It led to a flurry of excited discussion about how it would all fit together and if it would work in practice and whether and how to change the current design of the catalogue for it to fit.

One of his former MFA students', Peter Jenks, end of year show questioned the topic of 'old' age by contrasting the realities of growing older with the entrenched attitudes to ageing in society. He learned a whole set of new technological skills (including 3D laser printers, manufacturing technologies

and CAD) at the age of 69. The resultant larger than life pieces that he was able to make through using these tools, coupled with him learning them late on in his life, emphasized the tensions between ageing and ageism in a dialectical comfortable-uncomfortable way. But there was something else that struck me, even more than his mastering the technological challenges and putting them to creative use. Not only did he craft the striking pieces, all by himself, but also he demonstrated and taught the younger students on his course how to use them, showing them what possibilities they afforded to create quite different objects, artefacts and artworks.



Essence

The secret to Johann's creativity is in how he explores and plays out his ideas with other's participation, sculpting new possibilities enabled by new manufacturing tools and serendipity. Working collaboratively on community projects enables Johann and his participants to "creatively feed each other and share ideas, solving problems to create a unified body of work". How much control he maintains in the creative process varies from project to project. Knowing when to take over and when to hand over to other's expertise and creativity is an uncertain tension that adds to the process.

Food for thought

The Internet and social media have made it possible for anyone to get public recognition of their creative acts and artefacts – provided they know how to use it to good effect. The case studies distilled here have given a glimpse into the online and offline lives of an acclaimed chef, winemaker, choreographer and artist. The secret behind their creative successes lies in their respective realization that it is as much in the telling as in the doing and as much in the feeling as in the knowing.

We can all strive to be a bit more creative by being more alive, more aware and more receptive to what is going on around us and through developing more our relationships with other people. We can also try to be a bit more creative in our conversations, in friendships and in deciding what we eat, wear and try out each day. But when we create art, pots, music, wine, dance, food, technology, poems, and so on for others to appreciate, want or be moved by – then we need to delve further into the secrets of social creativity.

Much depends on being in the right place, at the right time with a measure of luck thrown into the mix. But as we have seen, it is about being prepared, knowing how to tell a compelling story about yourself, nurturing special relationships with others and having dialogues with people from other walks of life. Central to this endeavour is knowing how best to develop and manage one's online presence to reveal, inform and tantalize 'the other'.



10 takeaways

Rather than try list the top 10 secrets of creative people, I have instead distilled the insights gleaned from my conversations with Adam, Ben, Johann and Simon into ten takeaways:

- 1) **try not to think of what you are creating in terms of what you are looking for but imagine how it will play out with others**
- 2) **don't stick with the first great idea but know how to gently let it go and try out others**
- 3) **discover what someone likes, enjoys or wants by understanding what they don't like**
- 4) **think long ahead of how the story behind each new creation will be told both online and offline**
- 5) **reveal aspects of the story as it unfolds rather than keep it under wraps until what is being created is ready**
- 6) **explore questions and ideas deeply through conversations and interactions with others**
- 7) **build special relationships with suppliers to ensure you get the best, the only or latest materials/products**
- 8) **develop deep and long-term friendships with others from different professions to explore collaborative ideas that enhance the story behind your creative process**
- 9) **be open to others' interpretations of your ideas and don't be afraid of where this might lead**
- 10) **develop a special relationship and rapport with your online followers**

Bibliography

David Byrne (2012) *How Music Works*.

Margaret A. Boden (2004) *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*.

Tom Kelley and David Kelley (2013) *Creative Confidence*.

Eric Maisel (2000) *The Creativity Book*.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Adam Mason, Ben Spalding, Simon Ellis and Johann van der Schijff for opening up their worlds to me. The research was funded by an EPSRC dream fellowship.

Page 3 – David Byrne @ Future of Music Policy Summit 2006

Photo © Fred von Lohmann

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/vonlohmann/261661051>

¹This image is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Dedication


This book is dedicated to the late Gary Marsden and the late Steve Howard, who hosted my visits to Cape Town and Melbourne, respectively. They both died tragically much too young. My many conversations with them opened my eyes to new opportunities.



Gary Marsden



Steve Howard



What makes creative people stand out from the crowd? How much are they in control and how much is down to fate? How do they manage, adapt to and navigate in an ever-changing, increasingly crowded and competitive world? These are the questions Yvonne Rogers tackles in her latest condensed and insightful book. She argues that the secret behind creative people is not down to how their ideas develop and evolve in their heads but how they manifest themselves in the context of being 'out there'. Anyone can have a great idea, but to be noticed and continue to grow in recognition requires sharing, narrating, connecting and even sparring of nascent ideas with others, both in the flesh and through the fickle web of social media. Through following the journeys of a chef, a winemaker, a choreographer and an artist, Yvonne reveals how successful creativity is inextricably linked with social creativity.