

BEAVERS
OUTRAGE
&
BLOSSOM

A Creative Manifesto

By
Richard Holman



Before we begin I should introduce myself. My name is Richard Mark Holman and I was born on the 20th February 1973 in a small town in North Yorkshire called Harrogate. Now, not many people have heard of Harrogate. If they have they probably associate it with Betty's Tea Rooms. However, a simple internet search reveals three surprising facts about Harrogate which suggest that it has a lot more going for it than Earl Grey and jam scones.

01. People in Harrogate like a drink. In fact, a survey just a few years ago discovered that they like to drink more alcohol than anyone else in the UK.

02. In 2010 Harrogate was named 'the online pornography capital of the country' when a BBC documentary revealed that the residents watch more adult material on their computers than anywhere else.

03. In March 2013, the British property website Rightmove published a survey which declared Harrogate 'the happiest place to live in the United Kingdom'.

So there we are. I'll let you draw your own conclusions.

In the twenty or so years since I left Yorkshire, I've made a lot of stuff. I've worked as a Creative Director in both graphic design and advertising, making commercials and creating brand identities. I've worked as photographer shooting portraits and documentary projects. More recently, I've been the less talented half of a husband and wife team fabricating furniture and lighting.

And the more stuff I've made the more I've come to realize that whatever it is you're making, whether that's furniture, photographs or a logo for a TV channel, there are certain fundamental principles which always seem to apply. Once you understand these principles then you become better at making stuff. And the better you become, the more fun you have. The more fun you have, the better you become. Ad infinitum. Until you become lost in a swirling orgasmic miasma of work and joy. I'm exaggerating a little, but hopefully you get the point.

The purpose then of this short and simple book is to share with you these principles for making. I've learned them the hard way, in the years since I left that Northern hotbed of porn and booze they call Harrogate. I've learned them slowly, lesson by lesson, as I've careered between moments of exhilarating success and a far more familiar feeling of soul crushing failure. You, on the other hand, get them on a plate.

Over the course of the next 50 pages I'll share with you my creative manifesto for makers. A series of principles you can apply today to whatever creative endeavour it is that you're involved in.

Rather than talk about myself and my own work, which could become a little tiresome for us both, I'd like to show these principles at play in great works of art, literature, science, cinema and music. Together you and I are about to go on a journey: a journey that will encompass beavers, blossom and outrage.

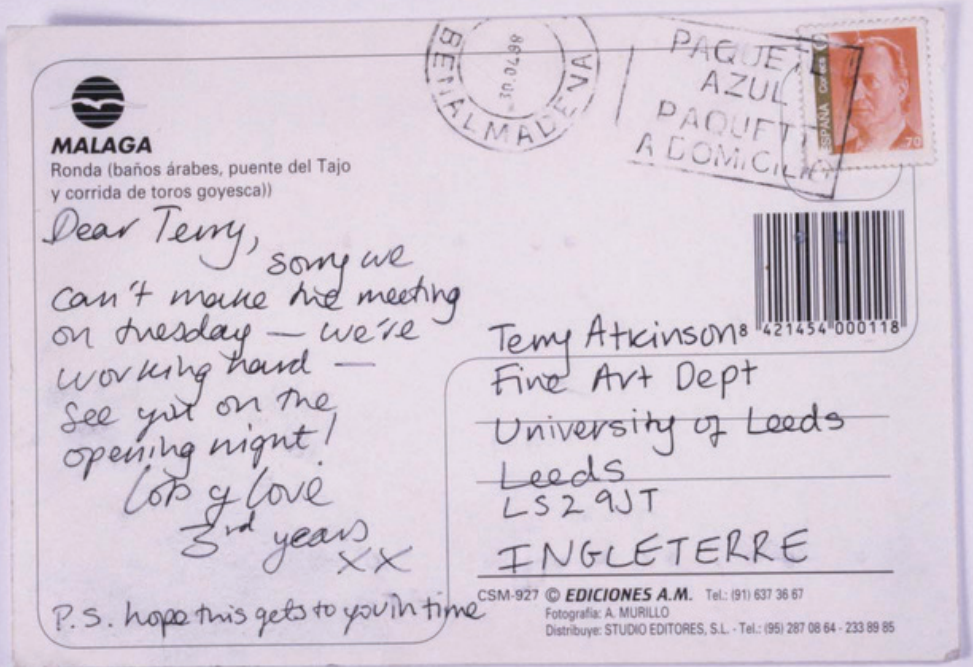
Shall we begin?

01

Break the rules

It's Summer 1998. We're in Leeds (which, coincidentally, for those of you who bothered to read the introduction, happens to be very close to Harrogate) and a group of third year art students at the university are planning an end of year show. They've secured a grant of just over a thousand pounds to cover the costs of hiring a venue, buying materials, doing the publicity, that kind of thing.

With a just under a week to go their tutor, Terry Atkinson, receives a postcard from his students. It reads 'Dear Terry, Sorry we can't make the meeting on Tuesday - we're working hard - see you on the opening night! Lots of love, 3rd years. PS Hope this gets to you in time.'



One imagines this would have been unsettling news for Terry, especially given that the postcard showed an image of the Arab Baths in Malaga and carried a Spanish postmark.

Sure enough, come opening night the gallery space remained all but empty: there were no artworks on the walls. Instead, a single jug of Sangria and some speakers playing flamenco music. The perplexed guests were then bussed to Leeds Bradford airport just in time to see the 13 art students emerge from customs, having spent a fortnight on holiday in Malaga, funded entirely by the grant they'd been given to put on their show.





The photos they later shared of them pissing it up on the Costa Brava only served to exacerbate the groundswell of negative opinion about their so called artistic endeavour. It wasn't long before the furore was picked up by the national media. Pretty soon the story had gone viral. Or at least as viral as things could go in 1998. The red tops were outraged: 'CON ARTISTS SPANISH RIP OFF' trilled their front pages. The broadsheets on the other hand took a more nuanced position: 'STUDENTS' ART WAS IN THE RIGHT PLACE'.



Some of the 13 fine-art students from Leeds University enjoying their holiday in the Costa del Sol. They claim their arrival at Leeds Bradford Airport was performance art, sponsored, including the students' union, were not so sure

Students' art was in the right place

Grant for exhibition entitled Going Places was used to fund a holiday in Spain, writes Paul Wilkinson

ALL great artists are misanthropes at some point in their careers. Last night, 13 fine-art students were protesting in trying to explain how using a £1,000 exhibition grant for a holiday in Spain was a perfectly proper misanthropic. For some reason, their protest were not entirely convinced.

The nine women and four men, from Leeds University were thought to be working in great secrecy on a piece of performance art entitled Going Places. Finally, their lecturers and a sponsor were invited to one of the city's galleries for the unveiling.

They were granted by a large bowl of mugs, a stereo playing flamenco music and a drama student dressed as an air hostess carrying a megaphone.

Without any explanation, they were loaded into a coach and driven to Leeds Bradford Airport. They arrived just in time to see the students emptying off the plane from Spain. The students had spent the money partying for six days in Estepona. The exhibition, they explained, was the evaporation of their behaviour.

Now the 13 are facing demands for the money back, a threat to have their degrees withheld and even police action.

Matthew Dunning, 22, said: "We weren't about enjoyment or such, it was about testing waters and reactions. It was quite hard to have the grant to do it. We could have just gone back and said we just wanted to go on holiday. My dad had to go to the Costa del Sol because that started everything.

Terry Atkinson, their tutor, said: "It's definitely art, but whether it's good or bad art is another thing. It was a complete secret quite amusing. They were lucky, their plane could have been 12 hours late. Their lack was phenomenal in respect of timing a and keeping it a secret. But even an event like that is quite within the bounds of contemporary practice. We think they're a pretty clever bunch and expect them to do very well in their degree show next year."

But Maria Dunning, whose Leeds gallery (Dunning has gone) said: "I've been asked for a time, I am considering taking in the public. As far as I'm concerned this is kind of a small every effort to recover the money and donate it to a worthwhile charity."

"I can think of a lot better causes to support them to pay for a holiday in Spain. The students' union, which gave £1,000, was more direct. They're really taking the piss," Ruth Wilson, the union communications officer, said. "When we gave them the money there was no mention of any holidays. This could have an effect on further requests for funds from art students. We have requested that they give the money back."

The big cost £1,000, with the students stepping up the bill. "If we do not get it we can register it as a debt to the university and none of the art students will be allowed to graduate until the money is repaid."

One of the students, Simon Clarke, 21, from Huddersfield, said: "We are going to try our best to pay the money back."

"It was a great, exciting project for us. We have made for these years and had lots of conversations about what it is art. There is lots of confusion about what it is art and what it is work. It's about trying, learning it is not but to reflect it is work. What we did over there, as I would be told, if I had, we did not have a time line."

"If people think it is unacceptable, they're making pre-judgements about what is or isn't art. If by raising awareness of this exhibition we gain more conversations like 'What is art, our children, has worked."



Making waves the students putting their £1,000 exhibition grant to good use

CON ARTISTS' SPANISH RIP-OFF

Art grant funds holiday in sun

LEEDS officials are demanding that artists who squandered over £1,000 on a Spanish holiday must repay the cash immediately.

BY MICHELLE CHAPPEL AND REBECCA SMITH
Both Writers' Communications Office at L.U.



Me, I was kind of torn. I thought that it was great that a bunch of students had managed to ignite a national conversation about the nature of art. But then a part of me also thought that deciding to spend your grant on a holiday wasn't the most imaginative of artistic gestures.

A couple of weeks after the show the students were invited on to the Today programme on Radio 4. Perhaps anticipating a more thorough grilling about their holiday / art project than they had yet received, they chose the nation's favourite early morning news show to make a startling revelation ... They hadn't in fact spent a single penny of their grant. They hadn't even been to Spain. The money was safe. Their travel documents and the postcard Terry Atkinson received had been painstakingly forged. The photographs of the students frolicking on the beach had been shot at Cayton Sands near Scarborough on one of the very few sunny days to grace the Yorkshire coastline. The shots by the outdoor swimming pool had been taken in Leeds with a blue lens filter to enhance the murky Northern sky. The only thing that wasn't fake were their suntans, though these had been acquired on a rented sunbed in the basement of their student digs.

This for me was the coup de grace. The twist which elevated the students' project into a brilliant piece of conceptual art. At a time when the feted band of Young British Artists were relying on physical objects like sharks in formaldehyde and unmade beds to provoke and outrage, these thirteen students had with a single fabricated act not exactly broken the rules, but forced us to question the very parameters upon which they are based. Which is of course what the very best creative work does.

First understand the rules and conventions of your chosen medium. Then interrogate, challenge and invert them.

The students all received First class honours and were never heard of again.



THE ONLY THING THAT WASN'T FAKE

02

Simplify. Reduce. Distill.

It seems somewhat counterintuitive to say that one of the most important parts of the creative process, if not the most important part, is to take things away. Too often makers will either fall so in love with detail of their creation that they fail to see how much stronger it would be were it simpler, or they try and camouflage the flaws in their original concept by adding unnecessary frippery.

Let me tell you a story from the Wild West.

On March 7th 1881 in New Haven Connecticut, William Wirt Winchester died of tuberculosis. Before his death he had been the treasurer of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, a company founded by his father Oliver. One wonders if William had succumbed to TB through a weakened immune system brought on by overwork: he had been the treasurer of a company that was awash with a tsunami of cash.



The Winchester repeating rifle was 'the gun that won the West'. Its self loading system made it an instant – and very deadly – hit.

On his death William left the family fortune to his wife Sarah. This included not only a lump sum of \$20 million dollars but also 50% of the company, which was to provide a daily income of \$1000, the equivalent to about \$25,000 dollars today.



07

So Sarah decided to do what any self respecting widow of a multimillionaire arms dealer would do in similar circumstances: she began building a mansion. Once construction was underway Sarah, who had a lifelong interest in spiritualism, decided to visit a medium and attempt to contact her deceased husband. Maybe she was after his opinion on the colour of the bathroom suite. Unfortunately for Sarah the consultation did not go as planned. Indeed she received some bad news. Some very bad news. The medium informed her that once construction on the mansion was complete, it would be haunted by the ghosts of everyone who had ever been killed by, you guessed it, the Winchester self loading rifle.

One imagines this news was something of a setback for Sarah. To be haunted by one ghost would be upsetting enough. But to be haunted by many millions ...

Sarah tossed and turned for a few nights before suddenly she hit on a plan as simple as it was ambitious: if the haunting was to begin when construction ceased then it would never cease; she would go on building her home forever. And that is exactly what she did.



08

For the next thirty eight years construction on 525 South Winchester Blvd San Jose continued around the clock, seven days a week. There was no architect, there were no formal plans and it wasn't long before the building made no sense at all. There were doors that opened onto nothing. Staircases that went nowhere. And windows overlooking other rooms. By the time Sarah herself died, in 1922, the mansion had 160 rooms and was seven stories high.

I tell this story not just because it's a cracking yarn, but also because it seems to me to be an extreme example of what happens when the urge to construct, to create, is allowed to go unchecked. From time to time I too have been involved in projects where clients have lost sight of their original intentions. Perhaps their objectives were not even clear in the first place. As if to hide the absence of any

clear direction they engage in a kind of collective myopia, blundering around in the darkness, giving feedback that ignores anything said before, requesting changes that are inconsistent with those already issued and adding confusion upon confusion.

As a creator you should always understand the purpose of that which you are creating. You should be able to express this purpose simply and in a single sentence. Every decision you take during the creative process should be about amplifying the capacity of your creation to fulfill that intention. If you add something to the form which does not enhance the function, then be brutal. Strip it away.

In my opinion the best things in both work and life are the simplest.

You can do a great deal with very little.

A later denizen of California was the writer Richard Brautigan. A master in the art of making just a few words do the work of a thousand. Here is one of my favourite of his short stories. It's called The Scarlatti Tilt.

'It's very hard to live in a studio apartment with a man who's learning to play the violin. That's what she told the police when she handed them the empty revolver.'

Don't be Sarah. Be Richard.



03

Make Friends

It is sometimes assumed that a creative endeavour is more worthy if the creator has struggled on alone, the isolated visionary, determined to forge his or her magnum opus singlehanded before sharing it with the world. And yet some of our most valuable scientific enterprises, best loved pieces of music and most innovative works of art have been the creation of a partnership between individuals. One thinks of Lennon & McCartney, Watson & Crick, Gilbert & George.

Indeed, one of the great joys of my own professional life is to have been present at that beautiful moment of alchemy where a group of like minded individuals come together in a shared endeavour and somehow become much more than the sum of their parts.

I would encourage you to open up, to share, to look for friends in the creative process and to know that those friends can come from the most unlikely places ...



In 1967 Aretha Franklin was 25 years old and she was already something of a music industry veteran, having recorded no less than nine albums. Yet not one of these records had troubled the top of the charts or made much of an impact on the ears of the public. It was quite possible that Aretha Franklin would be just another name on that doleful list of singers with a great voice who never quite made it.

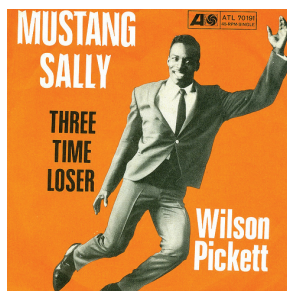
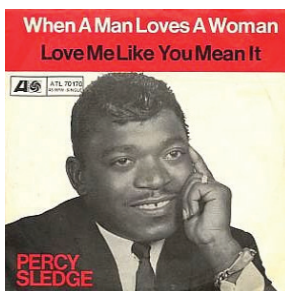
Her record company, Atlantic Records, decided it was worth one last push. They sent her south to Alabama to visit the Fame recording studios in Muscle Shoals run by the eccentric, visionary and moustachioed producer Rick Hall.



11

As was the way in those days, the studio had an in house band. When Aretha got together with these musicians, five guys whom she'd met only that morning, something extraordinary happened. In just a few hours, they had laid down 'I Never Loved a Man (the Way I love You)', a record that would be an enormous hit, the ignition point of Aretha's stellar career and one of the greatest recordings in the history of pop music.

18



12

The backing band, who were known as the Swampers - a name which could be one of the reasons why they never made it out of the shadows and into the limelight - worked on many other much loved records, including 'When a Man Loves a Woman' by Percy Sledge, 'Mustang Sally' by Wilson Pickett, 'I'll Take You There' by the Staple Sisters and most of Etta James hits.

Word of their exceptional abilities soon spread. Other recording artists got in touch with Rick to see if they too could work with the Swampers. As he recalls in the brilliant 2013 documentary *Muscle Shoals*, Paul Simon gave him a ring.

"Hi Rick. It's Paul Simon."

"Hi."

"I'd like to come down and do some recording with you."

"Sure."

"And I want those same black guys that played on I'll Take You There."

"They're pretty pale."

Just like everyone else, Paul Simon had assumed that down in Alabama the musicians who had played on the hit records of the country's best loved black recording artists and who had been responsible for that irresistibly soulful sound, were themselves black. But he and everyone else was wrong. Very wrong. The Swampers were five ordinary looking white guys - the kind of guys you could quite easily mistake for electrical engineers.



13

That they were making such a significant contribution to popular music through their collaboration with black recording artists was pretty extraordinary. But that they were doing so at a time of race riots and the struggle for civil rights in one of the most racially segregated states in America was all the more incredible.

It sometimes seems to me that the less sure a person is of their own creative ability, the more likely they are to resemble that kid at school, who, during test time, would hunch over his desk with his arm curled right round his paper, like anyone really cared what answers he was scribbling down.

Be open to creative friendships, look for collaborations that can become greater than the sum of their parts, and be prepared to find them in the most unlikely places.

As a coda to this this chapter I'd like to add that it's never been easier to get

in touch with someone whom you'd like to collaborate with. Getting hold of someone's email address and dropping them a note isn't hard to do. I've had the temerity to contact several of my heroes to gauge their interest on working together and been surprised when several of them have said yes. Even if it doesn't work out, you get to meet someone you've always admired. I'll never forget a cold, bright New York afternoon I spent with the photographer Joel Meyerowitz.

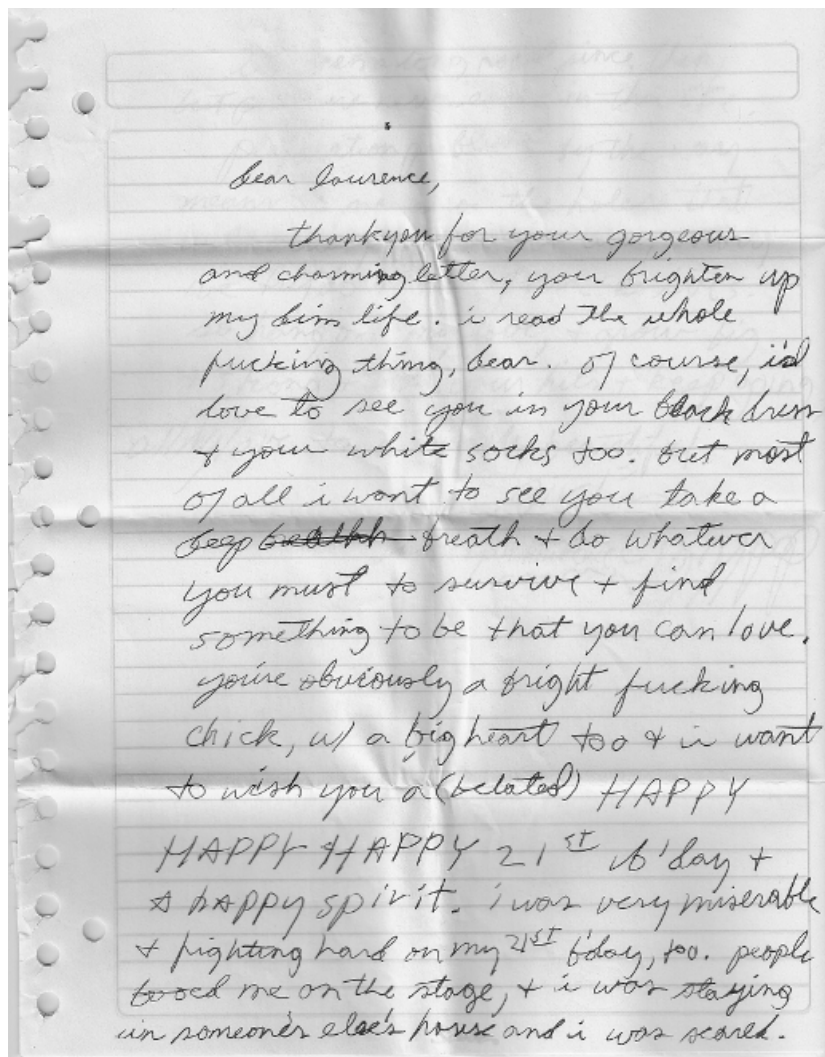


14

Someone else who contacted their hero was a girl from Paris called Laurence. She wrote a twenty page letter to Iggy Pop in 1995 about her own troubled life. While it took Iggy a little while to respond – and presumably to read the letter in the first place – he eventually did, with the response arriving on the day Laurence and her family were evicted from their home by bailiffs.

Dear Laurence, Thank you for your gorgeous and charming letter, you brighten up my dim life. I read the whole fucking thing, dear. Of course, I'd love to see you in your black dress and your white socks too. But most of all I want to see you take a deep breath and do whatever you must to survive and find something to be that

you can love. You're obviously a bright fucking chick, w/ a big heart too and I want to wish you a (belated) HAPPY HAPPY HAPPY 21st b'day and happy spirit. I was very miserable and fighting hard on my 21st b'day, too. People booed me on the stage, and I was staying in someone else's house and I was scared. It's been a long



Dear Laurence,

thankyou for your gorgeous and charming letter, your brighten up my him life. i read the whole fucking thing, dear. of course, id love to see you in your black dress + your white socks too. but most of all i want to see you take a ~~deep breath~~ breath + do whatever you must to survive + find something to be that you can love. you're obviously a bright fucking chick, w/ a big heart too + i want to wish you a (belated) HAPPY HAPPY HAPPY 21ST b'day + a happy spirit. i was very miserable + fighting hard on my 21ST b'day, too. people booed me on the stage, + i was staying in someone else's house and i was scared.

road since then, but pressure never ends in this life. 'Perforation problems' by the way means to me the holes that will always exist in any story we try to make of our lives. So hang on, my love, and grow big and strong and take your hits and keep going. All my love to a really beautiful girl. That's you Laurence. Iggy Pop.

its been a long road since then,
but pressure never ends in this life.
'perforation problems' by the way
means to me also the holes that
will always exist in any story
we try to make of our ~~the~~ lives.
so hang on, my love, + grow big
+ strong + take your hits + keep going,
all my love to a really beautiful
girl
that's you Laurence
Iggy Pop

04

1+1=2

Logic. There's an assumption that logic is anathema to the creative process. That it's the preserve of scientists, lawyers and accountants. As if we, as makers, head out into the wilderness and wait for the moment when - if - the God of Creation chooses to bestow her bounty upon us.

Yet logic should be one of the most important tools in your metaphorical creative workshop. Reason is invaluable in enabling you to arrive at a creative solution to a particular problem. And if you're working in the commercial realm then being able to explain to your client why you've got to where you've got will make your proposal much easier for them to buy.

Cast your mind back to 2007. With five years to go before the Olympic Games arrive in the UK, preparations are already well underway. With much fanfare, at a specially arranged press conference, the London Organising Committee of The Olympic and Paralympic Games reveals the brand identity for the games. The response is not quite what they'd hoped for.



16

The new identity, and in particular the logo, is met with widespread disdain. For some it's a 'broken swastika'; for others it resembles Lisa Simpson performing an unmentionable act on her brother Bart. For me it was distinctive but ugly.

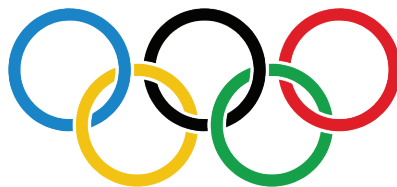
I was chatting to my friend and sometime collaborator, the graphic designer turned artist Daniel Eatock, about the identity for the games and he mentioned that he'd come up with an alternative.

I'd like to share it with you. Not just because I think it would have been an infinitely more elegant, effective and popular logo, but also because how Daniel arrived at it is an excellent illustration of how clear headed logic and reason can accelerate you along your creative journey.



17

The original Olympic logo was created by the father of the modern Olympic games, Baron Pierre De Coubertin. The five rings represent the five continents coming together in the spirit of sporting endeavour. The logo is simple, pleasing and one of the most readily identifiable ever created.



18

As Dan looked at Coubertin's original logo and its repetition of the circular form, he began to think of other visual identities with a similar make up, in particular the roundel.

The roundel – 'a circular disc used as a symbol' – has a habit of cropping up throughout British culture. The RAF roundel graced the fuselage of Hurricanes and Spitfires as they tumbled through the skies during the Battle Of Britain. The roundel is the basis of the logo for the London Underground and every station on its system. It was ever present throughout the 1960's having been appropriated by the Who and scooter riding Mods, as well as in artworks by the likes of Peter Blake and Jasper Johns. More recently in the 90's it was employed as an emblem of, ahem, 'Cool Britannia'.



19

So, Dan, in yet another illustration of his extraordinary capacity to come up with brilliant ideas that somehow seem obvious post conception, redrew the five Olympic rings as a roundel.

He had added nothing to the original logo. No floaty shapes, hard lines, or anything else that could mistaken for a cartoon character involved in a sex act. By simply redrawing the Olympic logo in a form which has consistently been at the heart of British popular culture, Dan had seamlessly integrated the Olympic brand and that of the UK with an irrefutable, elegant and – to me at least – extremely pleasing logic.

Whether you share my regret that Dan's logo did not become the official mark of the 2012 games or not is immaterial. What counts is that you're able to appreciate



20

how a brilliant creative outcome is often borne out of reason. As an aside, it was only after the games that Dan realized a flaw in his proposal. In the Coubertin logo the rings are all the same size and so occupy the same surface area. In Dan's version the rings, reconfigured in the roundel, occupy different surface areas. So he reworked it, to give the rings and the white space that separates them exactly the same surface area. This kind of attention to detail makes me go weak at the knees.



21

I'm losing you, aren't I?

We better move on.

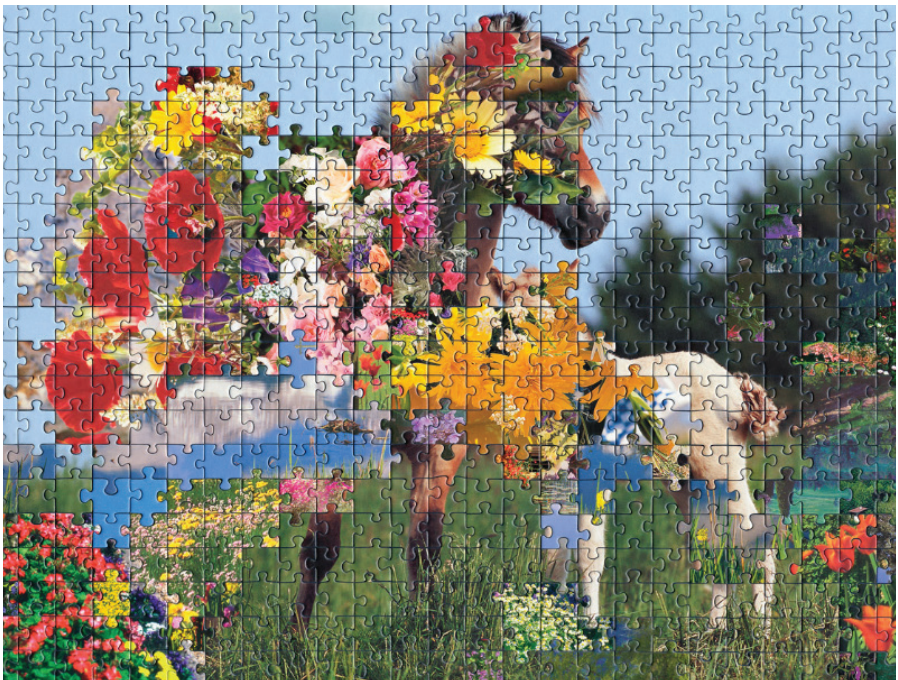
05

**Put things back together
the wrong way**

Kent Rogowski is an artist and photographer who spends much of his time taking mass produced objects and reconfiguring them in surprising, provocative and whimsical ways. He's worked with Teddy Bears, self help books and even folded pieces of paper, but perhaps my favourite work by him is titled 'Love=Love' and is fabricated from nothing more than shop bought jigsaws.

Kent discovered that some jigsaw manufacturers use just one die to cut all their puzzles. So the pieces of one puzzle can be put together with the pieces of another to create an entirely new image. In 'Love=Love' Kent uses this insight to startling effect. By combining just the flowers and the skies from each jigsaw Kent creates a series of surreal and explosive images which, as he puts it, 'sit in direct contrast to the banal and bucolic images of the original puzzles.'

I love this work. Is there any image more anodyne than that which sits on a 1000 piece jigsaw made to be pieced back together in a damp caravan on a rainy bank holiday afternoon? Yet Kent has transformed these images and



made them fantastical and arresting. He's given them a wonderful magnetism which makes you stop and stare, only to discover that when you finally turn away and move on they've somehow become fixed in your memory.

There is much to be learned from Kent's creative process. Too often we embark on a project having predetermined the route we will take, a route defined by our unconscious acceptance of conventions and the given parameters of our medium.

It is only by refusing to accept these parameters, by challenging them, by understanding the ways in which they can be manipulated, that we can really begin to embark on making work which is worthy of the gallery wall, rather than a mouldy caravan table.

06

Exploit your medium

I know from my own experience in advertising that creatives are often tasked with coming up with 360 degree campaigns: creative concepts which work in all media. Traditionally this meant TV, radio and print. Today it includes social, experiential, guerilla, VR and more besides.

While one should be able to execute a great idea in any of these media, what happens way too often is that the creatives get a little lazy and they fail to explore the ways in which the core idea can be enriched by the particular properties of each medium. We've all seen those campaigns where the TV spot is OK, but then the print ad is just, well a still from the TV spot, and the radio ad is kind of the TV spot but without the pictures, and the social campaign is asking you the audience to shoot something like the TV spot ... It all becomes very one note and dull.

The best creative work takes advantage of the particular possibilities of the medium in which it appears.

An extreme example of this is the Penrose Triangle, originally conceived by the Swedish artist Oscar Reutersvärd in 1934, only to be conceived of once again in the 1950's by the British Psychiatrist Lionel Sharples Penrose (who presumably was better at PR, which is why it isn't called the Reutersvärd Triangle).

Penrose described the shape, which can only exist in two dimensions and cannot be realized in three dimensional space, as "impossibility in its purest form." It was said to have inspired the artist MC Escher, whose work shares the same characteristic of being able to exist solely on paper.



23

I would encourage you always to consider the particular properties of the medium in which you are working, and ask yourself this: what is it that I can do here that I would not able to do if I were working in another form?

07

Make Mistakes



24

On August 24th 1853, George Crum, a half African, half Native American cook was having a bad day in his Saratoga restaurant. This was largely due to one especially irritating customer who repeatedly sent his French Fries back to the kitchen because, in his opinion, they were not cut thin enough. After this had happened several times, George, who was said to be a very mild mannered man, an unusual characteristic in a chef, snapped. He'd

had enough. He sliced the potatoes razor thin, fried them to a crisp, covered them in salt and sent them back out to the disgruntled customer. Who very quickly became grunted: the fried potato slices were delicious. Word soon spread about George's accidental creation. They became hugely popular, known at first as 'Saratoga Chips' and then just 'Potato Chips' (or in the UK, 'crisps').

This story may well be apocryphal. Wikipedia certainly thinks so. But if true, it's a lovely illustration of how some of the best things come about by mistake, by a conscious dereliction of the accepted way of doing things.

Cornflakes, Post-It Notes, Penicillin, X rays and microwave ovens all share a similarly accidental genesis.



Think about the last time you made a serious mistake during the creative process. A bad call, the wrong decision, something stupid which shortly after you couldn't quite believe you'd done.

If you can't, then I'd suggest you need to change the way you're working. Cause if you're not making mistakes then you're a very long way from making anything anyone is remotely likely to remember.

Most businesses today are inherently risk averse. Especially when it comes to advertising and design. Too often clients want to see evidence that similar brands have done similar campaigns and that they have worked. Or you find your proposal subjected to the mob like judgment of a focus group who will only celebrate a concept if they feel they have seen something like it before and are bemused and irritated by work which is original and without precedent.

So, if you're working for a client or a boss who rigidly restricts you to operating within a comfort zone that you're finding increasingly uncomfortable, sit them down with a bag of 'Saratoga Chips' and put it to them like this ...

The period in our lives when we grow the most, when we make the most profound discoveries, and during which we are most intimately engaged with the environment around us is as kids, when we also happened to be making mistakes all the time. Stop making mistakes and sooner or later you're dead.

08

Be Present

I'd like to talk about time. And the best way that I can think to do this is by talking about photography.

Time is critical to photography. The shutter speed determines the length of time that light is allowed to enter the camera, react with the sensor or film and create the image.

Usually the duration that the shutter is open is just a few hundredths of a second; so quick that it's imperceptible to the person taking the picture. Yet, if the photograph is a successful one, then it will go on to have a life and a resonance that exists long beyond the moment that the image was made.



Take this portrait as an example. It was shot by the prodigiously talented American photographer Bryan Schutmaat as part of his series 'Grays the Mountain Sends', an elegiac and contemplative sequence of landscapes and portraits, featuring rugged former mining towns and the equally rugged faces of those who inhabit them.

The moment in which the photograph was taken, when Bryan pressed the shutter release and the film in his camera was exposed to the light reflecting off his subject, was probably somewhere between 1/60th and 1/250th of a second. Yet I find myself captivated by it for far longer. Time seems embedded within this image.

We can see a lifetime of work, of trouble, of concern, inscribed in the man's face, in the texture of his weathered skin and the creases worn into his forehead. Look carefully and you can see too that he has only recently removed his hat - the hair just above his ears flairs out slightly - underlining that he is somehow exposed before us. Although his eyes are red rimmed with fatigue, the irises are ice blue, clear – so clear in fact that they are almost empty, reinforcing the impression of hollowness his expression and body language suggest. While this extraordinary image was created at a very particular moment in time, the subject of it appears distant, divorced from the 'now' of the photograph, lost either in contemplation of experiences already lived or in foreboding about what is to come: he is very much not in the present.

So, a simple portrait of a working man, made in a fraction of second, acquires a complexity, resonance and emotional depth which far outstrips the moment in which it was created. And it is this simple dynamic to which we as creators and makers should aspire – giving our creations sufficient richness, depth and ambiguity to ensure that they sustain and enthrall our viewers' interest long after they were created. Most of us will rarely - if ever - do so with the same aplomb as Bryan Schutmaat, but it is undoubtedly a good thing to aim for.

While I continue with this meditation on the fourth dimension, I'd like to make one further presumption about the photograph above: I reckon when Bryan hit the shutter he was, unlike his subject, totally there, present and in the

moment. In my experience it's almost impossible to take a good photograph if you are not. If you're thinking about the row you had with the kids on the way to school this morning, or worrying about the row you might have with your wife when you get home and tell her that you've banned the kids from TV for the next month because of the row you had on the way to school, or even if you're just thinking about your next photographic subject or set up, then you will miss that decisive but fleeting moment when subject, light, composition and form all align in exquisite harmony.

We live in an age of distraction. Technology demands our constant attention. Our phones and the social media they carry tug at us incessantly, perniciously, drawing our attention from the present moment. Yet if we are to give ourselves fully to the creative process we have to be able to give ourselves fully to the present. I know from experience that in a commercial context this can be extremely hard to do. Trying to write a brilliant commercial amid the cacophony of beeps, buzzes and dings announcing text messages, emails and social media updates is impossible.

So I would encourage you not only to switch all that stuff off, but to take time each day to be present and give yourself to the moment. When was the last time you sat and looked at something, really looked at it, so you could draw it later from memory?

To my knowledge no one has ever been more eloquent on this subject than the writer Dennis Potter. In 1994 I was at my final year in university. One evening, having spent the greater part of the afternoon in the pub, I arrived home, made my way across the sticky brown living room carpet, fell into a threadbare armchair and flicked on the TV. What I saw next had an indescribably profound affect on me.

Dennis Potter was being interviewed by the journalist Melvin Bragg. But this was no ordinary interview. Potter was in acute pain from the cancer that was to kill him only three months later. To ameliorate the pain he chain smoked cigarettes and sipped a cocktail of liquid morphine and champagne. And he spoke with searing clarity ...



27

"We're the one animal that knows that we're going to die, and yet we carry on paying our mortgages, doing our jobs, moving about, behaving as though there's eternity in a sense. And we forget or tend to forget that life can only be defined in the present tense; it is 'is', and it is now only. I mean, as much as we would like to call back yesterday and indeed yearn to, and ache to sometimes, we can't. It's in us, but we can't actually; it's not there in front of us. However predictable tomorrow is, and unfortunately for most people, most of the time, it's too predictable, they're locked into whatever situation they're locked into ... Even so, no matter how predictable it is, there's the element of the unpredictable, of the you don't know. The only thing you know for sure is the present tense, and that nowness becomes so vivid that, almost in a perverse sort of way, I'm almost serene. You know, I can celebrate life.

Below my window in Ross, when I'm working in Ross, for example, there at this season, the blossom is out in full now, there in the west early. It's a plum tree,

it looks like apple blossom but it's white, and looking at it, instead of saying "Oh that's nice blossom" ... last week looking at it through the window when I'm writing, I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be, and I can see it. Things are both more trivial than they ever were, and more important than they ever were, and the difference between the trivial and the important doesn't seem to matter. But the nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous, and if people could see that, you know. There's no way of telling you; you have to experience it, but the glory of it, if you like, the comfort of it, the reassurance ... not that I'm interested in reassuring people - bugger that. The fact is, if you see the present tense, boy do you see it! And boy can you celebrate it."

09

Look out of the side window

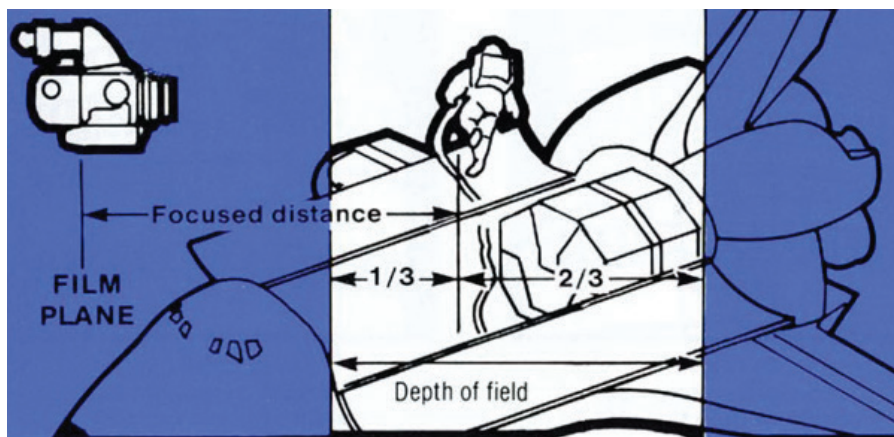
One of the most famous photographs ever taken, an image which changed our perception of our place in the universe, almost didn't happen.

The Apollo 8 mission was the first manned mission to orbit the moon. On Christmas Eve 1968, just after 1030AM Houston time, the crew of Apollo 8 were on their fourth orbit. Three times they'd witnessed the moon from a perspective that no human being until then had seen – an extraordinary spectacle in itself. But then, on the fourth time round, Mission Commander Frank Borman rotated the spacecraft by a few degrees. As he did so, his fellow astronaut Bill Anders happened to catch sight of something out of his side window that took his breath away: the blue pearl that is our planet slowly appearing over the barren, grey, lifeless surface of the moon.



NASA had given the astronauts a strict schedule of images to capture. This unanticipated event was not one of them. Nevertheless, Bill Anders, overwhelmed by the profound spectacle, grabbed his highly modified Hasselblad 500 EL and fired off a few exposures before returning, dutifully, to the schedule.

One of those exposures was to enter history. 'Earth Rise', as it became known, radically altered our perception of humanity's standing in the universe. For the first time we could see how fragile, how beautiful and how lonely this planet on which we live is amid the vast blackness of space. Indeed some people attribute the genesis of the environmental movement to this single image.



29

I love this story. If the spacecraft had been on the same rotation as it was during its previous orbits then earth rise would not have been witnessed by the astronauts on board. And if Bill Anders had not had the gumption to deviate from NASA's schedule then it would not have been witnessed by the world at large.

Throughout the creative process you should always keep one eye open to those accidental moments which throw up something infinitely more valuable than your intended objective. As you move inexorably forwards, don't forget to steal the odd glance out of the side window.

Too often we regard the creative process as linear one. We receive the brief. We determine a course of action. We pursue it. And so we blithely and ignorantly pass by those magical moments of unintended consequence.

The attentive and dutiful reader will by now have encountered both outrage and blossom. He or she is probably wondering when the beavers are coming. Well, dutiful reader, your patience is about to be rewarded because I would like to explore this idea of unintended consequence a little more, and in order to do that we need to visit Yellowstone National Park.

In 1995 after an absence of seventy years, in a controversial move that at first attracted much criticism, wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone. One of the most pressing reasons to do this, according to the environmental groups who lobbied for it, was to try and control the vast numbers of deer in the park.

Sure enough, once the wolves had been reintroduced they started to hunt and kill deer (not tourists as some had feared). Which was all well and good. But then things took a rather unpredictable turn ...

Because there were now wolves around the behaviour patterns of the deer changed. They started to avoid areas where they were vulnerable to being hunted, like gorges and valley floors. This had a dramatic effect on the vegetation on which the deer had previously grazed. The average height of the trees in the valleys and gorges quintupled in six years. Animals who depend upon trees began to benefit. Like songbirds. And insects. And ... here we go ... beavers! Yes, beavers: those industrious little ecosystem engineers who create habitats for otters and musk rats and ducks and fish and reptiles and amphibians. All of which began to flourish like never before.

The wolves also killed coyotes. Which meant that now there were more rabbits and mice. And as a result more hawks, badgers, weasels and foxes. There was also more carrion lying around to feed animals like bald eagles and bears.

And most surprising of all was the effect all this had on the rivers. Because the vegetation on the banks was thriving, now that the deer were occupying higher ground, the rivers meandered less. They became deeper and more stable, providing a richer habitat for fish.

This extraordinary wildlife bonanza - which was initiated simply by the reintroduction of a single species - became known as a trophic cascade. It is, I think, a glorious example of how, if we are prepared to go against the grain, challenge conventional wisdom, and embrace unpredictability in well, whatever unpredictable from it chooses to come, then truly great things can happen.

10

Stand for something

As an advertising creative or graphic designer you know how it is. As soon as the next brief comes in you throw yourself into it absolutely. Because you know that if you're going to hang on to your job this is how it has to be. So, for a short time toilet rolls, travel insurance or tampons occupy most of your waking thoughts.

You can't help but think about taglines while you're taking the kids swimming; a logo concept pops into your head while you're on the loo; in the middle of the night you wake, startled at the brilliance of an idea for an ad that's arrived in your head fully formed, only to realize over your Frosties in the morning that it's been done in one way or another a thousand times before.

But what if this creativity energy was employed not to sell tampons, travel insurance or toilet roll, but to do good?

What if those same skills we employ day in and day out to create work which is only ever going to end up in the literal and metaphorical recycling bin were used to draw people's attention to some of the problems of the world and to change the way we think?



30

The winner of the 2011 TED award of \$1,000,000 was the French artist JR. His TED talk about winning the prize is great. You should watch it. Just not now please, while you're still reading this book.

JR grew up in Paris. From a young age he'd go out onto the streets at night tagging buildings and trains. The chance discovery of a cheap camera on the metro led him to start photographing the graffiti created by himself and his friends. And pretty soon he started to paste paper photocopies of these images onto buildings and walls around the city. The street became his gallery.



31

It wasn't long before he began to photograph the people making the graffiti rather than the graffiti itself, and to post these images up too. When riots broke out in Paris in 2005 as young people frustrated by police harassment, institutional racism and a lack of opportunity took to the streets, JR's portraits - images of the same people who had been rioting - started to attract a lot of attention. And because the people in these images were portrayed not as heartless teenage zombies whose deathless eyes sought out destruction, but as, well, human beings, a new alternative narrative to the one being told by the media was created. As JR himself says, "I started to realize the power of paper and glue."

Once he understood this power he began to mobilize it all over the world. He made portraits of Israelis and Palestinians and posted them in Tel Aviv, Ramallah and on the West Bank. The portraits came in pairs, an Israeli beside a Palestinian, both of whom did the same jobs, and very few people who saw them could work out who was the Israeli and who the Palestinian.

He went to the favelas of Rio De Janeiro. There he made work under the banner



32

"Woman are Heroes", huge black and white images of woman's faces in close up posted full height over buildings, up stairways and on walls. These images attracted huge media attention, but because JR posts in a small team, quickly, quietly and without permission, no one knew where they came from. He went to Kibera, the largest slum in Africa, while it was still reeling from post election violence.



33

Again he made portraits of woman, whose stabilizing role in communities under pressure is so often overlooked. But this time instead of using paper he used vinyl. Why? So that the posters could be used as roofs to keep out the rain in houses damaged by the riots. Go on Google Earth now, type in Kibera and you can still the eyes of the woman who live there gazing back at you.

The power of JR's work is rooted in its simplicity: black and white portraits of people pasted onto walls. Yet his work has captured the imagination of millions, forced people inside and outside the locations where he's photographed to think differently about those places and ultimately it has changed behavior.

JR has used the TED money to set up the Inside Out Project. Now if you have a message of positive action you wish to communicate you send in portraits to the project and they send the posters back, ready for you to post. The project has become huge in scale and scope and yet is still wonderfully and inescapably local (www.insideoutproject.net).

Now, JR is quite an exceptional human being who has, through dedication, vision and circumstance, been able to create a global art project committed to turning the world inside out. Matching this could - for most of us - be a tall order. Yet I'm willing to wager that there is a cause you believe in already. Something you care about and which you feel should be more widely understood.

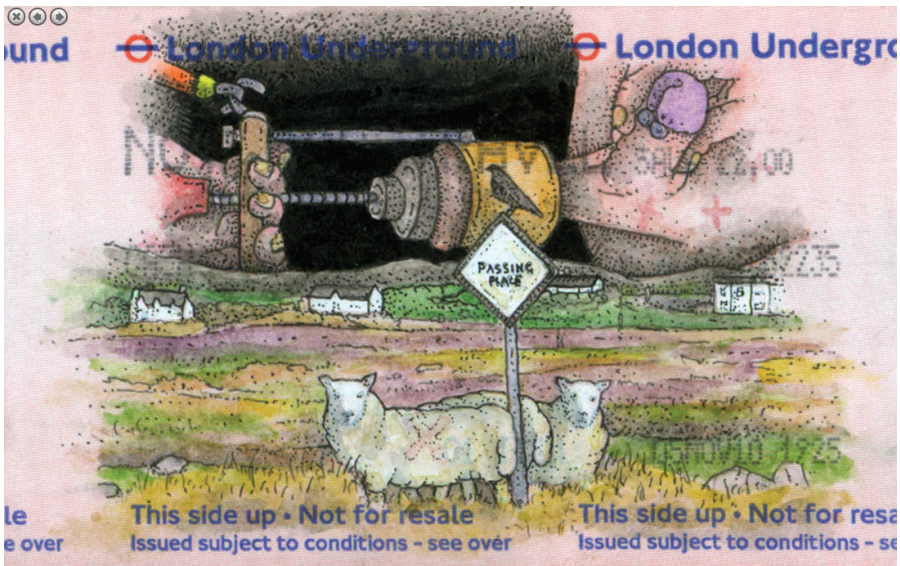
Maybe now's the time to use just a small proportion of your creative energy to do good, rather than sell toilet roll, tampons or travel insurance.

11

Recycle

In my opinion the age of mass production has already produced enough. We have enough stuff. You only have to spend a short amount of time in a country where there is not enough stuff to go round, or where the people can't afford it, to realize that an extraordinary amount of what we throw away could be reused.

Which got me wondering whether the principle of recycling and repurposing could be applied to the creative arts?



34

Paul Westcombe is represented by the Saatchi Gallery. He creates wonderfully detailed, gloriously lewd illustrations with titles like 'Sex Is Boring With Me', 'Donald in the Bushes With a Bag of Glue' and 'In The Morning in The Shower I Saw The Shit Run Down Your Leg'. To get a sense of Paul's work imagine if Hieronymus Bosch had been born in the Twentieth Century, grown up reading Viz and then started to doodle on paper cups, old batteries, underground tickets and shop receipts.

I love Paul's work for its humour, its craft, and its unfettered depiction of genitalia. But most of all I love the medium. There's something about the way that he uses discarded everyday items that makes his work both approachable and



35

exceptional – these are doodles, but doodles that you and I could only dream of doodling.

While Paul Westcombe was honing his craft as an underemployed car park attendant in Inverness, the gloriously monikered Nicoletta Darita de la Brown was growing up in a Panamanian community in Harlem, New York. Though their upbringings were - I'd hazard a guess - quite different, their work has a common theme: like Paul, Nicoletta creates art from things that people have discarded. In a series from 2013 called 'El Barrio Bodega', she

embroidered the discarded black plastic bags that she'd found tumbling down the street near her home with colourful depictions of flowers. And so that which had been discarded is elevated into something to be treasured and enjoyed.

Surely one of the most innovative recyclers is Ophir Kutiel, better known to his millions of online followers as Kutiman. While Kutiman is an established musician in his own right, he doesn't actually play on any of the compositions that he's best known for. Instead he trawls YouTube for clips of other musicians playing. Then in a process that must be as exhausting as it is painstaking, he layers and intercuts these clips to create an entirely new track. Kind of audio visual mash ups. Now, I know what you're thinking ... Hmm ... conceptually nice but I bet they're not much to listen to. Well, this is subjective of course, but ... they're great. His music layers soulful female vocals over the kind of groove that gets you shimmying along in spite of yourself.

He's got that kind of dark, groovy, Nightmares On Wax, DJ Shadow thing going on – but because everything's been culled from the internet the music feels more

raw, rougher and all the better for it. In a recent interview he explained how the project, now known as 'Thru You' came about ...

"At first I took some drummers—before I had the idea about Thru You, I took some drummers from YouTube and I played on top of them—just for fun, you know. And then one day, just before I plugged my guitar to play on top of the drummer from YouTube, I thought to myself, you know—maybe I can find a bass and guitar and other players on YouTube to play with this drummer..."

And so he looked out of the side window (remember that chapter?) and a new career was born.

Whatever creative field you're in, whether you work with real world materials or with music and film, you're fortunate enough to be living in the 21st Century when there has never before been such a surfeit of stuff. How about next time you embark on a project you see if you can create something new out of something old? You never know where it might take you.

12

**(know when to)
Never Give Up**

Well done for making it this far. You've got to chapter 12. That's 8459 words down. Impressive. And I guess, since you've stayed with me to this point, that I don't really need to talk to you about perseverance. Yet perseverance - sticking with something in the face of apparently insurmountable odds and believing in yourself and your work when everyone and everything is telling you to give up - is a trait all great makers have in common.

Originally, this chapter was called 'Never Give Up'. But then, looking back at my own career, it struck me that there are times when it's OK to roll over and say today is not my day: those trivial battles which one should now and again concede in the interests of longer term success. But then there are the matters which can appear trivial, but upon which you really should give no quarter. The trick is to know which is which.

Dyson vacuum cleaners are a bit like rats: if you live in an urban location you're never more than a few feet away from one. Which makes the fact that they almost didn't come into being all the more remarkable.

One day in 1978, James Dyson was hoovering his carpet. The more dust his vacuum sucked up, the less powerful it became. Dyson, being a practical sort of bloke, decided to dismantle it. With the machine laid out in pieces before him on his living room floor, he determined that he could do better. And this notion that the design of the vacuum cleaner could be fundamentally reworked must have been a very strong one, because it was to take him five years and over five thousand attempts before he finally arrived at a commercially viable product. Only after crafting 5,127 prototypes did James Dyson invent the world's first bagless vacuum cleaner.

This is the sentence that's supposed to read 'and the rest is history'. Except even after conquering, one by one, all the frustrations, sacrifices and dead-ends that five thousand prototypes must inevitably have entailed, Dyson's biggest challenge still lay ahead: finding a manufacturer. All of them turned him down. The reason was simple. They were making far more money selling bags for vacuums than they were selling the machines themselves. Indeed, some years



36

later Hoover's Vice President for Europe admitted in a TV interview, "I do regret that Hoover as a company did not take the product technology off Dyson. It would have lain on the shelf and not been used."

As you've probably gleaned by now, James Dyson is not a quitter. So it wasn't long before Dyson Ltd was created and the first vacuum cleaner to maintain 100% suction 100% of the time went on sale to the general public. Who liked it. A lot. To date Sir James has sold over \$10 billion of vacuum cleaners across the globe. And his innovations and products keep on coming.

The story of James Dyson is exceptional both in its doggedness and the incredible success of its outcome. If you are a designer or a creative in a commercial context the hurdles you have to jump are likely to be more quotidian - and probably a little lower - than those faced by Dyson. You will be required to pitch ideas and often those ideas will be rejected. Now, I'm not suggesting that each time you lose a pitch you go back to the client and insist that they make your work, no matter what their reservations. Do that and you'll quickly have far fewer pitches to worry about. Instead, I'm suggesting that on those infrequent occasions where you know you've got something really worthwhile, where you've found a new and surprising way of communicating a truth, where you've hit on an idea that deep down in your gut feels absolutely on the money but the client doesn't get it, you do whatever it takes to get it made. Take it to a different client. Make it yourself. Start a new agency if that's what it takes. **Just know when to never give up.**

13

The end

There's a flip side to knowing when to never give up. And I think our time together could soon be done. We've encountered beavers, blossom and outrage, as well as much more besides. I hope you've found our journey both edifying and entertaining. If you haven't, then er, how come you're still here?

Anyway, it seems to me that after everything I've said about simplicity and reducing things down to their purest essence, I owe it to you to sum things up.

And I can think of no better way to do this than by referring to a scene from one of my favourite movies, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*. I think you'll know the one ... when Indiana Jones is confronted in a Cairo marketplace by a black robed Arab swordsman, flourishing his weapon in the midday sun with a devilish expertise.



37

The scene - which was intended to last for several minutes - had been meticulously blocked out. The swordsman, actually a British stuntman, had spent weeks practicing a complex sequence of flushes with his scimitar. But on the day all was not well. Look closely and you can see Harrison Ford is a little more pallid in this scene than others.

"I had chosen to eat native food, unlike Steven who went to Tunisia with a steamer

trunk full of Spaghetti, and I had suffered mightily for that," he explained later. "I was no longer capable of staying out of my trailer for more than it took to expose a role of film, which was 10 minutes, and then I would have to flee back there for sanitary facilities."

Riven with dysentery, Ford had a word with Stephen Spielberg. Instead of retaliating with his whip and dancing round his opponent in a gymnastic flurry of pre-rehearsed moves he would instead reach for his gun and just "shoot the fucker". And so one of the most memorable, surprising and funny scenes in movie history was created.

Sometimes, you've got to forget what you've been told, ignore what you've read, sidestep the plan and just shoot the fucker.

Thank you for reading this book.

Image list

1. *My passport. You probably worked this out already.*
2. *Postcard sent by the students to their tutor. Probably the first time he realized that something was amiss.*
3. *Frolicking in the sea on the er ... Costa Brava.*
4. *Hitting the front pages in both the tabloids and broadsheets.*
5. *The students only expense was hiring a sun bed.*
6. *An early advertisement for the gun that won the West.*
7. *Sarah Winchester.*
8. *The Winchester home referred to here as 'The Mystery House'.*
9. *The legendary Richard Brautigan.*
10. *A young – and somewhat disconsolate – Aretha Franklin.*
11. *Rich Hall outside his studio in Alabama.*
12. *Some of the classic tunes that the Swampers provided backing music for.*
13. *The Swampers.*
14. *A Joel Meyerowitz photograph. Paris, 1967.*
15. *Letter from Iggy Pop replying to fan mail from Laurence.*
16. *London 2012 Olympic logo.*
17. *Daniel Eatock. Display Book Shelf.*
18. *The original Olympic logo.*
19. *The roundel on a WW2 Hurricane aircraft, a Mod parker, a Who album cover and an original artwork by Jasper Johns.*
20. *Daniel Eatock's alternative proposal for the 2012 Olympic logo.*
21. *The revised version.*
22. *From the series Love=Love by Kent Rogowski.*
23. *The Penrose triangle.*
24. *George Crum. Accidental creator of the potato chip or crisp.*
25. *Cornflakes, Post-It Notes, Penicillin, X rays and microwave ovens were all created by accident.*
26. *From the series 'Grays the Mountain Sends' by Bryan Schutmaat.*
27. *Dennis Potter being interviewed by Melvyn Bragg on Channel 4 in 1994 three months before his death.*
28. *'Earthrise'. A view of the earth from space taken during the Apollo 8 mission.*
29. *Hasselblad created a special edition of their camera instructions for the astronauts.*
30. *The artist JR.*
31. *A work from Phnom Penh by JR.*
32. *A work from Tel Aviv by JR.*
33. *A view of JR's work in the Kibera slum in Nairobi from above.*
34. *'Sex is Boring With Me' by Paul Westcombe.*
35. *An original artwork by Nicoletta Darita De la Brown.*
36. *The very first Dyson bagless vacuum cleaner.*
37. *The infamous scene where Indy shoots a scimitar wielding bad guy.*

© Richard Holman, 2017

Book designed by Mirjami Qin