



# Oblique strategies for connecting with creatives

What can we learn about creatives from talking to creative arts lecturers?



- Dialogic encounters
- Some provocations
- Oblique Strategies
- Creative Thinking Tools

## Outline

As a former librarian with a first discipline in history and sociology, I struggle to understand the worlds of creative arts lecturers which seem difficult, disruptive and interpretive spaces. In some ways, I am fearful of these worlds; yet I am also drawn to them and the riskier, creative thinking that inhabits /permeates the discourse I encounter as an educational developer. As a sociologist, I am interested in the lived realities of others but I want to be able to categorise these experiences , rather than accept the multiplicity of realities evoked from talking to creative arts lecturers...I often get frustrated that arts lecturers seem deliberately difficult or obstructive about ideas in education (Excerpt from reflective diary, January 2019)



# Dialogic encounters

10 x 45 minute interviews with creative arts lecturers

Disciplines: architecture, computer animation, graphic design, theatre, illustration, fine art, photography, fashion, creative education

**Interviews took place in unfamiliar locations  
– I did not know any of these individuals**

# Some provocations

Creative people love to draw pictures

Creative people love an open canvas

**Creative people hate frameworks**

Creative people are good at seeing connections

Creative people love to tell stories

Creatives like to test out ideas

Creatives like models



*Creative people love to draw pictures.....*

“You are not going to get creative block by filling in a one inch square..you can do it in ten seconds..You need to make these these things bite sized and non scary. “  
(Interview B)



*Creative people love  
an open canvas*

“the most terrifying thing you  
can do to a student is give  
them a blank page, and say,  
"Can you just draw, please?"  
The most terrifying..



# *Creative people hate frameworks....*

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‘....talk to any artist, any musician. They will all say that the thing that kills creativity is infinite choice – you want constraint. If you are in a frame, you are constrained by what you can do, then you become creative. Otherwise you just get creative block, no idea where to start, just being constantly distracted from your creative process by all things in front of you.’ (Interview B)

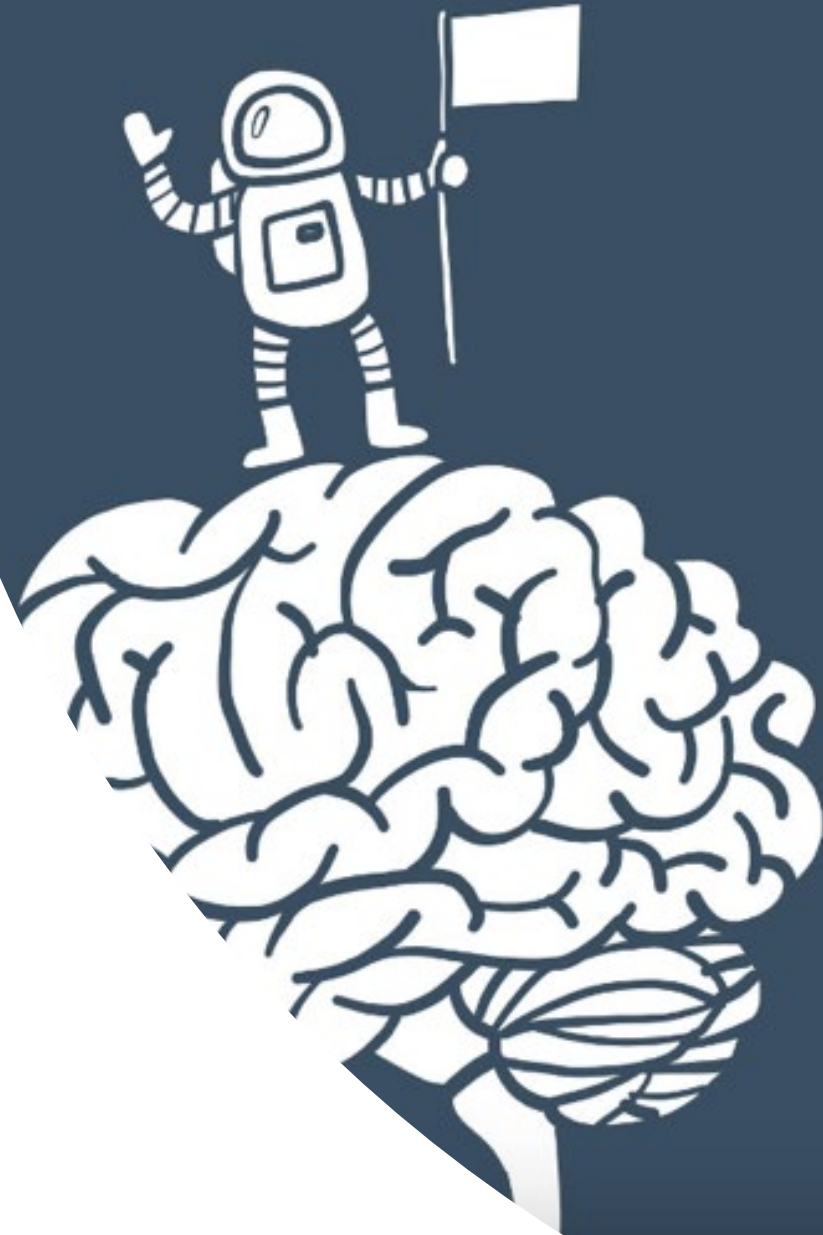
“So, what we try to do, in the first instance, is create structure by in which we then say, "Okay, how do you think freely?" So, we tend to give them examples, practice. And ask them to think around how they might manifesting or kind of re-articulating” (Interview D)



*Creative people are good  
at seeing connections.....*

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‘my own research let’s say leads me to those places often and..you know.. it has adjusted my own teaching as I have become more experienced and..you know I have been running design jobs at the same time to my teaching. Now my teaching is outweighing my professional practice, and you know,’  
(Interview D)



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*Creative  
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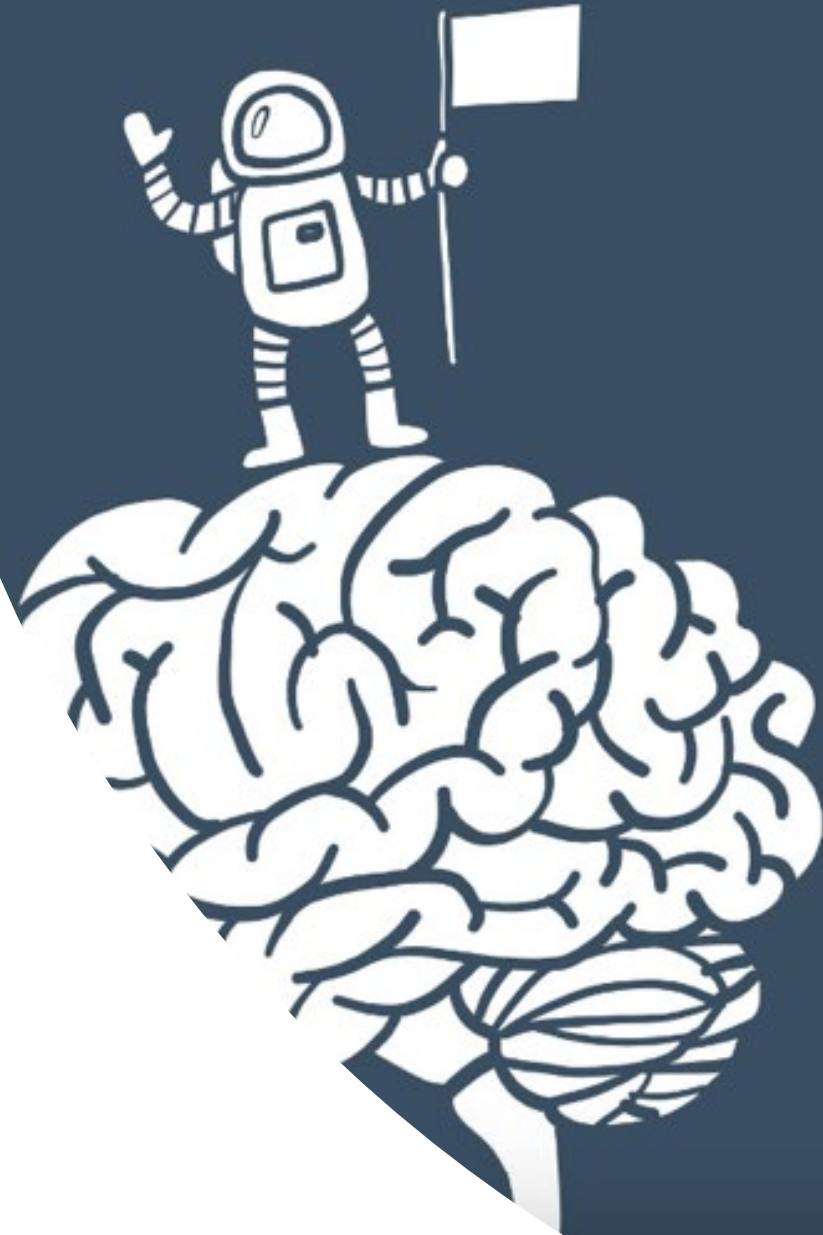
‘when I was at Cambridge we had a tutor for pure mathematics and the thing I remember about him is that he would get out bits of paper and draw these wonderful diagrams of mathematical structures with an old fountain pen..and I found that really useful cos he could draw set theory, group theory,,this kind of stuff..really kind of lovely, intricate drawings and I found that very helpful..not because I was thinking of things in the same way as him, but because I could develop a process in that worked in the same way as his process works ..’

*Creative people like to test out ideas.....*

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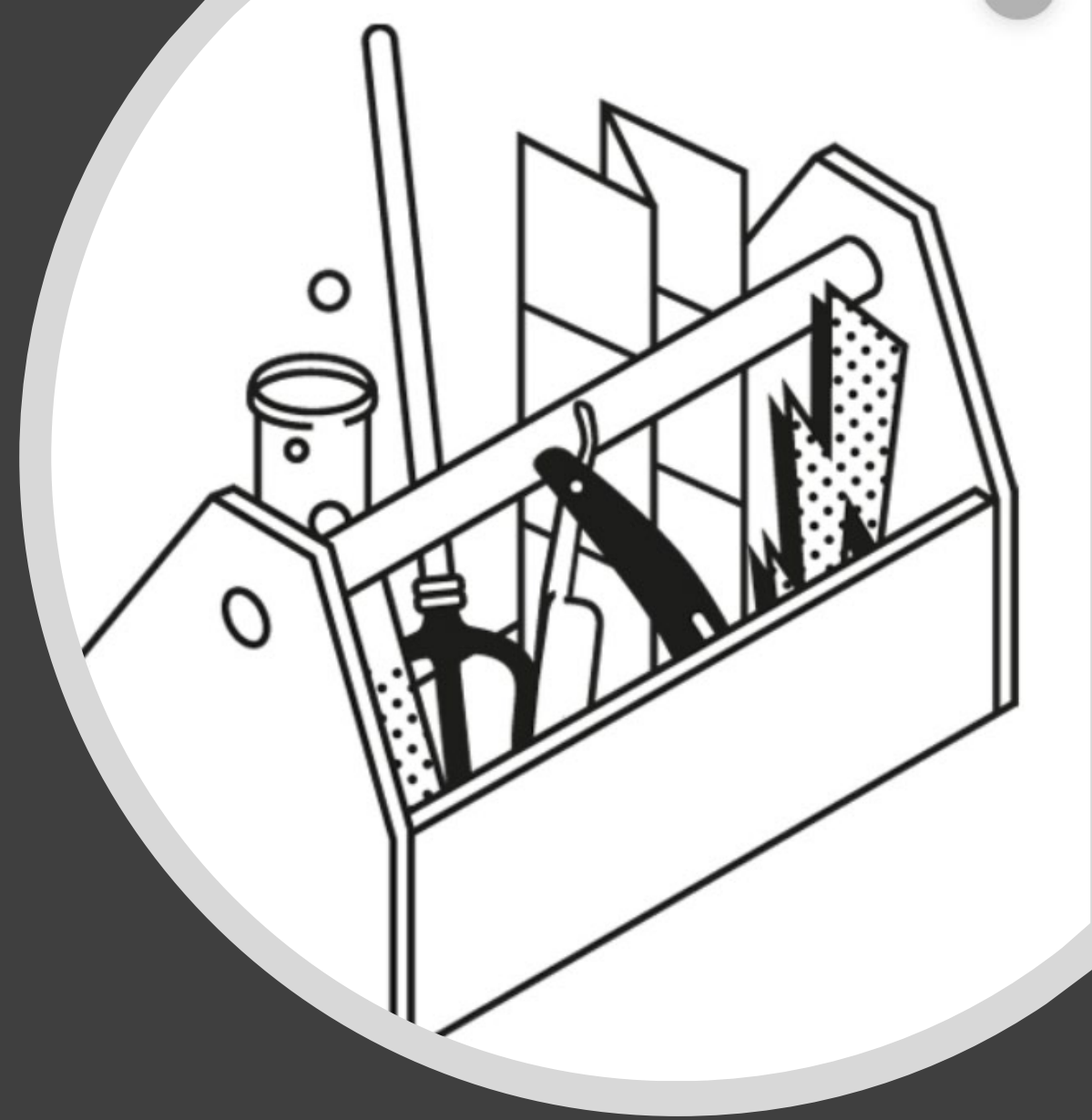
- ”. you give em exercises immediately where they feeling of empowerment that they can do things..they can achieve things..and then you give them enough of those and then you start I guess trying to generalise..its kind of encouraging reflective process of abstraction..so they can see that there are commonalities, fundamental kind of undercurrents to the things they are doing..

” (Interview F)



*Creative people like to play about with ideas*

‘It's almost like creating the perfect sand box....Yeah, it's like a page that you can mess up. You can do anything you like to it” (Interview G)





# Creative arts lecturers don't reflect on their teaching

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“we kind of go through a reflective process anyway in our work, its not like another course like fine art for example, you would have a personal collection of your work, but as a graphic designer we go through a process of ..you know the basic design process is about discovering insights to design problems and then it is about defining and narrowing down from that research – so you are having to constantly reflect on what you have done before in order to develop the right design solution – cos it is all about communication” (Interview E)



# Oblique strategies

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- Oblique Strategies (Over One Hundred Worthwhile Dilemmas), was a set of cards created by Eno and his painter friend [Peter Schmidt](#), and published as a signed limited edition in 1975. On each card is printed an (often quite abstract) [instruction](#), which is invoked when an artist, producer or band has reached some form of creative impasse and requires external disruptive influence to suggest new ideas.



**“Creativity is just connecting things.** When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things. And the reason they were able to do that was that they’ve had more experiences or they have thought more about their experiences than other people. Unfortunately, that’s too rare a commodity. A lot of people in our industry haven’t had very diverse experiences. So they don’t have enough dots to connect, and they end up with very linear solutions without a broad perspective on the problem. The broader one’s understanding of the human experience, the better design we will have. “ (Steve Jobs on creativity <https://fs.blog/2014/08/steve-jobs-on-creativity/>)

Thank you for listening...

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