

# The Performing Artist's Audience Workbook

## Part 1: The Prelude

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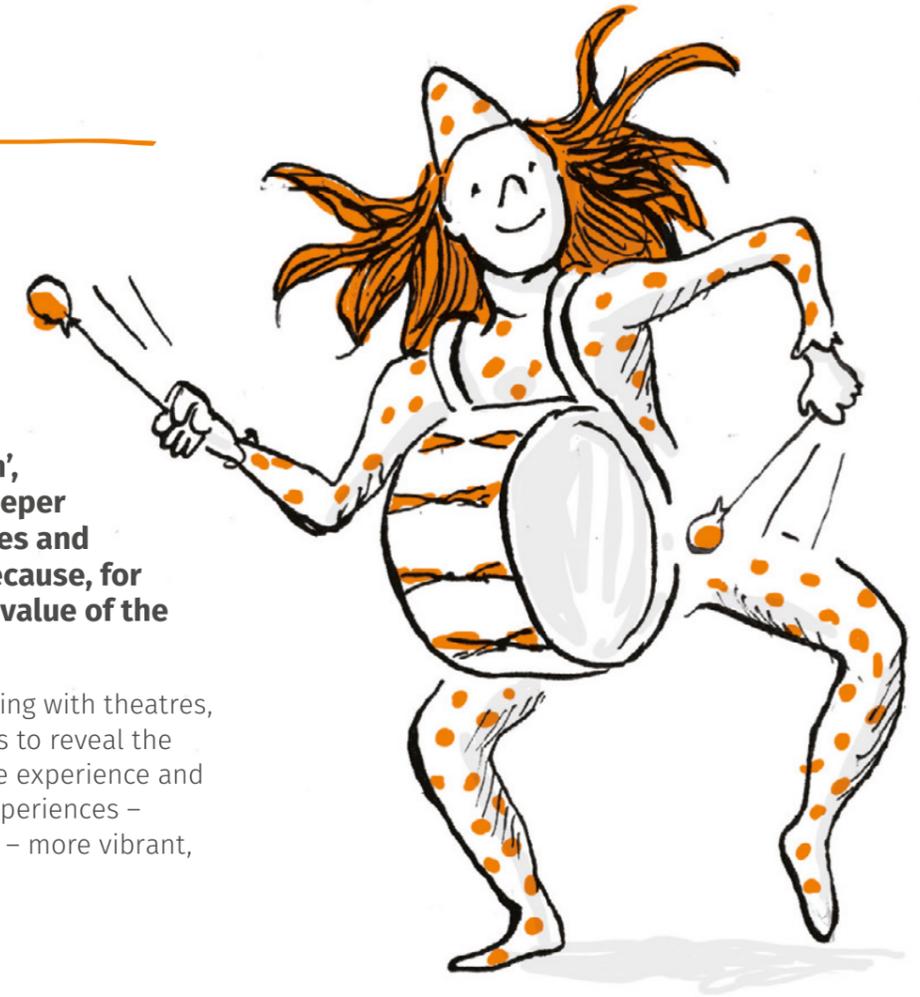
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# Hello

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**I’m Lisa. When people ask me what I do, I say ‘I’m an audience champion’, banging the drum for a deeper understanding of audiences and their experience of art, because, for me, this is where the true value of the arts resides.**

And so I travel the globe working with theatres, museums, galleries and artists to reveal the hidden depths of the audience experience and explore how to make those experiences – in ways that are big and small – more vibrant, meaningful and relevant.

More recently, I’ve been encouraging artists like yourself to think more laterally about audiences, and explore in more detail the value your work brings to those who experience it. I feel incredibly fortunate to be asked by Creative Scotland to create a workbook to support you (in whichever way you feel useful) in surfacing and communicating that value.

## Getting to know you

Artists have always been something of an enigma to me. Respected and admired, yes, but in an unknowing, awestruck, 'how do they do that?' kind of way.

Over the past two years, I've found myself working very closely with artists<sup>1</sup>. Through discussion, debate, research and experimentation, my appreciation of what impels artists like you to make work in the ways you do has 'sprouted'.

How much it is part of you.

What it means to you.

The craft ... the **CRAFT!**

How your creative process unfolds, in myriad ways.

And the degree to which audiences inform your artistic practice – either consciously, intuitively, or not at all.

Whilst I remain awestruck, I'm perhaps now a little more 'knowing', and certainly more appreciative.

Wouldn't it be great if more people within the sector 'sprouted' like I have? Maybe what emerges from *The Workbook* might do just that.

## So, why a 'Workbook'?

In 2017, I co-authored a review of Touring Dance and Drama in Scotland for Creative Scotland. During the conversations I had with artists and arts professionals, quality (of work) and quantity (of audiences) loomed large, but value was never mentioned. Not value-for-money, but value-for-audiences.

Somewhere along the line, the audience had, become side-lined within the process and 'consciousness' of touring. Whilst 'quality' occupied the limelight, the 'benefit' of the work remained in the shadows. How has this come to pass? Now *there's* a can of worms. Let's focus on one worm in particular – the hoops you need to jump through to get funded. The hoops that reflect the priorities of the funder, priorities which, inadvertently, shape your mindset and your language when it comes to talking about your work.

You see, none of these hoops focused on the potential value of your work from the audience perspective.

### Until now.

The Touring Review encouraged Creative Scotland to reconsider how they asked about audiences ... and one of the hoops changed.



## A New Hoop - 'audience benefit'

Instead of providing an audience development plan in your Touring Fund application you now need to write what you think will attract an audience to your work, i.e. the audience benefit. 'Audience benefit' here means the affective impact of your work, the audience experience and the value audiences might place on that experience.

### Why?

**Because if, in applying for public funding, you cannot fully appreciate and articulate the potential value of your work to audiences, on what basis can anyone make informed decisions about whether to fund you, programme you or book a ticket to see your work?**

*The Workbook* is designed to help you do just that – explore and articulate the hoped-for audience benefit of your work.

In producing it, I've drawn on my own practice and cast the net wide to source and adapt processes that will hopefully unlock new ways to think and talk about your work.

This 'prelude' is intended to support your thinking before embarking on *The Workbook* journey.

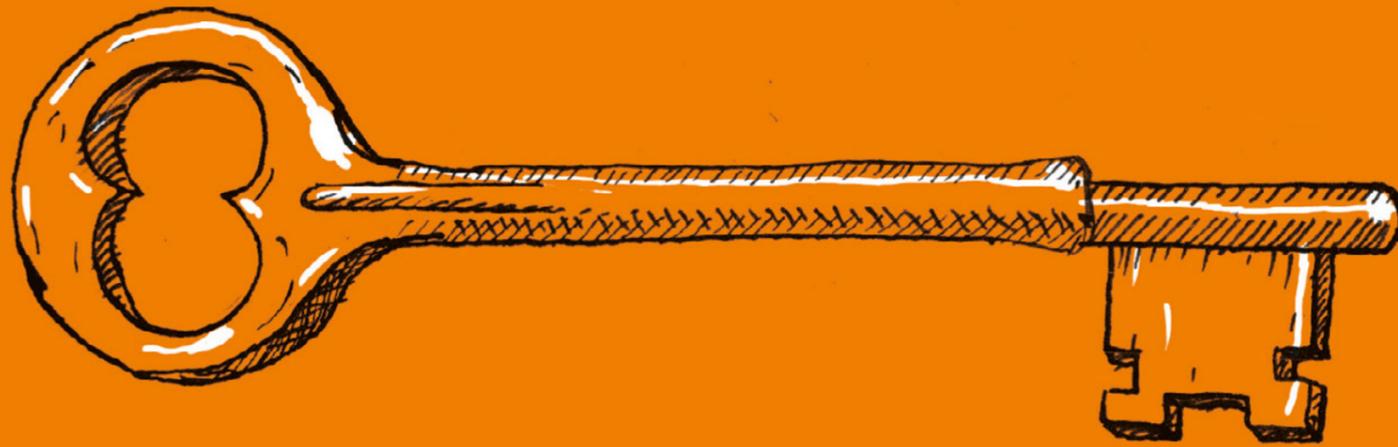
It's not obligatory.

You don't 'have' to do it to apply to the Touring Fund.

See this, rather, as an invitation.

<sup>1</sup> As part of *The Workbook* development process, as co-designer and facilitator of **BRAW** (a Paul Hamlyn funded experiment, working with devising artists to test new ways of developing appealing and relevant new work for rural audiences in Scotland), and through my own research on artistic intention and audience experience.

# The Key



# Why 'Audience Benefit'?

Creative Scotland want to know more about the audience benefit of your work.

Why is this important?

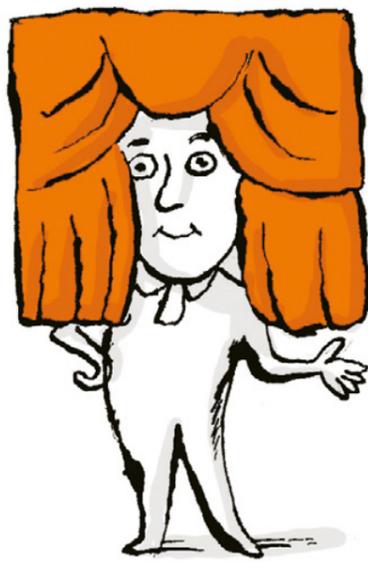
Well – because it might support more informed decision-making for the benefit of all.

You see, there are three key players within the touring ecosystem who, at some point, need to make a decision about your work:



## The funder

- who is responsible for supporting a diverse portfolio of work for **public benefit**.



## The programmer

- who is responsible for programming diverse work for **local benefit**.



## The audience member

- who chooses work for their own, **personal benefit**.

These three benefits – public, local and personal – revolve around the audience experience of the work and the value this brings **for them**.

It is on this 'audience value' that the vibrancy of the sector relies, and paying closer attention to 'audience benefit' is the **key** to achieving that vibrancy.

And it's not just any old key.

It's a key that opens more than one door, a bit like in an Indiana Jones-style movie where one simple turn sets in motion a whole series of 'unlockings' that reveal the 'awesomeness' beyond – a flourishing, diverse and vibrant sector where more audiences enjoy more great, new, rewarding, meaningful experiences, whatever that means for them, and for you.

*The Workbook* is the process by which you forge that key, because this is solely in your gift.

Through it you can explore the inter-relationship between your work and your audiences in new ways.

**What emerges you own.**

Collectively, the keys produced by artists applying to the Touring Fund will set in motion a series of 'unlockings' across the sector to help everyone make more informed choices:

- funding decisions can be more insightful and fund a diverse range of touring work for diverse audiences,
- programmers can better assess how work fits into their overall programming, local context and audience development strategy,
- marketing can become more audience-friendly, relevant and persuasive,
- audiences can make more informed booking decisions,
- more audiences might be persuaded to attend more work,
- and perhaps try something new and different.

**Let's be clear here, this process is not about influencing the work you make, but about clarifying your intention for the audience to help funders, programmers and audiences make better, more informed decisions.**

“Audiences do not necessarily have to be 'experts' in order to respond to art, and art does not need to be understood to be meaningful, yet people do need to feel able to grasp how they are meant to be orienting themselves (physically, cognitively, emotionally) in order to gain value.”

Dr. Kirsty Sedgman, *Audience Experience in an Anti-Expert Age*

# The Artist's Perspective

In early 2019, I ran a series of workshops with artists in Scotland who were considering applying to the new Touring Fund. The aim was to test out a process I'd developed to build confidence in completing the audience benefit element of the application form.

It worked.

Artists talked about how the process encouraged them to think in a new way about the why, how, what and who of their work.

- It invited them to **imagine their audiences** and **think more deeply about the relationship between creative decisions and audience experience.**

- It helped them **re-assess how they write funding applications** and opened up how they might describe their work to programmers and audiences.
- And it gave them **permission to experiment with fresh, jargon-free language.**

This process is now the backbone of *The Workbook*, my challenge being how to convert the facilitated hands-on experience of the workshops into something that could work on the page.



“It’s a useful process for the artists, not just the funder.”



“We already think like this; we just didn’t know how to articulate it.”



“What a great, invaluable way to look at your own work.”



“It’s flipped my thought process.”



“It’s a useful exercise to put the audience back at the centre of what we do.”



“I’ve learnt not to get caught up with what looks pretty on stage and look at my work from the audience point of view.”

# The Workbook

Designed as a journey, *The Workbook* will take you through a series of stages that look like this:

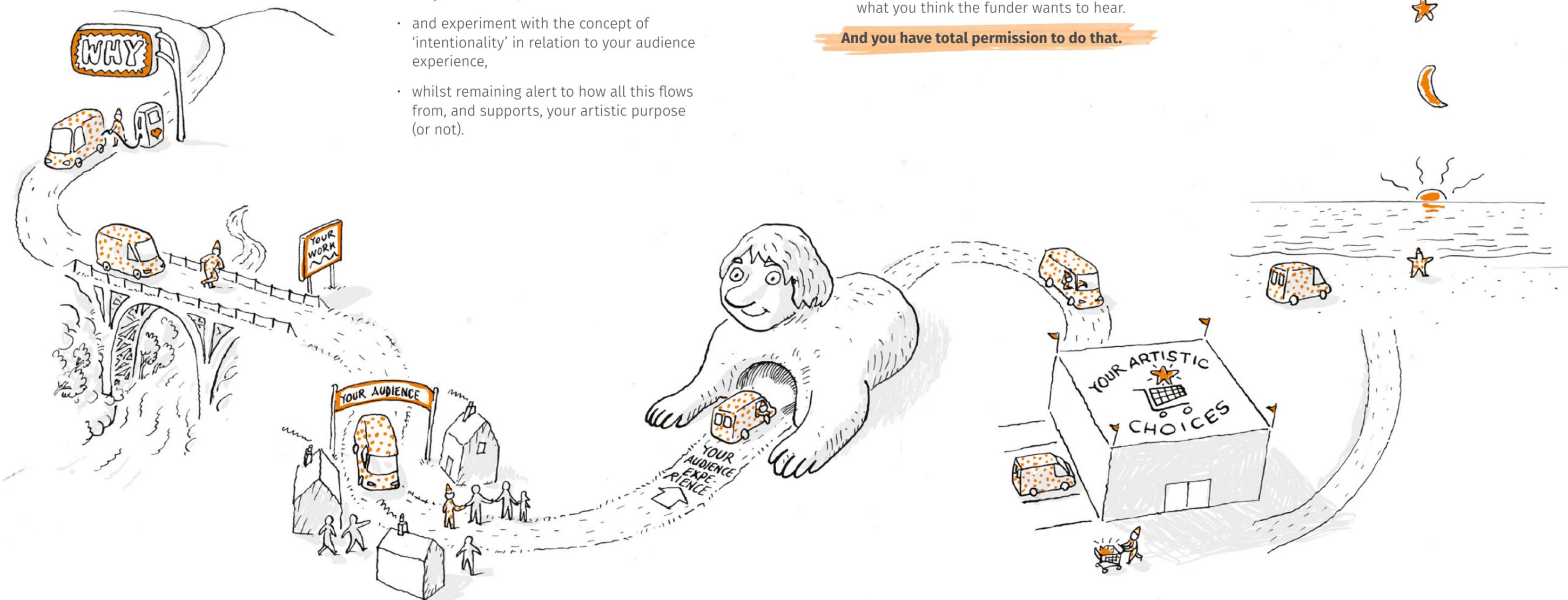
By going on this journey, the intention is that you will:

- explore, in-depth, the 'story' around your work,
- deepen your audience sensibility,
- avoiding the usual 'labels' that actually mean very little at all<sup>2</sup>,
- and experiment with the concept of 'intentionality' in relation to your audience experience,
- whilst remaining alert to how all this flows from, and supports, your artistic purpose (or not).

In addition, the process is intended to:

- coax out your authentic voice in relation to your work,
- help you articulate the 'stuff' that is difficult to put into words,
- and, in doing so, break the habit of writing what you think the funder wants to hear.

**And you have total permission to do that.**



<sup>2</sup> You know, those 'audience tick boxes' you have to complete for every show.

# Your Questions Answered

Here, I've tried to pre-empt any concerns you might have around writing the audience benefit element of the Touring Fund Application.

## 1. What if my work is not fully formed and changes in development?

The artistic intent behind your work-in-development can still inform the application. If that intent changes considerably during development, it would be helpful to advise Creative Scotland.

## 2. Will risk-taking work be deprioritised?

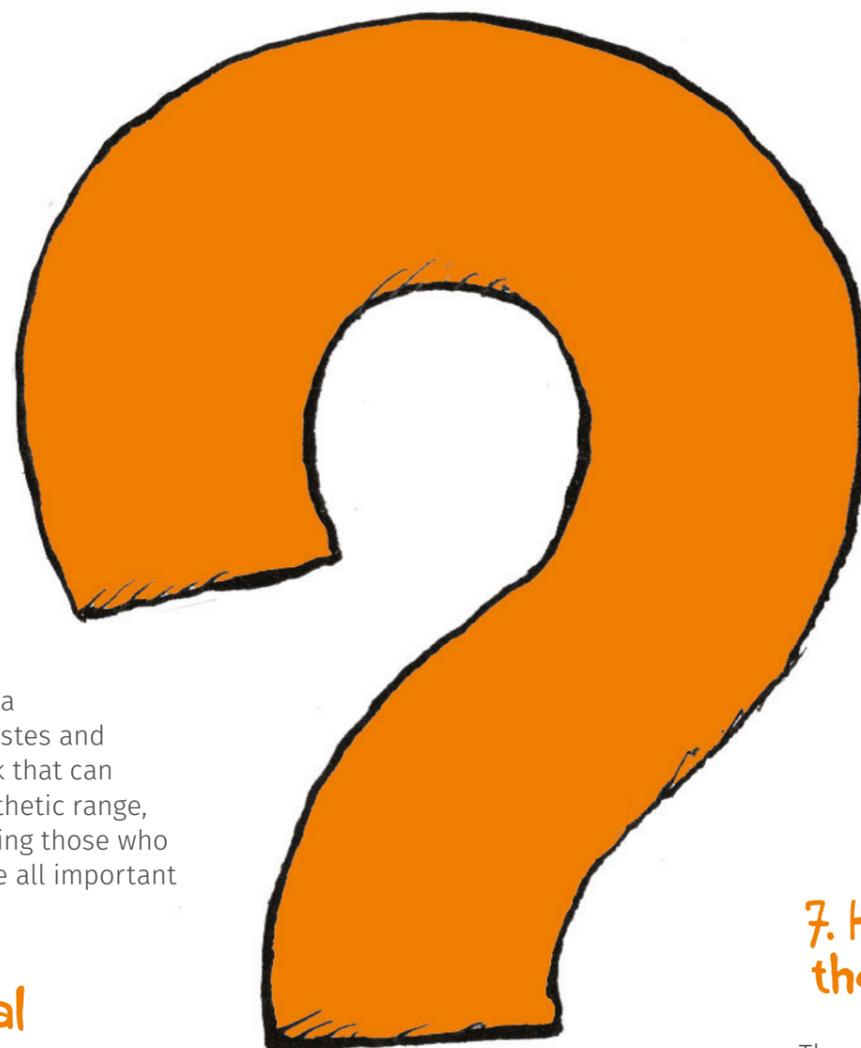
No. One of Creative Scotland's aims is to support a diverse, balanced portfolio for audiences of all tastes and sizes, from niche-interest risk-taking work to work that can appeal to a wide range of audiences. Quality, aesthetic range, relevance and reaching diverse audiences (including those who may not be well served by 'mainstream' work), are all important considerations.

## 3. What if my work is experimental and open-ended?

This kind of work has an important place in a diverse touring ecology and Creative Scotland welcomes new voices, fresh ideas, innovation in artform development, hybridity and experimentation in all its forms.

## 4. Do I have to consider audiences when making work?

Not at all. Different artists make work in different ways. This process is not intended to influence that.



## 5. Are you expecting me to compromise my artistic practice?

Upholding the integrity of the artistic process is paramount. By being authentic in your intention, Creative Scotland and the peer panel will be able to make more insightful decisions around supporting a balanced, diverse touring offer.

## 6. What if I don't know who the audience for my work is?

An audience is made up of a diverse set of people who all have one thing in common – they have chosen to experience your work. The aim here is to make informed assumptions about what draws them to your work and what this reveals about your audience.

## 7. How can you expect us to 'prescribe' the audience experience?

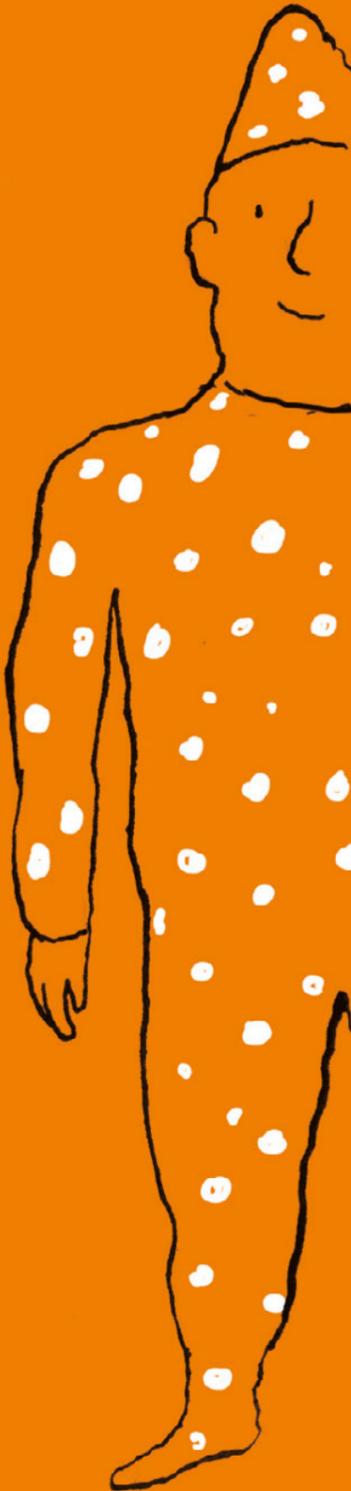
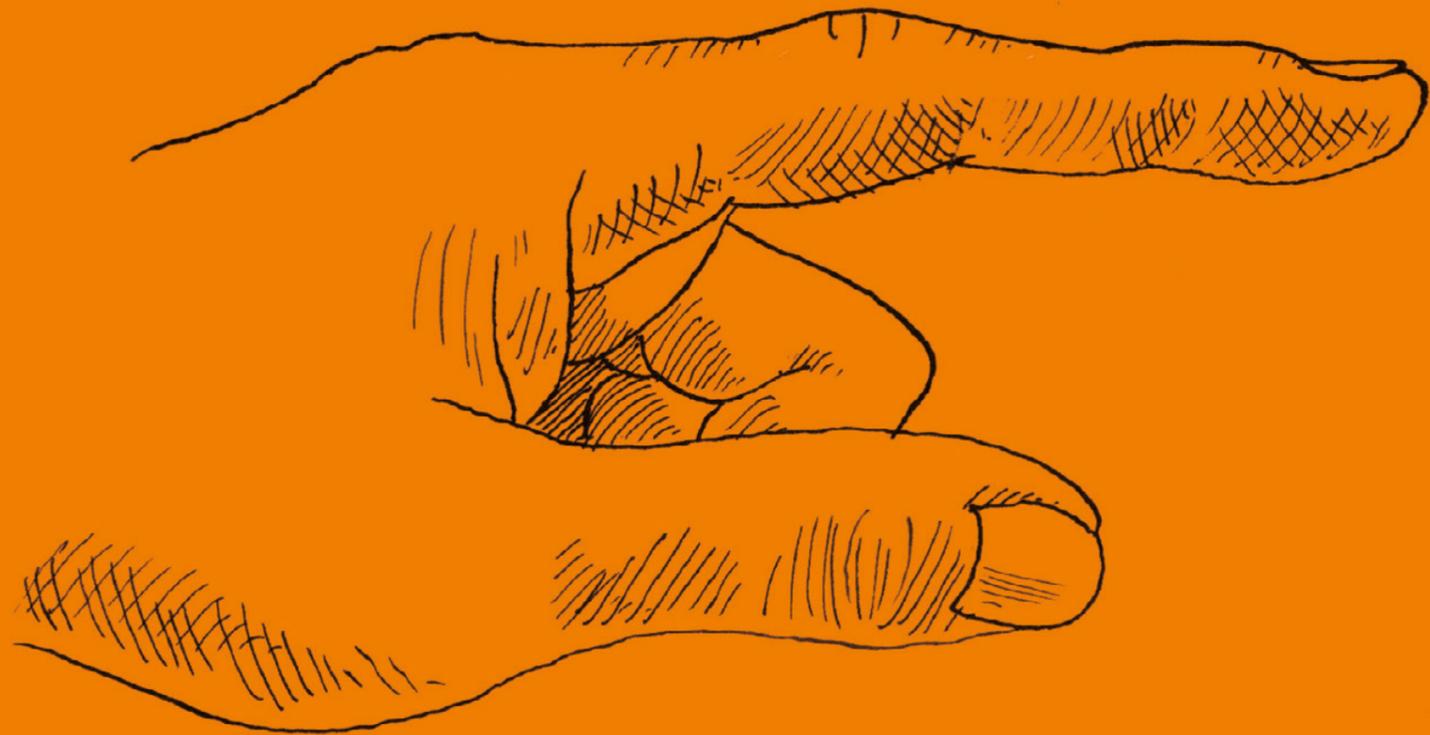
The aim is not to 'prescribe' but to 'reflect' on what might happen. It's about intention rather than certainty, 'what might' rather than 'what will'.

## 8. What about the audience's personal, subjective experiences?

Obviously, this is a vital element of the audience experience – how a person's life history, personal experiences, culture and identity influence their experience of your work – and one you cannot know. However, each work of art has a unique and intentional expressive quality that will impact on audiences in related ways. This is your focus here.



# A Gentle Prod and a Poke



# A Wake-Up Call

**Would I be wrong in saying there is a worrying disconnect between arts organisations, artists and audiences? I don't think so.**

**It's a systemic problem, and it persists.**

**The upshot is that we are sleep walking into a crisis of purpose, vibrancy and relevance, and we need to wake up, now more so than ever given the dizzying proliferation of experiential temptation out there<sup>3</sup>.**

The next few pages are intended as a wake-up call:

- Each short chapter in this section is a mini provocation, a 'ding-a-ling'.
- Each addresses a specific topic, or mental model,<sup>4</sup> around how we think and talk about art and audiences.
- Each ends with a question.

You might disagree with what I've written. Lots of people do ... and that's ok.

You might want to disregard this whole section as irrelevant and skip over it. That's ok too.



But if skipping is your thing, here's the skinny version:

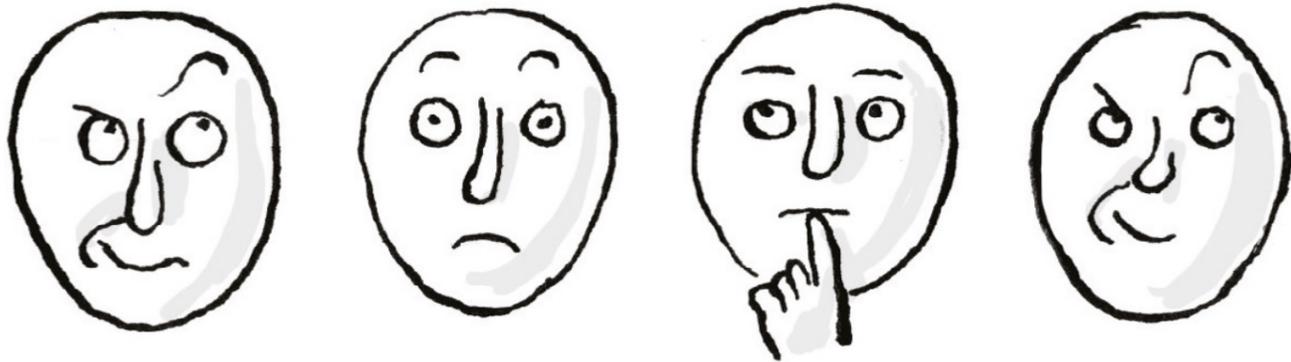
- **Focus on the 'why' as well as the 'what' of your work.**
- **Audience experience is not the by-product of your work.**
- **Be more curious about your audiences.**
- **Value is in the eye of the beholder, not the creator.**
- **Beware clichés.**
- **Audiences are not sponges.**
- **Goosebumps matter.**
- **It's not black and white.**

<sup>3</sup> My belief is that the arts sector needs to re-position itself within the 'experience economy' and realise that companies are investing millions in developing ever more appealing and novel experiences that are tempting audiences away.

<sup>4</sup> Mental models are deeply engrained assumptions and generalisations that influence how we understand the world and how we take actions.

# On 'Mattering'

The arts sector is really bad at talking about why it matters. Whenever I ask arts folk<sup>5</sup> 'why does your work matter?' they usually look back at me like this –



Why doesn't the answer burst forth, spontaneously, from a place of passion and purpose?

Perhaps it's because we've disconnected from our essential 'why?'. We've become too bogged down in the *doing* to focus on the *mattering*.

When the answer eventually trickles through, it usually goes like this:



**"To enrich the lives of our audiences through the provision/creation of high-quality work."**

**Question:  
Sound familiar?**

<sup>5</sup> Usually the 'back office' teams of managers, programmers and marketers, and sometimes artists.

Perhaps this is the default language of arts applications.

Well-intentioned though this is, it's a cliché, operating on the shallowest of frequencies, thinly-robed and oft restated, like a finger repeatedly playing a single note on the piano.

Where is the melody?

The nuance?

The depth?

Scratch beneath the surface of this thoroughly reasonable cliché and it all goes a bit shonky.

## Enrich

Enrich is the catch-all word for the value of art used largely as a proxy for the incredible, multidimensional stuff that art elicits. Ask what that 'stuff' is, and you could hear a pin drop ... In this way, 'enrich' has become a lazy word that absolves us from having to really think about the 'stuff' in any great depth or detail.

**You know better.**

## Our audiences

Our audiences refers to the people who turn up. They are generically conceived and leanly understood. Rare is the venue that understands the unique human qualities of their audiences, revealing how out of touch the sector is with the humanity of the people and communities it serves.

**You know better.**

## High quality

High quality art is, of course, very important. However, whilst quality matters to funders, programmers and audiences, this isn't what makes you matter.

**You know this already.**

This superficiality of engagement with the 'mattering' is contagious, diminishing our curiosity about, appreciation of, and ability to communicate the value of what you do.

*The Workbook* is intended as an antidote.

**Question: How often do you get to really think about how and why you matter? And to whom?**

# On 'Ivory Towers'

**When audiences book a ticket, what are they actually buying into with their time, their attention and their money? Is it the art, or is it their experience of it?**

**Obviously, it's their *experience* of it.**

Why is this significant?

Because **experience is the universal currency of value creation in our lives.**

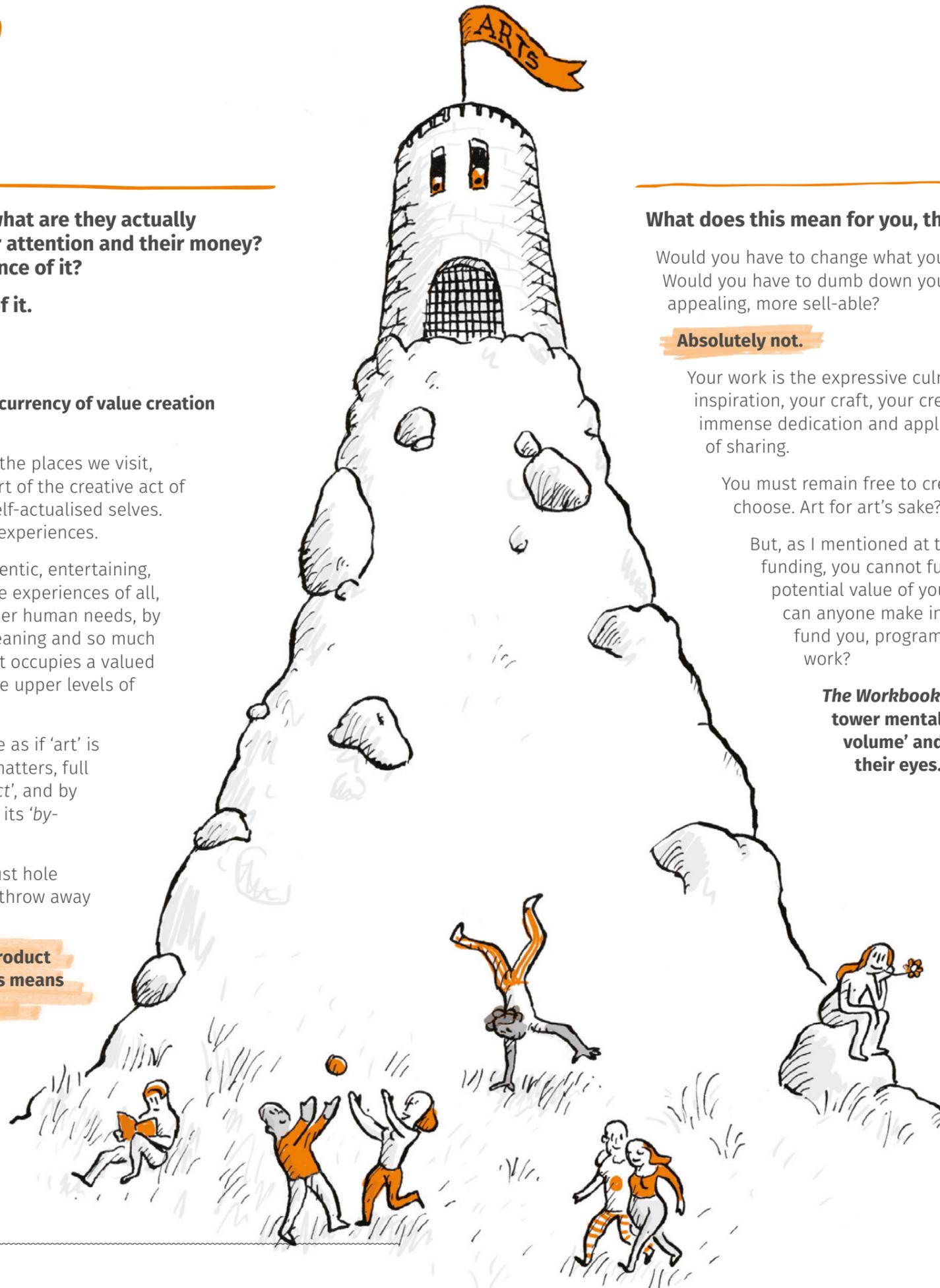
The books we read, the films we see, the places we visit, even the company we keep are all part of the creative act of becoming our best, happiest, most self-actualised selves. This makes us all curators of our life experiences.

The arts offer some of the most authentic, entertaining, thought-provoking and transformative experiences of all, experiences that meet our higher-order human needs, by bringing beauty, growth, pleasure, meaning and so much more to our existence. In doing so, art occupies a valued position in our lives, right there, in the upper levels of Maslow's<sup>6</sup> hierarchy of needs.

So why do we, the sector, still operate as if 'art' is intrinsically good and that's all that matters, full stop? As if the 'art' is the 'core product', and by inference, the audience experience is its 'by-product'?

This way ruin lies. We might as well just hole ourselves up in our ivory towers and throw away the key.

**Audience experience is not the by-product of art, but its consummation and this means the audience has a vital role to play.**



**What does this mean for you, the artist?**

Would you have to change what you do, how you do it, and who for? Would you have to dumb down your work to make it easier, more appealing, more sell-able?

**Absolutely not.**

Your work is the expressive culmination of your ideas, your inspiration, your craft, your creativity and your vision. It's taken immense dedication and application to get you to this point ... of sharing.

You must remain free to create work for whomsoever you choose. Art for art's sake? Bring it on.

But, as I mentioned at the very start, if, in applying for public funding, you cannot fully appreciate and articulate the potential value of your work to audiences, on what basis can anyone make informed decisions about whether to fund you, programme you or book a ticket to see your work?

**The Workbook provides an alternative to the ivory tower mentality by turning up the 'audience volume' and exploring your work through their eyes.**

**Question: To what degree (or not) do you consider audience experience and impact when creating work? Why/Why not?**

<sup>6</sup> You can find out more about Maslow's hierarchy of needs [here](#)

# On 'Curiosity'

## Why is our understanding of audience benefit so thin, and why do we struggle so to describe it?

- Could it be too difficult, costly or time consuming to explore how work 'lands' with audiences?
- Do we use the number, types and frequency of audiences as a proxy for our value?
- Or could it be that we operate from the belief that the quality of the art is the most important thing?

Whatever the answer, it leaves us paddling in the shallows. It deprives us of the opportunity to understand why audiences come, and what the true value of our work is to them. It robs us of the ability to fully appreciate the 'human goodness' of the work.

No wonder, after the crash of 2008, the arts and cultural sector found it so hard to champion its cause when every other government department was competing for a slice of the diminishing public money tree.

We're not much better at it now.

That the impact of art on audiences can be amazing<sup>7</sup> has become a truism.

But where is the illuminating insight? The rich language? The exquisite detail?

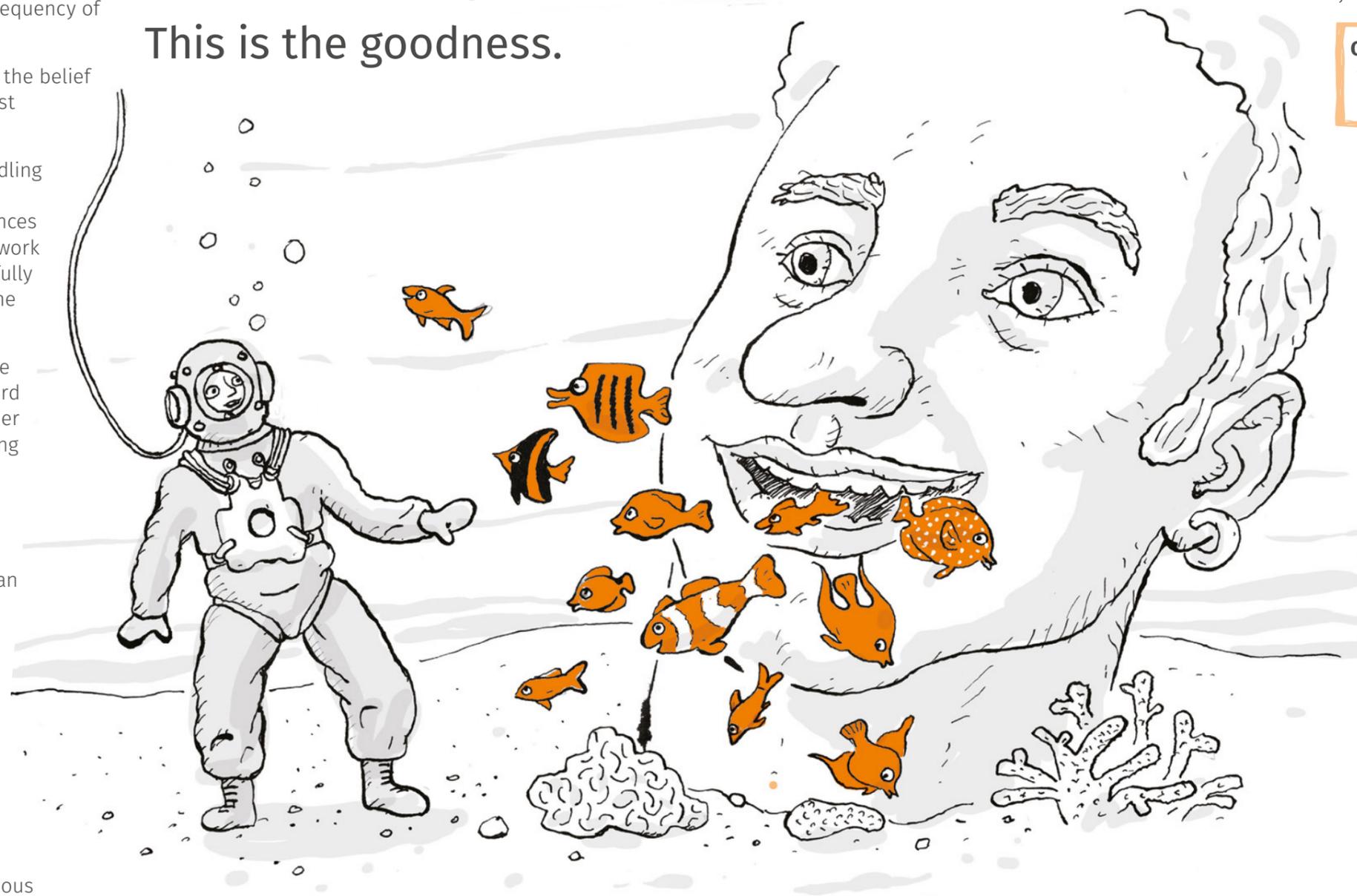
Exploring audience motivations and the dimensions of their experience is something I have been doing for years<sup>8</sup>.

Not in a 'paddling' way but in deep dives, bringing to the surface the glorious

multidimensionality of the audience experience that often remains submerged.

When I listen to audiences, I often notice them 'looking' at the descriptions that spin out of their mouths with surprise, as if these words were sparkling fishes, emerging from a part of the sea that was lost to conscious thought.

## This is the goodness.



The goodness that remains largely hidden from ourselves and others.

The goodness that we implicitly acknowledge as valuable, but about which we exhibit very little curiosity.

The goodness that makes art vibrant, operating on frequencies that touch us, move us, resonate with us in ways that are intended and unintended.

*The Workbook* invites you to exercise your curiosity about your audiences, and to 'see' them just a little more clearly.

**Question: How curious are you about your audiences? How can you prove it?**

“I am neither clever nor especially gifted. I am only very, very curious.”

Albert Einstein

<sup>7</sup> A woefully inadequate word for the richness and vitality of arts experiences, but I couldn't think of a better one.

<sup>8</sup> It's been immensely rewarding and frustrating because I get all the good stuff, stuff that gets lost in translation when 'reported' back to the client. I now train arts organisations to talk with audiences themselves, experiencing directly what they usually get second-hand, and with an immediacy that powerfully connects them to the 'why' behind what they do.

<sup>9</sup> Note of caution: anecdotal post-show conversations and audience surveys don't cut it.

# On 'Who's the Expert?'

When I was a student, I took part in a music sharing evening with friends. We listened appreciatively to Shostakovich, Joni Mitchell, The Beatles and what each piece meant to the person who chose it. My turn came. I can't remember whether I played Sisters of Mercy, The Cure or Bauhaus, but what stayed with me was the group's reaction. Cue, horrified faces.

I was gutted.

My music had no currency in the room. I felt diminished. And then I didn't.

This was a turning point.

Fast forward to just a few years ago and I'm working with a major regional orchestra. Outside, there was a long queue of people at stage door hoping to get autographs. When I enquired who was playing, the tone of the answer was derisory.

"Blue."<sup>10</sup>

My blood was up.

Thinking back to my student episode, I asked the people in the room why they thought the crowd had taken time out, on a work day, to stand in a long line for hours in the hope of meeting Blue in person.

They soon realised what the answer was ... because it mattered. Cue, shamefaced-ness.

**So, whether it's a goth band or a boy band, a pantomime or ballet, a musical or a Shakespearean tragedy, we need to flip our perspective and realise that whilst quality might be deemed by industry experts, value is in the eye of the beholder, not the creator.**

**The audience is the expert on the value of art ... to them.<sup>11</sup> Whether the work is experienced by an audience of 500 or an audience of one, the value they derive is individually and uniquely important.**

*The Workbook* invites you to tune into your audience sensibility, one that might be largely intuitive and imperceptibly woven into your craft, to surface the reasons why people might choose to experience it, and the desired-for potential value or benefit they hope to gain from it.

**Question: What matters most to you, expert opinion or audience value? Why?**

“All rankings of higher and lower are, ultimately, out of place and stupid. Each medium has its own efficacy and value.”

John Dewey



<sup>10</sup> A noughties boy band. [www.facebook.com/officialblue](http://www.facebook.com/officialblue)

<sup>11</sup> I know, what about 'great art' that wasn't appreciated in its lifetime. Maybe it's time hadn't yet come. We do, however, need to recognise audience value when discussing publicly funded arts.

# On 'Babel fish'

(Warning – this page contains a medley of mixed metaphors)

**Funding applications can sometimes encourage a certain way of writing that often leave artists feeling like they're trying to play a symphony on a harmonica.**

Like ill-fitting suits, these words might feel wrong, restrictive and 'not quite me'.

Like an amuse-bouche<sup>12</sup>, these words are insubstantial and amount to not very much at all.

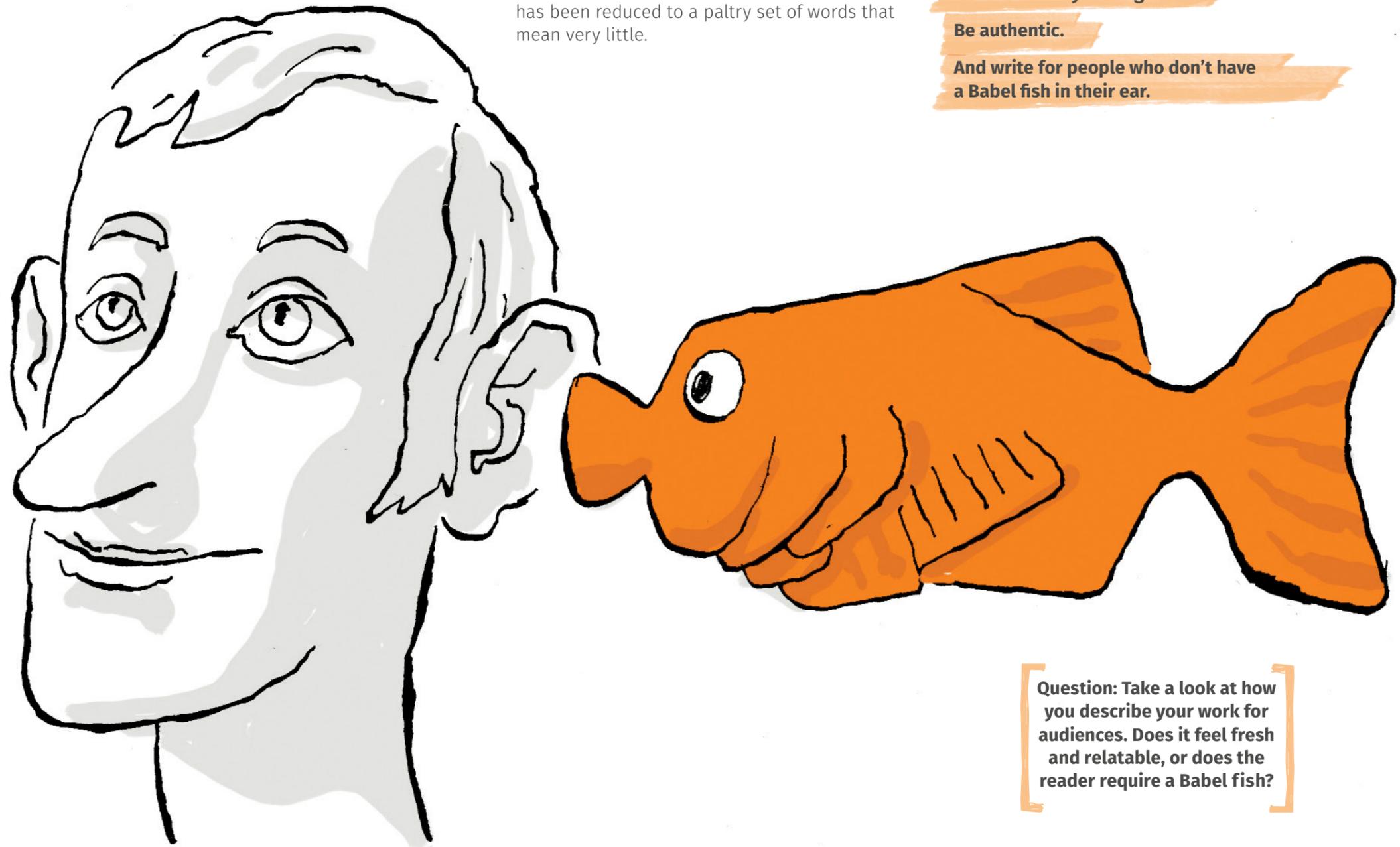
This becomes how everyone thinks and speaks.

Thinly.

Then there are the **big words**.

The clever words. The lexicon of the 'linguistically institutionalised', offered up in the belief that this is what the funders want to hear.

**This jargon has infiltrated the sector to such a degree that only those with a Babel fish<sup>13</sup> in their ear can understand it ... and audiences don't have one.**



Then there are the clichés, overused to the point of banality because it's easier than trying to be articulate.

And so, like a packet of magnetic fridge poetry, the language we – the sector – use around 'art' has been reduced to a paltry set of words that mean very little.

**It's time find some new and different words.**

**Your words.**

**The ones only you can speak.**

**Make sure they feel right.**

**Be authentic.**

**And write for people who don't have a Babel fish in their ear.**

**Question: Take a look at how you describe your work for audiences. Does it feel fresh and relatable, or does the reader require a Babel fish?**

<sup>12</sup> A single, small, bite-sized hors' d'oeuvre.

<sup>13</sup> In Douglas Adam's book, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the Babel fish is a fictitious alien, worn in the ear, that performs instant translations of the different languages spoken across the galaxy.

# On 'Audiencing'

Audiences are not sponges, eager to be soaked in art until they are dripping with goodness.

They have a role to play and someone gave it a name – audiencing<sup>14</sup>.

I love this word because it's not a passive word. It's a *doing* word.

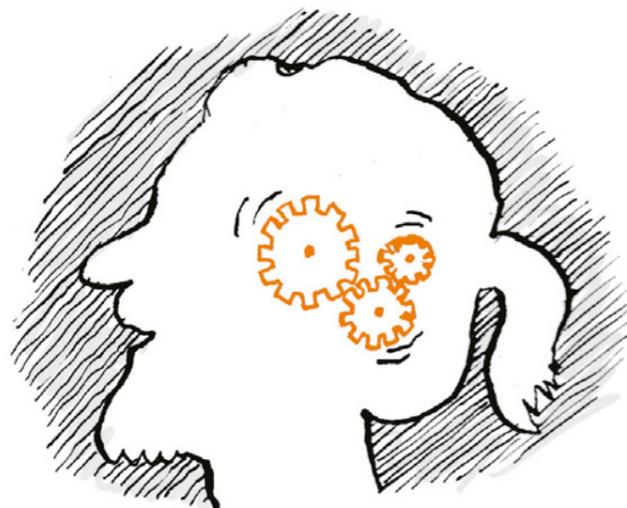


## Experiencers

Here, the audience is in 'flow', immersed in the narrative, musical, expressive, physical, aesthetic, emotional and sensorial elements of a performance. From deep emotional engagement with a story to the sheer awe of a physically astonishing performance, the audience relishes being in 'feeling mode', one that often takes them out of their everyday selves into a different realm that only live performance can deliver.

It's the act of 'audiencing' that brings a work of art to fruition. This, for me, is critical to our understanding of art and the role of the audience within the artistic exchange.

Audiencing can be summed up, albeit simplistically, into three discrete and inter-related categories:



## Processors

This is where the audience engages critically with the viewpoints, themes or structure of the work and/or develops their own meanings in response. From a sudden burst of insight to a slow gradual dawning, a tug of war between oppositional viewpoints to a sharpening of perspective, processors are very much 'in the brain' during a live performance.

“ Language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. The hearer is the indispensable partner. The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it. ”

John Dewey



## Do-ers

Here, the audience is physically engaged in the performance in some way. From the 'He's behind you' of Panto to more physical, hands-on types of audience participation, the dividing 'fourth wall' of theatre is replaced by a different audience-performer relationship that brings an exciting immediacy and sense of involvement to the audience experience.

Question: What kind of audiencing does your work involve? What is your invitation to the audience?

And what about what the audience brings with them – that which cannot be known in advance by the artist?

Here is where the unique 'self-ness' of each audience member comes into play (their life experiences, personal and cultural identities, values, world views and even their mood on the day) and intermingles with the work in unimaginable ways.

What this means is that the 'benefit' audiences derive from the arts is not just down to the work of the artists, but is, as John Dewey writes, 'impregnated' with each audience member's own uniqueness.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> First mentioned by John Fiske in the paper *Audiencing: A Cultural Studies Approach to Watching Television*

<sup>15</sup> I can't recommend John Dewey's 1934 publication *Art as Experience* enough. A bringing together of 10 Harvard University lectures on the Philosophy of Art. It's a hard but incredibly rewarding read.

# On 'Goosebumps'

## What about the little things, like goosebumps?

**Involuntary physical responses such as these mean a lot, revealing as they do the visceral impact of your work.**

A few years ago, I worked with a producing theatre that was touring an adaptation of a Gothic horror novel into northern towns of 'low arts engagement'. My job was to evaluate the success of the tour.

Rather than relying on the usual metrics (the types and number of bums on seats) I suggested we explore the 'vibrancy' of the work, by which I meant how it landed with audiences relative to the artistic intention.

I invited the director to articulate his intention for the work from the audience perspective.

"I've never been asked that before", he said, "it's always been, well, just intuitive."

"Give it a go", I replied, "and let's see what happens."

So, he did.

Goosebumps loomed large ... as did stomach clenching suspense, hairs standing up on the back of the audience's neck, shivers down their spine and the sharp jolt of visceral fright.

These 'embodied' experiences were critical to the audience experience of a genre predicated on suspense, shock and horror. A great deal of craft was required to elicit these important visceral experiences. The audience had to be immersed in the atmospherics and stagecraft, captivated by the story and emotionally engaged with the characters in order to surrender to the skilful building of tension, foreboding, dread and fear. Only then could the hair on their skin begin to prickle, and their bodies jolt out of their seats in fright.

Without all this the whole thing would have been a flop.

My point?

**Goosebumps matter.**

Question: How often do you think about the physical dimensions of the audience experience? How relevant is this to your work?



# A Brief Foray into Audience Experience



# A Fresh Pair of Spectacles

**Given that the arts 'trade' in human experience, why do we know so little about it? And why is the audience experience so leanly understood?**

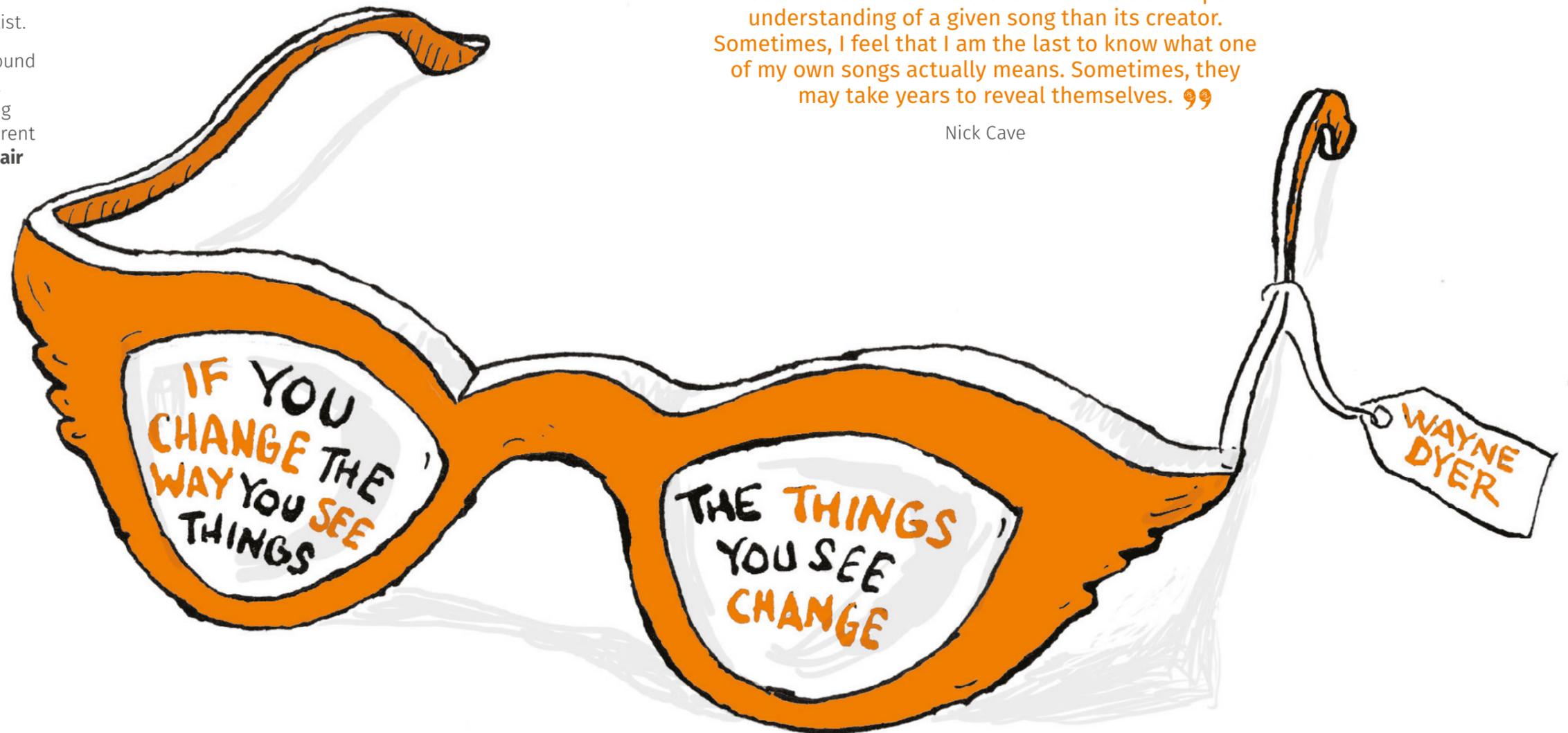
As an 'experience designer'<sup>16</sup>, I work with theatres, museums and galleries to help them understand, plan and design audience experiences that are audience-focused, live and breathe the mission, and are good for business.

I would never presume to do that for an artist.

However, the simple frameworks I share around the dimensions of audience experience in a 'business' context might be useful in helping you look at your work from potentially different and interesting perspectives ... **like a new pair of spectacles with which to 'see' audience experience afresh.**

Each 'lens' in this chapter is unashamedly simple, yet grounded in academic and business papers that I, as an 'experience geek', read avidly.

I've incorporated some questions to help you discover whether these frames are relevant to your work.



“There is a great danger in asking a songwriter to explain their songs – or at least to make the assumption that their interpretation is in some way more valid or true than your own. This is simply not the case. I believe the fan often has a deeper understanding of a given song than its creator. Sometimes, I feel that I am the last to know what one of my own songs actually means. Sometimes, they may take years to reveal themselves.”

Nick Cave

<sup>16</sup> You may be asking yourself here what on earth one of those is. Well, I run workshops, informed by a design thinking and creative problem solving, to help institutions develop their Experience Blueprint (what is their unique experiential signature, or brand), evaluate their current experiential performance from the customer/audience perspective, identify opportunities for improvement/innovation, generate new ideas to enhance their experiential value, and then develop and test those ideas before going 'live'.

# Experience and Time

## When you think about it, all experience is time-based.

- The momentary 'shock' of diving into a pool of cool water.
- The mounting awe of a spectacular sunset.
- The drawn-out pleasure of reading a great book.
- Life.

When we talk about audience experience, we usually mean that time between curtain up and the last clap.

Let's build on that.

## In-the-moment experience

This is the intrinsic experience of art. The one we recognise best.

Thoughts, feelings and emotions in the moment that build, loop, combine and disrupt one another to create the emotional signature of the work leading to the final release, catharsis, denouement.

**How might you describe the in-the-moment experience of your work?**

## Imprint

This is the 'trace' of experience that extends beyond the performance.

These traces can be impermanent, like footprints on the beach, or the diminishing vibrations of a melody, or a pebble in a pond sending out ripples that eventually become still. Or they might lodge somewhere in the unconscious until a trigger surfaces it as a memory.<sup>17</sup>

**Are there any specific 'traces' you'd like the audience to experience? What is that final, lingering 'note'?**

## Impact

This is what endures.

The performance's lasting gift.

It's about altered perspectives, awakenings, a change of direction, a promise to oneself or to others. This 'shift' is often referred to as the transformative nature of art.

**Does your work aim to elicit a 'shift' in the audience in some way? What kind of shift do you intend?**

## Cumulative

This is the accretion of arts experiences over time, and how they contribute to our personal, social, cultural, aesthetic, spiritual and intellectual selves.

Think of it as a snowball getting bigger and bigger as it rolls down a mountainside, and your work as a snowflake that contributes to its growing 'self-ness'.

**What kind of person might want to curate your work into their cultural world?**

## Latent

This is what happens when seemingly disparate experiences at different points in a person's life unexpectedly 'triangulate' and something new comes into being, often experienced as a 'dawning' or a 'realisation'.

As an artist, you have no control over this, but your work could be one of the dormant sparks that ignites that 'dawning'. Like a star that suddenly finds itself part of a shimmering constellation.

**Can you think of a time in your life when seemingly disparate thoughts and events converged to create a 'dawning'? How did that feel?**

“The performance is the beginning of a longer experience. It is the scorpion's bite which makes one dance. The dance does not stop when you leave the theatre.”

Eugenio Barba



<sup>17</sup> In his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman differentiates between the 'experiencing self' and the 'remembering self'. He describes the 'experiencing' self as the fast, intuitive, unconscious mode of thinking that operates in the present moment, focusing on the quality of our experience in the moment. The 'remembering' self flows from the slow, rational, conscious mode of thinking that tells the story of our experience, how we think about it.

# The Process of Experiencing

## Sense

We initially experience the world through sensory perception. These provide us with *impressions* of the world around us.

## Emotion

This sensory stimulation triggers corresponding *emotions*. It happens in a fraction of a second, involuntarily, and is pre-thought.

## Feelings

These emotions spark *feelings*, from the universal to the highly personal, shaped by an individual's unique life experience and personal context.

## Experience

This is when *awareness* comes into play as you recognise that you are having the experience.



“ Experiencing is a continuously interactive process of doing and undergoing, of action and reflection, of cause and effect ... A meaningful experience gives the individual a different outlook on the world and/or himself. ”

JMC Snel

## Meaningful experiences

These occur when we become *aware of what that experience means for us*. It can often feel like a depth charge that resonates somewhere deep inside. Meaningful experiences are personally significant. They can shape and reinforce who we are. In essence, we are the sum of all our meaningful experiences and what we make of them.

## Turning points

This is when a meaningful experience transforms us in some way. This may involve discovery, letting go of something, embarking on a new direction or seizing previously unexplored opportunities.<sup>18</sup>

Which of these relate to your work, and how?

<sup>18</sup> Much of this chapter owes its existence to *The Experience Economy – A New Perspective*, by Albert Boswijk, Thomas Thijssen and Ed Peelen.

# The Intrinsic Experience

**The intrinsic experience of art is that which the audience member experiences in-the-moment<sup>19</sup> – feelings, thoughts, emotions, embodied experiences, the senses.**

It can be fuzzy, fluid, subjective, hard-to-pin-down, difficult to put into words, visceral, ambiguous, ephemeral and contradictory.

Maybe that's why we stick our heads in the sand when it comes to really trying to understand what it is that 'art' brings, surfaces, catalyses or inspires.

There are lots of academic studies on this subject. They are brilliant, erudite, empirical but often consigned to academia.<sup>20</sup>

Alan Brown, a non-academic explorer of intrinsic audience experience, has developed a simple model that encapsulates that experience into a number of dimensions<sup>21</sup>. You might find it useful in organising your thinking.

“ Theatre has nothing to do with buildings or even physical constructions. Theatre – or theatricality - is ... this human property which allows man to observe himself in action, in activity. Man can see himself in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. Feel himself feeling, think himself thinking ”

Augusto Boal

<sup>19</sup> Interesting reading to be had here: [Cultural Value Project](#)

<sup>20</sup> A new [Centre For Cultural Value](#) has been established to aggregate the best academic thinking around audience experience and value, and repurpose/re-present it for a broader interest group. (Declaration of interest: I am the Partnership Co-ordinator for it, tasked with working with academics and the arts sector on innovative new audience experience research projects that deliver both academic and arts sector value.)

<sup>21</sup> [An Architecture of Value](#), Alan Brown



## Captivation

This is the extent to which the audience becomes absorbed in the performance, lost in the moment, deeply attentive. You might decide you want your audience in this state of 'flow', or you might want to disrupt it altogether.

## Aesthetic Enrichment

This is the pleasure audiences derive from experiencing something new, creative, or sensorially pleasing. It's the thrill of the skill, beauty and imaginative ingenuity of the work. It can also reinforce or validate a pre-existing interest which can be hugely affirming.

## Intellectual Stimulation

This is the way in which a performance triggers thought, exercises the mind, brings fresh perspectives, confirms pre-existing thoughts and beliefs or blows them out of the water.

## Social Bonding

This is about feeling part of that shared experience we talk about so often, when audiences come together in time, place and performance, react in the same way or share a realisation. There are times when even their heartbeats synchronise<sup>22</sup>.

## Emotional Resonance

This is about the intensity and multidimensionality of the audience's emotional response to a performance. It also includes the degree to which that response is personally meaningful or relevant.

**Question: Do you find these categories helpful? In what way?**

<sup>22</sup> [Audience members' hearts beat together at the theatre](#)

# The Embodied Experience



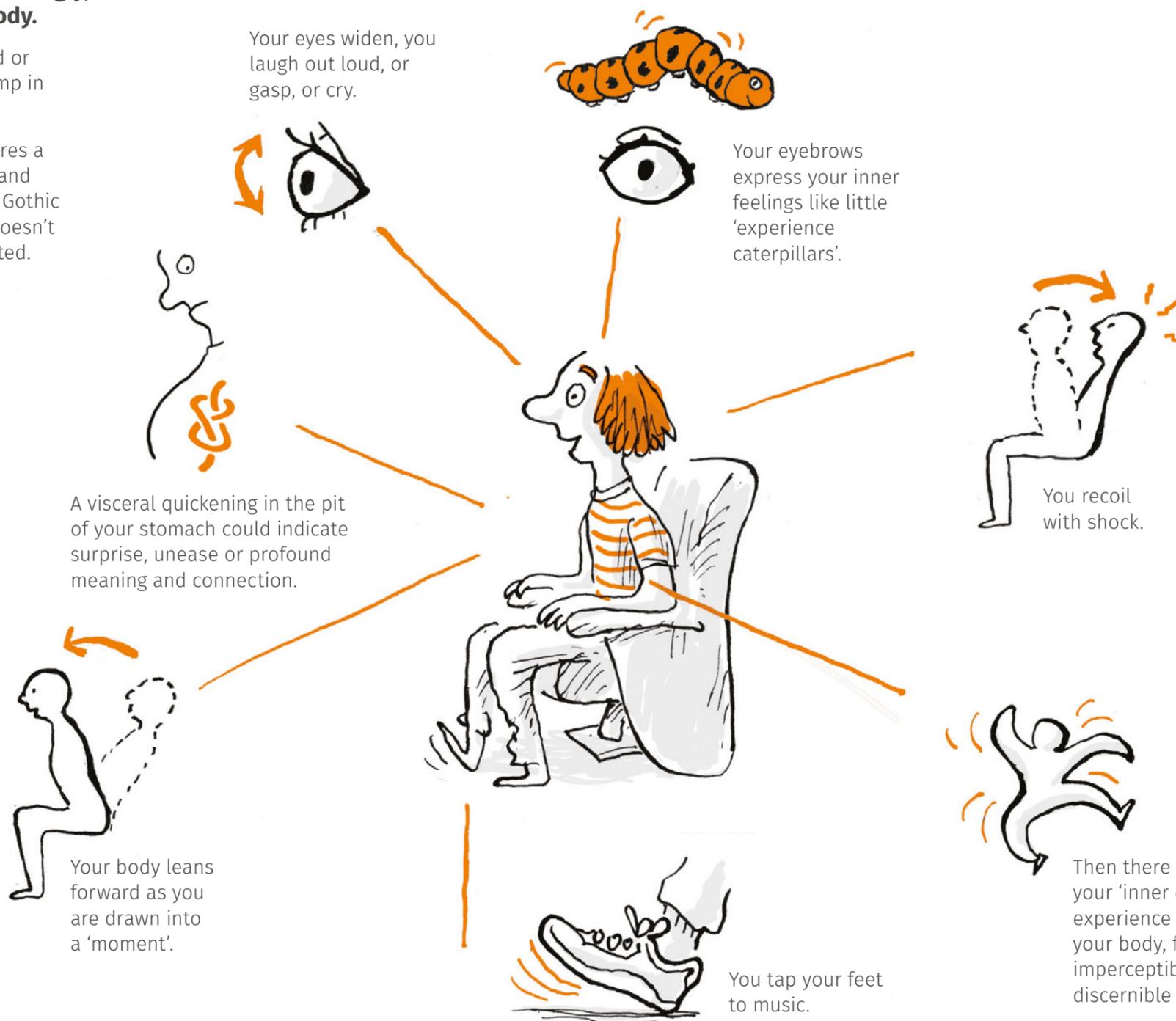
## An embodied experience is, unsurprisingly, that which is experienced in the body.

Think about the last time you felt elated or uplifted during a performance, felt a lump in your throat or choked back a tear.

My previous story 'On Goosebumps' shares a classic example where jolts, 'the chills' and goosebumps are an integral part of the Gothic horror experience. If the performance doesn't deliver that, the audience will feel cheated.

How else might 'embodiment' look and feel like?

All of these are embodied experiences.



Here are three fabulous and very short videos produced by The Place, London, which explore the language of dance and its impact on audiences. My favourite line is 'watching dance makes you dance inside'.

### It so does.

- ▶ [Planet Dance: Body Talk – Part 1](#)
- ▶ [Planet Dance: Body Talk – Part 2](#)
- ▶ [Planet Dance: Body Talk – Part 3](#)

**Questions: Are there any ways in which your work might trigger embodied experiences? How might these contribute to the overall audience experience?**

“ Art cannot be experienced except by one's entire being.”

Martha Graham

# Next steps

## I hope you've found *The Prelude* useful in understanding the context for *The Workbook* and why it came into being.

Hopefully, the gentle pokes and prods resonated with you in small or big ways, and made you think again about things like mattering, curiosity and goosebumps.

And hopefully the lenses on audience experience provided interesting food for thought.

The next step, should you wish to take it, is to invest some time and energy in *The Workbook*.

For those of you thinking of applying to Creative Scotland's Touring Fund for Theatre and Dance, remember that this book isn't a 'hoop' but a 'help'.

You can take it or leave it.

Totally up to you.

# Thank You

## It's true to say that without the generous advice and input of the following people, *The Performing Artist's Audience Workbook* would be much diminished, so my heartfelt thanks go to:

**Lorna Duguid**, for entrusting this project to me / **Tamara Christensen**, for making me feel un-imposter-ish / **Matt Lenton**, for the great Nick Cave quote / **James-Mackenzie Blackman** for making me think about context / **Philippe Brasseur**, for your incredible creative energy and amazing drawings / **Mel Larsen**, for your astute eye and wisdom / **Dr. Kirsty Sedgman**, for all the exclamation marks by the stuff you liked.

/ **Dr. Ben Walmsley**, for your excellent point of disagreement that got me thinking / **Liam Sinclair**, for not changing very much / **Jo McClean** for your unique perspective / **Joe Hancock** for your super sharp comments / **Suzi Willson** and **Roxanne Peak Payne** for your thoughtful responses to the exercises / **Nicky Burgess** for your enthusiasm and pride in me / **Anne-Laurie Mathieu** for gleefully offering to translate it into French.

# Biographies

## Philippe on Lisa

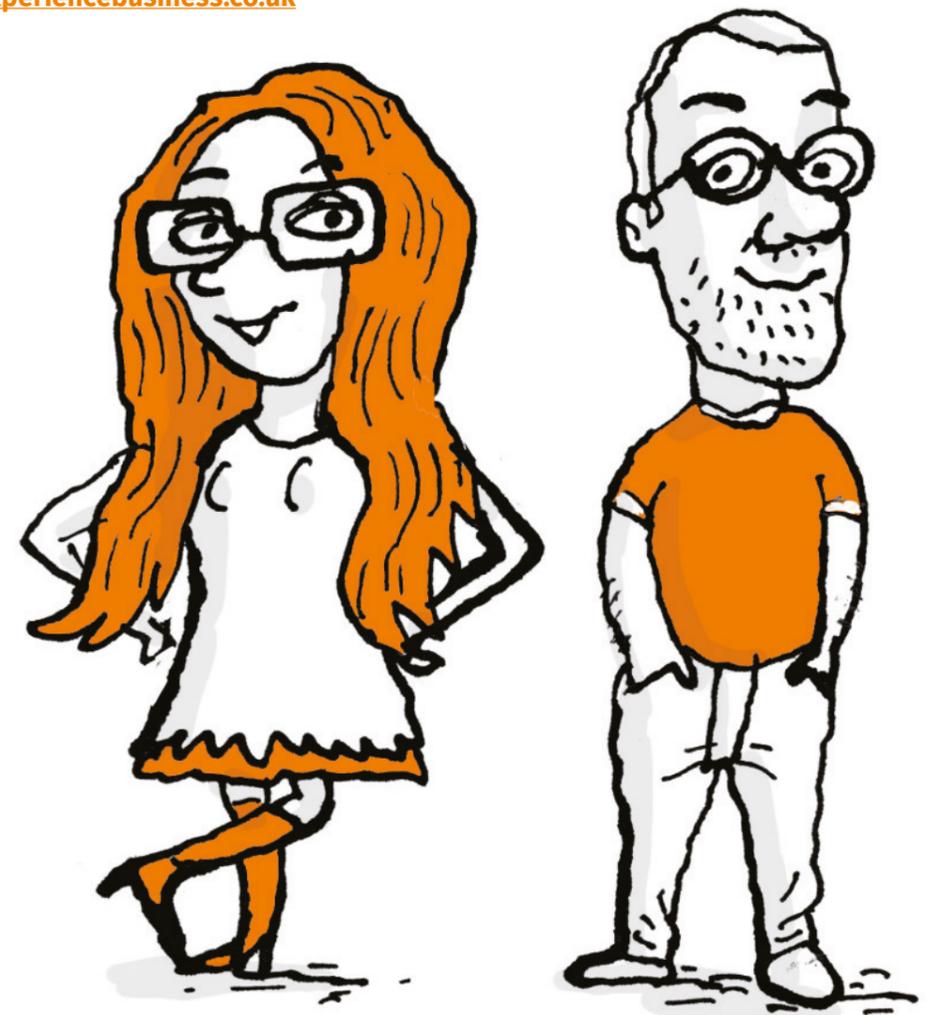
Lisa is truly passionate about the value of audience experience and shares her convictions and know-how with arts and cultural organisations around the world. We met at Mindcamp Canada where she gave a beautiful workshop called *The Museum of Me*: this is so Lisa, a lovely mix of intelligence and humanity. With my drawings and layouts for this publication, she was both very enthusiastic and very demanding. We had long discussions about how to produce something that is immediate, simple, creative and human – a great co-creation experience we are both proud of.

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## Lisa on Philippe

Philippe is creativity personified, warm of heart and touchingly emotional. A talented facilitator, author and illustrator, he has produced a smorgasbord of books around art and creativity which are a delight (e.g. *How to think like an absolute genius*). He also works with schools on creative education, as well as running workshops for CEOs on creativity management. Together and apart, we have developed workshops and games that bring people closer to the 'goodness of art', its emotional dimensions, and its potential to awaken creativity in us all.

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