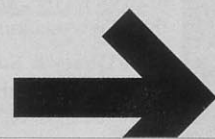




WHETHER IT COMES FROM A BOTTLE OF RED WINE OR BY WAKING UP IN THE MORNING; THE KEY IS WHAT YOU DO WITH IT. THIS MONTH OUR PANEL DEBATES WHETHER YOU CAN CLAIM TO TRULY CREATE ANYTHING AT ALL

inspiration is wherever you may find it



Font: 37pt PixelBitch Oblique Design, Pixelsurgeon



ALAMY: James West, co-founder (www.alamy.com)
We're a stock agency so we sell photography to the likes of these gentleman sitting around the table. Our photos are just one of the raw material sources that designers, ad agencies, and publishers use on a regular basis.



BANG SPLAT TWIDDLE: Lee Fulmer, creative director and founder (www.bangsplatwiddle.com)
We're a small design consultancy that tries to help clients achieve their goals by whatever means are most appropriate; even if that means sending them somewhere else.



INTRO: Adrian Shaughnessy, creative director and co-founder (www.intro-uk.com)
We're a design company – if it needs to be designed, we'll do it. Moving image, print and Internet. I write a lot on design, I'm very interested in the theory of design.



TOMATO: John Warricker, co-founder (www.tomato.co.uk)
What do we do? I think we do our own work. Some people are interested in what we do and give us money for that and sometimes we just put it out into the world ourselves.



TRIBESOFT: Tony Passero, founder, CEO and janitor (www.tribesoft.com)
We bill ourselves out as a "solutions agency," and as such, our work involves a combination of traditional design and interactive design. We work and are based in the city of Chicago.



WHAT DOES INSPIRATION MEAN TO YOU AS A WORD?

JOHN: I don't really understand what inspiration is or how you can measure it. There is certainly no empirical point where it starts or finishes, it's just part of the process of thinking.

LEE: I think inspiration is the spark that helps you connect two things together and therefore help you achieve things. The problem is too many people try to frame the concept in language and it doesn't work.

JOHN: I think common language tends to give it a certain definition and role and therefore a measurable quantity, whereas in fact that doesn't exist because there's absolutely no way that you can understand where your ideas come from because there is no way of self-examining them.

TONY: I disagree John, I think that inspiration can start when you start researching a problem and are starting to understand it. You're lucky if it comes when you want it to and you have to foster it all the time.

ADRIAN: I'm terribly suspicious of people who don't admit to influences; particularly designers and any sort of creative individual. Picasso is the best example of all, he never for a second tried to hide where his inspiration came from. If you look at his work it's as clear as a bell what he's been looking at: African art or his fellow Cubists or whatever. For me, that's a big thing.

JAMES: I suppose for me it has a totally different meaning. You're very lucky if you come across a concept that helps your business along and it might be an original idea or it might just be one of the motivating factors. I deal with the application of technology in relation to selling imagery so I'm probably inspired by totally different things, so it has a different meaning for me.

ADRIAN: Isn't it just the same creative impulse? You

want to run your business creatively and thoughtfully, so aren't you doing what we might do in a purely aesthetic realm? You're doing the same thing. You're thinking about things and out of those thoughts creating something new and dynamic, wouldn't you say?

JAMES: Yes.

ADRIAN: My point is that it's all the same really.

TONY: Actually, in a way you sometimes see inspiration in a tangible form. You're dealing with photographers on a daily basis who look through a lens with the same equipment but have a different view. So if anything you're on the end of inspiration looking out from there.

LEE: It's interesting because we're drawing a distinction between inspiration in design and in a business sense and whether the two meet. It's irrelevant. Inspiration is the spark that gives you the idea to do something, whether it's a business decision, or something like a meal or a piece of art or a photograph is irrelevant.

JOHN: It's part of the process of being human, as each individual human has their own life and work they do. It's really about one's approach and, as the artist Joseph Boyce said, "making thought into form," which is actually quite right.

ADRIAN: An appropriate place to say that.

SO IS IT REALLY ABOUT CREATIVITY?

JOHN: It's to do with your language processes and thought processes and the way that you don't build an exact replica of the world and experience in your head. Our brains are sort of Gestalt machines (**when the whole form is perceived to be more than the sum of its parts – psychology ed**) and recognise patterns, which is why we have language in our culture. It's not a completely mechanistic thing, it's actually fluid and process-driven which means you

can look at an object and actually recognise something else in it. Picasso was exceptionally good at doing that and as he said, "I don't copy, I steal". Therefore transmutation and transmorphing has always been a part of human culture.

ADRIAN: I think it raises the question: is there such a thing as a pure act of creation? I'd question whether there is because I agree with what you just said.

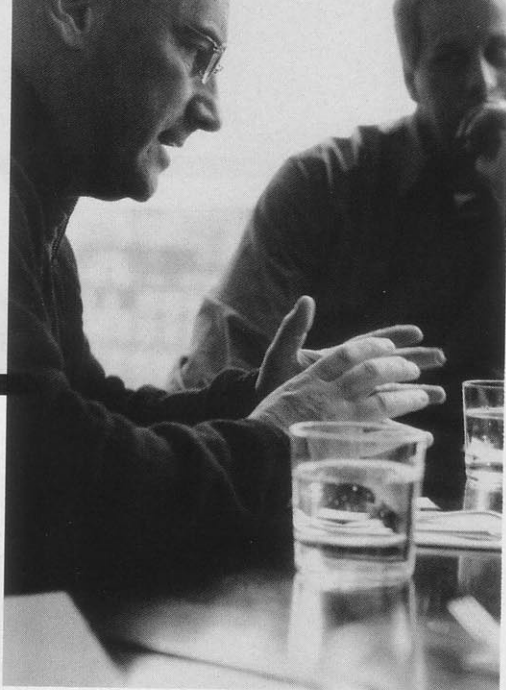
TONY: Not anymore.

ADRIAN: There never has been. Well, maybe there was one, depending on your religious views, but I don't think there is. I think creativity is about transformation, it's about your ability to transmute, to take given elements and make them into something new. I think that the people who do that well are the creative geniuses.

LEE: I don't agree because that implies that there is no real creativity, it's just changing things from one thing to another and I don't agree with that. I can agree with the concept of everything being inspired from something else which was ultimately inspired by something in nature, but that doesn't mean we can't create new variations.

ADRIAN: It's very easy to talk about music rather than design because everybody perhaps understands music. Just as we have taken Picasso, if you look at people like Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, Elvis – they all took something that already existed and moulded it into something that was uniquely theirs, but they didn't invent it. Hendrix didn't invent the blues, and Miles Davis didn't invent jazz but they made a unique articulation of it and I think that's why they are creative geniuses.

LEE: But that doesn't mean that they didn't create their music, only that they had influences which shaped it. Ultimately they still created something unique. A better example is when one band covers the song of another, it may be sung and played



■ differently but it's ultimately the same song.

JOHN: The uniqueness thing comes from our legacy of Greek philosophy.

ADRIAN: Does it?

JOHN: Yeah. You don't find that concept in other cultures at all. It is a unique thing.

TONY: I sort of agree. There's always an idea that's been done before, but it's a combination of looking at what's been done before and adding to it or sometimes, even more importantly, taking away from it. If you follow design, music, film, art through the centuries, it's always a combination of adding to or taking away from.

JOHN: Well you can't make the thing again because there's no such thing as the same river, so said Heraclitus. (Significant philosopher of ancient Greece until Socrates and Plato – ed). So therefore it was always in the process of change; whether it's less, more or similar, it's never the same.

TONY: If we make it again it would be so completely misunderstood...

JOHN: But we can't make it again because it's not occupying the same time and space.

LEE: Which was the Heraclitus' point: you can't stand in the same river twice because the water that was there the first time is gone.

WHERE DO YOU DRAW INSPIRATION FROM?

JOHN: I have no idea to be utterly truthful. The simplest is that I'm always amazed I wake up in the morning. I suppose I celebrate that really. Sometimes the most fantastic or the most banal things can inspire you, there's absolutely no way of predicting it – I don't look for inspiration.

LEE: It depends on what I'm doing. When I'm writing I'm at my most creative when I've had half a bottle of red wine and I'm listening to a particular piece of music. Get it right and it just flows and I can write thousands of words in a couple of hours. It's totally different from when I go out with my camera to shoot something; I'm much more anal and draw my inspiration from details within nature or man-made structures.

TONY: I start the inspiration process by trying to look at, touch, feel, and get immersed in everything that's been done before. I often find a lot of inspiration in those that have succeeded but, just as importantly, those that have failed. I like to see why they failed and what went on from there. Often changing environments inspires me. Half the reason I'm on this trip over here is the chance to walk around and look.

LEE: I agree. Once I took a bunch of my students from Dun Laoghaire College of Art and Design to Barcelona where we spent a week just walking around the city, getting drunk in tapas bars and looking at the architecture. When they came back, it was just amazing the quantitative jump in their creative output from that simple environment change.

ADRIAN: In terms of the commercial work we do, film and cinema is a really, really big influence and it just happens. When we sit around a table to talk about a new project, we always end up talking about films. The language of film is completely universal. If you're talking to a photographer, a typographer, or anybody really, it's often a very good shorthand to talk about film. So, professionally, I would say that film is the dominant factor in our work.

JAMES: I enjoy all aspects of cinema and probably thrive off it, but I don't think it has any influence on my work. There are really two things I need professionally. One is a very good team to work throw ideas around with. My ideas tend to

erode very quickly in their validity if they're not tested on someone close to what I do. Also, silence: taking a step back and sitting on your own for a considerable amount of time can get an awful lot of things thrashed out.

TONY: I agree that having a good support team structure to bounce things off is great. There are so many different things you can do in electronic design now that sometimes you just spin your wheels and it's tough to narrow it down, so it's good to have someone else to throw it off of.

JOHN: Picking up what Adrian was saying, I've always found that when I'm talking to students and they're saying, "What should I look at?", I always tell them not to look at the thing they're doing, the history of what they're doing or anything else like that but bring something else from somewhere else to it. What you were saying about music, it's about rhythm and cadence and timbre in time, isn't it? Where you put your notes and how you do it is what typography is about; black and white, negative and positive spaces and the voice of the typeface. So when James was saying about he didn't think film's influenced him, well it probably does but in a more subliminal way.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE'S VIEWS?

JAMES: I think anecdotes are very important to help build your ideas. I find I get a lot of enjoyment from anecdotal stories. Part of having an idea and going ahead with it is having the confidence that it's worth doing and you get more confident as you expose it to more people.

JOHN: One thing I was picking up from you James – and what I get really worried about – is that you really get worried about other people's opinions. I also get worried about the idea of solutions because I don't believe there are any; I believe there are situations and responses because there is nothing finite about the process.

JAMES: Do other people's opinions worry you?

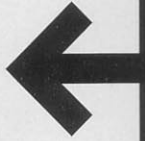
JOHN: Not at all.

JAMES: Are you worried about people having them?

JOHN: No, not at all, they can think what they like. If they like it that's nice but if they don't like it, that's fine too. I gave a talk at St Martins about 11 years ago and afterwards this really big

“SOMETIMES THE MOST FANTASTIC OR THE MOST BANAL THINGS CAN INSPIRE YOU, THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NO WAY OF PREDICTING IT”

JOHN WARRICKER



guy with a woolly hat and a goatee beard came up and said, "I really enjoyed what you were talking about but I think your work's crap." That's how I met Graham who then went on to become a part of our team. I can't speak for anybody else, but I do my work to find out more about me and about my world.

ADRIAN: There's a lot of interesting things that came out of that little exchange, but I particularly share your feeling about being too overwhelmed with opinion. But I think what you were talking about is just the benefit of exchanging views even if, as was the case with Graham, it was a controversial view.

JOHN: But sometimes that doesn't help in any quantitative sort of way.

ADRIAN: No, but I think we'd rather have that exchange than not.

JOHN: Not necessarily, that's what I'm saying. Sometimes yes, but sometimes you've got to put your neck out...

ADRIAN: Absolutely.

JOHN: ... and put your pencil on that piece of paper and that's your drawing and it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.

SO HOW DO YOU TRY TO FACILITATE INSPIRATION?

ADRIAN: To drag you back to something you said earlier John, what bothers me enormously is the formulaic nature of so much of life. Your advice not to study aspects of a project is absolutely crucial, you learn so much by going beyond the boundaries. I see so much Starbucks culture taking over where we all do the same things in the same way and I get very depressed with the narrowness of a lot of graphic designers.

TONY: There are certain factors that enforce that narrowness. In Europe it's very easy to bring different cultures together to work whereas Stateside it's much more difficult but we still do it. We have a designer who was born and raised in Thailand and one from Japan. Sometimes their ways of attacking issues or problems are completely different and it's just awesome.

LEE: Going back to the education point, I used to run the digital media programmes at Dun Laoghaire College and I was supposed to do the technical aspects rather than the creative ones

because there were "artists" who did that, but they couldn't use the technology. Inevitably students would ask how they could use technology creatively and I would come back with the fact that most of my inspiration comes from my travels which comes back to Tony's point about environment.

JOHN: You've hit the nail on the head there. It's very much about education and we all suffer in the English world from the legacy of the Victorian's taxonomy and splitting the world up into specialisations, whereas of course, the world defies any theory that is put on it.

TONY: When the Web started to explode, people had to put everyone into these neat pockets where you had to be a designer or a technologist or a producer. There is something to be said for structure to get things done, but a lot of the time

it was purely for the clients' benefit because the clients needed a structure that they could easily understand. We've always worked as sort of "free brand" teams. Yes, you have a specific role, but that doesn't mean that you can't participate in other areas and sometimes funny, happy accidents do happen.

ADRIAN: I think all that's great and admirable, but the reality is that society and the corporate world wants everything in nice little niches so it doesn't have to think. It doesn't want to have to engage in the sort of debate we're prepared to engage in; everything must be labelled and laid out so there are no mishaps or "happy accidents". I think you've just said that out of accidents come good things but that's not the way the world is structured anymore. ■

TEXT: LEE FULMER

