

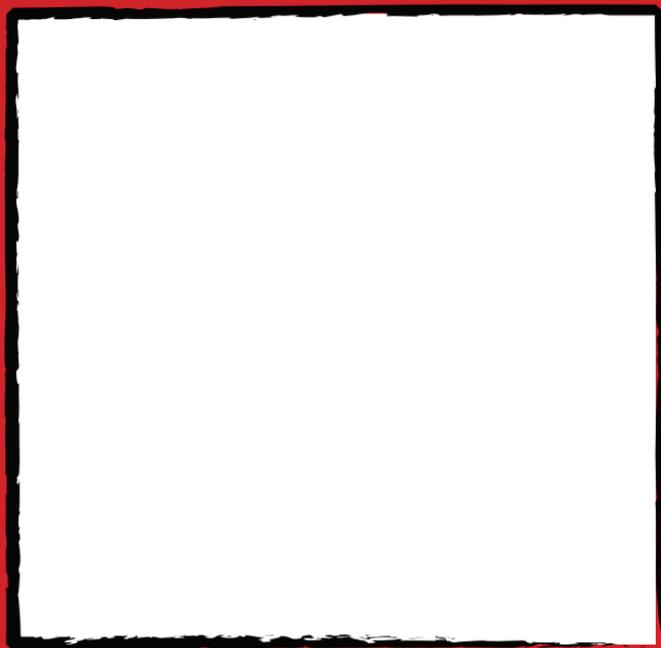
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# DANCING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

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*A Little Book of Creativity*

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Phil Beadle Edited by Ian Gilbert 

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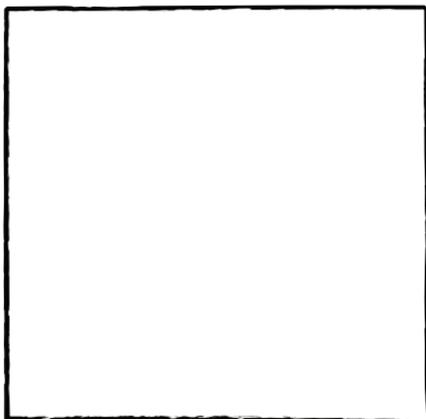
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# Introduction

*Doubt the conventional wisdom unless you can verify it with reason and experiment.<sup>1</sup>*

*Steve Albini*

If you do things the same way as everyone else, you'll get the same results as everyone else. Stands to reason. By definition, therefore, you will be average and the results you get will be average.

Let's have a look at average. He's a comfortable enough next-door neighbour alright, but you wouldn't want him coming to your house too often. Average doesn't get you drunk; it doesn't make you laugh, doesn't make you envious. In fact, average doesn't really do much, except borrow your lawnmower and bring it back not even properly broken. Average fails to satisfy.

No one spends their childhood dreaming of average. Few indeed are the children who have spent years lost in reverie at the ages of eight or nine thinking, 'One day, maybe one day, if I try to do everything I am told, if I follow the way that has been laid down for me by others, I will be the recipient of an award for conclusive mediocrity.'

The late advertising creative Paul Arden once said, 'You cannot produce great work by normal means. If you could everyone would be producing great work.' This is a

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Albini interview with lunakafe at [www.lunakafe.com/moon73/usil73.php](http://www.lunakafe.com/moon73/usil73.php)

shocking truth once you realise the veracity of it. It suggests that you must break the rules.

And you must. Not just because you are too lazy to follow them (though this sometimes creates an imperative). You must break the rules as a matter of policy – all day, every day, with a degree of rigour and dedication to the cause. The reason you must break the rules is that not breaking them is professionally negligent. Following the rules leads to being probably just about as good as everyone else and therefore perpetuates the cause of average. Copying a bunch of idiots eventually makes you an idiot: a moronic cut-out from a mediocre comic. Confounding the expectations that are set for you is entirely the best means possible of maintaining your personal and professional integrity.

The people you work for (and I mean the children you teach, not the bloke in the flash suit telling you that you're not good enough at your job) deserve better than working alongside a sheep-like copy of every unquestioned bad idea they've ever encountered. They desire and deserve you to be brilliant. You do not get to be brilliant by doing it the same way as everybody else does.

So.

Rip it up.

And start again.<sup>2</sup>

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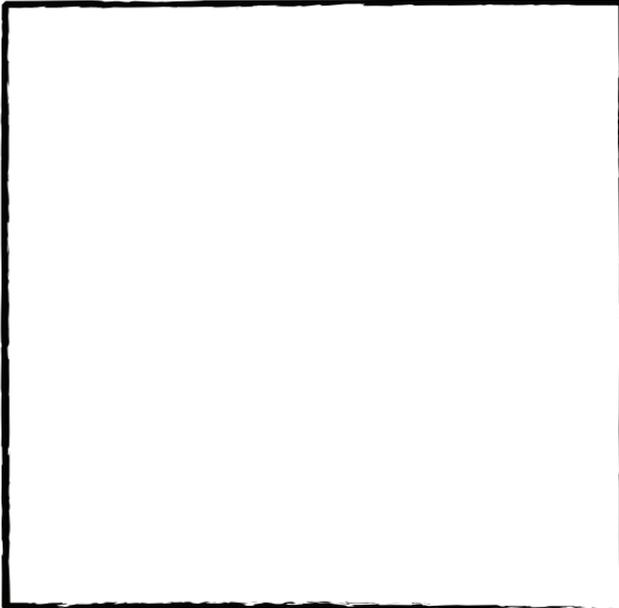
<sup>2</sup> Edwyn Collins and Orange Juice, *Rip it Up*

# Juxtaposition

*When things are novel, they are probably things we have discovered by accident or investigation rather than by design.<sup>3</sup>*

*Steve Albini (again)*

Draw an operating table in the space I have left for you between this paragraph and the next. It doesn't have to be good or anything.

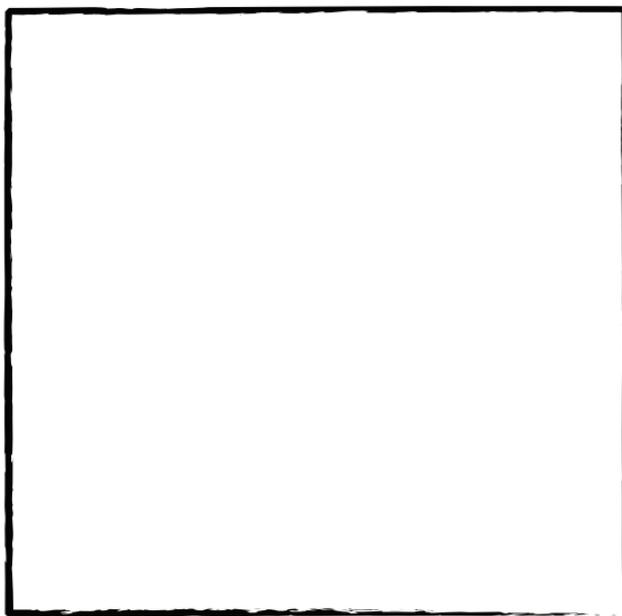


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<sup>3</sup> Steve Albini Op Cit

## Dancing About Architecture

Well done for doing the picture. It was for practice. You are going to have to draw another one (fail better this time).<sup>4</sup> But there is a difference. Now, and it is crucial that it is a chance meeting (they didn't ring each other up and arrange to meet - it's an accident), draw the chance meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on top of a dissecting table.

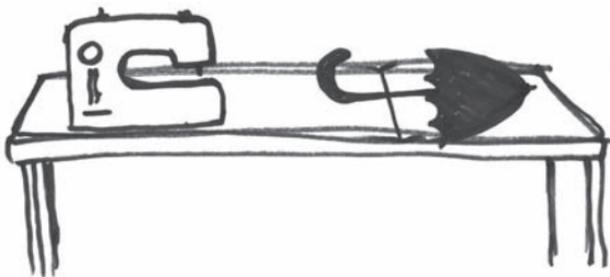


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<sup>4</sup> 'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better,' Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (1983). You know this though. Don't you?

## Juxtaposition

Well done. Perhaps your drawing looked something like this?



Now, I'm afraid, you must do some writing. I want you to write fifty words (forty-nine or fifty-one will not do at all). Those fifty words must be an analysis of the picture you have drawn, and that analysis must be from a specific perspective. You will argue that:

EITHER - the drawing is obsessed with death (a nihilistic interpretation if you will),

OR - it is obsessed with sex (Freudian perhaps)?

Do it here.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## The Classroom As Stage

There is a theatrical style called bouffant clowning. Bouffants are grotesque and deformed: they have grossly exaggerated facial expressions and gestures. When I first started teaching bouffant clowning to fifteen-year-old drama students in Canning Town, east London, many of the students cried hurt tears of righteous anger. They felt it was too close to being an uninformed, clumsy and morally unconscionable satire of people with profound learning difficulties. I was proud of them and of their reaction.

I was also proud of having come up with a lesson that – entirely accidentally – caused them to show what they were made of. The defined outcome was that they would know the generic conventions of bouffant clowning; the real outcome was that they clarified their ideas as to what is and is not morally acceptable in a classroom. Which was the better outcome: the defined or the accidental?

If you want to know what can be achieved in a classroom go and see your school's best teacher of drama. Learn from them. Copy them. Pretend to be them. For in their classes you will see teaching without fear, without stock reliance on the desk, the pencil and the shout. Should every teacher in the country be drama trained?

Will they be?

Drama teachers work with things they call drama forms. Some (not all) of these are transferable to any curriculum area. It is worth knowing what they are though, and examining how you might use them in other areas. However, I will not be bothering to pad out this book with a description of hot seating or forum theatre, because hot seating is for dullards and forum theatre (in which the kids are allowed to stop the proceedings and suggest an alternative cause of action for the characters) is, like rock musicians at any point in their career discovering an interest in Indian mysticism<sup>17</sup>, the province of the scoundrel.

## Drama Forms

### Thought-Tracking

*'I like your shoes.'* (However, I note that they fail quite singularly in covering up your unforgiveable ankles.)

*'Thank you ever so much. Did I forget to congratulate you on your new boyfriend? He is très, très charmant.'* (If you have a taste for poly-drug-addicted, sexually profligate, jobless liars. And as if I would look for fashion tips from *Coco the Clown!* And will you stop looking at my ankles.)

We don't always say what we mean. Most of time we just go through the socialised rigmarole of acceptable communicational norms. In short, we spend half our time

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<sup>17</sup> I refer here specifically to the worst band of all time: Kula Shaker.

## The Classroom As Stage

lying. What would happen if the truth of what we really thought was revealed? What if, rather than politely and half-embarrassedly intoning the none-more-repetitiously-hollow phrase of ‘Good morning’ to the colleagues to whom we are so utterly ambivalent, we replied, ‘No. It isn’t. If it were I would not be here. And I most certainly wouldn’t be exchanging meaningless unpleasantries with you, sir, who are the very dictionary definition of specious?’

Thought-tracking is a drama form where these secret thoughts are voiced, generally by another performer who, it is likely, will be standing behind the performer who is mouthing the platitudes. It is usually performed in fours. Two performers have the ordinary conversation, and two voice their real thoughts. Like so:

A: Some of my best friends are black.

*A’s thought-tracker: (Not many though.)*

B: Mine too.

*B’s thought-tracker: (Well there’s Reg from school, who I haven’t seen since 1984.)*

A: I don’t understand racism at all.

*A’s thought-tracker: (That Nick Griffin is a handsome and intelligent man.)*

B: Me neither.

*B’s thought-tracker: (Though I find Nick Griffin’s animal charisma and outgrown, skinhead machismo sexually arousing.)*

# DANCING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

is a compendium of outrageous ideas: ideas about how to take more risks and ideas about how to come up with better ideas. Ideas about how to plan experiences that leave people who are in the same room as those ideas awestruck, and ideas to help you avoid the textbook, the worksheet, the barely stifled yawn.

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**Phil Beadle** teaches sentence structure through football skills, analyses poetry by dancing the verbs and is most renowned for teaching punctuation through kung fu moves and teaching adults to read with space hoppers. He teaches English at a school in London and travels internationally, indoctrinating teachers into being interesting. This is his fifth book. It is very much his favourite.



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