

# **TACTICS FOR THE TIGHTROPE**

*Creative Resilience for Creative Communities*

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# CHAPTER TWO

## DREAMERS ON THE TIGHTROPE

*The point:*

- *The image of a multitude of dreamers on a plethora of tightropes, finding the balance between movement and stability*
- *The need for not just survival but creative resilience as resistance to hierarchy, inequality and irrelevance*
- *You cannot be resilient alone*
- *The opportunity for ‘infinite variety’ as a result of distributed leadership that connects, collaborates and multiplies*
- *The potential for a transition from hurt to hope using a handful of basic principles*
- *A paradox or conundrum: any one of us only gets to do the tightrope in our own unique way when we all get to do it in our own unique way*

*Some questions:*

- *If you cannot be resilient alone, who else is on the tightropes with you, and what do you owe them?*
- *How do you use your creative resilience to resist and to dream something unachieved into life?*

### Welcome

Imagine a person on a tightrope, juggling cups and saucers. One foot keeps them up there, weight running up and through bent knee and tightened core. Or they're on a unicycle, or using a wheelchair or crutches. Or they're even walking on their hands and juggling with their feet, if they have feet. It's your imagination, you decide. Their eyes fix on a cup and saucer in mid-air, apart, but not too far – the crockery is still a set. On the tightrope walker's head (or feet or shoulders or lap) sits a whole pile of cups and saucers. Their arms and hips and thighs are ready for the next shift. Around them the crowd has chosen not to worry, or to worry only from the far edge of wonder.

The spotlights single out each walker, though a host of others hold them. The room is full of others who make this moment happen. And now more make their way onto the tightrope, moving in accumulating patterns and singular forms, juggling different objects, every step and shape revealing another

angle. Members of the crowd, or people we thought were members of the crowd, start to come forward, to climb, to dream. Some begin to erect their own tightropes and slack wires, many a foot from the floor, some in the rafters. Soon people are leaping between the wires, somersaulting, vaulting, bouncing off the trampolines and rubber tables that others manoeuvre at a run. They make sure no-one hits the ground before they choose to. The multiplying tightropes help them escape the linear.

Movement and stillness meet where balance dances with the drop, with flight. The wire walkers unite in concentration, flow and muscle memory. They explore and improvise, confident that practice has replaced their tentative beginnings. Close, fresh attention to the moment, and the coming moment, and the one after that. They look each other in the eyes. They reach out knowing touch will come. Sometimes there is shouting. Those around them play their part too, add their silence, encouragement and will. The watchers have their own tightropes at home, at work, in the heights of their dreams. For this *is* a process of dreaming something unachieved into life, of finding better arrangements, closer ways of being. Culture is wideawake dreaming.

This is the image I want to start with, and invite you to hold as you read this book. For me, this is one image of an artist, of the freelance cultural worker, of all those working in theatre and dance companies, publishers, galleries, museums, artist collectives, producing hubs, magazines, festivals, arts centres and a thousand more variants, hybrids and mutations, and of those organisations themselves, and of the communities they serve.

The dreamers on the tightropes want to do good work, to take risks but be healthy and to care for each other. Yet the sector around them is beset with chronic conditions and dangers. Narrowness of voice, unfair power dynamics, reductions in public funding, undercapitalised organisations and precarious individual workers conspire to bake-in inequality, which encourages further inequality. The climate emergency, racial violence and injustice, social inequality and deprivation, the disabling of so many people, also form part of the environment in which they work. Then along came a global pandemic to throw loss, grief and more uncertainty at them. The Covid crisis revealed, again, the withering effects of a decade of austerity on the business models of the cultural sector. The limits of conceptions of resilience that restrict themselves to developing diverse income streams are clear. Those on the

tightrope are often pig sick of hearing about resilience.

Those on the tightrope also want to find the balance between the necessary risk of their creative and cultural lives, and the in-built precarity of the systems within which they find themselves. Many – though not all, there are solitary beauties on the ropes too – want to do this while involving people in communities and organisations and freelancers in different, non-hierarchical ways. I've spent the past decade developing tools and frameworks that can help, after two decades mainly on one tightrope or another. (Or, a few times, brushing myself down after falling.)

There are no silver bullets. The tightrope only looks like a straight line. We will still, for now, be working within or alongside a culture and economy dominated by notions of enterprise, individualism and marketisation, even where our work or approaches oppose it. But we can, at least, understand that environment and how we relate to it. We can then shape our approach to the extent we are able: our own combination of rejecting, ignoring, challenging, fitting in, accommodating. Or indeed embracing it if you prefer - we should not forget, in what follows, that many in the creative and cultural sector are fine with 'survival of the fittest'. I won't talk much about them, and they don't talk about themselves like that much, but they walk amongst us, and they are – inconveniently perhaps - responsible for some of the art and culture which most moves and challenges us.

### **What we need: creative resilience as resistance to hierarchy, inequality and irrelevance**

This may not seem a revolutionary cry for an opening argument. I believe it would be better for us all to move from carelessness to care, from hurt to hope. This is possible, I think, without 'burning it all down' in a revolution, if we build resourcefulness and creative capabilities so we can resist through our creative resilience. If we ditch hierarchical leadership models to connect, collaborate and multiply many, many voices. If we make ourselves useful and make spaces for others even as we take our own space. And if we keep some slack for ourselves.

I know that sometimes you have to step outside and work with others to create your own systems with your own values, with meanwhile and evolutionary

zeal. This means rejecting things others run towards. I also know how hard that can be practically for many, much of the time. In the decade I have worked with adaptive resilience, people have sometimes accused me of neoliberal managerialism, to my face or in academic papers, far more even than before I left a pinstriped job for the plains of independence. Those in organisations and community groups, though, have more often picked up on the other meaning of ‘manage’: to get by, to do what’s needed in the circumstances, to shift tactics to make the most of what power and control you hold. It is reassuring to me to find resilience increasingly conceived as a potential precursor to resistance and transformation, instead of necessarily a defeatist adaptation to an unhealthy system. If I wanted to promote neoliberal managerialism, I wouldn’t do it from here, and I’d have spent more time talking in repressive regimes than in the economically challenged towns where I’ve tended to work.

I have sometimes wondered if my lack of instinctive recoil at talk of resilience stems from growing up in a place full of imposing but empty cotton mills, which had been a rail hub but now was brown fields and rusting sheds. My grandad had driven one of the final steam trains out of one of those sheds when I was a toddler, and my ancestors specialised in the dying industries of cotton and steam trains. I grew up in Preston, Lancashire, in North West England and I have lived almost 30 years in the parish of Preston-on-Tees, in Teesside, a place once renowned for steel and chemicals, with towns that have been identified as the least economically resilient in England. Apart from a year as a student in hyper-diverse Saint-Denis in Paris, and a year in London’s bustling West End cheffing, it has essentially been a life lived a long way from what many people in England would still consider, in the words of Matthew Arnold, the “natural centres of mental improvement and sources of lucidity” that practice if not policy holds to be in the South East of England.

It was not an especially deprived place, or didn’t feel it to me as a child. It had a requisite variety of social clubs, pubs, bands, fetes and float festivals, youth clubs, churches, building sites and wind-blown recs, and a library. For a year or so in my teens, the village even had the most important cultural infrastructure I could then imagine beyond the library: a record shop with a box of independent label singles on the counter. I suspect now people had looked for how they could live and work with the positive ways community life expresses itself – what I might, in creative resilience terms, call the core

purpose and values – and repurposed, rebuilt and drawn on networks and assets so people could do what was possible. (They had done so in a very different policy environment, of course, with that previous community infrastructure still standing, like those mill buildings.) I don't want to paint myself as an outsider who struggled through, despite my flashbacks to being an 11+ fluke with a cardboard briefcase, that's not my point. My family were very supportive in many ways (even when, after graduating, I worked as a vegetarian chef for six years). My point is that if most people in the arts had parents with professional or management jobs when growing up – well over 60% on one programme I evaluated recently – maybe the idea of resilience sits differently. (My Dad worked in warehouses most of his working life; Mum was a secretary, shop worker and, in her last job before she died, a care worker on minimum wage. I was the first in my family to go to university. I did, though, make a fortuitously good and early marriage for what was to come, as my in-laws were a musician/composer and an animal welfare campaigner. I didn't know that when I fell in love with my wife aged 19, mind.)

Thanks especially to an inspirational talk by the artist Jess Thom, TourettesHero, and work by resilience researchers, I have come to think of building resilience as an act of resistance to the damage made in communities by economics and sometimes by nature – adaptive, creative resistance, bending rather than breaking. For many things in culture, longevity matters. It has a function, of accumulating memory and innovation into new, evolving traditions. It builds up habits and assets, bodies of work and their critical reception. It creates spaces for people to do their work over long periods, and for others to come in, learn and pass through. It also demonstrates a set of values at odds with the stick it up and tear it down values of much commercial activity. It allows for memory as well as discovery, for attachment to place and people to mature: all are component parts, for me, of the 'ordinary' thing we call 'culture'. This runs counter to a strain in the arts that loves to talk of transformation, of novelty, of opposition-as-identity, even from comfortable pension-building positions.

My argument is that if we want a culture that is creative *and* fair, that can better explore the stories, sounds and images of our times, and play a part in making those times better, and is also, as Raymond Williams put it, 'ordinary', we do need some organisations, events and institutions to last, and to be healthy, productive places to do work. This requires creative resilience at

all levels: the capacity of organisations and communities of people to be productive, valued, and true to self-determined core purpose and identity. This may involve absorbing disturbance, adapting with integrity in response to changing circumstances and positively influencing the environment. This capacity is most important at system levels, although it includes and respects individuals and should help them thrive. To sustain creative resilience according to anything like my definition, regardless of levels of public or other funding, we need new ways of working with communities, and we need new power structures that demolish hierarchical leadership and trickle down funding models and instead build collective, connected models that resist individualised marketisation of *everything*.

Let me be plain: you cannot be resilient alone.

The characteristics that make up creative resilience are collective and communal ones: resourcefulness, comprising a culture of shared purpose and values, predictable financial resources, strong networks and intellectual, human and physical assets; and creative capabilities, including power and agency, leadership, management and governance, creative capacity and situation awareness. These are all collective efforts, rooted in time and place. As Tyson Yunkaporta concludes when thinking about how cultures adapt and evolve over time: “like all things that last, it must be a group effort aligned with the patterns of creation discerned from living within a specific landscape.”<sup>1</sup>

Consultant and writer Peter Block, whose work on community has been vital to my growing sense of doing more than managing but rather resisting and building, says “We serve best through partnership, rather than patriarchy. Dependency is the antithesis of stewardship and so empowerment becomes essential.”<sup>2</sup> One of my own practical steps has been to make sure that those I work with are not dependent upon me, by sharing the tools I use, and by turning analysis into useable tools of my own and making those available to others. A positive side effect of this is that it also makes me feel less dependent on others. I simply refuse to monetise every idea I have, every conversation; I want to share it and see it used by others. *Even if* they don’t do with it what I would. *Especially* if they do something with it that I could never have done. That’s what culture is for me: the passing on of the tools to make your own world. This has also proved more valuable to my earning a living than trademarking every little exercise and framework. (I started off a poet and, like all minor poets, my greatest aspiration remains to one day be Anonymous.)



## About this book

I wrote this book in early 2021, during the global Covid-19 pandemic, after the summer of Black Lives Matter, and as Brexit became a reality and its sad and messy effects were felt, leaving the UK weaker and more isolated than at any point in my lifetime. I wrote it in the parish of Preston-on-Tees, in Stockton-on-Tees, in the North East of England, in a house I've lived in half my life now. I was born 56 years ago in the back bedroom of my grandparents' council house, breech, bruised and stubborn. I'm a white, straight man, long-married, father of two grown-ups, and a grandpa. I have worked in and on the cultural and hospitality sectors since graduating, first as a chef in vegetarian restaurants trying to change the world through food, then as a poet, writer, publisher, organiser, arts manager, university (adult education) lecturer, arts funder and suit wearer, and, since 2010, as a writer/consultant whilst also publishing books of poems and making public poems. I suspect there are people who consider me a bit provincial; I don't think it's just my imposter syndrome twinging when I see those looks, but I'm alright with that. (They are wrong, by the way: I'm a Parochial Cosmopolitan, as I'll explain later. I love London too. It's not Paris, but it's OK.) As such, it carries those roots and limitations, minimum. I have tried to challenge myself, my privilege, my instincts and engrained reactions, and to bring in a range of perspectives. But now, more than ever, that feels an effort doomed to only go so far. So it goes.

The first idea for this book came in the anxious, Lost Nights of Corona, with a half-waking, half-sleeping thought to bring together and revisit some of the writing I had done over a decade of Thinking Practice which had most connected with a lot of people. (And to move on from those that didn't.) On proper reflection I still felt this might be a useful thing for people to have and refer to as we discover what balance of new normal and old normal faces us. I had done several talks over lockdown, especially ones for Arts & Business Northern Ireland and for Centro Gabriel Mistral (GAM) in Santiago, Chile, where I put together ideas and frameworks from various earlier papers, and subsequent developments of them, to explore this time of release, and the relationship between resilience and resistance. This is not an attempt to respond to Covid and what it has revealed. The patterns and possibilities emerging from Covid are not unknown, they were hiding in plain sight, ignored or dormant. The frameworks, tools and tactics described were not a

response to a moment and have proved useful over time. I hope they will in future.

Happily, the ever-positive Annabel Turpin and Gavin Barlow, co-leads of Future Arts Centres, also thought that this would be a timely thing for many people in the cultural sector in the UK and perhaps beyond, grappling as we are with what one of the Co-Directors of Culture Reset described to me as an “existential moment”. I take it as existential because it demands choice, to be *for* something. Sartre said, in John Gerassi’s book *Talking with Sartre*, “what we must do instead is commit ourselves over and over again. No act is pure. All acts are choices, which alienate some. No one can live without dirty hands. To be simply opposed is also to be responsible for not being in favour, for not advocating change.”<sup>3</sup> My intention here is to share some ways of making those choices.

We also hope it will be useful to those who think of themselves as more in the voluntary or community sector, where many of the tools and frameworks also apply. There is not a world of difference between a volunteer-led community group and an arts centre. They are both ways of imagining better worlds whilst grappling with this one. On what basis to react, to choose and to build? On what grounds to adapt? Where to focus and why? How might the sector address the chronic conditions it had pre-pandemic in the way it came out the crisis? So I hope that it will be read by artists, writers, directors, curators, charity managers, by the boards of cultural organisations, by those developing leadership programmes, anyone tempted to run a resilience workshop focused on individuals not systems (my advice: don’t), and by people working in community networks, art form or subject networks, and people thinking of how to make their creative community endure – whether that’s a family, a group or company, a van full of people, an organisation, an institution or a local authority.

This book covers things people have found useful in deciding what to do, or what to stop doing. (I like a good theory more than the next person, I must admit, but I also like action.) I have updated, revised and combined various things I have written in the past, some being more altered than others. (The writing, projects and commissions of the last decade had given me some of the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order.) I have brought together some tools for using those frameworks and ideas. I have also drawn out some

of the implications of Covid-19's effects, as I understand them at the time of writing, but have not included every fresh statistic and fact. Even more than usual, it would be out of date by the time this book reaches you, whenever that is. (I hope it is some years and a world away from my writing it.) I hope the sector lives up to talk of transformation post-pandemic, but I have written this book on the basis that the underlying patterns and ways of being will persist in that reset environment, that the things which we adored, abhorred or ignored before will still be there, and that even if some new patterns have to be lived with in future, be it social distancing or jetpacks, we will face them with our human selves. I hope it provides a way to bring together some of the things I've written about in a way which is easier to share and access over time than the digital realm: a book. There may be the odd fold and crease where new meets old. Enjoy them. If you're one of those – I hope – mythical people who no longer read books but only listen to podcasts, what can I say? #SorryNotSorry.

I've written here about frameworks and models, what some might call theory, and about projects and people. Some of this writing has been public, and available under a Creative Commons license so others could use and adapt it. This book is similarly 'protected' and released into the wild. Take what's useful, change what doesn't work for you, and feel free to adapt. I take inspiration from a local hero in Stockton-on-Tees. John Walker, the inventor of the friction match, refused to patent it, for the good of mankind. He died in poverty, which I hope not to, but I still think it's a good example. These ideas are not mine alone, so I can't own them, I can only put them into the commons to see what use they can be. I am pleased this has happened, with organisations such as the Association of Independent Museums developing sector specific 'resilience' hallmarks from the characteristics I first outlined in *Making Adaptive Resilience Real*. Many other people have told me they have used the frameworks and ideas in their own planning, and I have developed ways of doing this with my own clients.

In this book, I draw out and revisit things I think are still relevant from some previous papers: *Making Adaptive Resilience Real*, *The Role Of Diversity In Building Adaptive Resilience*, *The Art of Living Dangerously*, *Inside Outside Beyond*, and *Multiplying Leadership in Creative Communities* especially. I have adapted and evolved the frameworks since those first publications, and want to share how they join together in my head, as a basis for making a shared, collective, fair

culture: **creative resilience as resistance to hierarchy, inequality and irrelevance.**

Many of the several hundred thousand words I have written in the past decade are not public, but are in evaluations and research reports for a wide range of organisations. These inform what follows in some way, as I've learnt something from each evaluation, each provocation paper, each conference keynote, each business plan. Some of them have provided material more directly, especially in Chapters Three and Four, which draw on commissions from Arts Council England and The Bluecoat, including some as an Associate of EW Group. I am grateful to the people who commissioned the originals, and those who collaborated on the original versions of some of them. Mission Models Money, the 'holocracy' founded by Clare Cooper and Roanne Dodds, of which I was an Associate from 2010 until its closure in 2014, linked transition in an over-extended cultural sector to that necessary for an over-extended planet, seeking to build collaborative and peer-led solutions, and I am especially grateful for that example.

My focus is arts and culture rather than the broader creative industries, or the broader social sector, both of which have deep parallels with what I discuss here, but which I have decided not to bring into my scope. I focus particularly on the non-profit part of the larger picture, rather than the commercial sector of say, music, theatre and visual arts. I suspect much of what I say holds true, but have not extended my work to look into that enough to say definitively. By culture, I mean that which we think of as the arts, heritage, museums, libraries, digital and publishing, both professional and amateur. That's deliberately baggy, I'm afraid, as last time I spent days debating this I wanted to bang my head against the wall and there's no time for that. I trust you. Trust yourself.

I am by nature, habit, budget and poetic leaning a bricoleur: someone who makes things from what is to hand. I prefer the hybrid, heterogenous, juxtaposed and borrowed, even the slightly awkward, to the pure. I have a high tolerance for ambiguity and expect people to work out applications themselves, so they fit the shape of their worlds rather than mine. This is not a book of academic research, for all its leanings towards frameworks and tools not case studies. It is full of things I have found useful in working out what the hell has been going on, and what to do next. I want more than

anything to say, “this may be useful to you”, so you can pick it up and apply to your own situation, not find set role models to emulate or simple solutions to implement. (Bricoleur is also used in French for odd-job man, which is a fair cop.)

In some ways, on some days, in certain moods, I even describe this as my cultural practice, joining the dots between writing, research, organisational development and facilitation: connecting, collaborating, multiplying the culture made by us all. Dreaming on the tightrope.

I hope this book will put these ideas, tools and tactics into more hands. It moves through the spheres of the ‘self’ or individual, ‘inside’ creative practice and organisations, ‘outside’ in the sector and ‘beyond’ in the world or society. It connects individual practice to that of organisations and sectors as they interact with society and, especially, creative communities, and the assets, strategies and tactics needed, including those of multiplying leadership. Throughout, you’ll find tools for individuals, staff teams, boards, sector groupings, local networks, networks of networks and any collective of people to help think through their position, possibilities and plans. (These will also be available online as standalone documents for practical use.) So if you choose to work on the tightrope you can do so knowing the risks and potential rewards. You can find your own way to stay up there to do what you need to – and, indeed, discover how you can invite others to dream with you, to make something healthier, more shared and more beautiful than the world we currently live in.

None of what you will find here applies only to people with fancy job titles, seats of power, big cheeses on their boards. These practices do not need authority. In fact sometimes working in the cracks of creaking systems helps. (And rest assured: the current economic system may feel inescapable but it is cracked and creaking.) Stepping away from so-called power to try and influence differently, as I did when I left the National Executive Board of Arts Council England in 2010, metaphorically leaving *Making Adaptive Resilience Real* on my desk, was a deliberate choice to work in those cracks, rather than adapt to the compromises I felt I was having to make. At times this feels exposed and frustrating, at other times, luxurious, even frivolous. It demands as much clarity as when I was an Executive Director. Maybe more. Promiscuous collaboration and sharing of your ideas, heedless of who takes credit, help. It takes a network of trusted critical friends, multi-function bullshit detectors and cheerleaders, too.

I concentrate on the models and patterns I see in the work of those I have contributed to, evaluated, thought about and supported over three decades in the cultural sector. (If you can call the little poetry magazine and press I founded in 1989 part of the cultural sector.) Although you will find reference to the work of specific organisations and programmes, what you won't find is a set of case studies describing specific arts, heritage or cultural organisations. This is partly because there are many sets of case studies out there and some of them – whenever you read this – will be more up-to-date than a book can be. It's also because case studies can be hostages to changes in fortune. (I am relieved looking at previous papers that no one 'case-studied' seems to have crashed and burned since. (You may know better, of course.) It is mainly, though, because the case study approach plays into the heroic leadership/breakthrough artist model I find so unhelpful for building more equitable creative communities. It becomes another kind of sorting mechanism, and we have no need of more of those. There are some inspirational people mentioned here, but they are not put forward as models to copy: they are who they are, and have done what they've done because of so many factors; you or I cannot copy them and hope for the same results.

As D.W. Winnicott wrote “examples can start to pin down specimens and begin a process of classification of an unnatural and arbitrary kind, whereas the thing I am referring to is universal and has infinite variety.”<sup>4</sup> I am not sure what I describe here is universal except in the sense that the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh used the word when he said, “Parochialism is universal, because it deals in fundamentals.”<sup>5</sup> (He contrasted being rooted at the parish level with the provincial attitude which always looks to the capital for approval.) The context I have worked in is primarily an English one, for all that internationalism has enriched it. The patterns here flow in part from British cultural policy since 1945, and a model of state, private and audience support different to the more private philanthropy-focused models of North America; the national and local government state-funding models of Western Europe and Scandinavia; or the NGO and community-centred models in Africa. I have, though, found from working in Canada, South Africa and Australia that these frameworks have resonance and application beyond the UK. I hope that at least there may be some fundamentals drawn from my tales of home, even if they must be adapted or held differently in different places and times. The heart of it is the other part of Winnicott's statement, which I'll repeat now with space around it and in bold:

## Infinite variety

That's what I hope people will make from the arguments and tools in this book. An infinite variety of ways to do the tightrope with an infinite variety of people. That is the purpose of the tools included here, to help in understand and make the best use of whatever it is you bring – the beliefs and values, the natural or enforced tendencies, the learned and acquired skills and experience, the brilliance, the shortcomings, the traits you were born with, those you picked up along the way, the abilities you didn't know about until later, but now you do. I hope these tools can support you to make best use of all these things.

I start by thinking about the people who work in the cultural sector and the pressures on them. We can consider individual livelihoods inside organisations and creative practices, and how one might sustain them, and on what terms. Is a poor artist 'resilient'? Or in *what ways* is a poor artist resilient? What are the pros and cons of that artist being resilient? I describe four domains to think about: the self, inside (the organisation or practice), outside (the art form or cultural field) and beyond (in society). Across these are four enabling mindsets to be encouraged: co-creating creative resilience; accountability; framing and reframing purpose; and enabling power and agency. I sketch a framework for individuals to base their tactics and strategies on an assessment of five kinds of assets: creative, social, financial, physical, and environmental.

You will find a number of frameworks of four or five things throughout the book. This is literally to help keep them to hand: picture one element per finger/thumb. This is an idea I have unashamedly taken from Tyson Yunkaporta's brilliant *Sand Talk*. I like the human touch of it far more than the 'rule of three' I learnt from Sunday School, the Three Bears and Tony Blair. It also serves as a prompt to remember another thing Yunkaporta said, which I find a source of inspiration: "Your culture is not what your hands touch or make – it's what moves your hand."

I then go on to present a description of creative resilience which I think is necessary, not for adapting to the world but for changing it, which embraces resilience as change and is centred on purpose, values and agency. Creative resilience is the capacity of organisations and communities of people to be productive, valued and true to self-determined core purpose and identity. This may involve absorbing disturbance, adapting with integrity in response to changing circumstances, and positively influencing or disturbing the environment. It requires resourcefulness built on a culture of shared purpose and values, and creative capabilities flowing from power and agency. It is a collective, eco-system process more than one of individuals.

Creative resilience is enhanced by, and enhances, community resilience and distributed, co-creative leadership, which I explore in Chapters Five and Six. I argue for the positive effects of arts centres and cultural or creative activity as a ‘potential space’ in which people can come together to explore and play, and for a leadership which connects, collaborates and multiplies the voices of others through a process of discovery – knowing and asking.

In between these sections you will find 25 tools that may be useful in deciding your tactics for the tightrope. To repeat: these will not tell you the answers. There are no set answers, just as there should be no despair, only tactics. Use them in the spirit of Ivan Illich’s “convivial tools”: making them your own to suit you by using the structure but altering the terms if my description does not fit or convince, and by adapting them to your circumstances and context, and what you wish to achieve<sup>6</sup>. Add the ones that work to what you take from the many other useful toolkits available. Never forget, to echo Illich, that the aim is to use the tools to “invest the world with [your] meaning”, rather than be mastered by the tools so they shape your self-image. Try them out and see which ones work for you, and feel free to adapt and pass on so long as you give us the due credit. These are all available free through the Future Arts Centres and Thinking Practice websites. You can add to the repertoire of tactics yourself and join the creative community on [www.tacticsforthetightrope.com](http://www.tacticsforthetightrope.com).

I end by setting out the potential for transition in the system, a transition that will see dreaming on the tightrope as risky but more protected, involving more people. It is possible for us to move from hurt to hope. To do so we will need to remember a handful of basic rules. How we work must build resourcefulness and creative capabilities in ourselves, in others and the collective. We should



ditch hierarchical leadership models to connect, collaborate and multiply many, many voices. Our creative resilience should be a process of resistance. We should make ourselves useful and make space for others, even as we take up our own. We should keep some slack for ourselves.

And finally we must hold on to this paradox or conundrum: any one of us only gets to do the tightrope in our own unique way when we all get to do it in our own unique way.