

THE INTUITIVE WRITER:

FLOW

– WITH GILLIAN FERRABEE –

What if our minds work best when we're in a state of play? Research is showing us this is the case for everyone. And yet, we each have different play personalities. Sarah Selecky spoke with Creative Coach Gillian Ferrabee about all eight of them.

June 19, 2021.

Sarah Selecky 00:05

Gillian Ferrabee has such an exciting and multifaceted professional story. As I was preparing for our conversation theme, studying flow and improvisation, I recognized our theme in the way that she's followed the twists and turns of her creative career. This is one of the signature features of flow.

So, I'll tell you her story. She started as a performer and for over a decade toured Europe, North America, and Mexico with the innovative dance theatre companies Carbone 14 and O Vertigo Danse. She then expanded into a new decade-long career as an actor in TV and film. In 2004, she joined Cirque du Soleil and traveled the globe auditioning talent. She was the artistic casting director of The Beatles: Love show. And in 2008, she was casting advisor for the complete roster of the company's touring shows. Then in 2012, she was promoted to the Director of the Creative Lab at Cirque du Soleil Media, where she led a team developing projects destined for international TV, film, and new media markets. Those highlights include the 2016 Emmy Award winning VR project Inside The Box: Kurios, produced with Felix & Paul Studios for



Sarah Selecky
WRITING SCHOOL

Samsung, as well as the preschool animated series *Luna Petunia* for Netflix. She also developed projects in partnership with Ubisoft studios, Google Chrome, Fox Studios, Jim Henson Studios, and Discovery South America.

In 2018, Gillian founded the innovation agency [Kite Parade](#), which offers consulting and training and transformational leadership, multiple point of view storytelling, actualizing genius creativity, and cultivating masterful collaboration. Clientele include international consumer product brands, scientific and cultural organizations, nonprofit foundations, and digital startups. Our own school has worked with Kite Parade too. Gillian is a certified coach with the Hendricks Institute and she's been coaching creative professionals and creative executives one on one for the last 10 years. That's how I first discovered Gillian. I read *The Big Leap* by Gay Hendricks and then I went looking for a coach who used the Hendricks method. Gillian is more than a coach though. She's a magical unicorn, and she's joining us now from Quebec. Not Montreal, though. Right, Gillian? You're somewhere else right now?

Gillian Ferrabee 02:29

Yeah, right now I'm about an hour north of Montreal, on the Laurentians.

Sarah Selecky 02:32

The Laurentians. Welcome. I'm so excited to introduce you to our readers. I'm so excited to introduce our readers to you. Welcome, Gillian, thank you for being here.

Gillian Ferrabee 02:43

Thank you for inviting me.

Sarah Selecky 02:46

So I want to start simply, I think it's simply, by asking you about a couple of stories that you've told me over the past years that we've known each other, that I've never forgotten. They just keep coming up for me. And when I was thinking about flow, and asking you about flow, and our conversation about flow, I was like, I want you to talk about these in this context. So the first one: do you remember telling me about working with some executives, I think, or someone in the corporate world, and putting balloons



into their hands in a meeting as a way to help them learn something new or have a more productive brainstorming or something? Do you remember this story?

Gillian Ferrabee 03:26

Yes, I do.

Sarah Selecky 03:27

Can you tell us... can you talk about that? What were you doing?

Gillian Ferrabee 03:31

I did it initially in a workshop that was on how to elevate the results from creative meetings and stuff like that. And then I later did it in meetings. And the principle is that our brain is, from a neurological point of view if you like, our brain is primarily a sensory receptor — so what you're seeing and feeling and hearing — that's what our brain is doing most of the time.

And we're all aware of that. Otherwise, we would, you know, fall off our chair and not know what to eat. And so our brain is constantly picking up information. And then the thinking is on top of that, the cognitive and other practices, and creativity is in more the cognitive sphere. So if you were to give your sensory system just a little bit of new information, it opens the net, if you like, of what your mind is paying attention to.

You add something as simple as a balloon, and I tell people, you need to keep the balloon in one hand or the other through this whole meeting. So their body is going to pay just enough attention to keep it from falling and to keep it from bursting. But it's not going to occupy any of the real conscious thinking track. But it's going to be occupying the sensory track that's going to say "Ooh, this is a different associative rapport." And we all know that in creativity, the new ideas often come from new associative reports. And so what they found that happens is if you do that on the sensory level, and then you drop in a creative question, your intellectual, factual thinking brain will also expand the net of associative ideas.

Sarah Selecky 05:02

Wow.



Gillian Ferrabee 05:02

So that's the principle, that because your sensory brain has gone, "Whoo, wait a minute: this is different than usual," that your creative brain... And I'll let people know this, this idea came because Cirque du Soleil had a core principle that they never repeated themselves. But imagine you come into a meeting when I was there, they'd made 12 shows, every one of them was what's called a "golden egg." So it was 14 years running, 84% capacity of sales, like there never was a drop in any of the shows. So now it's time to make the 13th show. And the mandate is you cannot repeat anything fundamental from the first 12 shows. Well, our mind has creative bias as well. All those things worked. So the first thought you're going to have for your own survival in a way is like, "Let's repeat what we did that is working as a golden egg." And so you have to juggle your brain to say, you're not allowed to go to the familiar. And we all know that challenge. But strangely enough, sensory input is a huge optimizing factor of that ability. So that's why people get great ideas when they're, you know, walking their dog or in the shower.

Sarah Selecky 05:52

Right!

Gillian Ferrabee 06:12

Yeah, there's additional sensory input. But you know, your dog's a little bit different every day, the weather is different, there's other people on the path. So there's something that you do have to pay attention to. So it has to be a kind of relaxed input, but just a little bit different or that your brain has to pay attention to.

Sarah Selecky 06:29

Yeah! Well, I'm thinking about, like writers who knit and like quilting bees, and anything where you're doing something with your hands that's just challenging enough to keep you occupied. Like you have to pay attention.

Gillian Ferrabee 06:43

Right.



Sarah Selecky 06:44

Or walking your dog, or getting into your car, you have to pay attention. It's dangerous if you don't pay attention, but you know how to do enough of it comfortably that it's very relaxed.

Gillian Ferrabee 06:54

Yeah. And we're talking about that "aha" connection. Not so much just sorting through, like a kind of editing thought processing. It's that you're slumped, you're looking for that kind of, "Ah, there it is!" You know?

Sarah Selecky 07:06

Yeah.

Gillian Ferrabee 07:07

This is another thing that's been found: it happens in between states, like waking up or falling asleep, but it's much harder to grasp. You know, we've all had those dreams that you're like, "Oh, yeah, I'm gonna remember this in the morning," and then nothing, right? And so when your sensory brain is more active, you'll also kind of anchor that "aha" moment to your memory more than if you didn't have that going on.

Sarah Selecky 07:30

Oh, that's fascinating. That's fascinating, too. Because even when an idea is fleeting, and it just comes in the middle of something, like taking a shower, or some habitual thing, if I don't write it down, yeah, it's often really hard to remember it. But if I do remember — this just happened to me the other day: someone reminded me of an idea that I had mentioned in a voice memo — and when I remembered it, immediately I remembered being in the shower, like it was my memory. I remember being. I saw myself there. There was a physical memory. It was embodied, even though it wasn't really on purpose. That's fascinating.

Gillian Ferrabee 08:06

And the writing down. Yeah, the writing down is both the visual aspect because anyone listening here who's a visual learner, you know, those people that write things down in a classroom or anywhere that they want to remember. And sometimes I do that, but I



rarely actually look at the notes again. It's seeing — it has an effect on my memory, but the other one is moving your hand. So that's people who doodle when they're in a class, or doodle when they want to have a kind of intellectual acuity. And it's the movement that's helping them. So when you write down that fleeting thought you're both moving in connection, and having a visual. So that's two things that for most people are going to help you remember it.

Sarah Selecky 08:47

Oh, that's also really interesting.

Little bit of a sideline but I've been looking into different ways to gather and remember and store and organize and work with writing that's online, because I just use index cards and notebooks. And then the last stage of anything that I write goes on the computer. But it's all in my book — I have paper books, I have highlighters, I have Post-it notes — I write it all down. And they're all you know, there's Instapaper and Readwise, and what else is there? Pocket... There are all these ways to gather information and sort it and organize it. And I've been kind of lingering in there. But because it's all digital, I just feel like it's not going to help me. It's not going to help me with my writing process.

Gillian Ferrabee 09:32

And do you find that you do that visceral part more when you're in the you know, the ideas arriving, the sort of magic exploration, and that when you get to more revising or editing, which is more organizational, is it...Is that when it's easier to transition to digital?

Sarah Selecky 09:51

Yeah, it's when ideas are forming that I'm using all the paper and the pens. Yeah.

Gillian Ferrabee 09:55

I'm just getting all excited. I mean, it's one of my favorite subjects. It's because of the sense of it. You know, it's the ideas forming. Whether people experience it as a kind of a download, or like a fluttery, you know, blurriness that comes into shape, or, all of those are, whether we're calling it right brain, they're just a certain part of the brain that is



very connected to our body, and to this moment. And the other things can live and function more purely intellectually, like revision and moving a paragraph here or there. But that receptive — what is essentially the sort of birth aspect of the creative process — it needs the body and I think, because of the two parts of the brain, but also because our body lives in the moment. And that kind of creativity is also very present-based, if you like. And there's something, but there's something where what you just said, there's a line that gets crossed in a lot of the creative process, where now it doesn't matter so much that you be so embodied.

Sarah Selecky

Right. Can we go back to what you were just saying? You just mentioned the mind being present. And that reminds me of the second story that I want to ask you about. You told me this story: there was something else about this story that was kind of the point, and it was like, by the way, when I was doing this, this day.

You told me that you woke up one day, you were in LA, and you told yourself, "Today, I'm only going to do what my body and instinct moves me to do." So like everything from, "Do I want coffee? Where am I going to have breakfast? Where am I going to go?" Like everything, you were just going to be all on your body. The story was about something else. We were talking about something else, but I've never forgotten that. And I want to ask you more about that. So that is like the ultimate present moment. You were just paying attention moment to moment of what you wanted to do and where you wanted to go. And how did it feel? Where did it lead you? And how did you do that?

Gillian Ferrabee

Great, great question. A great, great example story. So I'll give your readers a little bit of context, because that helps. So, I've always been what people call intuitive. You know, and there's lots of examples of... To me, it's a kind of listening, and I think artists understand this. It's, you know, yes, it can show up. Some people say, Oh, you know, you see a sign that says a word or...But really you're listening for a different kind of navigation than logic. You know, you wake up, I got this much time today. I need to



eat, I need to do this. And then you set about your day in a logical and efficient use of time and space and your energy, if you like.

And then there's another way that is saying, there's some other kind of listening, that we've all had it where someone will say, "I was walking on the street, I just had this feeling to turn left, you know, and you were free to do it. And then you bumped into this person you've been trying to contact for, you know, 10 days, and you go, how did I know that?"

So it... we don't always have words for it, but it's a kind of listening. So I was spending a lot of time... I was in a transformational leadership training. And so for people to know, you know, I'd started with like a singular thing. Like, I'm going out to eat at a restaurant. Do I have a sense from my body of one restaurant or another? So I'd been calling on that listening purposefully, and sort of building my track record with that. So I'm going to give that, because it's quite an advanced version in this story. And I don't want people to think like, what the? You know, how did she do that, just out of the blue could do that, you know?

So I was in LA with the Beverly Hills Hilton, I think. I was there for work, and there were three meetings in the morning that got canceled. So that's where that space came from. And I decided because the rest of my days were very packed, I'm going to practice this technique that I was learning in a training. And so I said, "where do I want to go for breakfast?" And there was this great Earth Cafe that was super cool up the street, but my body said go to the hotel restaurant. And I was kind of like, really? Because anyone else who has been in a hotel restaurant, you know, it's not usually the best culinary experience. So I went down, and I sat at my table and I looked at the menu, and I'm gluten free and there was nothing really to eat, but I ordered coffee, and then the newspaper was there: the *USA Today*. So I opened that, go into the entertainment section, and there's an article on a woman whose name was Jill Soloway at the time, she goes by Joey Soloway now, and she is the writer of *Transparent*, the series. And it was all about this whole legal battle going on with women being underrepresented in the industry. And she was one of the few women who was willing to put her name to her comments. Other people, you know, were just being anonymous at the time. And so there's a picture of her. I was like, well, that's interesting. Then the woman comes and



says we have nothing gluten free and then I check in with my body and my body goes “We’re going to Earth...” Like how it works is I literally had gone to Earth Cafe and I just saw the street in my imagination, my mind’s eye. I say, “What do I do now?” and I just saw the walk to that cafe. I got up, walked to the cafe, and ordered my muffin. I’m waiting in line, it’s a very popular spot in LA. And then I’m waiting for my food to arrive and there’s a long line up and I turn to my right. And there’s a woman who looks just like this picture of Jill Soloway. And so I look at her again and again, and then she looks at me like, “What are you looking at?” And I say, “Look, I’m really sorry I’m staring at you. I just read this article about this woman, Jill Soloway, and you look a lot like her, so I’ll stop looking at you.” And she goes, “Well, maybe that’s because I am Jill Soloway.” And then I’m having that, if anyone’s had that, I’m like, woo, *Twilight Zone* moment. Like, what the?

Sarah Selecky 15:28

Yeah.

Gillian Ferrabee 15:29

“You’re Jill Soloway?” And, and so I do this bumbling thing, which I realized was very California but I was like, “Okay, well, I’m just gonna tell you, you have... And we’re both waiting for food, so, you know, well, this is really weird, because I literally just didn’t know who you were five minutes ago. Just read the article.”

She did a little bit sideways eye, like, “You don’t know who I am and you’re in LA? I just got like Emmys and stuff.” And then I said, “You know, so I don’t know why this is happening, and if you’d be willing to just keep talking, maybe we’ll find out why this magic is happening.” Anyway, so we did chat. And I was saying that I was looking to work with more women, there was none of these, you know, Free The Bid. There were none of these organizations for finding women in the industry at the time. And she said, “Look, there is the Women’s Directors Guild. I’m speaking there tomorrow night. I can arrange for you to get a ticket. Why don’t you come and meet a bunch of people?” So that’s how I began to network. Because you know, in LA, you can put women’s names on a list, but nobody chooses them. That’s how it was at the time. And then after we got our food, and she left, it’s like the antenna just turned off. It was like, that’s what I was going to miss.



Sarah Selecky 16:34

Yeah. That was the session. That was the session.

Gillian Ferrabee 16:37

Yeah. And that's what I was going to miss if I had...

Sarah Selecky 16:40

Yeah, and what I absolutely love about this story is that it is like you are staying in the scene of your life. It feels like you're writing fiction. That's how it feels when you're writing fiction.

When you drop into a scene — and the way I describe it, and the way I try to teach it is like you're holding a divining rod. When you're in the scene, you don't know where you're going, you might have a milestone, like you might know... the milestone might be that your character needs to get something to eat this morning. So, you start freewriting. And there's no way to, I mean, it's a kind of listening. And often, not all the time, but often, if you pay attention to the physical details in the scene and pay attention — taking your temperature is another way that I describe it for writers, when you're in a scene, just keep taking your temperature so you can feel whether the line is alive or not. Whether your connection to that... whether the divining rod is sourcing water or not. And you follow that with your words and the words kind of write a bridge over to the milestone, and more often than not, there is an insight that drops when you can do that within a scene. And you get to the point where the character gets to eat the thing, but there's a moment of complexity, or another character enters the scene that you didn't know was going to be there. And another plot point is revealed. You know, it's just as you described it, but of course, it's fiction, but you're doing it in your real life.

Gillian Ferrabee 18:07

Just lovely to hear you describe that, because as you were talking, I had a thought like... so were you surprised? And then you said, and then a character arrives. And the phrase that came through my mind when you were sharing was, the body knows. There's something that our bodies know. And it isn't just something that seems very esoteric,



like, you know, was that going to happen anyway, and, you know, some sort of almost like, psychic, it's something else.

The few times I've experienced it writing when I've played with writing — I'm not by any means even close to a professional writer. But I've explored sense writing, I took that training, as you know, Sarah, and I took it from the curiosity of this work. It was to see, you know, comparing stuff. And what was so interesting was, I was exploring that question in a scene and it took me back to a memory when I was four years old, in Jamaica, where I was living. And I know that memory, but it had never seemed that important to me. And when I did this process of the body, you know, keep listening to that temperature. It actually showed me how that memory was my first experience of meditation as a child. And I didn't have, maybe because I was quite young, I didn't have very much cognitive memory of the moment. I just knew that it had been significant, but I didn't remember much sensorially about it. So I think there's, I mean, I'd be curious how different writers access that state.

Sarah Selecky 19:32

Yeah.

Gillian Ferrabee 19:33

Because I'm more kinesthetic than some people I would guess.

Sarah Selecky 19:38

Yeah. Similar. So am I. I think maybe, in some ways, it could be seen as a flaw because you don't have the words right away. And so much of writing is about words. But it's also a feature. It's also really great because in a lot of writing, and a lot of genre, it is through the sensory details and describing them effectively in a certain way that a reader then discovers the emotional resonance. Because you're speaking through words, you're writing to another reader's body, really. So that character, that feeling is...

So writers who are kinesthetically forward, have all that access to all that body awareness, whether they have words for it or not. They're processing information in the world through the body first — a kinesthetic person does, you know, a lot. And then the step of translating it into language is where the training and the practice can come



in. And there are other writers who come at it very mindfully, like very head-centered writers who are really thinking it all through and then they need a different kind of unfastening. You know, it's a different skill set and motivated from different places for different writers. But the body is really important, I think, in every scene. I don't think we can get away from it, because we are in bodies.

Gillian Ferrabee 21:01

We kind of discussed this once and I remember, you know, then reading and saying, "oh, yeah, the writing isn't just a person's inner thoughts or what happened, you know, because that would be missing a piece of the senses." And so I remember guessing that if a writer comes in to it first, from a more organizational, or structural, or thoughtful process, they would then need to add the sensory reality from some level. From, you know, they're seeing it so they would have to describe it more as a body would experience it, the character, rather than singularly visual. And then I would read after that conversation, I think it was Ann Patchett or some... I was reading somebody's work that I love. And I could see this, almost this choreographic triangle dance, you know, between what was happening, how this individual body was experiencing it sensorially, and then that person's inner emotional...

Sarah Selecky 21:58

That's right.

Gillian Ferrabee 21:59

And it would just dance between the three.

Sarah Selecky 22:00

Yeah, it's so beautiful. I think that we can enter it from an emotional space, we can enter it and experience it from the physical space, we can enter it from the mental space, and then that triangulation is what creates an experience. It rises off the page. I mean, those three ingredients are what we're made of.

You mentioned dance. And this is a good moment, I think, to segue to the next question I had coming out of this: how your body knows. You have a background in dance. And so I know this about you — and we can't see each other right now: this is



audio — but I bet you're moving as you're speaking because I've had enough conversations where I know that you express yourself through your body as well as your words. In a talk that I heard you give once you talked about naming your company, which we now know is named Kite Parade. But at a certain stage, it was an as yet unnamed company. And you talked about how you danced the names to choose them when you were brainstorming names. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Gillian Ferrabee 23:07

That name, Kite Parade, came to me in a Muji store in Milan, the name. And then we had a couple of other names, you know, that came along from all kinds of sources. And when you're asking the question, it reminded me of a description that Leonard Cohen gave once when he was writing the lyrics for Hallelujah, the song, which is, I think I've told you, one of my favourite songs, and not just for the kind of spiritual uplifting, you know, in the musical sequence, but the sort of perfection of the words. And he spoke about how it took him almost five years and that he would take a line and move it through his mouth over and over again. And with a lot of his work, you read a line, and you can almost hear the so-called perfect ending, which would be the perfect sort of literary ending. And then he'll just choose a word that's a little bit different. But that actually feels more true to me. And he said that that's what he would do, he would say it in his mouth and feel it in his mouth, feel the resonance in his body. And then when he would say the sort of perfect mental word, it wouldn't have the same dance in his body. And then the word that he finally chose would have this kind of hum in his body.

And so it was similar to that, except for me, it's full-on dancing. So I could spend like five minutes just now (*you can't see me moving*), but I would, I would be moving my body. So I would end up going like "Kiiiiite" ... And, well, to go along with the movement. And at some point, you just can feel that the two are working together. And with the other titles, it just wouldn't dance. Like, my body couldn't dance to those words in sequence the same way. And if there's any entrepreneurs in your writers as well, you know, I went through people saying "What? What? Why is that the title, you know? It sounds... It's like a kids' TV show!" or you know. And then interestingly enough, the more I even danced with it creatively in its creation, within a year, people were like, "God, I love that name!" You know, and the name hasn't changed at all right? And I think the body intelligence was what I realized later with, you know, as people



remember it now, because it is different than anything else associated with what we do. So it sticks out. It's like, I'm not naming what we do. It's not the words of our profession. And I think that my body, if someone else danced it, it might have been different. I think my body was telling me, you know, "Don't give up. This is it. This is your word." This is, I'm sure you have this experience when you're writing, you know, struggling with, this isn't making the most sense to me, you know, like my body and my intuition, and my temperature is telling me to write this, but my brain is going "What?"

Sarah Selecky 25:54

Yeah. Oh yeah.

Gillian Ferrabee 25:55

"Really? People are... I'm not gonna win an award for this, like it's doing a whole other dance."

Sarah Selecky 25:59

Oh yeah. Especially if something is unreasonable or illogical. And often, that stuff I think falls out more readily when we're in the trance of a freewrite. And the mantra of — the spoken or unspoken mantra — of a freewrite is just "Trust what's random." Let it go, let it go, like, don't edit as you go, just let it go, let it go. So your body is much more involved. Your whole body is much more involved.

And I see this — is a bit of an aside: but when writers are gathered around a table, which is how I used to teach, we were together, physically together. When people would get to that spot in their writing, their bodies would relax. Their muscles in their face would relax, their spine would relax, the rigidness would soften. And their bodies would respond. And there'd be this hush in the room. It's a really beautiful... it's so beautiful to write at a table with other people. It's very quiet, and then everyone's relaxed. In that space, if you interrupt that with logical thinking, you'll talk yourself out of all of those. Like, a lot of the stuff that comes out you don't want to use but something like Kite Parade — some delightful combination of words, or sentences, or a character's name, or a way of describing something, or a metaphor — might fall out that you would never, your logical mind would never allow you to get that far, because it doesn't make sense. Then the delight gets taken out before you even have the experience



of expressing it. You also wouldn't recognize the delight right away, because your mind wouldn't let you.

Gillian Ferrabee 27:33

Yeah. And even when you're saying it, I remembered when I was dancing it: at one point the word added "vivify" — vivify Kite Parade. And as you're speaking to freewriting, I can't tell you where it came from, no other word came, what I mean by... Someone asked me, "What do you mean by 'came'?" I was like, it...I mean, one of my friends would be like, "Well, do you hear it in your head?" Well, I don't really hear it... Or do you... you know, it's sort of inexplicable in those terms. And then I thought, for like a day or two, I was like, "So what is vivify? Like is it... is that one of the words?" And then I went back to dancing it in an open space, a studio space. And then I was like, "Wait a minute: vivify means bring to life, bring to life." And I was like, "Oh, bring to life Kite Parade." And that was when I understood, my body's saying, this is the name to bring to life. So it's, I mean, now I feel like, my brain is literally saying anyone listening to this is going to think you're crazy.

Sarah Selecky 28:29

Well, I mean, kind of, but not. I mean, first of all, the people who are listening to this are all writers who have all put themselves in various stages of trance, are working there in and out. This audience is not like other audiences. So nobody here thinks that sounds crazy.

And that's the sort of stuff that happens in our writing all the time with language especially, where it's not necessarily that we're trying to name a company, but naming a character. When there's so much randomness, and when there's nothing but options. You can either think it through, like, okay, I'm gonna relate this to this historical character who was named, you know, I don't know, George, or I can like to play with George. Or I heard the other day that there's a protagonist in a Neal Stephenson novel named Hiro Protagonist, H I R O. He's from Japan, his name's Hiro Protagonist. So there are these mental ways that you can trick a name. And that's, like, valid and great like, it's valid to have that history baked in. And then there's a whole other way where it's like, "Where did that word come from? Where did that name come from? Why did I think of that as a town name?" I don't know where any of it comes from. None of us



know where it comes from. And what you described with that word play also makes me think of dreams, and being in dreams, and coming out of dreams. Often there's wordplay in the dreams, where...

Gillian Ferrabee 29:53

Yes!

Sarah Selecky 29:54

Where it's like... I often do that. I had a dream recently where something happened with this dog, with a dog's paws. And the image of the paws was so visceral and it wasn't until I wrote it down and then told a friend about it that I saw that what I was saying was *pause*, like, take a pause. It was, it was a whatever, a homonym I think. It was my mind playing word games. And all of that stuff is just baked in. It's like, it's in there. It's subconscious, it's unconscious. So when you're dancing, I imagine you're just loosening the faucet of that. Or like, you get to take off the lid of that box. And it's a little bit more readily available to you. It's part of your process. It's so beautiful.

Gillian Ferrabee 30:39

Yeah, even what you're saying about wordplay when you said that, because I've had that in dreams, too, very clearly. And the thought I have is that that's, that word play is like a boat, a ferry that crosses between our conscious and unconscious. You know, it's something that can work as a fun way to direct. Because if you just had a dream about, "Hey, it's time to rest," some of that wouldn't make sense even. You'd wake up and go, "Oh." You wouldn't even think that that was a, you know, an important dream, right? There's something about the play. And so for me, I think dance is also a bridge between different parts of my mind or brain or, like somehow I access that less controlled thinking through movement.

Yeah, you know when I said your writers might think it's crazy, I actually don't worry anymore that people would think it crazy. I was letting them know that I do think that. I have the thought. So, and that's how, you know, and when I was first doing this, I would tell myself, so I can't be crazy. Because when you're losing your mind, you generally don't think you're losing your mind. And at some point, it just becomes the quiet voice. I don't know if you experienced that. But when I'm talking and I'm hearing,



people are gonna think you're crazy. I'm like, thanks for the warning. You know, from my rational mind, I realize that part of your job is to worry about my protection. But I'm really just on the call with Sarah and if I say this, nothing terrible is going to happen to me. And I'm going to say it. And that works creatively as well. You know. For sure.

Sarah Selecky 32:15

It seems like you practice, you've spent so much of your life, practicing building this trust, and this relationship with that insight and intuition creatively. And every time we speak, I just feel the benefit of that. I feel how you've been steeped in it. And you know, maybe not in solitude: part of the feature of working with dancers and in productions and on teams and collaboratives is that you're sharing some of that. So that sense of writers sitting at a table together, I mean, that's almost as close as we get to working together. So being in our own minds, and trying to understand our own processes and trusting when the inner voice interrupts us and says, "Oh, you sound like you might be crazy here. This does not make any sense." You know, there's some vigilance that is required to continue on the path of trust.

So I want to talk about Kite Parade a little bit. One of the things that I loved that you introduced us to, our team, were the eight play archetypes. Can you just briefly go over them and let people know maybe they see themselves in a few of these?

Gillian Ferrabee 32:16

Yeah, I think they're called officially the "play personalities." And it's work by a man named Stuart Brown, you can find his TED talk and the history of it. It came out of a 20-year research project: a global research project on play. So it's almost never been studied before, in and of itself. And the research study was: how do people play in different cultures? And I think he was an anthropologist, originally. And so that was something that he saw being studied, the differences between cultures. So he wanted to look at what the similarities are across human history and all cultures. And what he came away with were the eight ways that people play. And I'll tell them to you in a moment. And just for your audience to remember: most of us can do all of these things. What he points to is that most people have a favorite three. And so the way to wonder which might be your three — because as I say them you'll probably go, I do that, I do that — is if you added this personality, or it's more of a way of playing, to something



that was neutral, would it make it more fun for you? So the play personalities are the ways that we play. And then later you can decide they're helpful for seeing, which is actually my favorite way of playing. And I think it's really important in creativity, because creativity is essentially play. It's what we call play as a grownup, because "play" the word sounds childish to some people. They say, "Oh no, I'm being creative and innovative." But from a literal, logical brain point of view, it's the exact same process. And like children, you imagine something and then you play it out as a kid. And so we imagine life and then we play it out. It's what happens a lot.

So who they are? There's eight of them. And I'll give you like a phrase for each.

So one is called the Collector. And from my experience working with people for five years, I would say, it's people that, when they love something, they like to have a lot of it, regardless of whether they'll use it or not. So somebody who has 300 pairs of shoes, or 5,000 albums. People will say, "Well, you know, you're hoarding because you'll never use them all." But a collector is somebody that if they love something, they like to have a lot of it. Of the object, it's a matter of base for the most part. And then they like to organize it sometimes too, you know, by colour, or letter, or... Some people collect other people, like a big circle of friends in a Rolodex. And they keep in touch with everyone since kindergarten. And so they love people, and they like to have them, you know, reachable at all times, if you like. So that's a Collector. And archivist, librarian, scientists, these are jobs that if you're doing what you love, and you're a Collector, you might end up in one of those jobs.

Competitor is people who, I mean, I can compete, but it doesn't make things more fun. And occasionally, it makes it less fun. And I'm not talking about the dark side of competitive people who are just like, you know, maniacally have to win. It's adding competition. So competitors like measurability, if we're counting points, it's more fun. My husband's one of those. And it took me a while to understand how it makes it more fun, but it does.

Okay, so Director is the third one. And that, simply put, it's not someone who needs to make decisions or boss other people around or those ideas. It's someone who if you have the full overview of something, it's more fun for you. If you know who's involved



and what their roles and responsibilities are, regardless of what yours are. It's more fun for you if you have the big picture at all times.

The next one's an Explorer. Sarah and I have that. And that's people for whom, I'll put it simply, the unknown is actually their comfort zone.

Sarah Selecky 36:57

Yeah.

Gillian Ferrabee 36:58

When you say to creatives, oh, you know, we all hear this as creatives, to be creative and innovative you have to go outside of your comfort zone. And that's a little confusing for Explorers, because for us when things get set and formatted, and sure and certain, we start to get uncomfortable and bored. So Explorers are people where being in the unknown, not knowing what's going to happen — the kind of writing you're describing, Sarah, particularly — that is our happy place, it's more fun than if we know. It's more fun than if we have a map. So we like not to know: that's our comfort zone. And be confronted with new things that don't make us uncomfortable that might make someone else uncomfortable.

Next one is a Maker or an Artist. And that can be an engineer, or an artist who makes things with their body and hands. So it means, it's really a 3D, people who like to play in 3D. Take, you know, a bicycle apart when you're a kid. Take things apart and put them back together, but very much in 3D. So people who like to knit, people who like to paint, you know, crafting all that kind of stuff. That's one of Sarah's.

Sarah Selecky 38:03

Yeah (*inaudible*).

Gillian Ferrabee 38:07

Yeah, you know. Storyteller, all of you will understand that. And all of these, if you are doing your play personalities in your life, they really become how you relate to life itself. So Storytellers are sometimes people who professionally tell stories, but they're actually people who experience life as stories. So some of you might relate to this. I have



memories and I remember them like in a three act with a punchline. That's how I remember them. You know? None of my memories are like this happened and then that happened and I went skiing, and it was fun. No, they all get shaped.

The next one is a Kinesthete. And that's people who very much experience the world through their body and senses. And you don't have to be athletic or a dancer. But you might work with essential oils and smell. You might be a musician. You might, you know, work with babies in the neonatal because you have other play personalities, but babies are so tactile. So it's someone who, there's a predominance of sensory, somatic relationship to the world.

And then the last one is the Joker. And that doesn't mean you have to be like the class clown. It's that you experience the world through comedy. So Seinfeld is one of the strongest examples because his comedy is all ordinary life that most of us wouldn't find initially, you know, ha ha funny. So these are also the lenses with which, if you're happily playing through your life, your top personalities will be the lens of perceiving life. And so the Joker is someone for whom humour is not just important, but actually how they see life. And you know, anyone who's a comedian knows that can be touchy, because you don't always know where the line is for other people. But for you, everything's funny. Everything can be funny. So that's where when comedians say, I don't know if you guys know, they say "too soon," like, if some tragedy happens and like they make a joke, it's like, "Too soon? Yeah, too soon. Another week for everybody else."

Yeah, so those are the eight. And you can read about them online. Maybe I'll just say one other thing that when I stumbled on these, I mean, I'm very playful by nature. And I feel that play is kind of the biggest plus column in life after love, I guess, or along with love. And it's also essential to creativity. Because if creativity is your profession, and we've talked about this Sarah, you know, it takes tremendous resilience. And you have to have that stick-with-it-ness. You have to cultivate momentum, and dedication, often. And so if you can design your creative practice around these play personalities, play gives you renewable energy. It's fun, and fun is a source of renewable energy for our bodies, because our bodies are built for us to be happy, you know, all our endocrine systems are to favour positive memories. To favour the things that keep us in



homeostasis. So play is one of those. And I'll share that my top three are Kinesthete, Storyteller, and Explorer. So you can understand why for 13 years, I was happy and healthy at Cirque, even though there were tremendous challenges, and failures, and interpersonal relationship stuff. But every day I go to work, and I'm going to be playing at some level. And so that's a sort of anti-burnout panacea to be in a state of play.

Sarah Selecky 41:20

Right! I did just read that in *Flow*.

Gillian Ferrabee 41:23

Sorry, that was a long list.

Sarah Selecky 41:24

No, it's beautiful. Thank you so much. And it's just really, really useful. The information is really golden. I love how you describe it. And I have read recently that being in flow, or play, like they have a lot in common, is the antidote to languishing, which is, you know, a cousin to burnout and depression. It's where we can... it's actually medicinal for that state of mind.

We're coming to the end of our hour together, but coming off of what you just said so beautifully, I have one more question about that. Because you did talk about, if we can design our lives, if we can organize our lives more in this way, so we feel more play, it'll just be better for us professionally, it's better for our work. But there are so many mundane things that we have to do also. You know like, as artists, you have to do grant applications, and we have to submit and then, of course, there's the rejections that come up. And there's the, you know, depending on what field you're in, or what genre you're working in, there's a lot of admin, and a lot of weeds, and a lot of stuff, you know? Is there a way that we can do that stuff with more flow? And like, that's (a), and (b), is it even worth thinking about trying to live in flow all the time? Is that a reasonable goal?

Gillian Ferrabee 42:50

That's everybody's question. Seriously, it really is. I mean, in my experience, that's everything that we're looking for in life is a layer or a version of that question. No, really. So it makes total sense that you would ask it.



The first question, maybe it's not a romantic answer, I would say, with the mundane at some point in time, when you're able to financially, really as soon as you're able to, even through barter, is to find people for whom those activities are play if they're not for you. And an example is one of my very dear friends, we have a lot in common and we met working at Cirque, but we don't have in common is she's a Director, a Collector, she's a person who is more interested in the systems that support that flow, creative state, and in the follow through. So you know, tying the bows up afterwards, she's not a person that needs to be in production or needs to see the thing being made. She likes to support a system when you're in the conceptual stage. And then you can go off and do it. And then when you need all the expense reports tied up. And she literally finds this fun. She wrote me last night at eight o'clock and said, "I'm so happy after all my emails today that I finally have time to organize the Dropbox. I'm having so much fun. I have so many questions for you. And I'm just loving this." And I texted her back, like "You are the most awesome, ever, because this is fun for you. And you even make it fun, the things you need from me." So you know, and for years, I was like, well, I don't, I can't afford it. But when you find it, and she worked for us part time on barter, and now she's on paid hours and, so that's the real answer. And then if I were myself 10 years ago, I'd say okay, "What do I do before that happens?" And one way is if you're a mover when I used to do my taxes, I would put the piles in different places on the floor. So that I had to stretch and move around. And I do love meditation. Some people do it, you know, for health or relaxation. I just love what it is all about. And so I would use those things too, because I would constantly want to be somewhere else I'd be doing my accounting and just my mind is saying, "how soon can we leave work? Can we go?" Like a German Shepherd who wants to go outside and play, "Can we go? Can we go now?" And so I would say, "What happens if I feel my hands holding this piece of paper, and if I breathe?" And what would always come up is, you know, life is short, life is short, life is short. And so I would say, well, this moment is full, whatever I'm doing, if I choose to be present. So I would use that until I could hire someone. I would not say I would... you know, there was a lot of stuff I was doing that wasn't in my flow state. And so it wasn't enough to, you know, it was too much. So I didn't need to meditate that much every day. So that was my combo, like, aim to get somewhere. And we've talked about this, Sarah, you might even notice that the things that you dislike doing, I had a block finding people at first because I could not imagine that anybody would like it. So I felt



like I was giving somebody this horrible, you know, task. Like, they're a British chambermaid, and I'm like, "Please, you know, like, zip up my dress for me..."

But then I realized over the work that I do, that it's remarkable, but there's people who love everything that there is to do in the world. And they might not be there. And maybe they've got other problems that, you know, it's not a perfect science on a daily basis, but it is true, and so everybody can get there. And that's a lot of what my company is about. Let's all get into that place.

And then to answer your second question. Yes, we can. There's about well, taking sleep away from the hours in a day, there's about 5 to 10% of time that just, I mean, we have to eat, we have to do other biological things that aren't I don't think in anyone's flow state, like, in any sort of exciting way. They are physically in a flow state. So there's like a 5 or 10% — that is Gay Hendricks you know, who wrote *The Big Leap* says — that, that's just stuff that has to happen, you know, travel. And he divides his week into alpha, beta, and I think theta, theta being sleep and stuff. And alpha is high flow state. Beta is, if you're going to New York for an exciting trip, you have to fly. And there's a lot of things about getting on a plane that aren't, you know, aren't particularly unique to anyone's flow state. But everyone needs to do it to get to New York. So that's the beta of functional stuff. But I would say it's 5 to 10%. And the rest of the time, you absolutely can be in a flow state all the time. Good news.

Sarah Selecky 46:22

Yeah. That's a great answer. Thank you. It's so definitive and mathematical even, there's like precision to it. I love it. Thank you. It's a great place to end our call also, because everyone who's listening is gonna be like, "okay, how do I find Kite Parade and find out how to make that happen? How do people reach you? I know that your website is kiteparade.co. Not com. But C O. Kiteparade.co.

Gillian Ferrabee 48:08

Yeah.

Sarah Selecky 48:09

And what's going on? Yeah, how do people find you? Where should they go?



Gillian Ferrabee 48:12

They can also find us on Instagram, we just started so it's [kiteparadeco](#) all as one word, you know, kiteparade stuck together with C O stuck to that. And there's a Linktree. And the first thing on the link tree is to get our own email list. We're just starting. We've been B2B [*Editor's note: business to business*] for a long time and working with existing networks of clients. And now we're just starting to do the activities to open all that up. I'm one of those people that I don't know if other people experience this, I get scared to market because I think I'll have too much. Too many clients.

Sarah Selecky 48:43

I understand why you would think that.

Gillian Ferrabee 48:45

Yeah. And now we have the right container for that. And should I say just like a couple of sentences about what we do?

Sarah Selecky 48:53

Yes, please.

Gillian Ferrabee 48:56

We're a centre for conscious leadership for the creative world. So that's creative industries, creative cultural organizations. And when I say conscious leadership, leadership of self, of your creativity, of team building, of collaboration, not sort of the old one where the leader is like, you know, our old model of the singular person at the top kind of model. And we do that through general trainings for the, you know, general public can sign up at any time individually. Then we also do custom workshops for particular groups or organizations. And then we have a development support lab, if you like, for innovative projects, when people come with an idea. And we're particularly in the development stage of kind of what we're talking about: that seminal, liminal, early stage of creativity.

Sarah Selecky 49:41

So delicious.



Gillian Ferrabee 49:44

It's been really fun.

Sarah Selecky 49:45

Gillian, thank you so, so much. This is such a beautiful conversation. I can't wait to share it with everyone. Thank you. Thank you, and we'll talk again soon.

Gillian Ferrabee 49:57

Thank you. And if anybody, I'd love to hear how people feel about it. So if you get any of that kind of feedback, please share.

Sarah Selecky 50:03

Awesome. We will, we will. Okay.

Gillian Ferrabee 50:06

Okay, Take care.

Sarah Selecky 50:07

Thanks Gillian. Bye.

