



05 - Hover Above the Chaos

Hover above the chaos

The Beatles

Probably one of the least offensive statements you can make these days is "I love the Beatles!" It is right up there with "I love ice cream" or "I love to get a good nights sleep". That said, I do love the Beatles. I was born 2 weeks after the White Album was released. Hey Jude had just finished a 9 week run at number one. The music of the Beatles is some of the first music that I can remember my mom playing around the house. Through the years the Beatles music has been more than a soundtrack to my life, at times it was the goal I was chasing.

When I was in high school, my best friend, David, got to start taking guitar lessons. Paying for private lessons was not in the cards for me. So on Saturdays, I would go over to Dave's house and have him show me everything he learned at the previous weeks lesson. Armed with that new knowledge, I would go home to my guitar and my Big Book of Beatles Music. It had simplified guitar chords for many of the biggest hits. The music of the Beatles was the music I learned guitar too.

Later in college, I happened upon a bass guitar in a second-hand store in the Flathead Valley in Montana. It was a cheap, knock-off of Paul McCartney's Hofner bass. I spent the better part of a week returning to the store to try and get them to bring the price down to the \$50 cash I had in my pocket. It was a great win for me to drive the bass home to Seattle. Years later, the bass was joined in my guitar collection by a Rickenbaker 350 fireglo guitar. It was the spitting image of the guitar George Harrison played. This is the guitar that supplied the unique sounds on songs like: A Hard Day's Night, Can't Buy Me Love, and Ticket to Ride. In addition to finding gear that let me look like a Beatle, I also have logged the

lyrics to their songs deep in my memory. I would guess that I could sing along to every Beatles song and get the lyrics 99% correct. And I am giving the 1% because the task would take more than 20 hours covering 440 songs (according to the Complete Beatles playlist on Spotify).

All of this led to a big day for me in the early '90s. I was working in downtown Seattle at a firm that produced major corporate events and communications. Our offices were across the hall from Sub Pop records and across the street from the Moore Theater. An area of town that was ground zero for the rise of Grunge. But, what caught my ear that day was the news that Paul and Linda McCartney would be making appearance 4 blocks away at the Seattle Art Museum. They were in town to hock their new vegetarian microwave meals, or something like that. As soon as I had a break in my work, I tore a page out of the Beatles calendar that was hanging above my desk, grabbed a Sharpie, and hustled up 2nd avenue to see what might happen.

I have always lived life with the attitude that – if you act like you belong, you can get yourself into a lot of places. Armed with that attitude, I decided to head through a door that took me to the loading dock under the museum. My thoughts were that, anywhere else in the building, I would probably be stopped by ropes or security. I wasn't long wandering the halls that a door opened across from me and a big bodyguard looking guy walked through followed by Sir Paul McCartney. He was so gracious. In my mind, I looked like a star struck fan and hopefully not a creepy stalker. He approached me, shook my hand, asked my name, and asked if the Sharpie was for him to use. I still have the autographed pic hanging in my office today.

My love of the Beatles has led me to watch a lot of movies and documentaries, and read a lot of books, about them. Something that has always struck me about the Beatles was the way they used their first several years as a band.

Before the Beatles became the global phenomenon of the Beatles the hovered.

First they needed to observe the limitations that they were handed. Ultimately a 4 piece band, they were limited to the notes in a musical scale, to the number of minutes of music that could fit on a record, to the sounds that were available from each of their instruments, and to search for things they may have missed.

They spend a lot of time brooding and hovering.

The Beatles first started coming together in 1957. They were just school kids. During the early years, they played where they could for a few years. First as the part of the Quarrymen, then Johnny and the Moondogs, then the Silver Beetles, before settling on the Beatles. In early 1960, heir unofficial manager Allan Williams arranged for them to play a residency in Hamburg. This was something they did a couple of times. It was a way to immerse the band into music. When in Hamburg they ate, drank, and slept music. They were paid £2.50 each a day, seven days a week, playing from 8:30–9:30, 10 until 11, 11:30–12:30, and finishing the evening playing from one until two o'clock in the morning. Lennon said: "We had to play for hours and hours on end. Every song lasted twenty minutes and had twenty solos in it. That's what improved the playing."

As a group they learned to manage, or curate, their music in Germany. Playing 5-6 shows a day for months, hundreds of shows in a row without a break. Living their music from the time they woke up until they went to sleep. Honing and perfecting. Learning about how people react to different songs in different ways. This time in Germany coalesced them as a team and also forged their talent in a way that only time and repetition can.

I like to think of this as the Beatles "hovering" period. They would play every night, often from 7pm until 3am. They marinated themselves in music. Being a relatively new group they drew from the artists they loved, often playing cover songs. This was an incubator that allowed the group to really explore all the nooks and crannies of music.

When you step back and try to look at music logically, it seems to have some tight boundaries. An octave in traditional western

music only has 7 whole notes - A, B, C, D, E, F, G – supported by 5 flats or sharps distribute between them. There are a limited number of ways to sequence these notes, or even the chords that they can combine to make. Add to that the instruments chosen have a limited number of octaves. Then with the Beatles, they were limited by the number of players and voices they could combine to get their sounds. But their hovering period set them up for what became an unprecedented run in music.

If they were in the club in Hamburg for almost 50 hours a week, over their first run of 48 days, they logged nearly 2,500 hours of music in that first residency. Those dates were followed by a 92 date run in '61. Add to that rehearsal time, song writing time, and the other dates they played, they easily hit 10,000 hours as a band by the end of 1961, hovering over music. 10,000 hours is the magic number that Malcolm Gladwell identifies as the time needed to become a world-class expert in a skill. This gave the Beatles an intense time to get to know all aspects of their craft.

Coming out of Hamburg the Beatles were poised to make a big musical statement. In 1963 they released their first album, Please Please Me, and never looked back. Billboard Magazine list the Beatles as the artist with the most number 1 hits (20). Songs with the most weeks at number 1 (3 at 12 weeks). Most number one hits in a year (6). Most number one albums in the US all time (19). Most albums in the Billboard top 200 albums of all time (5). In the UK the Beatles spent more time at number one (176 weeks) than any other artist. Hey also have the most number one albums of all time (15).

So much of this success needs to be attributed to those early years.

The years spent hovering around the music scene.

Observing

Curating

Marinating

The Genesis of Hovering

First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

GENESIS 1:1-2 - THE MESSAGE

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

GENESIS 1:1-2 ESV

This is the beginning.

This is the description of the beginning of the beginning.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Some translations say that the Spirit of God brooded over the waters.

Typically brooding in this sense is like a bird that covers its young or its eggs to incubate and protect. It can also be about thinking anxiously or gloomily about something.

For a long time I thought this was just God and nothing. God creating everything out of nothing. But on a closer inspection that is not the case.

The Message translation of the Bible has God brooding over the face of the waters.

The ESV translation has God hovering over the deep and the waters.

In the beginning there was the chaos of the waters and God took time to hover.

Here we see God, hovering or brooding, putting in the effort to fully catalog and curate the situation. It leaves a sense of timelessness. That God hovered for ages. Marinated in the chaos, observing, identifying, protecting, and maybe even urgently planning for a change for the good. This seems to be confirmed by the very next step - Let there be light. Light drives out the darkness. Light exposes the reality. Light brings into focus all that lays before.

To see the light, we first need to observe, curate, and marinate in our chaos.

Observe

In my experience, hovering over a problem helps to better understand all of the opportunities available to help move toward a creative solution.

Taking the time to explore all of the factors that could impact the next move.

Identifying all of the tools at your disposal.

Looking into ways that others may have approached similar situations.

This understanding and perceiving can be a key to our own grasp of the boundaries that we will play within and the box that actually contains the solution. It all reminds me of the book Flatland by Edwin Abbott.

Flatland is a satire describing a two-dimensional world

organized by strict caste system of geometrical forms. The narrator, A. Square, introduces us to the features of Flatland before recounting his explorations of Lineland, a one-dimensional world, and Pointland, a world of no dimensions, and then the inconceivable three-dimensional world of Spaceland. Everyone that the Square comes into contact with cannot understand the dimensions that have been discovered.

The inhabitants of Pointland have never shifted their perspective to see that what at one time appears to be a point, may actually be the beginning of a line. In Lineland, women are thin, straight lines (the lowliest of shapes), and men have any number of sides depending on their social status. Square ends up in Spaceland, a three dimensional world that he had never been able to conceive before.

It is a reminder that we may at times allow ourselves to be confined by the way things have always been. That we need to find ways to brood and hover over our situation to make sure that we have all the facts and options in hand.

Don't dismiss anything at this point. You may find that what appears to be random will fit together later. Find ways to let go of what you thought the solution might be and allow yourself to be carried where life takes you. As you hover, and brood, and observe, and research you may find that you become all eyes, seeing things in new ways.

Another way to think about it is the difference between observing and simply seeing. Observing is something deeper. My family have been fans of the TV show "Psych" since the beginning. We watched it as they originally aired and have gone back and binged all the episodes a couple of times. In the show Sean Spencer plays the lead character. He claims to have special psychic powers that help the local police solve cases. But, he really only has a higher level of observation than those around him. It is a similar plot line to the TV show the Mentalist (another family favorite) and also the storied career of Sherlock Holmes.

In A Scandal in Bohemia, Sherlock Holmes explains the

difference between seeing and observing to Watson:

"When I hear you explain your reasoning," Watson commented, "the question always seems so ridiculously simple to me, that I feel sure that I could easily have made the same deductions as you. However, to each new case that appears to me of its apparently strange powers, I feel confused until you explain the process that followed and nevertheless, I think I have as good eyes as you."

"It's possible," he said, lighting a cigarette and dropping into an armchair. "You see, but don't observe. The distinction is perfectly clear. For example, you have often seen the staircase leading from the lobby to this room."

"Certainly."

"How often?"

"Well, several hundred times"

"Then, you can tell me how many steps there are."

"How many steps? I don't know."

"Do you understand now? You haven't observed, despite having seen. That's what I wanted to tell you. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps because I have seen and observed."

There is research that points to the need for observation as a catalyst to creativity. Researchers at the University of Amsterdam have studied the relationship between observation/mindfulness and creativity. The results of those studies show that strong observation skills are linked to greater creativity, originality, and flexible thinking.

So, how do we develop our powers of observation? A blog post by Kevin Eikerberry has been one of the better guides I have seen. In the post he identifies 6 steps to become more observant.

Be Open

This speaks to the Flatland of it all. Be ready to observe things you didn't expect. Be ready for inspiration to come from places you don't expect. Be willing to accept what you observe.

Be Intentional

The Beatles were intentional. They sought out new music that they appreciated. They took the time to learn the songs of their heroes. This does speak to a need for focus. Know what your goals are and line up your observations next to those goals. Be intentional about your observations.

Be Looking

Once you are open and intentional, be looking. Keep your goal top of mind as you encounter new observations. But don't think it only means looking.

Be Multi-Sensory

Use more than your eyes. Eikenberry says that "True observation is multisensory". Allow input from all your senses. Also understand that there is a heart component to observing. I also take this to mean multi-sourced. Talk to others. Watch/read/listen to all kinds of content, both non-fiction and fiction. You never know what might connect

Be Still

It is hard to be observant when your nose is in your phone. It is hard to be observant when you are constantly talking. It is hard to be observant when you are the center of attention, and always on the move. Without stillness you may miss a lot of what you need to launch creativity.

Be Aware of Your Filters

Often when observing we allow past experiences and

Hovering in action

Mavuno Church in Nairobi wanted to make a difference. They wanted to come up with an audacious goal. A vision for what their little local church could become. They had already come up with a mission of transforming it's members in Fearless Leaders, but they wanted to see if God had plans they weren't pursuing.

To look for that next step the leaders of the church retreated to the tallest building in Nairobi. From that vantage point they hovered above the city, praying, pacing, and planning. What came out of that new vantage point was a plan to plant new churches in the key neighborhoods or Nairobi, every capitol city in Africa, and the gateway cities of the world. Since 2005 this one church has planted five churches in Nairobi, four in other African nations, and one in Berlin, Germany.

habits, or our personal beliefs to act as a gatekeeper that will keep observations out. It really loops back to the first point, Be Open.

In Creativity begins with observation. Yogi Berra said "You can see lot just by observing." Often everything I need is there to be seen. What we need to do is begin to collect all of the observable data. After hovering over an opportunity, collecting the observations we move to the next key starting phase, curating.

Curate

Now that you have collected all of these observations you need to curate them. Find ways to connect things that may have not been connected. Identify the great ideas from the distractions. Separate the wheat from the chaff.

I have used many different ways to curate. It really depends on the goal, the task, and the amount of observations collected. Often the simpler the project the easier it is to do this in my own head. I have never been mind palace guy, but it worked for ancient Rome and Greece, and still works for people today. The ancients called it Loci, it was a way to commit large amounts of information to memory by tying them to specific visual and spatial memories or locations. Moonwalking with Einstein by Joshua Foer was a good book about improving memory.

Music has always been a great way for me to memorize details. Growing up, my mom would always help my brother and I with our school memorization by making up songs for our spelling words or memory verses.

The best way for me to curate large amounts of information is visually. Sometimes I like to use digital tools like Mrio.com or Evernote. These allow for simple linking to content outside my own thoughts and are great for inviting others into a group-think situation. I also find that the older I get the more I need to text

myself observations or create a note on my phone that I add to as new information arises. Sometimes, I can look like your typical tv conspiracy nutjob when my curation ends up on note cards and post-its tacked to my wall with strings showing the connections. That is actually the way this book started to take shape.

Marinate

Now that we have observed and curated, it is time to marinate.

I know that marinate is a cooking term, but it has stuck with me ever since I heard it used in a sermon. The pastor was making a point that sometimes we need to allow ourselves to be immersed in something. In the case of creativity we marinate in our observations. We allow the time for the observations to coat us, to permeate us, to change us both inside and out. We get to know the observations so well that we start to see them in new ways. We start making new connections. We start to see potential creative ways forward.

It really is at the heart of the description of marinating that you would find at the Food Network –

“The purpose of marinating is for the food to absorb the flavors of the marinade or, as in the case of a tough cut of meat, to tenderize.”

Biographer David McCullough, author of “John Adams” talks about marinating in the lives of those he writes about. –

“You’ve got to marinate your head, in that time and culture. You’ve got to become them.”

We can hover and observe and curate and marinate in a way that we come to a place where we have nearly mastered the content. It is what Anne Graham Lotz was talking about when remembering her dad, Billy Graham, and the way he would preach.

“But when I think of him I also think of his message because

he was immersed in it. Saturated in it. He was his message ... a simple man who had responded to God's love by placing his faith in Jesus, receiving the assurance that his sins were forgiven, that he would not perish, but would have everlasting life, simple faith. Faith that matters more than anything else."

Marinating just takes time. This means that you cannot schedule creativity. It doesn't necessarily happen because you put it on your calendar. Allow yourself to marinate in the car as you drive between tasks. Marinate on walks, as you doze off or as you just wake up. Hover well.

Because hovering, done well, will prompt us to action.

"Around here, however, we don't look backwards for very long. We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things, because we're curious... and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths."

Walt Disney