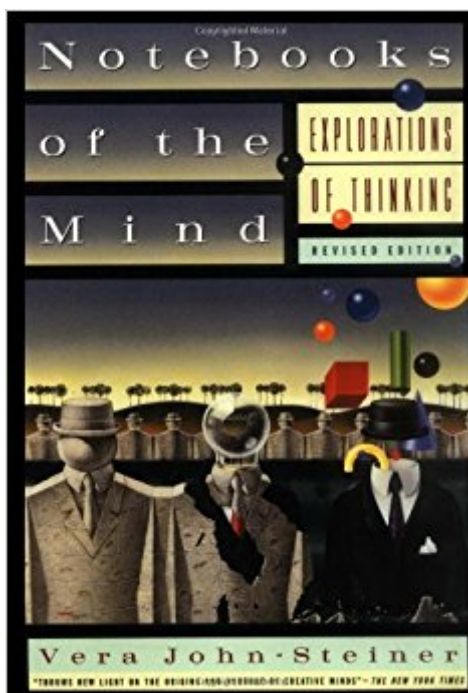


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# Notebooks Of The Mind: Explorations Of Thinking



## Synopsis

How do creative people think? Do great works of the imagination originate in words or in images? Is there a rational explanation for the sudden appearance of geniuses like Mozart or Einstein? Such questions have fascinated people for centuries; only in recent years, however, has cognitive psychology been able to provide some clues to the mysterious process of creativity. In this revised edition of *Notebooks of the Mind*, Vera John-Steiner combines imaginative insight with scientific precision to produce a startling account of the human mind working at its highest potential. To approach her subject John-Steiner goes directly to the source, assembling the thoughts of "experienced thinkers"--artists, philosophers, writers, and scientists able to reflect on their own imaginative patterns. More than fifty interviews (with figures ranging from Jessica Mitford to Aaron Copland), along with excerpts from the diaries, letters, and autobiographies of such gifted giants as Leo Tolstoy, Marie Curie, and Diego Rivera, among others, provide illuminating insights into creative activity. We read, for example, of Darwin's preoccupation with the image of nature as a branched tree while working on his concept of evolution. Mozart testifies to the vital influence on his mature art of the wondrous "bag of memories" he retained from childhood. Anais Nin describes her sense of words as oppressive, explaining how imagistic free association freed her as a writer. Adding these personal accounts to laboratory studies of thought process, John-Steiner takes a refreshingly holistic approach to the question of creativity. What emerges is an intriguing demonstration of how specific sociocultural circumstances interact with certain personality traits to encourage the creative mind. Among the topics examined here are the importance of childhood mentor figures; the lengthy apprenticeship of the talented person; and the development of self-expression through highly individualistic languages, whether in images, movement or inner speech. Now, with a new introduction, this award-winning book provides an uniquely broad-based study of the origins, development and fruits of human inspiration.

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## Customer Reviews

"Offers provocative insights about creative thinking and emphasizes how important it is to encourage and support children in their creative endeavors."--Psychology Today  
"A good book might be measured by the degree to which a reader is inclined to converse with it or with its author through the writing. It should provoke ideas, instigate argument, trigger a run of fantasy or memory of one's own....This, indeed, is such a book."--Bruce Woodford, Santa Fe Reporter  
"A wealth of testimony...wonderfully illuminated by Vera John-Steiner's analytic skill."--Vivian Gornick, author of *Women in Science*

In this revised edition of *Notebooks of The Mind*, Vera John-Steiner combines imaginative insight with scientific precision to produce a startling account of the human mind working at its highest potential. To approach her subject, John-Steiner goes directly to the source, assembling the thoughts of "experienced thinkers" - artists, philosophers, writers, and scientists able to reflect on their own imaginative patterns. More than fifty interviews (with figures ranging from Jessica Mitford to Aaron Copland), along with excerpts from the diaries, letters, and autobiographies of such gifted giants as Leo Tolstoy, Marie Curie, and Diego Rivera, among others, provide illuminating insights into creative activity. What emerges is an intriguing demonstration of how specific sociocultural circumstances interact with certain personality traits to encourage the creative mind. Now, with a new introduction, this award-winning book provides an uniquely broad-based study of the origins, development and fruits of human inspiration.

"What is thinking?" That is the question with which author Vera John-Steiner opens this definitely thought-provoking book. It is a tall order to fill, but she does so both with insight and eloquence by studying experienced, productive thinkers. I have read this book twice because it is so full of gems I could not seem to collect them all in one visit. One of the biggest strengths of the book is that it provides the depth needed by academic researchers as well as the accessibility of language and explanation most non-academic readers prefer. She examines how thinking develops, the emotional

and intellectual intensity of creative work, the tools creative thinkers use, and the similarities and differences among "languages of the mind" such as words, images, music and models. She bases her ideas on the reflective sources of thinkers themselves – more than 100 interviews, plus letters, journals, works in progress, biographies and autobiographies – sources which have been neglected by behavior scientists in the past but have proved invaluable for illuminating the succinct, telegraphic thought processes or "inner shorthands into artistically and intellectually convincing achievements." By using in-depth analyses of these self-reports and "working papers" of great minds in the arts and sciences, John-Steiner shows that creativity (1) requires sustained effort (it is not an instantaneous "aha" as it is sometimes portrayed) and (2) is not a product of "lone genius" but of social scaffolding, interaction and apprenticeship. Creativity, like this book, is a journey of wonder, exploration, evaluation and novel ideas that is well worth taking.

The title of this book led me to expect an analysis of and lots of anecdotes about how artists, thinkers and scientists work out their ideas. And yes, that's what I got, but it just didn't go deeply enough for me. I had no "aha" moments reading this, and none of her anecdotes really reached me to get me excited. I think it's because of the plodding, quasi-academic tone of the book. It's well-organized but without any spark.

the book is way too dry and anecdotal to be used as a book in grad school

A must have book!

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