

## Conclusion

# Whereto with Creativity?

In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.

BABA DIOUM<sup>1</sup>

Following on from the ideas presented in this book, a number of insights emerge for those seeking a better understanding of creativity and the role that various art forms play, namely:

- A. Art is a pervasive part of our lives. It is everywhere: in our music, our books, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the buildings we inhabit. Perhaps having read this book you can now see something of the processes that underpin this art, what it costs (when it's good, no less than everything); and how it may affect you (if you let it).
  
- B. Art also has stories to tell and these are now emerging as the artists of this last generation have begun to script and release their life stories for public scrutiny. Such stories are of immense significance. They help us make sense of the world; they lend us the eyes of these artists. Through their accumulated writings, they help us appreciate the world from a unique and deeply privileged perspective and this in a way that has not been possible to date. For those who have not paid sufficient attention to these stories, now is the time to do so. Properly understood, the art of this fast-passing generation provides a resonating point of reference. We need to appreciate this, bearing in mind though that it does not discount the work of those who came before. Artists practising prior to World War II played a massive role - for example, the painters of the Cubist, Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist periods of visual art, as well as writers such as Hemingway, Eliot and Woolf. They were, however, not the artists of this last half-century and, while I am deeply grateful for their critical and enriching contributions, they are of another era. What does the current period of art mean? What is our generation of artists telling us? As the stories unfold, the narrative of this passing era may now be better understood. We are in a rich and blessed period of exploration.

- C. Though it can be argued that the role of art is to entertain and inform, its primary purpose is to educate and to lead us into the light. This being so, based on the disciplines and mindsets disclosed here, what can art teach us? What lessons does art have to offer? I believe that there are several.

### **Lesson to take home**

1. Though not wishing to overstate the case, through the elements described in this book, we are now perhaps a little closer to comprehending how artists think. This has profound implications for those in other disciplines seeking answers. If we are genuinely serious about the cultivation of ideas, then it is these creatives who offer us the best insights available, and we need to pay attention.
2. As a more generalised comment it should be said that artists are de facto ahead of their times. They define the moment; they interpret the signals and offer a vision of the future. This is also what entrepreneurs do.
3. Right now art can and should be working with the STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In his most recent book, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations* (2016), Thomas Friedman makes this very point, observing that while the “supernova” of computing capacity is now increasingly capable of previously impossible technological heavy-lifting, the real breakthroughs will require an integration with artistic insight and flair.<sup>2</sup> This implies a revision from the STEM suite of subjects to one of STEAM, thereby incorporating Art in the process. As with Isambard Brunel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Steve Jobs at Apple, artists can and will continue to embrace technology as a basis of art.

Brian Eno recently suggested that, following songwriting, the next artistic era would probably be based around gaming.<sup>3</sup> This could well be so, though additional artistic forms will no doubt follow. Art is certainly not over. New forms will flare out from the margins, as they always have.

4. A further point to stress is that the big ideas of “high” art are not possible without the muse. From the research undertaken for this book it is clear that its role is vital, though often misunderstood. Many artists shyly admit to some level of supernatural inspiration, seemingly embarrassed to credit the presence of a divine creative force in their lives. In a secular world, the mention of God has become politically incorrect. Regardless, as sifting through the views of Dylan, Cohen,

Sting, Taylor, Waits and others will show, great art is written from the heavens, the artists serving as lightning rods for this purpose. This is not a new insight; indeed, it goes back to the Ancient Greeks, though right now it appears severely repressed.

5. There has been a lot of talk about the role of collaboration in creativity. Though this might well have merit, there is a strong case to be made for a reassertion of the artist as an individual lone ranger. As Nikola Tesla once put it: “The mind is sharper and keener in seclusion and uninterrupted solitude. No big laboratory is needed in which to think. Be alone, that is the secret of invention; be alone, that is when ideas are born. That is why many of the earthly miracles have had their genesis in humble surroundings.”<sup>4</sup> As solitude and absence from external distractions often allows the artist to hear and pay attention to the first indications of creative thought, solitude needs to be respected, understood and facilitated. Collaboration is important but, in art, initial insight is achieved individually, especially when driven by the muse.
6. Another uncomfortable subject is the role of depression, madness and addiction. As this book describes, mental fragility has always been twinned with creativity. If imagination is to be fostered and celebrated, this dimension of the creative mindset needs to be understood and sensitively incorporated into daily practices. Creatives are different from most others and - regardless of the reasons for it - this difference allows them to see and sense things in ways that the more conventional do not.
7. The same applies to the role of outsiders, who need to be accepted and respected if fresh approaches to innovation are to be cultivated. The question of how “outsiderliness” may be nurtured from within is a complex issue, as Bob Dylan has shown. Even as an elder statesman of his generation, he refuses to fit in. To emphasise the point, this 2009 quote bears repeating: “When I started out, mainstream culture was Sinatra, Perry Como, Andy Williams, The Sound of Music. There was no fitting into it then and of course there's no fitting into it now.”<sup>5</sup>
8. The role of practice, too, is critical to “setting” the creative table. We need to reach a degree of technical proficiency before the muse arrives and this can only be achieved with hard work. There are very few short cuts here.

9. The related discipline of paying attention needs also to be appreciated. New thoughts and ideas often begin as tiny inklings and, if not given attention, are too easily lost in the chaos of everyday life. There is a need to be aware at all times of these often fleeting feelings if they are not to be lost as stillborn because they are so tentative on arrival, and lost, in a flash, by the hooting of a car behind you. With practice, you can train yourself to be more aware of these often novel thoughts and feelings, tiny moments of inspiration, very brief downloads if you like and, if you pay attention - especially if you jot them down - you can come back to them, expand on them and turn them into something meaningful, something new, which has value. Those totally focused on composing, writing, painting and thinking pay more attention to the fluttering of ideas than most. They have learnt to be alive to them, to grab them as they pass and make something of them - like Paul McCartney with "Yesterday", and Robin Gibb with "You Win Again".
  
10. Most importantly, creativity is about being yourself, about finding your voice, your authenticity. Few artists of any merit are poseurs. The dedication required is absolute. Creativity, however, is not about giving up on life. On the contrary, it is about connecting with the shimmering force field of creative energy exchange. Those in this force field produce work of the highest calibre and are profoundly moved, if not altered, by the experience. Springsteen understands the transformational capacity of the creative life better than most. In his exceptional autobiography, *Born to Run*, he challenges his followers to reconfigure their lives accordingly: "All you have to do to taste real life is to risk being your true self ... to listen ... to the [radio j stations filled with poets, geniuses, rockers, bluesmen, preachers, philosopher-kings, speaking to YOU from deep in the heart of your own soul." He continues: "Their voices sing, 'Listen ... listen to what this world is telling you, for it is calling you for your love, your rage, your beauty, your sex, your energy, your rebellion ... because it needs you in order to remake itself. In order to be reborn into something else, something maybe better, more godly, more wonderful, it needs US.'" <sup>6</sup>

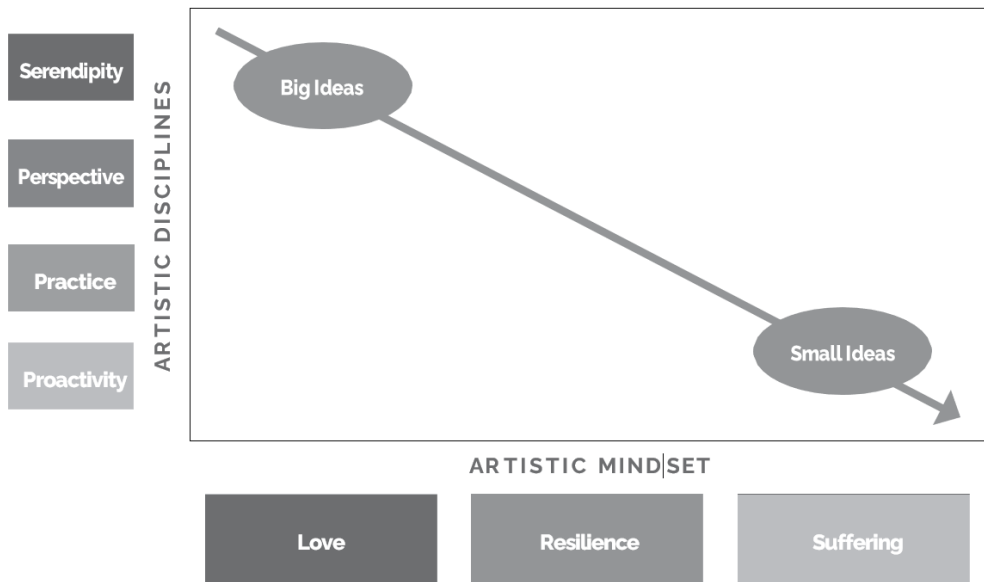
This is not just an injunction. It is a call to arms. The implied transcendence is also something experienced at Springsteen's concerts: the high of the artist connecting with his audience and of mutual surrender to the moment. These forms of energy exchange seem hardwired within our DNA. It is a fundamental component of the deep creativity described by Pollock and Evans: an explosion of the present, communing with orders of being beyond comprehension.

Though such existential intensity is available to all at any time, the problem for artists and non-artists alike is that there is inevitably a “fall-off” period when we retreat to our lesser selves, returning to the “automatic pilot” of the humdrum. But this is not how we are called to live. The creative person is always striving for more. As Irish avant-garde novelist Samuel Beckett wrote: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”<sup>7</sup>

11. Business now needs to take on these various lessons. It needs to acknowledge, along with most current educational systems, its historical complicity in stifling ideas and creativity; it needs to own up to its dinosaur and often toxic ways of operating, hiring, managing and dealing with failure. And, most certainly, it needs to rethink its approach to creativity. Great ideas do not emerge through rote methodologies. The most constant and irritating thing about creativity in business is its fixation on methods and procedures, and its consequent negation of the importance of heart. This has to change. Business that succeeds in this will win in the long term. Applied properly and thoughtfully, creativity can only reinvigorate business practices. But this is not just a responsibility of business. Schools, universities and other state systems also need to own up and re-equip young people with the necessary skills to think creatively. Partnerships are required. There can be no doubt that the organisations that get this right will be the ones that ultimately flourish and endure. Those that do not will be left behind. And they will perish.
12. Having read this book, some practices to consider might include: (1) allowing some staff the flexibility to act more creatively, (2) allowing for the inevitability of failure in the development of ideas, (3) hiring more creative types from the liberal arts and other creative disciplines, and (4) having certain sectors of business actually trying to cultivate more creativity through workshops and/ or by copying Silicon Valley practices. Note that these are not prescriptions. Each business must figure out its own best practice according to context and prevailing constraints. Aside from the mindset components and disciplines described in this book, what can be observed is how different the creative process is for everyone. In this sense there can be no “magic formula”. All we can see are a suite of generic principles that equate to laying the table.
13. While art can teach business, to be sure, business can teach art too. I worry that some contemporary art has lost the plot - take Tracey Emin's *My Bed* (1998) for example. (In 1999, Emin's *unmade bed*- featuring spent condoms, body secretions

and house slippers - was exhibited in London's Tate gallery. In 2014, it was sold at Christie's for £2.5 million.) The valuations attached to such works are ludicrous. At some point, the music must stop. If contemporary art is to be taken seriously, it needs to move on. Certain art dealers and their camp followers will grumble at this complaint. But then, as Goethe reminded us, "everything is hard, before it is easy".<sup>8</sup> And Steve Jobs would have put it even more bluntly.

14. I believe, too, that there is a lot of creativity in business - much more than is commonly imagined- though this is seldom written up. A number of my good friends in business have related the events surrounding some of their remarkable creative insights - often in quite matter-of-fact tones. From these disclosures, and from what I understand of the creative process, I have little doubt that inspiration is also visited upon those in business, as it is those in art. This is certainly a topic of further research.
  
15. Consider then the following set of statements as an encapsulation of everything presented here. At base, this book offers insight into the mindset and discipline components of creativity. The "mindset" components can be simplified into three major themes: love, resilience and suffering; the last of which has three sub-themes: (1) the recovery and betrayal of the inner child, (2) the outsider, and (3) depression, madness and addiction. Each of these occupies a chapter, along with resilience (in this book it is termed "grit"), and love (here termed "passion"). Correspondingly, the creative "discipline" components reduce (by order of significance) to proactivity, practice, perspective and serendipity. Once more, each is covered in a dedicated chapter.



**FIGURE 1: *How Artistic mindset and discipline components may combine to yield creative ideas***

Note how the quality of ideas may change from small to big depending on the components brought to bear. While art, suffering is generally a corequisite for all ideas, the development of big ideas is usually catalysed by additional degrees of resilience and love on one side, and by serendipity on the other

This conceptual framework may be further elaborated upon to yield the following in Figure 2:

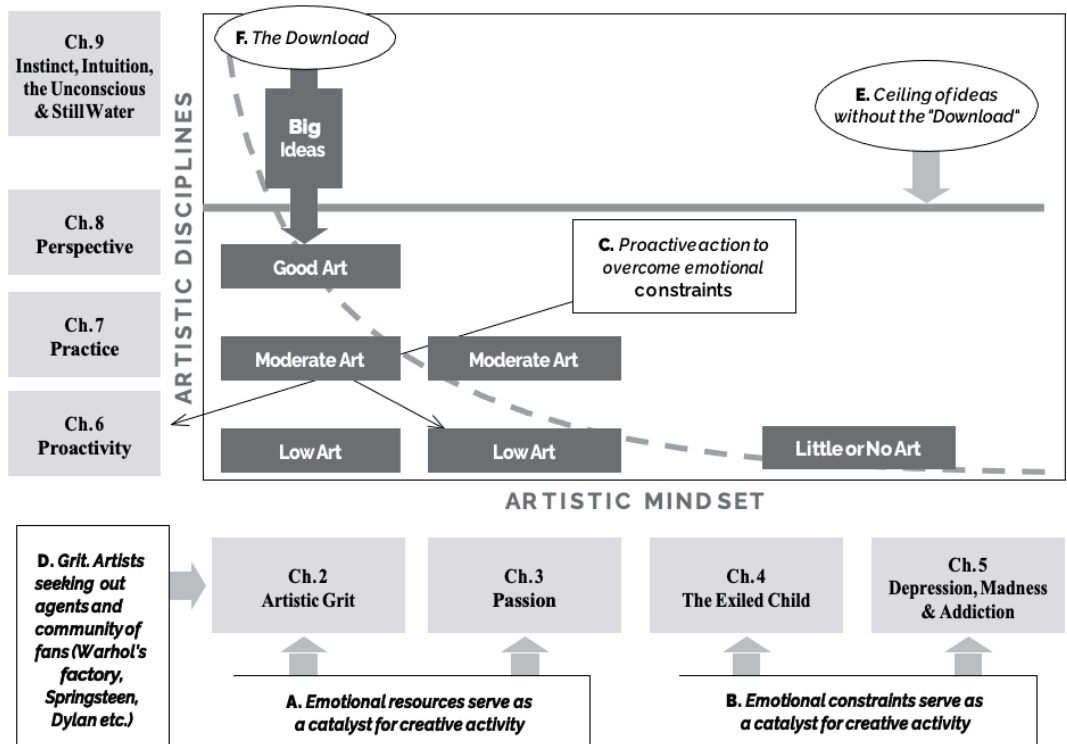


FIGURE 2: *The development of low-to-high-quality ideas within the context of creative practice*

A number of observations are made in the above sketch. (A) Grit and Passion may thus be considered as the key emotional resources necessary to the development of good and especially great ideas. (B) Note how the Exiled Child and the Depression, Madness & Addiction suite of the mindset yields little art in and of itself, but as an emotional constraint, may serve to catalyse creativity, given sufficient Grit and Passion. (C) Proactivity is the initial key to unlocking creativity. Without it there can be no creative output. Productivity overcomes suffering, if engaged with Passion and especially Grit. (D) Grit is required to break through – and is initially employed by the artist to access a sponsor-network through an agent - and then, subsequently, some level of market recognition through a fan-base. (E) There appears to be a ceiling that divides supernaturally derived “big ideas” from just good ones. Big ideas occur when passion is combined with the “disciplines” of inspiration and still water. (F) Under these conditions the so-called “download” of “big ideas” may occur.



16. In the realm of artistic ideas, Figure 2's conceptualisation appears to be the most sensible. It remains unclear, however, whether and to what extent it applies to other forms of idea generation - within the pure sciences, for example. Scientists appear to be less afflicted by suffering,<sup>9</sup> though this may be a gross generalisation - witness John Nash and Newton for example - and readers are redirected towards Chapter 5 on Depression, Madness & Addiction to re-familiarise themselves with the nuances of this argument.

While the creative processes of the artists explored in this book offer valuable insights, this is by no means an exhaustive study and, in time, fresh perspectives are bound to emerge. It is, however, a foundation for raising awareness about the importance of creativity, as well as recognising and stepping into the creative flow.

## Conclusion

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- 2 Friedman, Thomas (2016) *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.
- 3 Brian Eno quote cited off BBC HARDtalk with Stephen Sackur, 11 May 2016.
- 4 [www.goodreads.com/quotes/12601-the-mind-is-sharper-and-keener-in-seclusion-and-uninterrupted](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/12601-the-mind-is-sharper-and-keener-in-seclusion-and-uninterrupted)
- 5 [http://archive.boston.com/ae/celebrity/articles/2009/04/25/bob\\_dylans\\_imperfect\\_music/](http://archive.boston.com/ae/celebrity/articles/2009/04/25/bob_dylans_imperfect_music/)
- 6 Springsteen, B. (2016) *Born to Run*, Simon and Schuster, London (p. 40).
- 7 Beckett, Samuel (1983) *Worstward Ho*, Calder Publications, Richmond, London (p. 21).
- 8 Goethe quote [www.goodreads.com/quotes/298576-everything-is-hard-before-it-is-easy](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/298576-everything-is-hard-before-it-is-easy)
- 9 See Simonton, D.A. (2005) "Are Genius and Madness Related? Contemporary Answers to an Ancient Question", *Psychiatric Times*, (31 May 2005) [www.psychiatristimes.com/cultural-psychiatry/are-genius-and-madness-related-contemporary-answers-ancient-question](http://www.psychiatristimes.com/cultural-psychiatry/are-genius-and-madness-related-contemporary-answers-ancient-question)