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**DESIGNING A SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE FOR PERSONAL LEADERSHIP IN
THE 21ST CENTURY: THE AUTONOMOUS REALIZATION TETRAD (ART)**

A Synthesis* Project Presented

by

BOBBY RICKETTS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

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Advisor: Dr. Peter Taylor

Abstract: Rather than summarizing the extent of my learning as a graduate student in the University of Massachusetts Boston Critical and Creative Thinking Master of Arts Program, this work instead illustrates a starting point for how I intend to apply my learning moving forward. Various characteristics in the writing do, however, reflect influences from all CCT courses taken. Primarily using personal narrative, I discuss various personal and professional experiences which have inspired self-developed creative methodologies. The methodologies, and learning derived from using them, are folded into an inquiry regarding Futures Studies, Systems Thinking, Design Thinking, Mastery, and Flow. Inspired by these disciplines along with the Creativity matrix, I then synthesize what is termed as The Autonomous Realization Tetrad (ART) - a social architecture synthesis inspired by Futures Studies, Systems Thinking, Design Thinking, Cognitive Psychology, and Human Creative Potential. The ART social architecture seeks to consciously nurture a generative field which encourages a range of co-creative social behaviors beneficial to the realization of a visualized, desired outcome, from an economy of means. The writing closes with an indication of proposed Next Steps for the further evolution of ART, as well as Concluding Thoughts.

Keywords: artistry, creativity, development, education, flow, human potential, mastery

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* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

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1. In The Beginning

I was the least likely candidate to become who I am.

My mind recalls memories of early childhood, and of course, such imagery may be foggy at best, although my memories are supported by stories based upon the comparatively hazy recollections of my nuclear family members. I recall the hushed conversations between my parents, which stemmed from my father's concern that I was becoming a "mama's boy". Not from the perspective that this was a negative connotation, but more because my father, a man of vision who had seen much of the world, meant it might be time to widen my horizons. I suspect the root cause of my father's apprehension stemmed in equal parts from the fact that I spent most of my days either in the company of my (at the time) stay-at-home mother while my older siblings were at school, or in the company of the boy (let's call him TK) from the building next door. TK and I were the same age, and apparently the only two children in the neighborhood not yet old enough to attend school. As I recall, accurately this time, TK tended to coax us into mischievous activities which both resulted in always getting caught, and increasingly heated discussions between our mothers regarding who's son was at fault. Let the record reflect that every mischievous episode was a result of TK's bad ideas, and my inability at the time to refuse participation in what was clearly a bad idea.

With the prospect of kindergarten class at least a year away – minimum age for the district was set at four years back then, it was decided, without asking my opinion (as I recall), that I would be enrolled in nursery school, the historical equivalent of an early education concept now known by the label of pre-school. One sunny day, or perhaps it was partially cloudy, I was led, like an innocent pig on his way to the slaughterhouse, a few blocks down the street, to be handed over to the tutelage of Ms. Yates, who was reputed to "have a good way with children".

When my mother and I reached the front door of now-legendary Freedom House Play School in Roxbury,¹ and it rather quickly became apparent that my mother was leaving and I was being left in the care of a complete stranger, I did what any kid of my age would do under the circumstances. I staged a complete, epic, emotional meltdown of a tantrum. The “episode”, which I have a fondness for playing off as being traumatic, was, as I said, staged. True, I was displeased with the prospect of leaving the comfort zone of my mother’s company, but I was also incensed at being duped. For all I knew, my mother and I were heading out for ice cream. To be fair, and accurate, my mother’s version of the story includes two small details, the first being that I had in fact participated in an orientation activity at the nursery school; the second detail being that subsequent enrollment in the program took place with my approval. Apparently I had failed to connect my expression of approval to the consequence of enrollment.

Nonetheless, the critical point in regard to this early childhood pseudo-trauma, is that in between my unease with the situation, my anger at feeling deceived, and the glorious catharsis of tears, screaming, and random alterations of physical resistance tactics (i.e., body stiff – body limp), I was simultaneously aware of a blossoming curiosity in regard to the group of children peering at me from behind Ms. Yates, and the group of children behind them, too engaged in various play activities to be affected by my Oscar-worthy performance. This conscious sense of inquisitiveness marked my first memorable pang of tension between the comfort zone of the known and the alluring potential of the unknown. Uncertainty reframed as mystery.² Ms. Yates assured my mother with, “Don’t worry, he’ll be o.k.”, and thus, as a sniveling three year-old, I embarked upon a life-long journey of curiosity-driven, comfort zone-challenging, transformative

¹ <https://www.freedomhouse.com>. <https://freedomhouse.library.northeastern.edu/search/?q=yates>.

² Eisenberg, B. E. M. (2001). *Building a Mystery : Toward a New Theory of Communication and Identity*. Journal of Communication, Volume 51, Issue 3, 1 September 2001, Pages 534–552, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2001.tb02895.x>

quests within various social contexts ranging from pre-school in urban Roxbury MA, relocation to Waltham, MA at age four along with parents and siblings as the second African-American family in a white suburb of sixty thousand people, through K-12 education and extra-curricular activities in the Greater Boston suburbs, high school sports, music competitions along the east coast of the United States and into Canada, undergraduate studies at one of the world's finest musical education institutions, international solo travel at the age of nineteen, expatriation to Europe, multilingualism, an adult life of raising a family in a foreign country, and an expansive career in music spiced with artistic pursuit, entrepreneurial adventures, and performance tours across five continents.

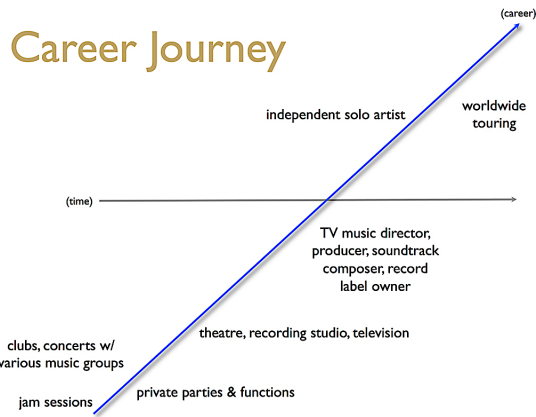
Through my upbringing and life experiences, I have become interested in the power of curiosity as an intrinsic motivator, and the human ability to consciously and intentionally reframe perception in the shift from the comfort of the known toward the uncertainty of the unknown, in the same manner as my focus of attention was shifted from the known to the unknown on that day, a lifetime ago, at the entrance to Freedom House. At present, I am curious regarding the degree of external, social, and cultural influence on how and what we perceive as possible, the potential for transformation when we manage to “tame” perception and motivation in the context of creative endeavor, and the implications of an artistic command of such a life skill on personal leadership, and leadership of others through example.

2. From Then To Now

My journey in music up until the present moment has progressed through three stages I would categorize as Education, Application, and Emergence.³ Continuing education and

³ Ricketts, B. (2018). *Deep Listening At The Eye Of The Needle: Music Improvisation & Co-creation In The Social Field Of Presencing*. Gunnlaugson, O. (Ed.), *Presencing Theory U, Book 3: Collective Perspectives on Presencing*.

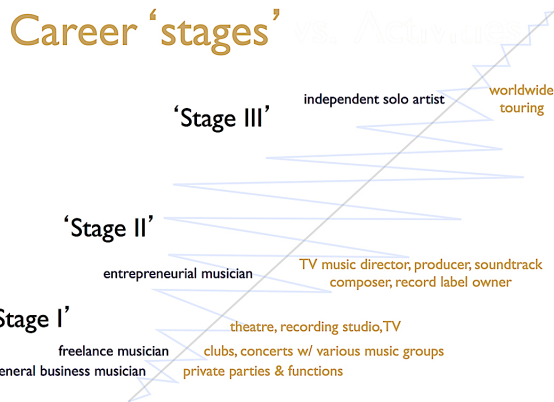
extension of musical skills and abilities has, however, remained a pillar in my development during the past four decades, via reflection and self-study, deliberate practice within a variety of skill sets, and recently, well into my mature years, enrollment in graduate school to study transformative processes more closely.



Stage 1 of the journey (Education)

was characterized by studying music at college after a period of success as an award-winning high school musician; while in college I also worked as a freelance musician, often under the

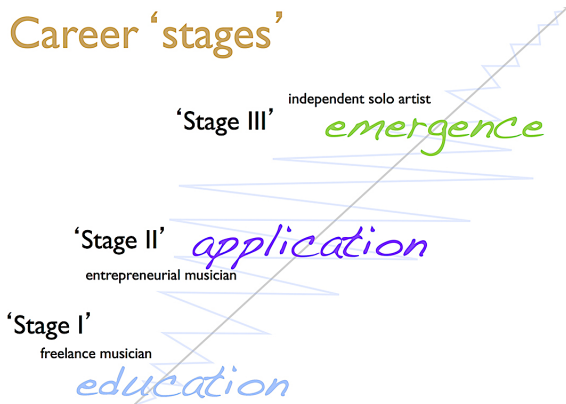
tutelage of my teachers, mentors, and older, more experienced musicians. It was an extended period of paying dues, learning the ropes, and allowing the rich legacy of musical icons before me to guide my aspirations. Vocational training during this period of my life took place, initially, at private entertainment functions for weddings and bar mitzvahs around the Greater Boston, MA



area from my late teens forward. With experience came opportunity, and the more-coveted engagements in jazz clubs, concert performances with various music groups, and, after relocating to Copenhagen, Denmark, continued club

and concert engagements throughout Scandinavian and Europe, plus musical theater engagements as an orchestra pit musician, studio recording sessions, and performance engagements in television house bands.

Stage 2 (Application) ensued about ten years later when I began to apply everything I had learned up until that point more purposefully, and as an entrepreneurial musician and independent business owner, began to take control over, and responsibility for, my career path



and its outcomes. During this period, I served as a musical director and production executive for television, as a music producer with my own recording studio, fulfilling the needs of numerous clients by composing and producing television, documentary, and corporate presentation soundtracks. I also became a record label owner. This stage of my life was very much characterized by deeper research and inquiry into music and the business of music, repeated trial and error, increased risk-taking, and a more outward focus in life, searching for inspirational sources outside the realm of music.

Stage 3 (Emergence), which began roughly fifteen years later (or, about ten years ago), was all about freedom and emergence. It was as if I was utilizing the wide range of experiences and influences to which I had been exposed, to zero in on a higher musical purpose. Music became more than a vocation, it became a vehicle for personal insight and connection with others. I returned once again to composing, recording, and performing my own material, something that hadn't previously been a primary pursuit, was able to cultivate an international audience for my music, and began touring the world as a solo artist. This was an intense, highly rewarding period of life lessons and transformation through realizing the dreams of my youth. I became aware of an orientational shift from referring to what "they" say, to having a secure, independent, inner frame of reference regarding the world and my place in it. The Emergent

stage became characterized by personal growth and life experience from the bizarre to the beautiful; knowledge of, and learning from, world cultures beyond the Western-oriented, plus increased spiritual and social awareness, self-discipline, and focus. I became stronger and more proficient as an instrumentalist than I had ever been at any point in my life, my skill for musical improvisation became more intuitive, and I became aware of an ability to foster change beyond the realm of music.⁴

I feel it is important to note that the three stages did not occur by intentional design, and that my categorization of the stages is the result of reflection during the past four or five years. The common driver leading to, and through, each stage to the next, is curiosity. Initially, curiosity drew me to an immersive study of music at the undergraduate level; then to inquiry about how I might break away from being told or advised what to do, toward making my own discoveries in regard to the various ways in which I might ply my craft; and finally, to an exploration in regard to the uniqueness, if any, of what I might have to offer this world, both through my musical expression, and as a human being.

I correlate the longitudinal developments throughout these life stages to the three phases in traditional cognitive psychology theories of skill acquisition, i.e. (1) an initial "cognitive" phase of learning the underlying structure of an activity, and clear feedback regarding what aspects must be attended to, (2) an "associative" phase where an acceptable (in this case, professional) level of performance is attained, and (3) a third, "autonomous" phase, where the typical goal is to achieve effortless performance, and where expert performance continues to

⁴ Within philosophy, art, science, and systems theory, emergence is said to have occurred when "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts," i.e., the whole has properties its components do not have, as a result of interactions among them. Wikipedia contributors. (2018, April 4). Emergence. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved April 4, 2018, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergence>

improve as a function of increased experience and deliberate practice.⁵ However, the correlation seems analogous rather than practical, with the acquired skill in question possibly pertaining to learning how to navigate life, rather than an extension of musical mastery, although it has often be difficult for me to discern any distinction between the two. At this point in my growth and development as a human being and a musician, I no longer find it necessary (or remotely interesting) to distinguish between who I am as an individual and how I express myself musically, or creatively. Whether we interpret the word emergence to mean “coming into being” or, “a whole greater than the sum of its parts”, I find either interpretation applicable to my life experience. At present, I do feel a sense of coming into being, as if I am spending my time on earth meaningfully, and at the same time, I can’t point to any one occurrence as being the key to a sense of emergence. It is rather as if the cumulative total of all that I have experienced, personally and professionally, serves as a form of ballast from which I might extend myself more deeply into additional curiosity-driven journeys into the unknown. Perhaps, in reality, the skill I have been developing as a bi-product of my pursuits is a capability to embrace the uncertainty of the future without fear, while autonomously forming my life in a manner which provides a sense of meaning and purpose. If this is true, then it would certainly provide additional meaning and purpose to my life, to be able to help others acquire such a skill.

⁵ Ericsson, K. Anders. (2002). *Attaining Excellence Through Deliberate Practice: Insights From the Study of Expert Performance*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

3. From There To Here

The advent of the third, emergent stage is something I attribute to a self-developed methodology, “From There To Here” (FTH) which consisted of employing creative visualization to identify a heart-led goal, my most passionate aspiration at the time. Because I perceived the goal, once identified, as unattainable (as did all others at the time, with whom I shared my thoughts) but was drawn to it nonetheless through my curiosity, I began to reverse-engineer feasible, incremental steps working from the goal back toward where I found myself at that present point of time. Starting in 2004, the next four years of my life were spent on mastering this series of incremental steps through daily, deliberate effort, until from 2008 into 2009, I was able to recognize as my present state, what was once perceived to be an unattainable desired future state. I had in fact achieved the seemingly impossible. The affect of the resulting life change was beneficially transformative for myself as well as my family; exponentially more transformative was the realization that I was able to consciously form the existence to which I had aspired, rather than resign myself to navigating life in response to the random coincidence of external circumstances. An awareness

The future desired outcome derived from my original FTH visualization was an imagined scenario in which I had cultivated an audience for my original music in a minimum of ten (at the time unspecified) countries around the world, and was able to earn a living via performance tours to these countries. I evaluated that performance tours would be largely dependent upon recording, releasing and successfully promoting a CD (music streaming had not yet become ubiquitous) of original music to specified regional audience demographics, as well as key regional music promoters and agents. The promotional aspect required that I employ communication and marketing skills learned during my career in television. I had already established a record label and secured a global, digital distribution deal, and had become an accomplished music producer and audio technician, again, thanks to my career experience of composing and producing music for television.

A specific musical niche was identified where the self-evaluation was, I'd be able to compete internationally within the market segment. The task was then to compose and produce an appropriate quantity of music which would appeal to the designated niche. The greatest challenge in the earliest phases of the incremental journey was to make the transition from journeyman saxophonist to solo artist. In other words, I had to somehow find a unique characteristic which could be communicated through my playing, and then discover, via long periods of practice and experimentation, how to bring forth this identifying quality. The endeavor continues to this day.

of one's capability for creative self-empowerment is a life-changing insight from which there is no turning back, and something which lies at the core of the sense of emergence that I felt.

I'm tracking two growth/development threads here: first, a shift from "doing as one is instructed", progressing to independent thought and action. Second, I'm seeing a transition from incorporating "ways of thinking" i.e., the cognitive phase, to "ways of knowing" i.e., employing "the associative" more freely in response

to the challenges and opportunities offered by one's environment, to finally, "ways of being", where knowledge and skill are embodied to a degree which enables a creative autonomy, which in my case, spilled over into personal life. The ability to create music as I saw fit and form my career as I wished, also meant I was both catalyst and captain to the change I wanted to see in my personal life.

Perhaps of particular significance within the context of this writing, is an observation that mastery level in music seems to inspire concern for the greater "We", through a search for a connection

between artistic expression and the human condition. This is a foundational shift which affects outcomes both onstage as well as offstage. Saxophonist John Coltrane's work, for example,

Leaving The Comfort Zone

Something happened during the 49th year of my life. Suddenly, everything I had ever wished for was happening. At once. I felt like a child wallowing in a sea of Christmas gifts, birthday presents, big balloons, and lots of love 'n' warmth, all at the same time. I was traveling across 5 continents, playing my heart out on the saxophone, performing my very own music with some of the best musicians in the world, receiving standing ovations, meeting exciting people, visiting exotic places and gaining new perspectives on humanity and human nature. It was as if my birthday was a celebration that wouldn't end.

After one particularly triumphant night in Tokyo, I returned to the hotel and read my emails. And there it was, a message from the TV production company saying the network wouldn't be able to alter its shooting schedule for the program I worked on both as musical director and part of the editorial staff, to fit with my international concert schedule.

Since I had already committed to the concerts in writing, there was no decision to make – I was forced to leave the comfort zone of a cushy TV gig, a victim of my own ambition. I had walked the plank to the very edge, now it was time to jump and swim to save my life. Ears ringing, still high on the adrenaline rush from the night's performance, I felt a slight tinge of anxiety. Then I smiled... one door closes, an unlimited number of doors open. And during that single moment just before the age of 50, after a long career spanning 32 amazing, eventful years, I unofficially retired as a professional musician and became an Artist. It was the only path left untraveled.

became increasingly more spiritual in its nature as he, through his development and musical expression as an artist, sought a more intimate personal relationship with God and humanity.⁶

During my emergent third stage, I began to notice and eventually sought to explore the beneficial powers of transformation which music holds. The more deeply I examined music performance mastery with the objective of achieving profound interpersonal connections with the audiences and musicians I encountered throughout my travels across the U.S.A., Europe, Japan, and East and West Africa, the more I began to believe that there are no boundaries between music and life. The more I engaged and interacted with attendees of the numerous master classes and seminars I was called upon to conduct in conjunction with performance tours, the more I became drawn toward facilitating transformative change via a musical and music improvisational perspective. Quite possibly, I now find myself at the advent of a fourth stage which extends beyond what I can imagine or perceive from my present vantage point. Ergo the personal relevance of this writing and inquiry.

4. From No To Yes

Perhaps it is worth noting that during the stage 2 phase, “Application”, I crafted a framework for saying 'no' in professional contexts, which I called "The 3-Point Equation". Briefly, the three points were Music, Knowledge, and Money; the rule was, a minimum of two out of three points in the equation always had to be in place before I would accept an engagement. “Three out of three” opportunities did not present themselves often. The three points translated to: (1) “Music” that I was all-in passionate about, (2) “Knowledge” that was unique and couldn't be acquired elsewhere, and (3) “Money” as in, being compensated for time on the job (as was and still is the industry norm) wasn't enough; I also wished to be compensated

⁶ As manifested in Coltrane’s highly influential, life-defining creative work, “A Love Supreme”

for years of preparation, breadth of applicable knowledge, plus a profit margin on time and resources spent on the equivalent of research and development. This was a common practice in most other forms of commerce, so why not apply this principle to the business of music? The economic component, in particular, forced me to think carefully in terms of market value. If I was going to cost two to ten times more than the next qualified saxophonist on the call list, then I'd better bring something extra to the table, beyond musical skill, preparedness, and showing up on time with a clean shirt and a good attitude. I began to reflect upon how I could offer value, and what my unique personal contribution might be to every professional opportunity accepted.

The 3-Point Equation was an effective tool for graciously saying 'no thank you' to a majority of offers received which were intriguing, but which (in my view) would not result in development and growth, either personal, musical, or financial. I didn't say "no" directly; the most compassionate response was "thank you, but unfortunately, I'm not available." It wasn't that I was in a position of financial or social status to demand such exclusivity. But as an independent freelancer, the choices one makes are largely speculative. I needed a heuristic to guide my decisions and at least vaguely or sub-consciously communicate which type of opportunities I was looking for, even if, or primarily because, my own thinking on such matters wasn't always clear.

During this second stage, and because I had done all of the deep thinking beforehand, I was able to avoid the distractions of "shiny" job-related perks, and focus on the core values of growth and development in the three areas most important to me, with one of them of vital importance to my ability to provide for my family. Being able to play the music I loved in an environment from which I gained unique, special knowledge more than outweighed a lesser, albeit fair, financial compensation. The knowledge and experience gained could be leveraged at

a later date, toward another opportunity. Being generously compensated while granted access to specialized knowledge and learning was a reasonable consolation prize if I wasn't entirely passionate about the music being performed – at least, in such situations, I could, as the musical director, directly influence how the music was shaped to serve its designated purpose, and I was certainly passionate about that aspect of the work. And every once in a while, the planets aligned perfectly, and I was generously compensated for playing music about which I was deeply passionate, and there were always valuable lessons to be learned because the colleagues involved were incredible musicians.

5. From Artist To Leader

I have come to believe that there has to occur an intentional and attentional shift from the default of saying no, to saying yes; from “this isn't what I want” to “this is what I want.” Especially if there are others who are dependent upon oneself. This isn't about an ego pursuit, “I” can easily be interchanged with “we”. This is about ‘yes’, as in, at one point we have to cease rehearsing for life, step into character, and be that person we're going to be. We can spend years saying ‘no’ until our only choices are between ‘yes’ and nothing, or we can begin early on, to lean into ‘yes’. Eventually, and perhaps this is middle-age speaking, ‘yes’ requires vision, an idea, or concept regarding our character, who we are, our relationship with those to whom we are connected, and the life we are living. Perhaps The 3-Point Equation was my way of culling the field in order to let emerge that which I was looking for, authentically, but couldn't quite express or identify through language. If so, then some ten years afterward, developing the FTH framework was my way of leaning in toward life, telling myself, “rehearsal is over, if ever there is going to be a time when you step into character, this is it.” Perhaps this circumstance of stepping into character occurs more than once in a life seen as an open-ended journey,

continually shifting and changing (Eisenberg, 2001). It is, quite possibly, a question of identity, influenced by a Western, individualistic culture.

Regardless of probable cultural influence, this isn't a perspective handed to me from a position of privilege, culture, or societal status. It's a creative perspective. For an Artist, the full expression of "this is what I want" is, "this is what I want to create."

Within the realm of skills, musical or otherwise, which I have acquired and in certain cases mastered, I am also confronted daily by the harsh realities of my vast limitations. For every note I can articulate masterfully on a saxophone, there are at least two notes that still need work, even after forty-plus years of practice; similarly, when I seek to communicate as precisely as possible how or what I think, I am continually confronted by how little I know. This Socratic Paradox is hardly unique; what fascinates me, however, is that in these moments of self-doubt, I am able to turn toward music – that construct of flawed mastery - for answers, for clues, for insight. The curious physical and physiological phenomenon of projecting exhaled breath into a mouthpiece coupled to a bamboo reed, the vibrations of which, once amplified through the brass tube of the imperfect design that constitutes a saxophone, result in sound waves whose abstractly aesthetic qualities are capable of evoking virtually every possible emotion in the human experience; this one simple breath reminds me that when I create, or perhaps instead, because I *can* create and through my creations connect generatively with others, I am empowered, artistically and humanly.

From this capacity to create and connect, the potential for leadership arises when we begin to create and consistently express ourselves creatively through mastery or artistry. Others are then drawn to the artistry of what we do and we the people who do it. A spark of curiosity is ignited in regard to how we were able to realize the creative output in question. If we as creators

are then willing to share our thinking, practices, and methods openly, in a manner which enables and empowers others toward creative realization of their own design, the seeds for leadership are sewn. How is it we artists begin with nothingness, navigate the murkiness of ambiguity, and end with something tangible, well-intentioned, crafted, and emotionally evocative? We fantasize, imagine, visualize something, anything; masterfully apply our craft, and watch that something magically come to life. We learn whenever we fail, readjust our course accordingly, and persist toward manifesting the imagined.

While traveling as an Arts Envoy of the United States Department of State during the Obama administration (nominated for the honor in part via a consistent ability to create, connect, and lead), it was requested on numerous occasions that I facilitate self-conceptualized seminars of my choice under the theme of “Young African Leaders Initiative” (YALI).⁷ As the number one question emerged from the young musicians, artists, and creatives in my charge, “How do I get to be like you?”, I decided to share the exact method used to step into my character, and the FTH methodology was adapted to be facilitated as a ninety-minute seminar. Wanting to be like someone else is based upon a perception of what appears to be, that which we find appealing; the purpose of the seminar is to help people begin to identify who they want to be, expand their perception of the possibilities, and discover what they have within their means to take action toward realizing that particular outcome, i.e., to step into their own character.

6. Creative Visualization 1.0

The FTH concept is simple: participants are guided through a process of creative visualization, whereby they identify how they would live their lives if given the opportunity to do so without restrictions, barriers, or obstacles of any kind. They are also guided toward

⁷ The Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) is a signature effort to invest in the next generation of African leaders. <https://yali.state.gov/>

identifying which characteristics, traits, or resources they possess within their present means toward achieving that objective, as well as which resources (e.g., knowledge and skill) they may need to work toward acquiring. No visualized scenario is judged as being too outlandish.

The FTH methodology begins with removing self-imposed cognitive restraints. Imagine, for example, that you are invited away for the weekend, in an impromptu fashion, spur of the moment. Despite the appeal of the idea to ditch it all and get away, you might have any number of valid reasons for balking at the offer, all of which may be triggered automatically before you even begin to examine the feasibility of the proposal: I have that work presentation coming up, can I bring my children or house pets, who's going to babysit my children or feed my house pets, am I sure I want to spend a whole weekend with this person or these people, etc. The more responsibilities we have, the more difficult it becomes to say yes unequivocally, without any thought given to the consequences. When an unexpected opportunity arises, it seems we are cognitively programmed (e.g., by inherent human risk aversion) to first examine why we can't or why we shouldn't accept the offer, rather than to explore the opportunity itself more closely.

To define "there", that is, "what the heart desires", we must allow ourselves the freedom to imagine without worry, knowing that everyone and everything we care about will be taken care of regardless of where we permit our minds to wander or what we identify as a heart's desire. There is no concern about how, means, or ability; only pure imagination, under utopian circumstances: *What would you be? Where would you be? Who would you be?* These same questions can easily be posed to groups of people as a means to identify and contribute individualized visions of group goals, i.e. *What if (I, you, or we) had the power, means and ability to achieve (my, your, our) dreams, without care or worry, right here and now? What would (I, you, we) be? Where would (I, you, we) be? Who would (I, you, we) be?*

The next step is to sketch a supporting narrative including names, places, people, quantities, descriptions, et al. Once completed, the first call to action is to "be that vision", i.e., to be that person in the vision, going those places, doing those things in the vision, even before they begin to happen. The rationale here is, that by being that vision, i.e., assuming the identity of that vision, we are better able to recognize opportunities along our journey which will help us achieve the future desired state. Provided there is a gap between present and future states, the ultimate goal is to, over time, align ourselves with the vision, e.g., *What would you be?* What I am now. *Where would you be?* Where I am now. *Who would you be?* Who I am now.

The methodology continues by stressing the importance of doing the daily work required. For example, if my vision were to become one of the top saxophonists in the world, I might ask myself, "what do the top saxophonists in the world do; what do they practice or study; how often do they practice, and so forth. Then I would have to examine how to model best behaviors, and commit to these behaviors by (at the very least) deliberately practicing and studying a defined repertoire. By "being that vision", I wouldn't merely be acting the part without doing the work; I'd be able to look myself in the mirror knowing that every day, I was devoting qualitative time and effort toward achievement of my goal. For me personally, the goal isn't to be the best saxophonist in the world, it's to be the best saxophonist I can be. One way of achieving this goal is through emulating the growth and development behaviors of the greatest saxophonists and being consistently committed to the endeavor.

At some point in my seminars, I ask for a show of hands: who amongst us hears a voice inside proclaiming, "Outrageous - there's no way I can accomplish this vision?" Most often, there are one to three people who raise their hands. I assure them we'll address their concerns

later in the seminar, but also ask them to consider the possibility that, perhaps that voice inside, the voice of judgment, cynicism, or fear,⁸ may be their greatest obstacle.

The second part of the seminar addresses the gap between "there" and "here". I provide a brief example narrative:

"As the MC shouted my name, I climbed the few short steps up to the platform. The roar of the crowd was deafening. Someone placed an arm around my shoulder, their other arm pointing me toward center stage. Looking up to identify the good Samaritan, I saw the smiling face of Quincy Jones. There was so much I wanted to tell him, but the band had already kicked in. Finding my place in front of the musicians, and looking out over the Hollywood Bowl for the first time ever, I placed the horn to my lips and began to blow. This was my moment. "

Even such a brief supporting narrative points to what may be required in order to realize the vision, or a reasonable facsimile thereof:

- The necessary tools and skills to entertain a crowd of 17,000 people (Hollywood Bowl capacity), i.e., music repertoire, stage presence, instrumental skills, etc.
- A sizable audience familiar with my name and music, meaning I'd be an appealing "draw" in regard to ticket sales.
- A connection, directly or indirectly, (via an agent, manager, etc.) to the organizers of the Playboy Jazz Festival.
- An organizational structure in place enabling the band to rehearse my set beforehand.
- Somehow, I've managed to attract the attention of people in the entertainment industry (i.e., Quincy Jones) who may have functioned as an "ambassador" on my behalf.

⁸ Referred to as "the voices of resistance" in Scharmer, C. Otto (2009). *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

- Continue the list, in further detail.

We then evaluate the "here":

- My performance track record proves my saxophone skills can keep a live audience engaged.
- My repertoire has been successfully tested with club audiences across five continents.
- I feel confident and comfortable onstage, and love performing for audiences.

In acknowledging the gap, one might then ask, why hasn't the Playboy Jazz Festival booked me yet? The vision makes it crystal clear:

- I must work to build an even broader audience, e.g., live as well as online through social media.
- I must develop relationships with people who can help connect the "dots" between the festival organizers and myself, such as agents & managers, or 'people who know people'.
- I must expand my network of great musicians everywhere, who would love to play my music, and are ready to do so.
- I must attract attention from movers, shakers, taste-makers or passionate fans who will be my "ambassadors".
- Continue the list, in further detail.

The method illustrates the beginnings of what can be developed into an effective strategy or plan for action. My final message at the seminar:

"From There to Here" is an effective method for pinpointing goals, strengths, and the missing elements required to fulfill these goals. The most important aspect is to take action. Maintain your strengths, work to eliminate your weaknesses. Daily steps, however small they may be, will eventually lead you to the finish line. The simple act of

taking a step in the direction of something you feel passionately about, and continually taking steps until they become good habits, adjusting underway for what works well and what doesn't, will lead to a sense of well-being, even joy. After all, life is about the journey, not the destination."

Despite a starting point as vague as 'wanting to be like me', the visions which have emerged through numerous seminars are as diverse as the participants themselves: "I want to work toward becoming the best guitarist in Africa"; "I want to start a music school"; "I want to combine my two passions of music and science." Day 1 after identifying and vocalizing such goals is like that of an Artist before a blank canvas, about to paint the first stroke of the image in her head.

7. Reflections On The FTH Learning Experience

When I began facilitating FTH seminars, I was admittedly prone to over-simplifying what for me was a process lived daily over the course of four years. While crafting ninety minutes of content based on an expansive scope of experience, there was much of value that could have been included in the seminar adaptation but was omitted due to format constraints.

I consider FTH to be a social experiment, with myself as the guinea pig. My use of FTH is not the first time I've employed creative visualization as a means to manifest future outcomes. The utilization of creative visualization as a means to optimize performance, for example, in music or sports, is quite common. During my late teens, I also visualized myself performing and living in Europe, however, the occurrence of this very circumstance is serendipitous rather than designed. Perhaps an awareness of a desire opens us to opportunity which leads to the fulfillment of that desire, should we heed the appearance of signals pointing us in that direction.

The four-year FTH experiment represents the first time I attempted to consciously and intentionally form my life according to the imagery of a visualized future state, without perceiving myself as having the means at my disposal to realize the desired future state. At the outset, and metaphorically speaking, it is like imagining a destination one is not sure exists, and then drawing a map to get there. As such, I don't teach or advocate FTH at seminars; I merely share my lived experience in response to the question of how I arrived at being in a position where people are curious enough to consider emulating certain of my creative actions. In sharing my experience, I also include several caveats.

However, focusing first on the positives: most people with whom I have discussed FTH, also outside of the seminars, hadn't spent time within their recent memory contemplating or reflecting upon what their highest

aspirations in life might be. Most seemed to be locked into a socially or culturally-directed path in regard to education, career, choice of life-partner, et al. No judgment in respect to this, however, what strikes me as a common factor regardless of culture or social setting is a need for

One of my first FTH "clients", frustrated over not having enough time to spend on her art, found my ideas sound enough that she took notes while I explained FTH methodology. As an arts educator and school system admin, she had 12-hour long days including the commute between home and work. I asked what she would do if she had more time. Her dream was to master a specialty technique she was particularly fond of using, and complete enough works employing the technique, to stage an exhibition.

My reasoning was, if, in her future, she saw herself as an artist, then she should "be" an artist in her present. Doing so required some minimal changes. First, instead of identifying as an Arts Educator, she should begin to identify as an Artist Who Educates. To support this mindset, I suggested it was essential that she make art every day, as the first activity of the day before leaving for work. I challenged her to wake up a few minutes earlier and sketch ideas for five minutes before her usual morning routine. Five minutes is an attainable goal requiring little change; if she enjoyed the activity, then surely she would be motivated to expand the time frame incrementally. The final challenge was to scale down on any non-essential activity (based on her own self-evaluation) during evenings after work, and use the time to complete the morning's sketches or begin new ones.

My client met every challenge and took things several steps further. She eventually sold her home, found suitable accommodations enabling her to scale back on her workload without restraining financial consequences, thereby freeing up several hours daily to devote on mastering her art technique and producing works. Ten years later, she is exhibiting nationally around the United States and has achieved recognition as an Artist.

"gamification" in order to help people disregard self-imposed restraints. In other words, it's easier to ask people to imagine having three wishes granted by a genie (and receive a coherent answer) than it is to ask outright, "what is your highest aspiration in life?" Doing so is most often met with a shrug of shoulders. I see it as a victory that all of my seminar participants were able to identify a long-term, heartfelt goal. Regardless of whether or not they perceived the goal as attainable, it was at the very least, now viewed as a possibility – one which they hadn't been able to articulate earlier.

A number of the people with whom I've worked in seminars conducted on the African continent originated from a marginalized segment of the population, living hand to mouth. "Marginalized" in the context of a developing country often translates to "living in poverty". Remarkably, it was not a difficult task for many within the marginalized segment to identify their highest aspirations, most of which were on behalf of family or community. Perhaps these particular concerns are due to a stronger influence of collective culture in Africa in general, than what is common in the West. It is a powerful moment to witness when a person of little or no means is able to connect their highest aspiration (future state) with an immediately actionable step that is within their current means (present state), particularly when the individual is likely to perceive long-term strategizing as a luxury. It was also interesting to observe the effect of "being that vision" as a builder of self-esteem amongst participants whose daily needs were not always being met. As I watched a number of participants transition from poverty to middle class in the years that followed, I've wondered if perhaps self-esteem is able to beneficially impact or expand one's perception of the available means for meeting daily needs - an idea which defies Maslov's often-contested hierarchy of needs pyramid.⁹

⁹ Physiological needs are presumed to be igniting the process of satisfaction (Kenrick et al. 2010), with the other

Finally, the element of expressing the imagery of a creative visualization as a story or supporting narrative seems an effective means of recording imagery in a manner that is easily accessible to all. Storytelling is central to human existence, stories inspire and motivate us, and serve to tell us what we think is significant in our lives. The emotionality of storytelling functions as a navigational guide, i.e., if the visualization narrative resonates within the visioner, there is valid reason to record the story. Emotional connection helps make the vision memorable and communicable to others. Narratives can be revisited, reflected upon, amended, and augmented to build upon and extract meaning.

As mentioned earlier in regard to caveats, there are several points which I'd like to address, as my inquiry progresses:

- I'm intrigued by what seems to be a cultural, social, or cognitive pre-disposition in the choice to visualize a particular future scenario. Despite the perception that one has set the mind free to wander without restriction, I'm curious as to how much can we imagine that doesn't present itself in the image of the familiar, even if that image may be packed away deep in the sub-conscious. The cognitive processes and perhaps biases in play are well worth closer examination.
- There can be a tension between striving toward a visualized future, the supporting narrative of which is specified in detail, but takes place in a future scenario which can be difficult or impossible to describe accurately, being that we haven't yet been there. For example, I visualized myself performing in Tokyo, Japan before I had seen any photos or

basic needs in the hierarchy being derived from the satisfaction of the physiological needs (Maslow 1954a).
Fallatah, R. H. M., & Syed, J. (2018). *A Critical Review of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. Employee Motivation in Saudi Arabia, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67741-5_2

visited the country. This brings up a question of “knowing in not knowing” which I have explored in other work.¹⁰

- FTH addresses the path between a present state and a future state as being one of linear, forward progress, which, perhaps due to this two-dimensional depiction, is a perceptually inaccurate imagery for both progress as well as the future state. In consciousness, future can exist simultaneously with present and past.¹¹ A forward-oriented, linear representation of progress overlooks failure (perceived backward, relative to forward progress) as a learning experience capable of yielding exponential gain. Thus, failure can be progress, including ups, downs, lefts, rights, forward’s and backward’s in all spherical directions of dimensionality. Oftentimes, actual progress doesn't feel like real progress; in the uncertainty of moving toward the unknown (future), we need to remain open to the perceptually unusual or illogical.
- We most often perceive cause and effect as being tied to action. However, I observed that exertion of concentrated attentional focus directed at any point of progression naturally results in a lack of attentional focus being directed elsewhere – perhaps due to the constraints of cognitive bandwidth. Even without actual physical action or external communication, conscious intent may affect crucial or essential environmental elements, such as the people within our closest social circles. This also speaks to the concept of non-linear causality, i.e., that the same action (and perhaps also conscious intent) may yield both calculated effect in the short term, and unexpected effect(s) in the long term.

¹⁰ Ricketts, B. (2018). *Deep Listening At The Eye Of The Needle: Music Improvisation & Co-creation In The Social Field Of Presencing*. Gunnlaugson, O. (Ed.), *Presencing Theory U, Book 3: Collective Perspectives on Presencing*.

¹¹ A reference to the theory of eternalism, a.k.a. the "block universe" theory of time, e.g., as per Skow, Bradford. (2009). *Relativity and the Moving Spotlight*. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 106(12), 666–678.

Similarly, as individuals, we may be subject to effects caused by external events seemingly unrelated to us (e.g., 9/11, global financial crises, et al. incl. their catalysts)

- External events or the passage of time, for example, may affect our view of a chosen future desired state, or new goals may emerge and take priority over previous choices. Change is a characteristic of the future, which calls for an openness to, and capability for, continual improvisation and adaptation.
- Motivation, effort, and persistence seem essential to realizing outcomes.
- A skill, craft, or competency within a body of knowledge (or several areas) relevant to the desired future state seems advantageous to the realization of a desired future state.
- Sometimes, the journey itself is the outcome. As an example, it is difficult for me to say whether achieving my future desired state was a more valuable outcome than the learning and experience encountered underway.
- The first-person narrative utilized in this paper naturally contains much “I/me”; however it is important to note the vital importance of connection to and relationships with others before, during, and after the journey.
- I’m curious in regard to what I call “follow-through”, as in, “what happens when you realize your future desired outcome – then what?” The concept ties in perhaps with a notion of “thinking through, and past action”, for example, if actions have consequences, then surely outcomes must also have consequences.

In consideration of the above “plus/delta”¹² evaluation of the FTH methodology, with particular emphasis placed on the “deltas”, I am curious in regard to how I might possibly

¹² Plus-Delta (+Δ) Feedback begins with an appreciation (+), followed by a suggestion for change (Δ). This form of feedback can also be used for self-evaluation, where one states something that has worked well, and something that might need developing or improving. Taylor, P., & Szteiter, J. (2012). *Taking Yourself Seriously: Process of Research and Engagement* (p. 111). Arlington, MA.: The Pumping Station

optimize FTH, or perhaps more preferably, utilize what I have learned through living the FTH experience, and apply these lessons toward developing a more systemically-aware, holistic approach to consciously forming one's life from a standpoint of creative self-empowerment and personal leadership. I am in search of a means through which to authentically identify aspirations, address perceptual, cognitive blind spots, incite the "what ifs" and "what happens when's" of curiosity into generative action, delegate creative resources throughout the journey, and acknowledge interconnection, i.e., that none of us exist in a vacuum.

8. Three Outcome-based Frameworks

Toward this objective, over the years I have noticed three standout frameworks in particular, often featured on various business blogs, in TED Talks, and on social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter, which have attracted my attention and piqued my curiosity: Futures Studies, Systems Thinking, and Design Thinking. All three earn praise from those interested in innovation, disruption, problem-solving, and solution finding. Such terms appear most often associated with business and organizational development, both of these being contexts which are concerned with future outcomes, creating value, and the management of human resources. To my way of thinking, business and organizational environments and their objectives share much in common with my desire to improve FTH or progress beyond the methodology to a more evolved model for creative empowerment. Like myself, businesses and organizations are, in essence, interested in discovering new ways of being productive within a field of complexity comprised of change, challenges, and people.

Before examining how Futures Studies, Systems Thinking, or Design Thinking may be of use to my mission, let us explore each of them in turn.

A. Futures Studies.

Futures studies, also referred to as futures thinking, futurology, strategic foresight, et al., initially attracted my interest during the late 2000's as I began to follow updates from a well-known music industry futurist. Taking note that I was often in disagreement with his views on where the music industry might be heading, I began to wonder how he was reaching various conclusions published on multiple social media platforms. As an observer of, and practitioner in the industry, I came to realize that with my career experience, historical knowledge of the music business, and curiosity about technological developments which were affecting the industry, my guesses regarding where the music industry was heading were as accurate or inaccurate as the music futurist and many other self-acknowledged experts who commented on the industry. I began to formulate industry projections for personal use, and thus became curious to learn more about how futurists carry out their work. It is not my objective here to take a deep dive into futures studies and the intricacies of its methodology, but instead explore what might be extracted from the practice, toward the objective of expanding the linear approach to creatively visualized outcomes as utilized in FTH.

Futures studies is a discipline which systematically explores the future from various perspectives, including the possible, the probable, and the preferable, as well as the underlying myths and worldviews of each scenario. The discipline has evolved from predicting the future to mapping alternatives, to shaping desired futures. While futures studies is often utilized by executive leadership teams and planning departments in organizations, institutions, and nations around the world to navigate the complexities of planning long-term policy and strategy, to assess risk, and to avoid imminent threats, the discipline is also a tool used to formulate positive

visions. The practice provides a means of tracing historical structure to enable agency as a capacity for influence.

The futures approach is typically long-term, e.g., five to fifty years (or longer) and is committed to imagining multiple authentic future scenarios which differ from each other. All interpretations of reality are considered legitimate, e.g., the role of the unconscious, mythology and the spiritual are equally as valid as empirical data. In that sense, futures studies can be disruptive to habitual frameworks and assumptions, ensuring robust, resilient strategies. Scenarios are not considered to be forecasts of the future, but instead, are images of the possible which create tension with the present.¹³

As an illustration of how I am inspired by Futures Studies, I have chosen five initial takeaways which stand in contrast to the linear, singular visualization concept of my FTH methodology. First, is the notion of varying perspectives, e.g., scenario archetypes (Dator, 1979) or variable scenarios (Schwartz, 1995, 1996) of the future, which appear crucial to foresight. Perhaps Schwartz' model is most applicable within the context of this writing. According to Schwartz' model, the scenario structure consists of four variables: best case (what we aspire to); worst case (where nothing proceeds according to plan); outlier (a surprise future based on a disruptive emerging issue); and business as usual (no change).

Second, whereas FTH makes use of a reverse-engineered, aspirational, best case scenario only, the futures studies concept of backcasting (Boulding and Boulding, 1995), which is similar to reverse engineering in that one would outline the necessary action steps to achieve the preferred future, challenges the original FTH framework. Backcasting utilizes all four scenarios (i.e., 'best case', 'worst case', 'outlier', and 'business as usual') as opposed to FTH's single-

¹³ Inayatullah, S. (2010). *Futures Studies: Theories and Methods*. Junquera, Fernando G. (Ed.), *There's a Future: Visions for a better world* (Madrid, BBVA, 2013), pp. 36-66.

scenario method. For example, in a worst-case scenario, backcasting would help outline strategies to *avoid* the worst-case scenario, i.e., which action(s) *not* to take. Furthermore, backcasting also incorporates a more extended timeline encompassing both past and present, asking what happened in the last twenty years to bring us to the future. The reflective nature of backcasting stands in contrast to FTH, in that FTH doesn't include any consideration of how one has arrived in present circumstances, in order to help determine how one will proceed in the future.

Third, in futures studies, alternative futures are created first, after which the practice aims to develop an individual or organizational capacity to invent the desired future outcome *within* each multiple future scenario created. For the purposes of this writing, let us refer to this as "vision integrity". This course of action may require a structural change or change in consciousness, depending upon the scenario in question. (Inayatullah, 2013) A capacity to undermine present structures is often useful in creative processes. Fourth, there is the concept of Telos thinking. Telos comes from Greek, and means "ultimate aim" or "ultimate purpose." Telos thinking entails asking one question: "To what end?" As one seeks to solve a specific problem or challenge, this particular mode of thinking introduces the idea of maintaining awareness about what will come after one has addressed the issue at hand. (Wallach, 2017). I liken Telos thinking to my previously expressed concept of "follow through" as is often spoken of when pitching a baseball, executing a dance move, or completing the performance of a musical phrase. In these cases, cognitive awareness of the ultimate aim is essential to the execution of the physical act. Finally, in futures studies, additional inquiry can probe hidden assumptions about future scenarios in search of a supportive narrative or story. Although the basis for content differs, FTH

also utilizes a narrative form of the creative visualization as a means to devise the necessary steps toward achieving the desired outcome.

Even at this surface level analysis, the five points mentioned above (multiple scenarios, backcasting, “vision identity”, Telos thinking, and supporting narrative/story) manage to illustrate how futures studies might be useful in expanding the existing visualization component of the FTH framework:

Futures Studies, Adapted: A Practical Example

While preparing for an upcoming concert performance, I might visualize, i.e., invoke mental imagery of playing a particularly troublesome passage with the desired level of masterful execution. During such visualizations, I would habitually assume that all else around me in the performance environment of the future, imagined scenario is proceeding as planned: the acoustics are perfect, my musician colleagues are performing brilliantly, the audience is attentive. In reality, any number of variations of this scenario is possible, as my "futurist hat" now reminds me. The venue acoustics might force me to play louder or softer than my current practice volume; perhaps the bassist (or any other band member) might lose their way in the composition's form and suddenly drop out. Or, maybe there's a chatty couple in the audience. Any one, or all, of these factors might influence a live performance significantly, and thus, an elementary futures studies modification to the preparation stage triggers a change to my typical practice routine, e.g., by accommodating the possible occurrence of unexpected events. The altered method of running through multiple scenarios, both mentally and in practice, is conducive to the overall pursuit of mastery extension, thereby (presumably) increasing the probability of a successful outcome during the actual live performance.

I see a relation between futures studies and "creative process as a change in perception".¹⁴ In this process, a transformation occurs as one discovers a relationship that wasn't there before. Creative transformation techniques such as 'Magnify, Minify, Modify' and SCAMPER (Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate, Reverse) might also be used efficiently to compose future scenarios, seeking to yield variations of each scenario category (i.e., best case, worst case, outlier, and business as usual) or expanding the sphere of categories considered.

How might we put this into practice, in a manner which makes the pursuit meaningful? The objective here is not to predict the future, but rather to expand a perception of future possibility. The discipline of futures studies calls for us to visualize a variety of circumstances from a variety of perspectives all linked to a historical timeline, doing so as an observer rather than a participant. The detachment of an observer role adds an element of objectivity to the task. At this point we are neither emotionally nor personally invested in an outcome; quite the contrary, instead, the exercise increases the quantity of possible outcomes, and therefore, the magnitude of possibility itself. When approaching each visualized scenario, one might ask, "how do I/we see myself/ourselves in this particular future?" Perhaps, from a developmental or transformational perspective, a richer, more philosophical question wants to emerge, which is, "in how many ways can we see our future self?" The question is non-restrictive, and in that sense, more open and "artful" than the original FTH framework question, sans the underlying, fear-based, risk assessment element inherent to the norm in futures studies inquiries. Thus, moving forward, I see futures studies not as a means of providing answers, but as a means of asking questions.

¹⁴ Davis, G. A. (2004). *Creativity is forever*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub.

B. Systems Thinking (Cybernetics)

At one point during my graduate studies, I began an informal inquiry through which I sought to illustrate personal creativity as an organism. There is a process, and an output – surely the quality of input has a significant influence on output, I thought. I quickly discovered that "input" – i.e., what the creative “organism” consumes, might constitute anything from food to information, and was also related to all things sensory, and that all things sensory are related to environment. In addition to directing my creative inquiry straight back to the 4 P's of Creativity – Person, Process, Press (i.e., environment), and Product, the short-lived exercise reminded me that none of us exists in a vacuum, but instead are quite connected, directly and indirectly. From this position, my inquiry led me to Systems Thinking.

Systems Thinking, as traced from the work of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968) and various contributors around general systems theory, believes a system to be characterized by the interactions of its components and the non-linearity of those interactions (Jackson M.C, 2003 and Walonick D, 1993). As with futures studies, the domain is far too comprehensive to cover in its entirety here. However, in spite of this and perhaps in contrast to futures studies, examples of systems thinking can be observed in the physical world. Here, seeking to extract the most basic concepts:

A system is an organized entity made up of interrelated and interdependent parts, with barriers that define the system and distinguish it from other systems in the environment.¹⁵ A system tends to maintain homeostasis, i.e., to be resilient towards external factors, maintain its essential characteristics, and to make the internal changes needed to protect itself and to continue

¹⁵ Stroh, D. P. (2015). *Systems thinking for social change: A practical guide to solving complex problems, avoiding unintended consequences, and achieving lasting results*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.

fulfilling its purpose. Reciprocal transactions are circular or cyclical interactions in which systems engage, such that they influence one another.

The discipline of systems thinking encourages a shift of mindset so that one can perceive interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and perceive processes of change rather than snapshots. The practice of systems thinking starts with understanding a simple concept called "feedback" that shows how actions can reinforce or counteract (balance) each other. Feedback loops are the process by which systems self-correct based on reactions from other systems in the environment. The development of systems thinking requires a liberation of thought ingrained in past experiences and beliefs. To be an efficient systems thinker involves the discipline of mental models. These two disciplines fit together naturally. Systems thinking concentrates on how to modify assumptions to show the actual causes of problems. Mental models, in contrast, look at revealing our hidden assumptions.¹⁶

Systems thinking demands a sensitivity to the circular nature of the world we live in and attentiveness to the role of structure in creating the conditions we face. It demands a recognition that there are powerful laws of systems in operation that we are unaware of, and a realization that there are consequences to our actions that we are oblivious to. Systems thinking is a disciplined approach to examining problems more thoroughly and accurately before acting. It allows us to ask better questions before jumping to conclusions.

The practice of systems thinking involves moving from observing events or data, to identifying patterns of behavior over time, to examining the underlying structures which drive the observed phenomena and trends. Through understanding and changing structures which are not serving our purpose (including our mental models and perceptions), we can expand the

¹⁶ Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday/Currency.

available choices and create more satisfying, long-term solutions to chronic problems. Systems thinking interventions are appropriate when problems or challenges exhibit the following characteristics: (1) The issue is important; (2) The problem is chronic, not a one-time event; (3) The problem is familiar and has a known history; (4) People have unsuccessfully tried to solve the issue before.¹⁷

Perhaps the most fundamental presentation of systems thinking lies in an analogical iceberg model. An iceberg is of course only partially visible at surface level, with the majority of its mass hidden unseen below the surface of the water. In systems thinking, this visible, "Event Level" is the initial level at which we typically perceive the world, i.e., "what we see". While the tendency is often to address problems observed at this *reactive* event level with a simple readjustment, the iceberg model illustrates how some issues can't be solved by simply treating the symptom at the event level. Moving below the surface, we reach the second, *responsive* "Pattern Level" where we can examine patterns or trends which have been occurring over time. Observing patterns over time allows us to forecast or anticipate events. Perhaps here we have an intersection with futures studies. At the third level, the "Structure Level" we can examine the underlying influence upon patterns. Structures can include something physical (e.g., terrain, roads, walls, traffic lights and signs), organizations (corporations, governments, institutions), policies (laws, regulations, rules, and directives), and rituals or habitual behaviors which are so ingrained that they are not conscious behaviors.

Structural explanations are essential in that they address the underlying causes of behavior at a level where change can affect the patterns of behavior. Structure produces behavioral response and action, and changing underlying structures can bring about different

¹⁷ Goodman, M. (1997). *Systems Thinking: What, Why, When, Where, and How?* The Systems Thinker, Pegasus Communications, 6–7. Retrieved February 6, 2018 from <https://thesystemsthinker.com/systems-thinking-what-why-when-where-and-how/>

patterns of behavior. In this sense, structural explanations are inherently generative.¹⁸ In Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), a generative field is a container of creation and co-creation, a space of empathic understanding from which significant outcomes are born. If we can understand structural explanations and change underlying structures to bring about different patterns of behavior, then inevitably it follows that we can also create new structures which bring about new behaviors.¹⁹

At the fourth level, we examine assumptions, beliefs, and values which people hold about the system and which keep the system in place. This stage is known as the Mental Model level. The term "mental models" refers to the attitudes, expectations, beliefs, morals, and values which enable structures to continue functioning at status quo. These behavioral traits of which we are likely unaware, are often learned subconsciously through the influence of, e.g., society or family (Mugadza, 2015). The mental model level is about seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and seeing processes of change rather than snapshots.

Although systems thinking is far more complex than what will be addressed here (I have omitted, e.g., causal loop and behavior-over-time diagrams, et al.), additional "must know" basic concepts (within the context of this writing) of systems thinking are:

- **Dynamic complexity vs. detail complexity** - Senge (1990) defines detail complexity as a complexity in which there are many variables, i.e., there are many "moving parts".

Dynamic complexity is said to be present when the same action has dramatically different effects in the short run and the long run, or when an action produces one set of

¹⁸ Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday/Currency.

¹⁹ "Creative Orientation" involves building new structures, as opposed to responding or reacting to status quo structures. Fritz, R. (1989). *The Path of Least Resistance*. New York: Fawcett Columbine.

consequences locally and a very different set of outcomes in another part of the system.

Dynamic complexity is when obvious interventions produce non-obvious consequences.

- **Feedback** - refers to how actions reinforce or counteract (i.e., balance) each other; in systems thinking, every influence is both cause and effect. There are three types of feedback in systems thinking: Reinforcing (growth), Balancing (stabilizing), and Delays (interruptions in the flow of influence). I consider my FTH example of attentional focus being a cause of effects due to non-attention elsewhere in the system, as an example of balancing feedback. I.e., feedback can be both negative and positive, for example, in a negative spiral, reinforcing (growth) feedback amplifies the negative aspects of the spiral, a phenomenon which can be labeled as a reinforcing “loop”.
- **Systems Archetypes:** There are roughly nine types of systems archetypes; rather than list and describe these in this writing, permit me instead to emphasize that the existence of archetypes points to underlying, more simplistic components in complexity. Archetypes can be used to identify systemic structures which enable recurring patterns of behavior, the symptoms of which are observable events.
- **Leverage** - refers to the inherent generativity of systemic structures, which enables a leverage point to change or create new structures. Perhaps the most significant insight in regard to the principle of "leverage" in systems thinking, is that it also shows how small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements, if these actions occur in the right place within the system.²⁰

²⁰ Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday/Currency.

A Systems Thinking Narrative

Early in my professional music career, I began to gain fame through my work in Danish television. At one point, I approached a major record label in Copenhagen, presenting my demo recordings in the hope of landing a recording contract. The head of A&R told me, "Bobby, we know who you are, in fact, the entire country knows who you are. We recognize your abilities and potential, but the music of your jazz-instrumental niche is simply not profitable for us. Let me show you something." The A&R executive then pulled up local sales statistics for the leading global saxophone artists at the time. I already knew the recordings of these artists were receiving airplay on commercial radio, and I saw advertisements for their record releases in print media and on ad billboards in the public space. The A&R executive explained, however, that as the local representative of a major, global record company, they were required to maintain a 70/30 percentage split in their product releases, i.e., 70% domestic artists, and 30% international artists which were designated by the mother company. "We're required to promote the international releases locally, and we do it well as you can see and hear, but look at the sales figures." I saw the top three global artists within my genre had sold a couple of hundred units each, nationally. "As you can imagine, the money we spend on promotion relative to sales income means, these activities are unprofitable. It's a tax write-off for us, but we're bound to manufacture, promote and distribute this product regardless."

I began to release my recordings independently, on my own record label, pressing a minimal amount of units. I had no promotional budget, but I made use of the product copies I had and sent promo packages to radio and music venues, and the rest were

gifted individually anytime I met someone who had some type of influence, regardless of whether they were in the entertainment industry or not.

The first thing I noticed was how people's perception of me changed, immediately. Even with people who knew me well, respected me and my musical abilities, I could see their eyes light up when they held a product in their hands, with my name, face, and creative credits on the cover. In their eyes, I was instantly transformed from a talented saxophonist into a composer, arranger, music producer, recording artist, and business entrepreneur. Nobody ever asked how many copies I had sold; they only asked if I would sign their copy.

The second thing I noticed was that I began receiving career offers and opportunities of a qualitatively higher level, i.e., more “in tune” with my core aspirations. The tendency continued as I maintained what was largely a promotional practice, until literally from one day to the next, I graduated from being a hired hand in the band to being appointed as a musical director for television, with both creative and fiscal responsibility for program entertainment. My duties included talent selection and recruitment, liaison with artist management and record labels, composing and recording theme music for television, arranging music for artists guesting the program, and performing with these artists, many of them global names, on broadcast television. In short, I was doing everything my record cover said I could do.

If we examine the above narrative from a systems thinking perspective, at the event level, I had pursued what was visible, judging from what I saw in magazine ads, on billboards, and heard in radio broadcasts, but in reality, the record contract was a non-existent opportunity. I wasn't able to see this until I explored below the surface by speaking with the A&R executive.

There was a structure in place (the record company in the “gatekeeper” role) which impeded the realization of my goal. I was able to create a comparatively similar outcome at event level by creating a new structure through producing my own record albums, which as it turned out, was more advantageous from a business perspective. The same royalty I would earn as a contracted artist at say, 10,000 units, I was able to pay myself with 80% fewer units sold. And yet, the alternative outcome at event level, i.e., having an album on the market is not the whole story. My first musical director position with a national TV broadcaster can be traced directly to a handful of the record albums I placed in the hands of work colleagues who happened to be TV executives, but who had not previously perceived me in a leadership role, despite having often heard me perform in clubs, appearing as the headline artist and leading my own band.

We can analyze this transaction of events starting with someone who pursues a recording contract in the expectation of earning a living via record sales, which at the time was a commonality in my professional circles. This turns out to be a non-starter but nonetheless results in a record album - which is used primarily for handouts resulting in zero income, although enough sales occurred to break even. Three to five albums end up in the hands of people who are modeling an opportunity; as a result, I am viewed as a viable candidate and am headhunted for the job. The albums have a total retail value of \$30-\$50, however, by receiving and accepting the opportunity which in several incarnations lasts twelve years, my earnings are exponentially higher than what a record deal would have yielded, times several hundred thousand. On top of this, the initial, single opportunity spurns a wealth of additional career opportunities. The chain of events perhaps illustrates the principle of "leverage", i.e., small, well-focused actions which produced significant, enduring improvements.

In a perfect world (for example, through a controlled experiment), we could replicate the event level (i.e., “perception”) - structure - causality formula, again and again. However, causality (appearing here as dynamic complexity) is in itself unpredictable; structures can be "invisible", and perception can be biased. The aspect of unpredictability and the role played by perception inspire me to draw a connection between systems thinking and futures studies (as does the use of narrative to explore a complex system). Futures studies uses multiple scenarios as a tool to model future behaviors; here, I’m thinking of the “outlier” scenario in particular, as a means through which to perceive and account for unpredictability. Futures studies, through its nature of employing the imagination to construct multiple scenarios, is connected to creative visualization, which is the starting point of FTH. What I am suggesting here, in an effort to progress beyond FTH, is that rather than select one framework over the other, the overlaps between futures studies and systems thinking indicate there may be a way to incorporate both (or all) frameworks simultaneously, each working to complement the others.

An additional interesting aspect, relative to my concern with “change” in FTH context, is that the real-life solution described in the above systems thinking narrative would most likely be obsolete today, due to massive disruption in the music recording industry, which illustrates the essentiality of adaptability in regard to conditions which change over time.

C. Design Thinking

Design Thinking is a process utilized by designers to solve complex problems and find desirable solutions for their clients. The designer mindset is said to be solution-focused rather than problem-focused, and action-oriented towards creating a preferred future. Design Thinking draws upon logic, imagination, intuition, and systemic reasoning, to explore possibilities of what could be—and to produce desired outcomes that benefit the end user, customer or client. When

adapted to business, Design Thinking utilizes elements from the designer's toolkit such as empathy and experimentation, in search of innovative solutions. In Design Thinking, decisions are based on a concept of future end-user wants. Actions are evidence-based rather than instinctual. Design Thinking considers everyone who devises courses of action focused on changing existing situations into preferred ones, to be a designer.²¹

At first glance, the Design Thinking matrix appears to be an adaptation of Osborn's Creative Problem Solving template, also known as the Thinking Skills Model.²² Published Design Thinking templates seem to lack, or perhaps assume familiarity with, the body of knowledge attached to the Design domain. Without this specific, connected body of knowledge, Design Thinking might be considered a context-based, solution-focused utilization of the creative problem-solving method.

Osborn's five-point Creative Problem Solving (CPS) template involves fact-finding, problem-finding, idea-finding, solution-finding, and acceptance-finding. Perhaps one could view the five points as dealing with (1) a fact-based, objective reality, (2) an empathic understanding of issues surrounding the reality being examined, (3) generation of ideas regarding a desired future state, (4) proposal, and perhaps implementation of one or more of the generated ideas intended to realize the desired future state, and (5) an evaluation of whether or not the desired future state has been realized to satisfaction. Over time, the five-point CPS model has evolved to a more straightforward, three-point model accomplishing essentially the same objective through similar mechanisms, i.e., knowing and understanding as much about the present state as possible, generating ideas toward altering the current state to a preferred future state, and finally, prototyping a solution for implementation. In both models, learning is gained through

²¹ Naiman, B. L. (2014). *Design Thinking as a Strategy for Innovation*. Retrieved April 10, 2018, from <http://www.creativityatwork.com/design-thinking-strategy-for-innovation/>

²² See illustration in Appendix I on page 84 of this document.

prototyping and implementation, and if necessary, the cycle is repeated until a satisfactory state is achieved. The process is reminiscent of the three primary Action Research cycles, i.e., (1) Evaluation, (2) Proposal & Planning, and (3) Implementation. Action Research also includes epicycles which involve (1) reflection & dialogue, (2) looking ahead, and (3) constituency building.²³

Thus, Design Thinking appears to be a rendition of creative problem solving frameworks adapted to the field of design. With a three-point process described as “Inspire, Ideate, Implement”, it wouldn’t surprise me if the term “Design Thinking” was coined to enable a power play on behalf of its key proponent, the otherwise reputable Palo Alto, California-based design firm IDEO. As design in itself is a field which requires mastery, I’m wondering if innovation-hungry business organizations who are enamored by the results and track records of design thinking consultants, might find themselves unable to produce similarly striking results using a design thinking template without knowledge of, and mastery in, the principles of design as employed in the field of design. In general, the field of design strikes me as utilizing a combination of the cognitive, the intuitive, the aesthetic, the logical, practical and systemic, along with knowledge and skill within the manipulation or crafting of these integrated aspects within a particular medium, material, or environment. Without design knowledge and awareness, or any body of knowledge, or some semblance of core competencies, how much is there to feed inspiration, ideation, and implementation?

Perhaps because I reside in a country (Denmark) renown for its design, I was left with a feeling that the essence of design was absent in descriptions of Design Thinking. I contacted one

²³ Taylor, Peter J and Szeiter, J. (2012). *Taking Yourself Seriously: Process of Research and Engagement*. (p. 37). Arlington, MA.: The Pumping Station.

of the finest designers I know, graphic designer, educator, and author Christina Bruun Olsson. Christina and I worked together years ago, on a project where we helped create a visual identity for a startup. Christina was the head graphic designer for the contracted design agency; I was hired by the client company as a creative go-between to help translate and communicate the company's needs and desires. My recollection of the experience is that Christina and I had much in common as creative practitioners, a commonality which served the design process up until the point where a divergence in our areas of expertise emerged, and it was clear that I was a musician/composer, and Christina was a designer. I remember watching in awe as Christina revealed the company's new visual identity (it is entirely possible I might have composed a musical sound identity based on the same information), a logo which had been created according to various descriptive attributes attached to the company and its principal products: a series of salon pianos designed by world renown Danish designer Poul Henningsen in 1931. The miraculous was, it was as if the logo had been there the whole time. The result resonated instantly with all involved, both aesthetically and emotionally. Christina Bruun Olsson explains:

"I establish dogma, rules, or boundaries within which one can move freely. Drawing up such principles or boundaries helps place a limit on the many available possibilities, and enables me to justify creative choices.

De-composing (or deconstructing) is one of the most important methods in my design process. There can be many levels and perspectives in this progression, both visual and verbal. One of the first points in a process such as this is to translate the tangible and/or visible to language, i.e., words which describe form, color, and materials, but also language which helps personify and generate associations through storytelling, something which can be a stepping stone into a deeper exploration of creating form, a way of paraphrasing. One specific, primary tool I use for creating form is contrast, e.g., in shape, size, or style, and so on.

It's probably rare that designers involve the client in their processes as I do. But I believe insight promotes understanding, and all of the thoughts and associations, etc., which I've had along the way are important to share with the client, as these help substantiate the emerging result with personality, flesh, and blood.

When I say that I don't see this as an artistic process, it is partially because emotions don't control the way forward. The course of action is built up over a scaffolding of design methods and tools, and these steer me in a direction which I probably wouldn't have chosen on my own accord. Refinement in the design endeavor transpires through the means of design aesthetics, and craftsmanship.”²⁴

From Christina's account, I'm extracting (1) the creation of a value-based, generative space within which there's free movement to act; (2) the usage of storytelling to interpret pre-defined values upon which action is based; (3) the sharing of insight, for the benefit of others outside of the generative space, to promote understanding of actions proposed upon the basis of vision, and finally, (4) a carefully administered process which enables specific, emotionally detached and possibly less-biased courses of action to be guided through connection to a body of knowledge and craftsmanship. Once again, I'm getting the sense of overlaps occurring, now between design thinking, systems thinking, and futures studies. The characteristics of narrative and vision reappear in design thinking, as does a relation to “otherness” or connectivity, and possibly also a concern with biased perception.

According to Design Thinking, everyone who devises courses of action focused on changing existing situations into preferred ones is a designer, however - and perhaps I'm arguing semantics, my experience is, Christina designs, I compose, yet we both create. Based on the exact same process, our outcomes would diverge substantially, due to our differing practitioner domains. While I am drawn to core properties of Design Thinking such as folding an empathic understanding of discernible values into course-of-action prototyping, I am now moved to explore an additional complementary discipline which, although not grounded in a solution-focused methodology, seems essential to the creative process of producing viable solutions: the acquisition of skill or mastery within a domain. Mastery or expertise within a skill, craft,

²⁴ Excerpted from a conversation on April 10, 2018 with graphic designer, author, and educator Christina Bruun Olsson.

competency, or body of knowledge, whether in the field of design or otherwise, seems essential if one is to “design” anything at all.

9. Artful Mastery And Flow

The FTH seminar urges its participants to take action, maintain their strengths, work to eliminate their weaknesses, and that daily steps, however small they may be, will eventually lead to the finish line. It is in this component of any outcome journey, 'doing the work required', that many experience a stall in progress. We stall by either failing to initiate action, by being impeded in taking action, by taking ineffective (or inefficient) action, or by failing to maintain effective action. **In simpler language: we don't begin, something gets in our way, whatever we're doing isn't working for us, or we don't persist.** The apparent objective is to administer a process, i.e., launch a course of action which is enhanced by a body of knowledge, competency, or craft.

At the beginning of any such course of action, there may be areas in which we lack resources, e.g., skills we don't have (enough of) which are in need of development. Assessing the available resources at hand, areas which need improvement, and which tasks should be delegated and when, calls for a state of mind where one can critically evaluate strengths and weaknesses from a perspective of truth, honesty, and objectivity, without bias, and for the purpose of incremental, long-term progression. Perhaps the concept of a “growth mindset” is applicable here, i.e., the belief that one can learn and develop new skills. This particular “growth” state of mind, based firmly and objectively in the present, might seem to stand in direct contrast to the non-restrictive, freely imaginative, creative visualization mindset characterized earlier in this writing; they are, of course, the same mind. Perhaps it should be labeled as a “generative”

mindset instead, i.e., having the power or function of generating, originating, producing, or reproducing.²⁵

Wanting to create something isn't quite the same as being able to create it. That which we want to create may be far off or just outside of our reach, regardless of skill level. Christina Bruun Olsson's perspective regarding a process enabling specific courses of action in a value-based, generative space within which there's free movement to act, guided through connection to a body of knowledge and craftsmanship, piques my curiosity. Perhaps cognitive psychology may help delineate possibilities for tackling the challenges of moving beyond hopeful optimism, to personal empowerment.

Earlier in this writing, I referred to the three phases of skill acquisition in traditional cognitive psychology theories: (1) an initial "cognitive" phase of learning the underlying structure of an activity, and clear feedback regarding what aspects must be attended to, (2) an "associative" phase where an acceptable (in this case, professional) level of performance is attained, and (3) a third, "autonomous" phase, where the goal is to achieve effortless performance, and where expert performance continues to improve as a function of increased experience and deliberate practice. Perhaps it's relatively straightforward to imagine how these phases apply to learning how to drive a car, how to play chess, or how to play a musical instrument. But if one were to approach an ability to learn, grow, develop, and change one's habits or behaviors as a skill, I'm curious as to how these three phases might correlate with the acquisition of a mindset enabling one to initiate action, effort, or an endeavor, and persist sustainably over the long term, regardless of any obstacles encountered underway.

²⁵ Definition of "generative" according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

Three fundamental concepts emerge for me through an exploration of cognitive psychology in relation to skill acquisition: neuroplasticity, deliberate practice, and flow. The concept of neuroplasticity (or neural plasticity) involves the brain's ability for change, and that radical improvements in cognitive functioning, e.g., how we learn, think, perceive, and remember, are possible throughout one's lifetime.²⁶ According to the concept of neural plasticity, it is said that with every repetition of a thought, emotion, or action, we reinforce a neural pathway. A neural pathway is a series of neurons connected together, enabling a signal to be sent from one brain region to another. The use of such a processing pathway increases the processing fluency of that pathway, and with each new occurrence of that thought, emotion, or action, we begin to create a new way of being. These small changes, repeated frequently enough over time, lead to changes in how our brains work. It is worth noting that there is some skepticism regarding neural plasticity, and perhaps the concept is best viewed as a helpful metaphor for seeking to understand what might be actually happening in the brain. The objective here is to communicate that essentially, the brain seems to adapt to three basic types of change: (1) the brain strengthens current behaviors; (2) expands or modifies existing behavior patterns; and (3) accommodates entirely new behaviors.²⁷ As a frame of reference in this writing, the brain's capability for adaptation to change is the focus, rather than exactly how adaptation to change takes place.

In FTH context, it occurs to me that learning how to carve out time for a new activity while simultaneously engaging in that new activity, presents a dual behavioral modification challenge, which is maybe why some stall in taking action. I recall my FTH client whom I

²⁶ Doidge, N. (2007). *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the frontiers of brain science*. Carlton North, Vic: Scribe Publications.

²⁷ Damasio, Antonio (2010). *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*. London: Vintage.

challenged to start the day five minutes earlier, for five minutes of sketching activity. Perhaps what we're trying to establish here is the construct of a generative, conscious space within which to nurture a generative mindset. And possibly, there's also a qualitative difference between "making time" and "making space" for an activity. We can't, in reality, create time; time just is. We can, however, create and form space, both physically (an atelier, for example, is a room designed for creative activity) and consciously, through directing attention, and setting boundaries for directing attention – as occurs in meditation, or any mindful pursuit. Either way, the atelier metaphor is helpful in both directions: perhaps the physical atelier is merely a manifestation of the conscious atelier. I might have suggested to my FTH client that five minutes of mindful, creative visualization within her chosen activity would be equally as purposeful, or more so than five minutes of random sketching. My thinking at the time was that any step toward progress was better than no step at all. I'm uncertain as to whether this is the case.

In terms of acquiring, maintaining, and extending skill, expertise, and mastery, the principal challenge is to induce stable, specific changes which allow for incremental improvements.²⁸ The second concept, *Deliberate Practice*, is a structured activity which helps provide guidelines for such incremental improvements. However, expertise (or mastery) itself does not transfer across domains, and even within a domain, expertise can differ. Therefore, the nature of deliberate practice can vary across domains, as well as within domains. Nevertheless, perhaps a few general guidelines can help us begin forming a conscious space within which to nurture a generative mindset. *Deliberate Practice*, (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1999) as I have experienced it in the domain of music (e.g., in instrumental performance) involves:

²⁸ Ericsson, A. K., Charness, N., Feltovitch, P. J., & Hoffman, R. R. (2006). *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Having explicit goals which help frame specifically where or upon what, effort will be focused.
- Feedback, often by way of coach or teacher, which ensures the subject of focus is executed appropriately.
- Effort which supports a commitment to whichever action is involved in improvement of the skill.
- Concentration, i.e., the quality of attention, consciousness, or awareness utilized by the learner to bring about the change in performance behavior.
- Intrinsic motivation, which, studies have shown, is enhanced by autonomy. Giving a learner choices (including ones that are not important to the task) results in their sense of agency and of being in control. People succeed better when they are autonomous – even when it involves more effort.
- Time limitation, to avoid burnout. The quality of action, effort, and/or concentration needed to exceed previous limits can only be sustained in measured increments of time (varies depending upon activity).

According to these principles, if one has the goal of embarking upon new action, for example, in response to a New Year's resolution, the macro goal (new action) needs to have micro goals defined. Let's say I decide to learn a new language. This objective involves beginning (*requiring motivation*) by determining which language (*explicit goal*) to learn, and then finding (*effort*) reputable (*feedback*) teaching resources, and sifting through the possibilities (*concentration*) in order to make a suitable decision (*feedback*). All of the above requires that a period of time be set aside for the necessary research; if the search does not yield immediate results, the *effort* must be repeated (*new micro goal*) again (*explicit goal: determine a new time*

slot for the activity). And I haven't yet begun to learn a new language, which in itself is a process with a separate set of challenges. It's easy to see why initiating new action or behavior is so difficult: doing so often requires a great deal of pre-thought and pre-action before we perform the intended action or behavior. Accordingly, wanting to create something enough to embark upon the journey implies that what we want to create has to be important to us, before we can do the work required. But what if the work itself was enjoyable? Is there a way to "craft" work to become a task that pulls us in, instead of being a chore to be overcome? The question brings us to the third concept, *Flow*.

As the central thesis of his book, "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience" (1990), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi defines flow as a state in which we are involved in an activity to the extent that nothing else seems to matter. A flow experience is so enjoyable we will persist even at high cost, for the sheer sake of the experience. Complete absorption in a chosen task characterizes the Flow experience, along with an energized sense of enjoyment and focus on the process of the activity. Csikszentmihalyi identifies nine elements of flow repeatedly observed throughout his research.²⁹

- Clear goals, with a clear purpose, and an understanding of what to do next.
- Immediate feedback to action, enabling a sense of knowing how well the task is progressing.
- A balance between challenges and skill such that the task is neither too overwhelming nor too easy. Problems which are overwhelming relative to skill result in anxiety, functions which do not challenge one's skills can result in boredom.
- Action and awareness are merged, with concentration centered on the activity.

²⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Distractions are excluded from awareness, consciousness, and attention, with focus directed on the task at hand, enabling one to set aside unease that can cause anxiety or depression.
- In a flow state, one is too involved with the task at hand to be concerned with failure.
- In a flow state, self-consciousness disappears, as involvement in the activity diminishes attention to protecting the ego. Letting go of the Self can strengthen flow, and possibly result in a connection to something larger than oneself.
- Flow can distort one's sense of time, as in "time flies when you're having fun"; similarly, time may feel as if it's slowing down at the moment of execution of an action for which one is highly trained and skilled.
- Activities and tasks become "autotelic", i.e., they are performed as an end within themselves and enjoyed for their own sake.

Consider this: our brain (for example, via neuroplasticity) allows us to strengthen current behaviors, expand or modify existing behavior patterns, and accommodate entirely new behaviors. There are plenty of available examples of the phenomenon, e.g., via historical observation of social, cultural, and global changes in human behavior over, say, the past one hundred years, or an overview of a child's behavioral developments from birth until adolescence.

One method of accommodating new behaviors, or perhaps more accurately, modifying existing behavior, is to approach doing so as an acquisition of skill or expertise - as is often the case in learning something new. However, in this particular circumstance, the expertise we seek to acquire is one which allows us to form a generative, conscious space, e.g., just as my FTH client was challenged to create a conscious space quantified by an initial time measurement of five minutes. Once space is created, that is, when we know that we are habitually able to place

our consciousness in the space in order to devote quality attention, we can then focus quality attention toward any specific activity, while in the space. This reminds me of an idea I've explored through other work, in which I suggest that the more profound quality of awareness from which improvising musicians in a jazz ensemble operate, is perhaps facilitated via an enhanced ability to first direct and sustain consciousness in the present moment, thereafter allowing them to explore a deepening of consciousness within that present moment.³⁰ In other words, one has to be present in the generative space, in order for something generative to occur.

There are numerous overlaps between deliberate practice and flow, e.g., explicit goals, feedback, quality and focus of attention (rendering multi-tasking as useless). Four things stand out in a comparison of deliberate practice and flow: (1) the role of autonomy in intrinsic motivation, (2) the relationship between skills and challenges, (3) the absence of failure and self-conscious ego as a concern, and (4) autotelicity, i.e. enjoying the activity for the sake of the activity. I'm advocating the idea that all of this can be integrated and achieved artfully through bringing the best version of Self, ability, and capability to the work. So perhaps, when embarking upon a long-term journey toward a creatively visualized, desired future state, the first step involves a detachment from the macro goal via a choice of our own making; a decision contingent upon something we are capable of and over which we have control; something we enjoy wholeheartedly, yet wish to improve through consistently bringing the best we have to offer to the table in the given moment, and that doing so empowers us, and enriches our lives.

10. Toward An Outcome-based Framework Synthesis

The above thinking seems to align with Self-determination Theory (SDT), a macro theory of human motivation and personality concerned with inherent growth tendencies and innate

³⁰ Ricketts, B. (2018). *Deep Listening At The Eye Of The Needle: Music Improvisation & Co-creation In The Social Field Of Presencing*. Gunnlaugson, O. (Ed.), *Presencing Theory U, Book 3: Collective Perspectives on Presencing*.

psychological needs. SDT focuses on the motivation behind choice as it occurs without external influence and interference, and the degree to which individual behavior is self-motivated and self-determined. Disability literature, for example, defines self-determination in numerous ways, particularly as a fundamental human right.

Four essential characteristics are evident in self-determined actions: autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. A behavior is said to be autonomous when an individual acts (a) according to their own preferences, interests, and abilities, (b) free from undue external influence or interference, i.e., independently. Autonomy also takes into consideration the interdependence of family members, friends, and others with whom one interacts daily, as well as systemic influences such as environment or culture. Self-determined individuals are self-realizing in that they use a comprehensive, reasonably accurate, knowledge of themselves, their strengths, and limitations to conduct themselves in such a manner as to capitalize on this knowledge beneficially.³¹

As humans, we are born with the means through which to be self-determining in our actions, i.e., to be autonomous, self-regulating, self-realizing, and capable of psychological empowerment. We have inherent capabilities to imagine, adapt, improvise, and create, to the extent that these capabilities are considered human rights, e.g., to pursue life, liberty, and happiness, free from undue external influence or interference. However, as an inherent component of our nature, we possess self-inhibiting cognitive biases which counteract intrinsic capabilities to progress throughout life, of which failing to recognize our biases is perhaps the most frequent perpetrator.

³¹ Wehmeyer, M. L., Kelchner, K., & Richards, S. (1996). *Essential characteristics of self-determined behavior of individuals with mental retardation*. American Journal of Mental Retardation : AJMR, 100(6), 632–642.

The FTH methodology was an initial attempt to beneficially utilize such inherently human capabilities to the best of my cumulative abilities, toward overcoming perceptual limitations of self-inhibiting bias, in search of a means by which I could explore what I considered to be untapped personal potential. Curiously, perhaps due to cognitive bias, I looked toward vocational intervention as a means by which to explore my untapped potential. Although in my FTH creative visualization, I was by default afforded an opportunity to see past vocation. If vocation is an instrument for providing income, security, and finding some manner of purpose in life, and income and security were given circumstances in my visualization scenario, it is entirely possible that a quest to explore untapped personal potential is in reality, a quest to discover Purpose. I would wholeheartedly evaluate my FTH journey as being fruitful and did in the process inadvertently stumble upon new pursuits which have added purpose to my life. Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of FTH was that the experience of living the methodology enabled me to discover its weakest attributes, which ultimately, also proved to be my most vulnerable personal traits.

11. Thinking Critically About Creativity

I view this purposeful quest, and perhaps quests in general, however purposeful (or not) as a creative act. The FTH journey involved imagination (or fantasy, had it been unsuccessful) in its visualization; reverse-engineering in its construction; trial and error in its process; cause, effect, hindrance and aid relative to my surroundings; the ultimate outcome was realized through intention. When a toddler gains awareness of their mobility, and an exploration quest commences within the surrounding, protected environment, each discovery represents an outcome characterized by increased empowerment. In both cases, the symbiosis between components – subject, setting, action, and result - corresponds to the four P's of creativity,

defined by Mel Rhodes as four distinct areas, Person, Process, Press, and Product, which influence the occurrence of creativity:

"The term person, as used here, covers information about personality, intellect, temperament, physique, traits, habits, attitudes, self-concept, value systems, defense mechanisms, and behaviour."

"The term process applies to motivation, perception, learning, thinking, and communication."

"The term press refers to the relationship between human beings and their environment."

"The term product refers to a thought which has been communicated to other people in the form of words, paint, clay, metal, stone, fabric, or other material. When an idea becomes embodied into tangible form it is called a product."³²

I consider an “outcome” to be synonymous with a “product”, e.g., thoughts can be (silently) communicated via intentional action toward a desired state; a manifestation of the intention, whether total, partial or by fluke, is an outcome. Failure is also an outcome, often one of learning, providing the necessary insight leading toward realization. Perhaps the toddler struggling to grasp a toy just outside of reach, and the artist painstakingly guiding the stroke of a brush across a canvas, experience a similar emotion of triumph upon successful realization. Seen in this light, it is difficult to determine which is the most vital component of the four P's. Western culture might have us focus on the tangible outcome, i.e., successfully grasping the toy or completing the artful stroke, but perhaps the intangible outcome, in this case, a sense of triumph, accomplishment, or empowerment, is the more valuable outcome.

As far as creative acts are concerned, and somewhat resistant to the idea, as design thinkers, for example, suggest, that any one single framework or methodology might present a solution for every situation, I am instead drawn to the idea of nurturing behaviors, or, in collective contexts, nurturing a culture of behavior which can support the realization of desired

³² Rhodes, M. (1961). *An Analysis of Creativity*. The Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 42, No. 7, pp. 307-309. Arlington, VA: PDK International.

outcomes. The term “social architecture” is synonymous with the conscious design of infrastructure or environment intended to encourage a range of behaviors which help achieve a goal, set of goals, or collective goals.³³ I am visualizing a social architecture, not necessarily as a physical environment, but as an environment of consciousness which seeks to nurture a generative field within which a range of (co-creative) social behaviors beneficial to the realization of corresponding desired outcomes are encouraged. The specific social architecture of which I speak is a creatively-oriented synthesis inspired by elements of Futures Studies, Systems Thinking, Design Thinking, and Cognitive Psychology as discussed in the course of this writing.

12. The Autonomous Realization Tetrad (ART)

Once I hear a musical sound in my head, I do whatever is necessary to sustain the auditory imagery until I can sit at the piano and work at bringing the imagery to life. The sounds may appear randomly, but they aren't random sounds. They are musical tones, often comprised of dense, rich textures which evoke emotional meaning inside of me. I hear sound, feel an emotion, and am subsequently moved to bring the mental imagery to life. On other occasions, the imagery is absent. I'll have to disregard the noise of thought concerning what I should create, what others are creating, or wondering if I still can create - until I remember, the only thing holding me back at this moment, is myself. I then move my fingers gently across the keys, until an impulse emerges to play a note, any note. And another, and so on. Perhaps this a way of saying, "no, not that" until I can say "yes" to the potential of what might be. Yes, this is what I want to create.

"What do you want to create?" is a question inspired by Robert Fritz' book, *The Path Of Least Resistance*. In the book, Fritz explains the concept of creative orientation, a sort of artistic

³³ Wikipedia contributors. (2018, March 24). *Social architecture*. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved March 24, 2018, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_architecture

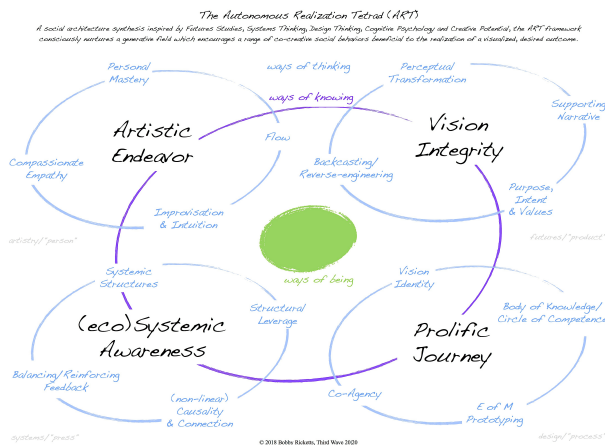
license to create whatever one desires, in juxtaposition with reactive/responsive orientation, which is similar to action occurring at the event or pattern level in systems thinking, where events are symptoms of underlying patterns caused by systemic structures.³⁴ The thought noise of speculating over what one should create, what others are creating, or wondering if one can create at all, are examples of reactive/response orientation, i.e., impulses to take what may often be fear or angst-based action in reaction or response to potentially misleading input from one's environment (as per my 'Systems Narrative' on page 36). Fritz explains systemic structures from the standpoint of harmonic musical structure, however, in spite of my theoretical knowledge and practical experience in music, I find it much easier to comprehend the concepts of systemic structures and reactive/responsive orientation through an understanding of systems thinking which is easily supported by observing one's surroundings.

Thus, in a situation where recognition of an impulse for change occurs, i.e., there is an awareness of wanting to alter the present state to something else, a natural step is to imagine some rendition of the future desired state. For example, in a survival situation, there are physical, physiological, and psychological reactions and responses to hunger, some of which we can't control. Perhaps we have some rations which alleviate short-term needs. However, recurring hunger at an unacceptable rate as rations diminish is a pattern we might see as being caused by a lack of a stable food source. Something else needs to happen, and the solutions are to be found via creative orientation. Perhaps we might seek to hunt, fish, gather berries and nuts within the immediate environs or begin migrating with the intent to discover a stable food source and relocate within its vicinity. We might then speculate concerning how to hunt or fish more efficiently, how to cultivate food sources, or how to stockpile food reserves.

³⁴ Fritz, R. (1989). *The Path of Least Resistance*. New York: Fawcett Columbine.

By this account, we can begin to see how humans have developed over time, adapted to their environment, created tools for survival, and have learned how to use these tools. For each step throughout history, whether individually or collectively, someone, at some point in time and in recognition of a present state in need of change, had to imagine a future desired state. There were undoubtedly innumerable blunders and accidental discoveries along the way. However, a thought such as "there has to be a better way of doing this" is a variation of the question, "what do I, or we, want to create?"

I see a connection to the four P's of creativity, i.e., there is a Person in an environment (Press) who visualizes an outcome (Product), devises a means through which to achieve the outcome (Process), masters the means through which the outcome should be achieved, and works toward it using the process within the environment, until realization. I then see a cognitive progression from ways of thinking, which through iteration becomes ways of knowing, until a fluency emerges and becomes a way of being.



Developing the concept further into the construction of a generative space, I imagine myself (and encourage you to imagine yourself) in a circle, with four surrounding components distributed equally, e.g., north, east, south, and west (or wherever you choose to imagine them,

e.g., northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest). Component 1 represents Creative Visualization of an outcome, component 2 represents Creative Processes, component 3 represents Personal Mastery, and component 4 represents (eco)System. Within this tetradic

social architecture³⁵, there is autonomy to draw upon each component, or allow each, individually, in combinations, or collectively, to nurture behaviors which enable the realization of a desired future state of one's choosing. Each tetrad component (and I will rename these components shortly hereafter) has four fundamental properties. The explanation for the component origins and their features is as follows:

I. Vision Integrity

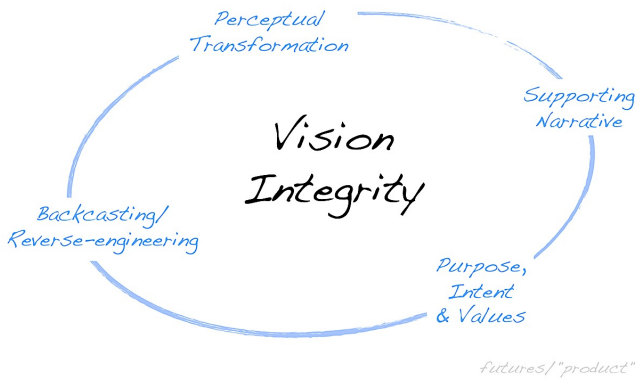
FTH methodology allowed me to identify a long-term goal, outcome, or desired future state (all three designations are applicable). Based on a self-written narrative derived from a "utopian" creative visualization scenario, all basic needs, etc., for my closest circle and I were eliminated as areas of concern, enabling me to focus on a "heart's desire" state. Unable to see the way forward to reach the desired future state, I then reverse-engineered a plausible path back toward my present state. When I was able to recognize what once was a future desired state as being my new present state, an evaluation of the reverse-engineered path versus the journey in its reality was helpful in charting next steps, or "follow-through".

Along the journey toward the future desired state, I found myself in a situation more than once, where it was required to reflect upon exactly what was or wasn't important about where I was heading, and why. Also, as I increasingly encountered unknown territory, I often found that opportunities, when manifested, did not always appear as they had been imagined or visualized. "Flying blind" at this point in the journey, I found it vital to define motivation according to values, intent, and purpose. The alternative would have been clinging to an ideal image, the reality of which proved to shift from culture to culture, e.g., from American, to European, to

³⁵ The Autonomous Realization Tetrad is illustrated with a larger image in Appendix ii on page 85 of this document.

Japanese, to East African. Values, intent, and purpose, however, were able to remain intact throughout the journey.

For these reasons, I've named the component Vision Integrity, to remind of the



importance of vision authenticity, values, and purpose. The component represents Product (as an outcome or future state) in the four P's of Creativity, and is where creative visualization takes place, via the question, "What do I/we want to create?".

The fundamental properties of the Vision

Integrity component are inspired by futures studies:

- *Perceptual Transformation* when directed upon the vision, addresses our blind spot, i.e., our habitual worldview perception, its cognitive biases, as well as social and cultural inhibitors. Futures studies with its multiple scenario perspectives and creative transformation techniques such as SCAMPER or Magnify, Minify, Modify (Davis, 2004) help us "attend to the situation with fresh eyes" (Scharmer, 2009), and "see what's not there". Creative visualization becomes an information gathering process, with the core difference that what might be considered "non-rational" means (e.g., meditative/spiritual vision, imagination, fantasy) are equally valid as methods through which we learn or explore alternative ways of perceiving the world, working toward an authentic, rather than ego-driven vision.
- *Supporting Narrative* is used in futures studies, design thinking, and systems thinking. The supporting narrative was also one of the most important characteristics

of the FTH methodology, as "storytelling is central to human existence, stories inspire and motivate us, and serve to tell us what we think is important in our lives."³⁶ The emotionality of storytelling or supporting narratives functions as a navigational guide. An authentic supporting narrative resonates within, and can be revisited, reflected upon, amended, (e.g., by striving to incorporate precise language), and augmented to build upon and extract meaning.

- *Purpose, Intent, and Values* are teased out and extracted through *Perceptual Transformation* and *Supporting Narrative*. For example, I find that exposing a creative vision to an outlier (e.g., dystopian) scenario, serves to illuminate the extent of one's will to realize the desired future state.
- *Backcasting/Reverse-engineering* utilized as an element of the supporting narrative both serve to answer the question, "How did we get here (to the desired future state)?" The difference between the two is that backcasting may be unrestrictedly imaginative, whereas reverse-engineering, in spite of the imaginative aspect, seeks toward a certain logic, practicality, or probability.

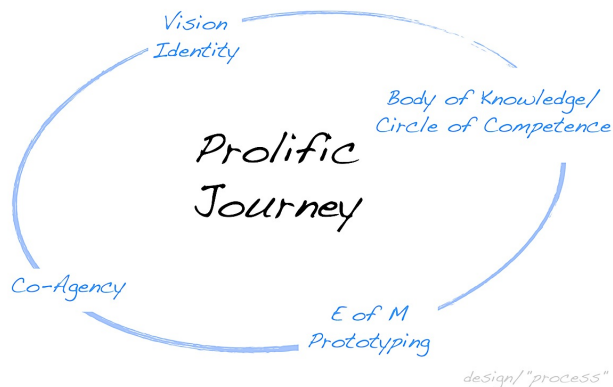
II. Prolific Journey

Representing Process in the four P's of creativity and inspired by design thinking, the Prolific Journey component is named for its dedication to long-term commitment, immersion, persistence, and iteration. Its fundamental properties are:

- *Vision Identity* as the daily embodiment of Vision Integrity and its values, purpose, and intent, which trace the perimeter of a value-based, generative space, (i.e., the social architecture) within which there's free movement to act.

³⁶ Excerpted from p.22 in chapter 7 of this document, "Reflections On The FTH Learning Experience".

- *Body of Knowledge/Circle of Competence* help institute a carefully administered process which enables specific, emotionally detached and possibly less-biased courses of action to be guided through connection to through craftsmanship.
- *Economy of Means Prototyping* asks the question, “What action can we take *now* toward realizing the outcome, using the means at hand?” Action steps are determined according to Vision Identity and carried out utilizing the available body of knowledge or competency.
- *Co-Agency* is the sharing of intent, actions, progress, and learning with an inner circle. Whereas stakeholders and constituents have a vested interest in outcome and



may therefore be intentionally or unintentionally prone to manipulation according to a personal agenda, co-agents are impartial. A co-agent’s sole interest is to see one succeed. They function as a confidential sounding board, a mirror, or a perception other than one’s own. Co-

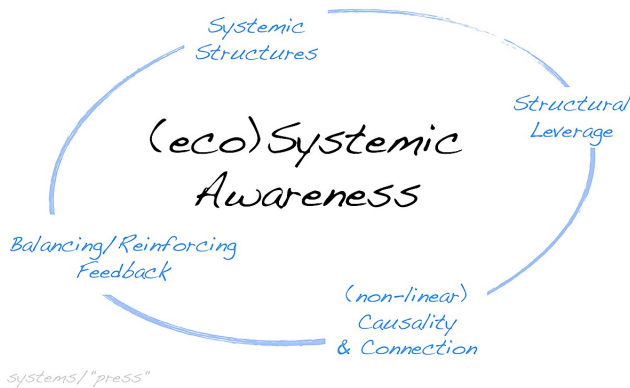
agents do not advise, but instead seek to understand, ask questions to further their understanding, offer perspectives on various courses of action, and in doing so, contribute to one’s own learning and clarification of thought and ideas.

III. (eco) Systemic Awareness

Representing Press in the four P's of creativity and based on systems thinking, the (eco) Systemic Awareness component reminds us that we do not operate in a vacuum. (eco) Systemic Awareness, in correlation with the discipline of systems thinking, encourages a shift of mindset

so that one can perceive interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and perceive processes of change rather than snapshots. The component's fundamental properties are:

- *Systemic Structures* drive observed phenomena and trends. They are the underlying causes of behavior at a level where change can affect the patterns of behavior.



Through understanding structures and the assumptions, beliefs, and values which are

held about the system and which keep the system in place, we can change those structures which are not serving our purpose (including our mental models and perceptions). If we can understand structural explanations and change

underlying structures to bring about different patterns of behavior, then inevitably it follows that we can also create new structures which bring about new behavior (Fritz, 1989), thereby expanding available choices for action.

- *Structural Leverage* refers to the inherent generativity of systemic structures, which enables a leverage point to change or create new structures. It is through structural leverage that small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements, if these actions occur in the right place within the system. (Senge, 1990)
- *(non-linear) Causality & Connection* awareness nurtures a sensitivity to the circular nature of the world, and attentiveness to the role of structure in creating the conditions we face. We are reminded of the powerful laws of systems in operation that we are unaware of, and that there are consequences to our actions about which

- we may be oblivious. We are encouraged to take a disciplined approach to examining problems and issues more thoroughly and accurately before acting. (Senge, 1990)
- *Balancing/Reinforcing Feedback* refers to how every influence is both cause and effect, and how actions can reinforce or counteract (balance) each other. Feedback loops are the process by which systems self-correct based on reactions from other systems in the environment. There are three types of feedback: Reinforcing (growth), Balancing (stabilizing), and Delays, which are interruptions in the flow of influence). Feedback can be both negative and positive. (Goodman, 1997)

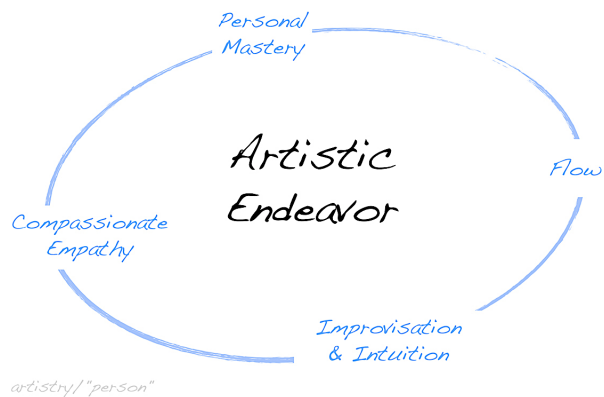
IV. Artistic Endeavor

Research in cognitive psychology uses the terms "expertise" and "mastery" interchangeably, whereas, given my expertise or mastery in music, I observe cause to distinguish between the two. In fact, I'd like to take it a step further and designate four categories of skill acquisition, from lowest to highest: expertise, mastery, artistry, and eminence. To the best of my knowledge, there isn't yet any research indicating cognitive psychology researchers are following suit.

I believe artistry can exist anywhere, in any domain. Whereas I see expertise and mastery flatline relative to a domain's professional standards, artistry, in my perspective, extends above and beyond. When you hire an expert, you have a right to expect expertise. Often there is somebody who in comparison is clearly able to execute the same task at a level above the expert without diminishing the expert's expertise, surely that must be mastery. Then once in a while, you might encounter an individual who does something expertly and masterfully, but with that extra *je ne sais quois* that renders the experience as being unforgettable. Perhaps that is Artistry. Rarer than mastery, but less rare than the most eminent productive output of a Picasso, Einstein,

or Coltrane. Representing Person in the four P's of creativity and drawing upon cognitive psychology, the tetrad component Artistic Endeavor seeks to bring the generative mindset of artistry into the social architecture; that extra investment of oneself, or perhaps one's best Self, individually or collectively as a group. Its fundamental properties are:

- *Personal Mastery* involves an ability to incorporate and practice new or modified actions and behaviors, through a capability to persist deliberately, constructively, and adaptively. Ultimately, the purpose of creative visualization in ART context is to



determine and influence actions and behaviors in the present which are conducive to realizing a desired future outcome. The probability of realization seems reliant upon the application of a creative process to a domain in which one

has acquired skill or mastery as well as the will to extend one's skills, or acquire new capabilities.

- *Flow* (and the ability to maintain Flow) enables sustainable progression throughout the Prolific Journey, and is quite possibly the factor which often can transform the journey into something more valuable than the outcome destination.
- *Improvisation & Intuition* enable adaptation and agility nurtured through mastery which has evolved from ways of thinking, to ways of knowing, to ways of being. Both are as much about awareness as they are about execution, and provide a vital link between Person, Process, and Press (i.e., environment/ecoSystem) on the quest toward Product (outcome).

- *Compassionate Empathy*, an essential leadership trait, is an emotional intelligence which provides space for mutuality, the sharing of experience, dialogue, and reciprocity.³⁷

The four components of the Autonomous Realization Tetrad are each meant, initially, to support new ways of thinking. As I begin to incorporate ART in my daily life and work, I'm discovering that the more often each component is revisited, including its fundamental properties (and quite possibly, the underlying disciplines which have inspired each component), the easier it becomes to embody the concepts in a manner which over time should enable fluid shifts at will, between the tetrad's components.

What I'm imagining here is the development of a habitual behavior resulting in a conceptual familiarity with ART, with the intention of familiarity being to encourage a change in how we perceive the world and our environment. We might then begin to understand events and patterns as products of the belief systems and attitudes which allow the corresponding systemic structures to remain in place; begin to see how our actions affect others, whether intentionally or unintentionally; begin to understand how and why we encounter resistance. Ultimately, if we become proficient enough in the application of these new ways of thinking, we might then be able to start folding rationality, reason, and sensory intelligence into intuitive behaviors, following the cognitive progression from Ways of Thinking, to Ways of Knowing, to Ways of Being.

Eventually, thinking and sensing are meant to become trained, yet openly adaptive behaviors upon which action is based. The Autonomous Realization Tetrad components and their supporting, fundamental properties are meant to encourage a steady, balanced means (integrating

³⁷ Goleman, D. (2006). *Social intelligence: The new science of human relationships*. New York: Bantam Books.

felt-sense, rationality and reason) for questioning and changing less beneficial behaviors while reinforcing and extending beneficial behaviors which move us toward realizing a desired future outcome or state, in symbiosis with our surroundings and ourselves. A social architecture synthesis drawing upon elements from Futures Studies, Systems Thinking, Design Thinking, and Cognitive Psychology, ART seeks to consciously model a generative field which encourages a range of co-creative social behaviors beneficial to the realization of a desired outcome.³⁸

13. Navigating ART

The illustration of ART included in this document is a work in progress, the latest of several versions. The ideas and concepts outlined above haven't emerged out of the blue, but are instead the result of an inquiry into issues which have arisen from living the FTH experience and reflecting upon the methodology's imperfections during the past ten years. FTH itself was a **synthesis of two creative techniques, i.e., visualization and reverse-engineering**. The FTH journey was one of complexity, involving, e.g., creative processes of problem-solving and solution finding, acquisition of skill, as well as encounters with both restraining forces and driving forces (Lewin, 1951). During this learning journey, I found myself navigating an unfamiliar social field of alien cultures with adhering customs and social norms, within which I sought to establish personal equilibrium while undergoing a work/life transformation. It is perhaps for these reasons I was able to discover a correlation between the strands of creativity, sociology, and psychology research which influence the tetrad's architecture in its current rendition, and personal observation and experience.

While developing a means by which to communicate the social architecture, its components, and properties over the past several months, I've had several opportunities to field-

³⁸ The Autonomous Realization Tetrad is also illustrated in Appendix ii on page 85 of this document.

test ART as an informal observer in organizational development, startup, and SME (small and medium enterprise) settings. The majority of cases are still ongoing. However, there is one SME case example of short-term resolution which may provide insight regarding ART's potential impact. The chosen narrative style respects an agreement of confidentiality.

The two partners of the SME in question were in non-constructive conflict with each other, with only one of the partners acknowledging the conflict. I was asked to advise the acknowledging partner, whom I'll refer to as Partner 1. The other party involved in the dispute is referred to as Partner 2, with whom I have not had any contact.

The fact that I was called upon can be said to be in *reaction* to the most recent conflict event. Therefore, the logical move was to navigate toward the *(eco)Systems Awareness* component of ART. According to Partner 1's account, this was the latest in a series of negatively-spiraling conflicts (a reinforcing loop), - bringing us to the 'Pattern' level of the Systems Thinking iceberg model. An inquiry at the structural level revealed Partner 2's belief system regarding social status (Partner 2 perceiving itself entitled to superiority over Partner 1) was most likely the cause of a consistent set of behaviors which triggered reactive behavior from Partner 1 in objection. An effect which in turn caused negative reactive behavior from Partner 2, and so on. It was determined there were no means by which to leverage the systemic structure – this would require that Partner 2 both acknowledge the conflict and confront an ingrained belief regarding social status.

Thus, the natural question to ask Partner 1 was, "What do you want (to create)?" Shifting us to the *Vision Integrity* component. Partner 1 visualized a future desired state, which was then subjected to best-case, status quo, and worst-case scenarios (as per futures studies) writing brief supporting narratives for each. After teasing out possible combinations of values, purpose, and

intent, Partner 1 felt none of these resonated and requested a reflection period. A few days later, Partner 1 returned with a modification of the original future desired state; we worked with these, and this time around, were able to formulate resonating values, purpose, and intent.

We then encountered a hiccup. I had imagined extracting a *vision identity* for integration into the *Prolific Journey* component, whereby Partner 1 would assume the identity, working toward an immediate, initial step toward the future desired state. However, Partner 1 realized this would not be possible without the cooperation of Partner 2, who still had yet to acknowledge any form of conflict. (As a side remark regarding the *Prolific Journey* component, my role might be regarded as that of a *Co-Agent*.)

Drawing a blank in the *Prolific Journey* component, we turned our attention to the component entitled *Artistic Endeavor*. I suggested that from a perspective of Personal Leadership, i.e., “being the change you want to see”, Partner 1 should examine which changes could be made on a personal level. Two courses of action were decided: (a) that current patterns of reactive/responsive behavior on Partner 1's part should cease (leaving this up to Partner 1 to evaluate how), and (b) Partner 1 should claim “equal space” in the generative field, i.e., that perhaps in response to a perception of being treated inferiorly, Partner 1 might actually be reacting and responding as an inferior would to a superior. First steps for action were outlined, and thus a new, sub-state vision emerged, focused entirely on Partner 1's *personal mastery* over own behavior. The *Prolific Journey* component process was altered to nurture Partner 1 toward achieving *vision identity*, which is one of the component's fundamental properties.

The first several post-intervention status reports reveal that Partners 1 and 2 are currently working together harmoniously and productively. Partner 1 does not consider the situation entirely resolved, as Partner 2 has yet to confront a belief system incompatible with a fruitful

partnership. Partner 1, however, is emerging as a more effective co-leader of the SME; perhaps this is an example of an emerging, new systemic structure for the company, which ultimately may prove to be the solution required for long-term conflict resolution.

Partner 1's field of vision did not, at the outset, include a possibility of looking inward to influence own behaviors, but was instead focused on the actions of Partner 2. In retrospect, one might ask, aren't there other methods by which to reach an identical diagnostic conclusion, implying the same action steps toward bringing about a similar state of affairs? Perhaps there are. However, in the case of the Partner 1/Partner 2 SME conflict, the negative spiral and its reinforcing loop was a restraining force prohibiting a progression toward resolution.

The utilization of ART as a diagnostic and interventional tool enabled a beneficial change in the partnership's interactional dynamics in less than a week. It will be interesting to follow the SME's future activities, to assess whether the changes remain sustainable in the long term.

In addition to the above case example, I have had numerous conversations with *Co-Agents* within my inner circle, with the objective of stress-testing ART through inquiry based on randomly-formulated scenarios. From these conversations, what seems to be emerging is two possible angles of approach to the tetrad. First, an intrinsically-motivated, creatively-oriented perspective of the desired future state, based on the question, "What do I/you/we want (to create)?" Perhaps an alternative catalyst might be, "What am I/are we curious about?" The second, and perhaps most common approach, seems to be from an external, responsive-reactive systems perspective, based on an event, or series of events, which require action or intervention. Through *(eco)Systemic Awareness*, we might observe the event, examine the degree to which the event is part of a pattern, identify the structure causing the pattern, and determine which attitudes, beliefs (including limiting self-beliefs), and values allow the structure to continue

functioning. At this point, a natural step seems to point toward identification of a desired future state, and therefore the question arises (once again), "What do I/you/we want (to create)?" The exploration of potential then shifts toward mental imagery of a desired state and its values and purpose, through examination of multiple, narrative-supported scenarios. We are no longer engaged in responsive-reactive mode relative to an event symptomatic of deeper causes, but instead seeking to nurture behaviors which either leverage the systemic structure, or create a new structure.

Unbiased perception seems vital throughout: are we seeing the problem objectively? Systems thinking views structures as objective (and therefore potentially generative) in that intent lies with the belief or behavior supporting the structure and not with the structure itself. Likewise, unbiased perception seems equally vital to identifying the desired future state. As such, perhaps there may be a need to toggle between the tetrad's components in search of authentic values and Purpose, i.e., "*vision integrity*", before prototyping possible action steps.

I emphasize the importance of an "*economy of means*", i.e., which immediate action(s) can be taken to support a shift toward the desired future state? Desired future states with a long-term time horizon may require resources not yet in place. Nonetheless, there always seems to be at least one immediate action with our means, even if this initial step is merely to gather more information or understanding of the situation or circumstance, prior to re-prototyping action steps for implementation.

My *Co-Agents* and I continue to examine ways in which to enter the generative space from each of the tetrad's components, using a governing question as a catalyst. For now, the chosen question for the *Vision Integrity* component is, "What do I/we want to create?"; for the *(eco)System Awareness* component, "What external event do I/we see which calls for

intervention?"; for the *Artistic Endeavor* component, "What aspect of myself/ourselves do I/we wish to master?"; and finally, for the *Prolific Journey* component, "What warrants my/our willful commitment?". The task of formulating a governing question for each component, and, whether or not governing questions are the way, or only way into the generative space is an ongoing inquiry.

Approaching ART via 'Vision Integrity'

Suppose my dream is to produce music in the hope of reaching an international audience. Imagine now, in a dystopian, "outlier" futures scenario, that all music has been outlawed by a global authoritarian political system, under penalty of death. Remember there are no extremes or limits to rationality, reason, or fantasy in futures thinking. Furthermore, let's "stress" the scenario by injecting a "We" element, i.e. "we are a resistance cell". In this dystopian scenario, we, the resistance cell, are contemplating the operation of an underground "speakeasy" (or a linked system of global speakeasy cells) through which we can secretly provide music (as a reminder of a more enlightened world for which we fight) to other members of "The Resistance". We are, however, worried about the safety of our families and how they would be provided for in the event of our absence, were we to be prosecuted or worse. We are therefore hesitant to risk our lives (and the lives of others) by providing audible (live) music performances in a closed, secluded venue easily tracked and surrounded by armed representatives of the oppressive state authorities.

This simple, off-the-cuff paragraph of supporting narrative provides vital information:

- *There is a systemic structure in place preventing the open distribution of creative music "product".*
- *The music we will create or supply has an underlying mission or purpose.*

- *We are willing to take risks and oppose the status quo, short of risking death, or the lives of others.*
- *Any course of action on our part will have to take the interests of our families into consideration.*

Operative keywords are “mission”, “purpose”, “calculated risk”, “pragmatism”, and “resistance”.

Via the (eco)Systemic Awareness tetrad component, we imagine a means whereby the oppressive systemic structure is circumvented, through the use of digital technology. Music in digital formats consists of 0's and 1's and is therefore not illegal in the dystopian scenario. The nodes of highest vulnerability occur during music-making, confiscation of digital information during transmission, and end-user music consumption. For now, let's assume we've figured out how to make music secretly, without detection. Our Prolific Journey calls upon us to figure out an alternative method of digital encryption which self-destructs if accessed through status quo encryption methods, and to share design plans for how to erect undetectable workstations for producing and listening to music. To further minimize risk, the entire distribution network would need to be decentralized. Reverting once again to (eco)Systemic Awareness, or perhaps via Backcasting in the Vision Integrity component, we examine historical events to learn more about how the European resistance organized itself and communicated during World War II, or how communities which frequented speakeasy's during the U.S. Prohibition Era were formed and avoided detection.

Economy of Means as a fundamental property of the Prolific Journey component now suggests that we attempt to prototype our ideas in actuality, leading us out of the fictive future scenario and back to present reality. How might we take immediate action toward realizing our

dream? Let's begin with as objective a view as possible. "We" belong to a generation of musicians who have lived through a variety of recorded music distribution forms. We've seen vinyl singles and albums, cassette tapes, 8-track tapes, CD's, digital downloads, and now digital streaming, which in many ways is a form of radio, driven by user choice and algorithms rather than the musical tastes of radio DJ's. Although we've seen recorded music formats disrupted numerous times, and find ourselves mid-disruption regarding digital business models, perhaps we, and many industry veterans like us, are biased or limited in our view of how to create alternative music distribution models. The supporting outlier narrative above could be viewed as analogous to a distribution model which we have never considered, and therefore the distorted concept or transformation technique has value for us as creators and business owners. As long as we have the legal right to distribute the library of music at our disposal, present reality does not inhibit this activity. In addition, the internet enables creators and international audiences to connect with each other, a structural driving force in our favor.

"Our" initial thought for a prototype model is to view the scenario as a game. To emulate the encryption aspect, we imagine deconstructing a single master recording (i.e., the final product of a music recording which consumers are accustomed to streaming or downloading) into several sub-mix components which together comprise the whole. A user, subscriber, or listener would then be challenged to "unlock" various layers of sub-mixes by answering multiple-choice, genre-related, music trivia questions, emulating the element of "secret knowledge" required to be considered a member of the underground "resistance" community. Only those who are "in the know" can access the music recording as its whole, as intended by the creator. The dystopian scenario might include an element of disseminating propaganda and false information. To emulate this characteristic, a creator using the game

might allow others to incorporate sub-mix elements into "new" creations which are unlike the originally-intended version. Perhaps within the game platform itself, all trading of "information" might be a free activity; any extraction of information from the game environment to the outside world could result in creators being paid, at present via downloads, streaming or sync licensing to film and video. Blockchain technology would keep track of original creators and co-creators, while individual users could become curating distributors who "push" their favorite versions of self-customized music mixes via social media, earning a small percentage in the link of blockchain transactions.

The narrative above, composed within minutes as a quick stream of consciousness riff on the dystopian future scenario, represents a viable model for digital music delivery. If “we” were to pursue the game concept further, there are plenty of indicators for daily action. Naturally, we'd have to work out the gaming aspect, meaning we'd either need to acquire knowledge of the gaming domain or find a collaborative partner. Unfortunately, we also know very little about blockchain technology, except that all transactions are traceable. Progress here we would again require knowledge of the domain, or contact with a suitable collaborative partner. Concerning music creation, a skill in which “we” fortunately have acquired a certain level of mastery, we might begin thinking in terms of various sub-mixes or re-mixes, whether or not we pursue the gaming aspect. In this manner, what was formerly one creative "product" might become four or five "product" versions. This concept is a potentially effective method of providing extended products and services to “our” current audience, or expanding our current audience to new listeners more attracted to the music "styles" which emerge as a result of "deconstruction". Regardless of the path chosen, new, constructive habits, practices, and behaviors need to be formed and nurtured. At this juncture, within the *Artistic Endeavor* component, the fundamental

property of *Personal Mastery* would enter the picture to help us acquire the skills mentioned and to do so while in *Flow*.

14. Next Steps

Perhaps the ultimate test of ART will begin shortly, as I enter the next chapter of my life, the "follow-through" to Stage 1 education, Stage 2 application, and Stage 3 emergence. Perhaps this next chapter will present itself as an element in a cyclical progress, e.g., as a stage of application subsequent to the past two and a half years of graduate level education. Perhaps an unforeseen fourth stage will emerge, wherein I am no longer boxed in by socially or culturally-influenced self-identity, e.g., as a musician or creative, but rather as a human being, living in interconnectivity with other human beings. I suspect my first steps will be to enter the generative ART space through *Vision Integrity* by asking myself, "What do I want to create?" I will also be examining the applicability of ART as a creative consultant within the context of business and organizational development, and as a 2.0 version of FTH when facilitating seminars.

Additionally, I will be working toward the development of ART as the basis for a graduate-level, personal/professional development course, and C-Suite Executive Performance Training Program. A potential title for the course might be "Creative Empowerment". The course rationale is based on an observation that most of us seem not to have considered what our highest aspirations are, whether personal or professional. It's quite possible that, given an opportunity for a project-based learning experience of our choice, we might choose that which seems applicable to whatever is right in front of us, before our eyes. Instead of merely taking the next step, the course would encourage participants to reach longer, higher, or engage more profoundly regarding long-term aspirations, beyond what is readily achieved. Small actions have

a potential to create significant change; perhaps it is of great value to explore how to initiate small steps toward one's highest aspiration, once we discover what that aspiration is.

The ART-based Creative Empowerment learning journey might include:

- Early identification of a project topic, and weekly assignments which, through recommended course texts, require an exploration of the subject matter upon which ART is based,
- Immersion within each of the four tetrad components and their fundamental properties, using the project as a vehicle for learning (project-based learning),
- A final project presentation which touches upon the four ART components, i.e., Vision Integrity, including a supporting narrative; a description of an associated Prolific Journey; outlining Artistic Endeavor, including incremental steps for Personal mastery and Flow, and; (eco)Systemic Awareness, including potential action/realization impact upon interconnected people and environments.
- A mid-way work-in-progress presentation, and a course learning evaluation.

Within CCT context, for example, the course might be offered under the headline of “Reflective Practice” or “Seminar in Creativity”. Courses in Creative Thinking, Cognitive Psychology, and perhaps Philosophy, might be considered as recommended prerequisites. To fulfill these next steps regarding course development, I imagine, as a first step, having to learn more about course design in accordance with various criteria for college accreditation.

15. Concluding Thoughts

Twenty-something or so years ago, I thought I had “made it”; by all signs of what I could perceive at the time and had dreamt of as a teenager, this was the case. Then, within the same week, an irritating spoiled-brat, trust fund supported, twenty-something jazz innovator-wannabee

music conservatory student accused me of being complacent. Shortly after, in a completely unrelated incident, a wiser, older friend peered at me through his reading glasses and asked, “Bobby, has it ever occurred to you, you could be more than you are?” Truthfully, at the time, it had not, and the realization caught me off guard. What irked me most about the spoiled brat was, I knew he was correct, but those who have yet to accomplish have no right to chastise those who have. Or maybe uninformed indignance, the arrogance of ignorance, is the best trait of younger generations, to keep their elders honest and hungry.

There I was, once again, deeply entrenched in the comfort zone. No longer a three year-old being unknowingly led to pre-school, but a young adult with a family of his own, and a career. What do you do when you (foolishly) think you’ve done it all, is exactly the same question as “what do you do, when you don’t know what to do?”. Not knowing what to do can be the result of being overwhelmed by the magnanimity of possibility, or an inability to perceive any possibility at all, either because one is not looking, or one can’t see clearly. Both states seem to lead toward inaction, and possibly also a tendency to rationalize the current status quo, perhaps with, “Well, things could be a lot worse.”

On three different occasions in my adult life, I’ve found it necessary to pause temporarily for recalibration. Was I on the right path? In spite of everything being O.K., all things considered, something felt off. The second “recalibration”, or period of reflection lasted four months and resulted in the FTH methodology. The third recalibration is still ongoing, not as a pause in activity, but in search of a more contemplative way of living. Relatively recently, while discussing these periods of recalibration with a *Co-Agent*, the question arose regarding whether it might be possible to find a way of being which didn’t require periodic recalibration. A way of

remaining firmly rooted in the present, while simultaneously aware of present action being in alignment with a chosen path toward a higher aspiration.

Through my experience as a musician I have observed it is possible to assemble a group of masterful musicians in the generative space of a rehearsal or onstage venue, without prior instruction or communication regarding repertoire or musical direction, and expect each to artfully, warmly, openly, and generously perform co-created works of music on the spot. As musicians, we enter the generative space with a spirit of desire to fulfill our highest aspirations of artistry in performance. Naturally, each has engaged in thousands of hours of deliberate practice beforehand, often enabling confident, joyful achievement of their objective. Masterful musicians, especially jazz musicians, nurture creative, musical habits and practices which help facilitate a capacity to engage the uncertain and complex circumstances of improvisational performance, in pursuit of a higher artistic aspiration.

I think there is a part of our soul that we humans save for the most intimate experiences, the places where we feel most comfort, and the people with whom we feel most secure. Exposing this part of the soul makes us vulnerable. I find often that the musicians I perform with bear their vulnerability with a confidence in mastery that allows a giving spirit. This artful, musical way of being seems to find its equilibrium in the present moment while simultaneously leaning aspirationally toward a desired future state, neither complacent in the present nor anxious regarding the future. This way of being, brought to the generative space, includes vision, endeavor, connectivity, and a journey. It is difficult to say that one component is more important than another. The whole seems greater than the sum of its parts; this occurrence, when it happens, is emergence, representing the potential of the generative space.

How might this look outside of a musical context? Quite recently, I was nominated and chosen as a finalist to receive an honor. Selection of a sole honoree would take place by interviewing the final candidates. There wasn't a logical means by which I could prepare for the interview, as I was not aware of the selection criteria. However, I felt I should do something to prepare for the interview. Realizing that the names of the selection committee and their organizational affiliation was made apparent through the email addresses included in the notification of my nomination, I conducted some research on each person. Who were they, what did they stand for? I reviewed the information about myself which had been submitted on my behalf, in order to have a sense of what may have prompted their selection. I then found photos of the venue where receipt of the honor was to take place, and imagined myself standing on stage, addressing the crowd assembled in the venue. What might I have to say to the people assembled, based on my sense of who I am today, relative to what was communicated through the profile information of my past?

When I entered the video-conferenced interview, I was on familiar ground. I recognized the faces of the people sitting across from me in the virtual room, and had respect for their accomplishments. I was prepared to speak about the topics chosen from my profile information. When they asked how I would address the audience if selected, I recalled the mental imagery of myself in the room, and felt ease in providing my response to the question.

This method of preparation was identical to how I would have prepared to enter the generative space if unexpectedly called upon for a critical musical performance at short notice. I entered the unknown comfortably, without any control over, or attempt to control, the proceedings or outcome. The familiarity and ease felt in the situation is what I would describe as knowing-in-not-knowing. As good fortune would have it, I was awarded the honor. That,

however, is not the point. The point is, had I not been awarded the honor, I would have known that I had entered the space wanting to contribute value, bringing the best of my ability, that extra investment of oneself, and my best, present Self. And perhaps for now, this is the closest I can come to describing the artful way of being, outside of a musical context.

As one who is fascinated by Big Ideas, and perhaps ART is one such big idea, I will continue to model my curiosity toward an ideal that somewhere in the enclosure of consciousness between fear, anxiety, uncertainty, overwhelmingness, and the warm, felt-sense jacuzzi of contentment, curiosity, openness and wonder, exists a generative field of potential where anything can happen, and where we quite possibly can, if we so desire, form our lives in a manner which allows us to co-exist and thrive by way of deliberate, self-determined action. If only we can maintain an unobstructed, authentic field of vision without being hampered by ego, emotion, irrationality, cognitive bias, social and cultural press, and perceptual limitations - while maintaining a zest for life, that which the French call *joie de vivre*.

The concept that we are endowed with "certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" is an aspirational concept, formulated in The United States Declaration of Independence. In the context of this historic document, prosperity, thriving, and well-being provide one interpretation of the word Happiness. The document limits its provisions to "the pursuit of", i.e., we have the liberty to pursue happiness, it is not something provided for us. The social experiment of letting my imagination fly without limit or restriction in order to write a narrative describing the future my heart desired, and then setting out to follow a path toward what had always felt beyond my reach and means, was one of the most liberating actions I've ever taken, the ultimate pursuit of happiness. I am of the opinion that once in a

lifetime at a minimum, whether we act upon it or not, all of us should at least contemplate what our highest aspirations are, and how we would go about realizing them.

From isolated islands off the coast of Madagascar, to rural villages in East and West Africa, to global metropolises such as Dubai, London, New York, Paris, or Tokyo, it is my observation that most of us spend our days and lives in the endeavor that we, our families, and our communities, may prosper, thrive, and experience well-being.

We are already engaged in the pursuit of what is, essentially, a Big Idea.

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Appendix
i. (39)

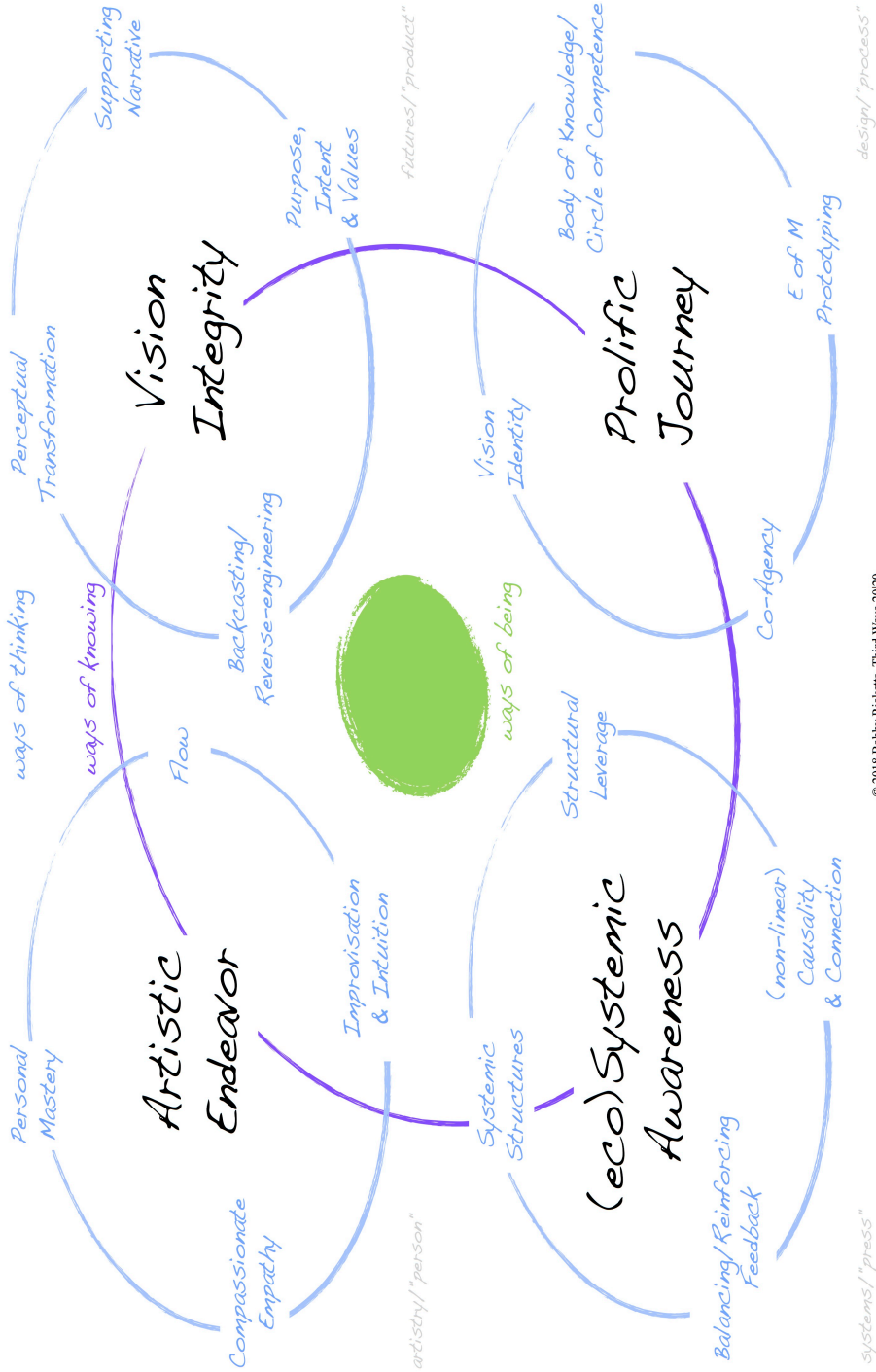


³⁹ Sources: Davis, G. A. (2004). *Creativity is forever.*; Waloszek, G. (2012). *Introduction to Design Thinking.*; Simon, H. A. (1996). *The Sciences of the Artificial.*; Dam, R. and Sian, T. (2018). *Design Thinking: A Quick Overview.*

ii.

The Autonomous Realization Tetrad (ART)

A social architecture synthesis inspired by Futures Studies, Systems Thinking, Design Thinking, Cognitive Psychology and Creative Potential, the ART Framework consciously nurtures a generative field which encourages a range of co-creative social behaviors beneficial to the realization of a visualized, desired outcome.



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