

# EMBRACING CHANGE THROUGH ART, DESIGN & NEW LEADERSHIP



The radio reporter couldn't suppress her amazement when she heard that Dutch entrepreneurs successfully ran a school for creativity in China. "But China was already a very creative society more than thousand years ago", she argued. "And now you are teaching them how to be creative?!" Her guest politely reminded her that in the middle of the 20th Century, Communism took power. Since then, creativity was erased from the collective mindset. It took the communists less than a century to eradicate creativity from an ancient culture that thrived on it for thousands of years. While they talked on about the ins and outs of this school, it became strikingly clear how vulnerable any system becomes when creative expressions or contributions are banned.

In 2011, according to ArtReview magazine, the Chinese dissident Ai Weiwei was called the most powerful artist in the world. He was arrested and persecuted by the Chinese government, quickly beoming a symbol for both, the Human Rights struggle in China, and its forever changing landscape. With his nonconformist creative utterances, Ai Weiwei powerfully challenged a totalitarian and homogenising system. He states, "Creativity is the power to reject the past, to change the status quo, and to seek new potential. Simply put, aside from using one's imagination - perhaps more importantly - creativity is the power to act."

Konstantin Dimopoulos is one of WeiWei's kindred spirits. He is a social and performance artist whose artworks are grounded in his sociological and humanistic philosophies. "As an artist I think in images", he says. "These installations are my 'voice' about global issues, a visual platform to effect change."

For many, art has been simplified to just an aesthetic experience, however, it can go beyond that. Art can offer a way of viewing different realities. Various creative minds have presented us our history through a largesarray of lenses, while simultaneously, presenting us with the inspiration to realize the future.

Less obviously, but with even more determination, the Western world has moved art out of our daily lives and into places devoted to the consumption of culture. They have reduced us to a form of entertainment or performance, which, for obvious reasons, should not be completely integrated into society. It has been made an exclusive rather than an inclusive, experience. If we want to be amused or provoked, the only place for us are museums, theatres or art galleries.

What if it is the artists and their creative fellows we ultimately dependent on to create a sound future?

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## Beautiful losers

Although managers and directors were fully aware that innovation depends on creativity, there were seldom company policies promoting creativity, and certainly no budgets reserved for such things. Creativity was seen as something that belonged to artists and therefore, in studios and places we could visit, and with all this we systematically curtailed ourselves.

All this happened contrary to the many known examples of how representatives of arts and design have made important contributions to solving complex problems. They are the people that think laterally and put forward the kind of disruptive questions no one else asks. They often had to fight a lack of open-mindedness, and therefore, often chosing to live within the margins of society. As mentioned above, censorship and excluding certain forms of art by dictatorial regimes only underlined the influence on society and its way of thinking.

## So, what are the artists doing banned to the outskirts of society as eccentrics, freaks or beautiful losers?

Works of art confront us with different ways of perceiving the world, and encourage us to redefine our reality. Unconventional approaches or points of view help us to see beyond the borders of our own imagination. Artists bring in the element of play, not as thoughtless entertainment, but as a way to do things differently. Artists work tend to open new paths of experiences and sensations for its viewers.

In the past, artists were also scientists, traders or statesmen. Artists like Da Vinci, Su Song, Benjamin Franklin and Archimedes are just examples. In modern times however, these crafts are set a part, one having little to do with the other. We believe that art and science hold equal wieght, however, in reality, in the past centuries, science has truly held the stage<sup>1</sup>. The real irony here, is that they each need the other more than ever. In facing so many complex or 'wicked' problems, we are entering an era in which the noncommittal character of many issues is reduced to zero, where humanity is more at stake than ever. We need breakthrough thinking. We need the boundless curiosity, unconventional views, intuitive improvisation and imaginative capabilities that artists and designers deliver. However, we have to re-establish our relationship with this group. They need to sense an authentic position of equivalence.

The importance of art and design for our society is still heavily underestimated. We tend to capitalize on experts and scientists when issues become difficult or complex. There is a lack of appreciation of art and design in their true meaning. How many business- or statesmen, well-respected politicians, and scientists have an easy entrance to the world of art and design? How many of them have artists in their contact list or on

their LinkedIn profile?

As sustainability-related questions are posed by the depletion of natural fossil resources, banks seem to have reached their perishable date. Globalization is making every problem world wide, technical inventions have an increasing impact on our lives. Governments fail and lose confidence, but there is no time to waste. Failing to involve art and design in finding solutions for sustainability, and in realizing the inevitable systemic transition to the securing of and enlargement of global humanity is no longer an option.

It's not only about embracing change but also about inviting change; About creating many little changes that diffuse and act. The issue with Utopia is not if we'll ever reach it, it's about the journey to Utopia. Utopia is like the stars: we can never reach it but we can profit from their presence.

The key issue is that we should no longer travel without good company. We must invite art and design on our journey because our future depends on it.

## New leadership

The future is in our hands. There are no Gods, Kings or Queens to lead the way; no established rules or fixed truths. There is movement. In the fluidity of the movement we perceive the non-duality of reality. We are on the move. We are free to choose what we think, who we are, where we are going, what we want to do, and so on. What is our evolution telling us? Where are we now? And why is it so difficult to embrace change?

Embracing change demands new leadership. As Senge<sup>2</sup> et al. (2004) stated, "The changes in which we will be called upon to participate in the future will be both deeply personal and inherently systemic. Yet, the deeper dimensions of transformational change represent a largely unexplored territory both in current management research and in our understanding of leadership in general...not the what and the how - not what leaders do and how they do it - but the who: who we are and the inner place or source from which we operate, both individually and collectively." So participation in future-related challenges does not depend on expertise or skills, but on personal characteristics.

It's not only art and design, the results of a creative process that can help us create a better future, but also the artists' and designers mind, and their ways of thinking and approaching issues. New leaders need an open mind for creative contributions of all sorts to ensure sustainable growth.

We need new leadership to overcome our connectivity paradox in which we, on the one hand, are living in a society of globally connected and technologically enhanced human beings, 'always on' for twenty-four hours a day. On the other hand, we are becoming more and more mentally, physically and

spiritually disconnected and always 'off'. We've become unreachable and off track. The critical issues we are facing cannot be solved unless we turn this around. The high rate of obesity, new kinds of man-driven / progress-driven diseases and psychosomatic disorders, depression, burn out and addictions of all sorts are the outcome of a self-destructive on-going process that is progressively draining our human potential and resources.

New leadership will enhance collective ambition and synergy, not excluding but including, all the possibilities we have and most of all, our imaginative potential. We'll have to be able once again to see solutions and a bright future that is inviting us to make it a reality. Like the minds of many creative artists and designers, we have to picture for ourselves what is not, but what can be. Creativity needs direction. As Seneca said "For he who doesn't know which port to sail to, each wind is unfavourable." We have to stop acting like a full-grown elephant thinking the rope prevents us from moving around because it did so when we were just a new born calf. Maybe this is best summarized by Carter Phipps<sup>3</sup> (2012) as he said:

"... a new worldview and the people who are consciously engaged in its creation. Working across different contexts and disciplines, these individuals are united not by creed or a belief system but by a broadly shared evolutionary vision and a care for collective future. " Creative minds like artists, designers and architects have the potential to create a new worldview, to heal, to transform and to restore our confidence that there is a powerful generative force inside of us that contains the solution to our problems. We need to get artistic and creative minds back to the table as catalysts of transformation and change. We need new leadership to do so.

1. Of great interest here is the recently highly acclaimed work of Daan Roosegaarde in which he fills the gap between art, science, social design and entrepreneurship.

2. Senge, P., Flowers, B., Scharmer, O., Jaworski, J., Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future, Society for Organizational Learning, March 2004.

3. Phipps, C., Evolutionaries: Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science's Greatest Idea, Harper Perennial, June 2012.



Mitchell Joachim's vision of how our cities might look like in the future  
Blimp Burner Bus: on the mobility fly; Terreform ONE, Mitchell Joachim