

The Role of the Arts in Strategy Crafting

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Whether we are crafting strategy, crafting a poem or crafting a roll-top desk in our garage workshop, we are fashioning by hand something that was once mere idea and giving it form, purposeful form, so it can carry power and take its place in the world. Our crafting of the work is a curious blend of virtues and skills: two parts sheer dedication and persistence, two parts dexterity and skilled artistry, and one part pure imagination. Each of these ingredients is crucial to the end result and we will concern ourselves with each of them. But first let's delve a little deeper into the meaning of our first key word, "craft".

A "craft" is also a vessel, a container which holds cargo, a form which floats. The verb "to craft" refers to the dedicated artful making we have just described above. A third meaning derives from a related form, namely "crafty" suggesting a certain trickster quality, an element of magic or unseen action. As an exercise in layered thinking, let's keep each of these aspects of "craft" in mind as we continue our explorations: craft (the vessel), craft (the making), and craftiness (the trickster nature of unseen action).

John Cimino and Rob Brodnick, your authors, explore the role of the arts in strategy crafting, considering how the arts can serve as a fundamental catalyst for new thinking, eventually leading to strategy. This article introduces the key concept of *orbital thinking* and unpacks a simple methodology for integrating the arts into the strategy crafting process. In the final section, we offer several specific applications we have used ourselves and continue to use with powerful results.

The Arts as a Catalyst for New Thinking

So, what do we mean by the arts?

Here's the view of a young student, translator and freelance journalist, Marilina Maraviglia: "Art is generally understood as any activity or product done by people with a communicative or aesthetic purpose – something that expresses an idea, an emotion or, more generally, a world view. It encompasses a diverse range of human activities, creations and ways of expression, including music, literature, film, sculpture and paintings. It is a form of human expression whose definition is ultimately open, subjective, and debatable, and perhaps best described as an evolving and global concept, open to new interpretation, too fluid to be pinned down." This loose, encompassing approach to defining art is just right for our purposes. But for good measure, here are a few quotes from artists and scholars that enrich the framing still further.

"Art and artists stimulate us to see more, hear more and experience more of what is going on within us and around us." Edgar Schein

"I paint things as I think of them, not as I see them." Pablo Picasso

"Art does not reproduce what is visible, it makes things visible." Paul Klee

In the search for solutions, we must think about thinking.

Our thinking about anything is often a multi-layered affair. Do we know enough about our subject to draw conclusions? How many other ways of looking at this are there that I'm not seeing? Should I trust my perceptions, my point of view, my particular knowledge and instincts in this area? How can I get out of my own way and see things differently? Consider these nuggets from three well-known thinkers.

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." Albert Einstein

"Everything we see hides another thing. We always want to see what is hidden by what we see." René Magritte

"The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers." James Baldwin

Sharpening and shifting our perceptions to access other perspectives and layers of meaning frequently takes a *catalyst* to get things moving. We all know catalysts to be accelerators of chemical reactions which are not themselves consumed in the process. In the world of mental and group processes, a catalyst can be as simple as a metaphor which takes us quickly into new territory. "My love is a red, red rose" said Robert Burns and 'voilà', a whole constellation of attributes – beautiful, vibrant, passionate – come to our aid as we think on our lady love. Just as quickly we might add she is like a sunrise or a gazelle and our perspective shifts again, this time to warmth and light, gracefulness and speed. In the blink of an eye, we are there, swiftly and quietly beneath the radar of our customary logic.

The arts are in the business of shifting our perspectives, helping us to see things differently, asking provocative questions, making the unseen visible. They not only help us to think differently, they help us to feel – more deeply, more authentically and differently too. Sadly, much of our on-the-job thinking is a deliberate effort to separate us from our feelings, as though emotions carry no value but distraction. Whereas neuroscientists today (Damazio) assure us that there are no thoughts without feelings, no feelings without thoughts, that the traffic of our conscious minds is a glorious blend of thought-feelings and feeling-thoughts. Indeed, it is the emotional leading edge of our thought-feelings which sets the trajectory of our explorations and ultimately locks our discoveries into long-term memory.

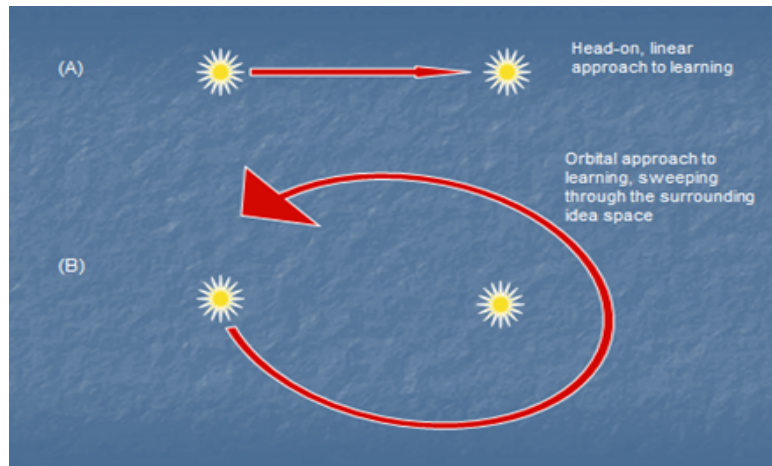
We need the feeling aspect of our mental processes as much as our so-called thoughts. We need the arts as much as the sciences, the aesthetic as much as any other aspect of our conscious experience. As our great American philosopher, Maxine Greene, was fond of reminding us, "the opposite of aesthetic is anesthetic, aesthetic means 'to feel', to be without the arts is to be deprived of feeling, to become numb, and that's where evil finds its way in, when there is no feeling." Powerful words.

An Orbital Model of Thinking and Learning

Buckminster Fuller once described something he called "precessional learning" as learning that occurs slowly over time as our accumulated insights interact with one another (typically well beneath the level of our awareness) and find their right relationships, adjusting their orbits, as it were, around our central focus. Celebrated scholar, Mary Catherine Bateson (1995) has written wonderfully about what she calls "peripheral learning", the sort of learning that happens when you think you're learning something else or not even learning at all. In both cases, the learner is moving through the broad idea space surrounding the focus of his or her attentions. In both cases too, the learning surfaces unpredictably from unconscious rather than conscious process.

John's (Cimino) version of this non-linear, indirect approach to learning is called "orbital learning" and is illustrated in the figure below. It is purposefully indirect, preferring to explore the surrounding neighborhood of ideas in order to get a feel for what might lie at the center. It seeks context, field forces, the topography of the terrain, the perspectives of other disciplines, the culture of local highways and byways – all the time cultivating a measure of intuition for that special focal point, not unlike the meanderings of a shy boy in orbit around his 'Juliet'. Here, however, although there is plenty happening beneath the level of one's awareness, there is a conscious strategy of enrichment of the learning field.

The orbiting is deliberate and research oriented, mindfully seeking a multiplicity of perspectives on the subject of one’s fascinations.



As you will see, this *orbital model* of our learning process is exceptionally compatible with an arts-based approach to thinking and imaginative development. To better understand this, however, let’s position the arts themselves as the focal point of our orbital investigations and see what we can learn about their inner workings via this model.

In Orbit around the Arts

To begin, we need a set of enticing *satellite concepts* to launch into orbit around our arts focal point and serve as our catalysts. Their job will be to tease out insights and clues as they circulate through the idea space surrounding “the arts”. Here we present four concept words for this, each representing a dimension or direction of growth in our human conscious development. Their interplay will hopefully spark a few insights.

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| <p><i>Fantasia</i>, the Italian word for imagination (<i>pronounced, in the Italian, fan-ta-SEE-a</i>) borrowed famously by animator Walt Disney. Arguably, <i>fantasia</i> – and not formal logic – may be our most direct and potent way of knowing. <i>Fantasia</i>: an authentic species of knowing equivalent to the uniquely intimate knowing of an inventor or creator – personally experienced, personally grasped, personally felt. <i>Fantasia</i> = imaginative insight.</p> | <p><i>Coeur</i>, the French for “heart”, from which we also derive our word for “courage”. So many noble and endearing qualities attach to this blood pumping organ: compassion, wisdom, fortitude, gentleness, intuition, the ineffable, love, passion, hope. Pascal’s classic, “The heart has reasons, which reason does not comprehend.” The heart is our portal to another species of knowing, to mystery, imagination, and yes, courage.</p> |
| <p><i>Apericolia</i>, a Greek word referring to “a lack of experience of things beautiful”. The scholar Joseph Campbell once said, “Far too many of our youth, our leaders and our communities suffer from <i>apericolia</i>. Beauty isn’t cool, commercial or controversial anymore, or so some would have us believe.” But the arts favor beauty! Whether captured in an equation, the sweep of a symphony or the leaping of a gazelle, the arts favor what happens in the presence of beauty: joy, rapture, hope, a deeper and different knowing of ourselves and our connection with the world.</p> | <p><i>Consilience</i>, a rare word until recently, recovered for us by biologist Edward O. Wilson in his book, <i>Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge</i>. <i>Consilience</i> – literally, a “jumping together” of knowledge across disciplines – is all about “connectivity” and the weaving together of ideas from different domains of knowledge to reveal deeper, common groundworks of explanation. Our minds delight in <i>consilience</i>. Our “atoms of <i>consilience</i>” are our metaphors. “My love is a red, red rose.” Writ large, <i>consilience</i> is knowledge fit together in a broad connected landscape.</p> |

Gleanings and Insights from our Orbital Journey

Hitching a ride on these satellite ideas as they encircle our focal point of the arts has yielded for many of us curious travellers gleanings and insights which include the following:

- The arts bring us into direct contact with imagination, our own as well as others.
- The arts jump-start a process of reflection through which we begin to 'see' what lies beneath the surface of things.
- The arts open us to alternative perceptions both of ourselves and the world around us.
- The arts challenge us to see more, to envision the "not yet" and then to work to bring it into being.
- The arts connect us deeply and meaningfully to our senses as channels of perception to the outer world and as modalities of expression for our inner world.
- The arts help us to feel deeply, to feel differently and to connect with one another empathically.
- The arts tap the wisdom of the ages across cultures, centuries and codes of conscience.
- The arts bring us face to face, eye to eye with beauty and the silent experience of awe. (The aesthetic encounter becomes one of *self-recognition*, an aspect and a glimmer of ourselves recognized in the beauty which has overwhelmed us. This may bring us to tears, but this is not sadness, rather joy and a more compassionate knowing of ourselves and all we love.)
- The arts are imagination (fantasia), connection (consilience), beauty (apericolea), wholeheartedness (coeur).

Putting the Arts to Work for Us: Unpacking the Methodology and Using It

A quick summary of the ground we've covered so far:

(a) In order to think effectively in a given context, we need to think first about thinking itself: to be mindful of our default modes of thinking; to be proactive in gaining access to other ways of seeing and understanding. Mental catalysts such as metaphors and other artful devices can project us into new perspectives; and secondly, the emotional leading edge of our thought-feelings can serve as our scout in identifying new horizons.

(b) Our orbital model of thinking and learning tracks well with these higher order challenges and can take us into a wide-angle search of the idea space surrounding our point of focus. This broad sweep of the neighborhood activates intuition as well as observation, our senses as well as our imaginations. Our choice of satellite ideas and catalysts to move us through this space should be rich in personal meaning and alive with potential connectivity.

(c) Having completed our orbital examination of the arts, we might claim the following: *The richness of content and evocative power of the arts across our senses, memory and imagination, point to their serving as a rich source of satellite ideas and catalyst activities for orbital explorations of complex subjects.*

Now let's get more specific about how to do this!

Step One: Getting Ready

Getting ready is a layered and *inclusive* affair, as essential for the design and facilitation team as it is for the participants themselves. In a very real sense, everyone will undertake this journey together. And so both must enter into the space of new thinking and imagination; both must jump into the process of thinking about thinking. Of course, the guides and facilitators of the experience will need to be at least a couple of steps ahead of the participants, both *in* the moment and *above* the moment. But their experience of the journey must be as authentic as those they facilitate or the spell will be broken. A skilled facilitator will have mastered the art of dual awareness: immersion in the moment, vision above the moment, a trusted keeper of the group's relationship with both present and future. And also, an observer and manager of the group's energy: each individual and the collective as a whole.

Establishing signposts to trigger exploratory leaps and dives above and below our more ordinary thinking can be as simple as drawing attention to a series of keywords such as our word “craft” mentioned earlier, rich in layered meaning. Craft: the vessel, container or form which floats our idea. Craft: the skilled shaping and making of our idea. Craft, as in craftiness: the trickster element of unseen action. Setting the mind in curious exploratory motion and then unpacking the experience together is precisely the impulse we wish to liberate in getting ready for our journey. And as we know, the arts are a treasure trove of such launching points cued to each of our senses. The spirit of the moment? Curious, playful, reflective.

Step Two: Identifying the Tools, Designing the Journey

This level of planning belongs to the designer/facilitators and is necessarily grounded in two kinds of knowledge: (a) knowledge of the participants, their organizational culture, history and vision for the future, and (b) knowledge of the arts and a methodology for utilizing the arts as a catalyst for new thinking and process facilitation. The first type of knowledge is research-based and customary in working effectively with every variety of participant group. The second type of knowledge has only more recently been brought to bear on issues of strategy crafting, leadership development and higher order thinking. Working in collaboration with seasoned artists or more optimally with those called “teaching artists” is something to be recommended as their expertise will certainly include the arts but also extend beyond the arts *per se* to the application of the arts in the service of thinking and learning in other domains. Yet another recommended approach to launching the design process is to play on the artfulness of the participants themselves and guide and facilitate their own expression from a variety of perspectives or activities.

In selecting artful catalysts and satellite ideas for the exploration of a point of focus, it is important to cast one’s net both near and far: to reach for the periphery and far horizons of shared knowledge and awareness, and to swim intermittently in the shallows and utterly familiar. The former are the domains of imagination and invention, the latter – just as important – keep us grounded even as we are challenged to see the familiar with new eyes. Ultimately, it is the flexing of perspective from near to far and back again, from the familiar to the unknown and back again, which builds our capacity for agile, adaptable and adventurous thinking. This is precisely the skill set most valuable for participants to take home with them: not some golden nugget encapsulating the idea of the month, but a habit of mind that has become a part of them.

Step Three: Activating the Orbital Experience

Here once again, the spirit of the enterprise must be curious, playful, reflective. Only this time, the dive will be deeper and the leap will take us farther from home. Participants should be ready and eager at this point to jump in and be fully immersed. After all, thus far, it’s been safe, fun and curiously inviting. Some may even have developed an intuition for where things are headed. However, no one will have a strict read on the future. What comes next will, by definition, be *learning by surprise*. This means that their emotional self will be in the game now too. Emotion, imagination, memory and senses together will be evoked and called into to play. “Ah ha” moments await them, simmering in the sensory interplay of sounds and stories, touches remembered and imagined, visions and images just out of reach just coming into focus, words pronounced or unspoken, poems, whispers, songs and symphonies, catalysts all!

The role of the facilitator here is both critical and subtle. Manage the process too closely and the magic closes down as participants lose those crucial degrees of freedom so loved in our own moments of discovery. Fail to manage the process or manage it too loosely and the magic evaporates into thin air as participants lose their grounding and their ideas fail to find their containers. The skillful facilitator, again both *in* the moment and *above* the moment, will guide the process lightly but surely, assuring journeys both inward and outward, thoughtful and full of feeling, introspective and in dialogue with others, and most importantly, allowing the unknown and the ‘not yet’ to have their moments of hidden action, the “trickster” element that runs ten paces ahead of clarity and illumination. Much depends on the skill of the

facilitator *in partnership with his or her artist collaborators*. In special instances, artists and facilitators will be one and the same. In sum, the process requires constant engagement and vigilance while applying a consistent *soft touch*.

Step Four: Reflecting, Discussing, Debriefing Together

When participants have spent an hour or more wholeheartedly immersed in a new experience, they are often near to bursting with a desire to tell someone about it, especially someone who's just completed his or her own version of the experience. This is a threshold moment for the facilitator and participants alike. Generative and interpretive processes are both in "on mode" at this point. The internal mix of fresh experience and perception is still registering, still flooding conscious awareness while early interpretive reflexes are already active. This is a tricky moment and not necessarily the best moment for participants to be chatting with one another. Why? Because that would be cutting short the crucially more important conversation barely begun with oneself. The skilled facilitator will be aware of this and create a space for this inner conversation to deepen and run its course. This time of quiet reflection or quiet writing is invaluable to a person's knowing her own experience: the thoughts, feelings, inspirations and memories which belong to her alone.

The step of gathering in conversation circles can then bear its own fruit without pre-empting the individual's internal discussion. Indeed, each person is now far better prepared to engage with others, to listen, to take in other perspectives and to share one's own unique contribution. Step by step, the group process can be guided to learning mode, to the multiple perspectives on the subject at hand, to emerging lines of deeper inquiry and to potential reframing of the original problem. From conversation circles onward to group reports back to plenary and open discussion, the diversity of reflections will find their commonalities, their nuanced contrasts and next set of burning questions. A process of guided reflections will help the group to generate not only the outcomes they set out to produce from the beginning but also to capture important surprises, learnings, and insights gleaned from their orbital journeys.

Step Five: Opportunity for Extension Learning

This is one point in the process that is especially ripe for serving up one or more tasty entrees from content specialists. Some of these offerings will have been lined up well in advance per the carefully crafted plan of the design team. Others will have arisen more spontaneously and just as spontaneously facilitated by content specialists from within the group. Topics selected by the design team might well be governed by the same rule as their selection of artful catalysts and satellite ideas, namely "casting one's net both near and far". This would mean offering: (a) deep dives into content areas immediately close to the point of focus, and (b) expeditionary dives into content areas approaching the far periphery. The value of the former is practical and immediate, the value of the latter is a second invitation to imagination and invention. Stan Gryskiewicz, founder of the Association for Managers of Innovation, refers to this reach to the periphery as "positive turbulence", a fundamental strategy for embedding both resilience and innovation into one's organizational or personal culture.

Opportunities for extension learning, 'both near and far', can be positioned at any of several junctures in the strategy crafting process. In some instances, it can be part of early preparation or pre-work. In others, it may cycle intermittently through a multi-phase process. In the scenario of the paragraph above, it follows on the heels of debriefing an art-based orbital journey. It's worth noting that the deep dives of extension learning, whether 'near or far', generally call upon a modality of thinking which stands in contrast to the arts-based mental processes of our orbital journeys. This contrast in modalities is something to be exploited. For it turns out that alternating our modalities of mental processing keeps us alert and energized in the short term and enhances our mental flexibility in the long term. Expert designers and facilitators can *bake in* opportunities for extension learning and positive turbulence, but perhaps even more importantly, they can recognize unexpected opportunities to allow them to emerge while in the process of facilitating.

Step Six: Synthesis, Discernment and Recycling

In the process of strategy crafting is important periodically to take stock of where the process to date has taken everyone, in other words, to think and reflect together on what has been accomplished, what has yet to be accomplished, what is clear, what is still unclear, where there is consensus and where there is not. The process is iterative and provisional, but intentionally progressive, and ultimately, it will have an endpoint. Along the way, however, successful designers and facilitators will be prepared to re-enter the catalyst stage and orbital processes as often as needed to refresh, sharpen or shift participant perspectives. This process might be conceived as a regimen for maintaining the group's creative flow and peak performance readiness. It may also serve to boost morale and keep the group mind agile and energized. The group will gain awareness along the way of when the process has achieved enough *results* and when it has not – and if they don't, the facilitator can help guide them to discover this.

In the final stage of the strategy crafting process, as the living document is created and readied for formal adoption, it will be crucial that its form or container be equal to the task of holding its ideas securely and accurately (the craft must float), that it be drafted in language and images equal to the task of expressing its ideas with compelling elegance and power (the crafting must be masterful), and lastly, that it be presented and shared in a manner equal to the task of capturing constituents' imaginations, winning their hearts and minds, and acquiring their ownership (the curious, 'crafty', magical nature of unseen action).

Various Applications: Practical Catalysts Large and Small

Practical applications of arts-fired catalysts and orbital learning can spring from any one or a combination of our senses, exactly analogous to our many art forms: painting and drawing, stories and poetry, sculpture, hand crafts, songs and instrumental music, expressive movement and dance, theater and acting. Whether formally conceived and rigorously rendered or invented on the fly in the spirit of improvisation, arts-based experiences can deliver us to new vistas, perspectives, introspections and expressions of strategy. Skillfully facilitated experiences in nature can serve a similar, mind-shifting purpose precisely because nature too reconnects us with our senses, with beauty and imagination. "To the Eye of a Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination Itself. As a Man is, so he Sees. As the Eye is formed, Such are its Powers." (Blake) In this final section of our article, we share four contrasting applications of our arts-based methodology drawn from four different art forms, playing out at different scales of personal and group process.

The Concert of Ideas and The Harvest of Learnings

Invented in the late 1970s by John Cimino and colleagues, the Concert of Ideas is a keynote type event embodying a set of artful triggers designed to set the minds and hearts of participants in curious exploratory motion. Featuring grand and exciting music performed by award-winning artists, the Concert of Ideas IS a world-class concert performance. Music by Bernstein, Copland, Gershwin and Rachmaninoff as well as Broadway showstoppers are essential ingredients of a Concert of Ideas. But there is more. Woven through the music and creatively juxtaposed to leverage imaginations, audiences discover equally brilliant contributions from thinkers such as Einstein, Picasso, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Margaret Mead, James Baldwin and Langston Hughes. The whirlwind of connective possibilities is exhilarating. Participants are royally entertained. Simultaneously, they are invited to think deeply, to entertain new perspectives, and ultimately, to enter into thoughtful dialogue with one another.

The Concert of Ideas is the original prototype for the orbital model of thinking and learning. Each song, story, poem or theatrical scenario comprising the Concert of Ideas serves as a catalyst to launch the listener-participant on a journey of exploration around the central focus or theme of the Concert of Ideas. Each image, metaphor or narrative trail embedded in the songs, stories, poems and theatrical scenarios suggests a curious and inviting trajectory for close examination, but importantly does not deliver discrete answers. Instead, it points to possibilities, to directions of exploration, leaving the process open to the participant's own originally conceived configurations of thought and meaning. In this way, the thinking and learning happen by surprise along the way in the midst of captivating play.

Taken as a whole, the Concert of Ideas might be considered one large scale, multi-layered catalyst for setting the mind in motion. As such, it is critical the experience be thoroughly and invitingly debriefed. Opportunities for quiet reflection, small group discussion and the sharing of insights back to plenary are vital to shepherding the process to its richest outcomes. Deep dives into emergent and more specialized content are frequently a natural next step on the heels of a Concert of Ideas and the ensuing processing. Further artful catalysts on a smaller scale can refresh the minds and imaginations of participants as often as needed along the way to crafting the final work product.

A special culminating event aimed at synthesis and full ownership of the final work product can also take an artful form. Known within Creative Leaps International as a “Harvest of Learnings”, this culminating event is assembled collaboratively with participants to distill and imaginatively re-express key insights and outcomes of the entire work process. The end result is a celebration of personal creativity and achievement. Music, poetry, song, humor, spontaneity and the element of surprise merge with the honest insights, learnings and enthusiasms of the fully engaged participants. The experience anchors learning, creates powerful memories and sends people home with a sense of triumph. What is more, the arts-based methodology has been internalized, its catalyst energies and orbital strategies absorbed into the tool kits of the participants themselves.

Modeling Collective Vision

Everyone can be an artist. The experience of engaging in artistic expression opens the pathways for creativity, immerses us in flow, and makes connections and associations among ideas and thoughts fruitful for strategy crafting. The challenge is that not everyone is awash with artistic talent across all of the arts – who is? We have developed a technique that makes the artistic experience accessible to nearly everyone, more like serious play than art. The method has individuals working in small groups to build models set in the future.

To get ready for such an activity, we first need to explore and define either a problem or a scenario. The group needs a trigger to set themselves in motion. One approach is to articulate a clear, current problem and then transport the group to the future using a variety of stories. Once the setting is established, small groups are challenged to build a model of what the future is like when a positive solution is in practice. For example here is a potential problem, *We know that our current program/offering is falling short in terms of active engagement - what would a future program/offering be like that was really engaging?* A second approach to set the context is around future vision based on depicting and extending a number of current trends and forces. For example, *We know that these four trends are emerging and will disrupt our current business model - what future business model will likely emerge as a result of these intersecting trends?*

The second step in preparation is to identify an artful medium for model building. We sometimes use clay or putty, but building blocks, pipe cleaners and small objects, or any kind of collection of small, odd objects can be used – even a combination of items. The goal here is set the bar very low for entry so everyone plays. We set groups in motion and ask that they build their model and write a story to tell when they make their presentation. This works well in mid-sized group setting where four or five or more groups can show their models and tell their stories. The larger group learns along the way.

The orbital experience is activated in three phases. First, each individual in the small group begins to touch and hold the objects. Once some familiarity is gained, they start to put things together, even before the group has decided where to go. The experience of building, tangibly, kinesthetically, sets the mind in motion around the task: the first orbital experience. The second comes from creating the story in the small group. As the story unfolds and builds, the models tend to adapt and reshape. Experiencing the story adds layers of clarity and possibility: the second orbital experience. The third, and maybe final, maybe not, experience comes during the small group presentations. Experiencing the minds

of another group, their story, sends the individuals away again on a micro learning journey. Returning to their own thoughts, now more enhanced with each story.

Reflecting and harvesting is a critical facilitation matter. What we might be left with are great stories and lumps of clay, all swept away at the end of the day. The positive experience will live on, but meaning must be extracted and documented. We like to use photographs of the models, videos of the stories when possible, and a set of synthesis exercises at the conclusion of the activity to identify the key learnings and takeaways. There will always be a next step in the strategy process and good outputs from the modeling and storytelling need to be isolated so they can serve as inputs to the next part of the process.

Engaged Enactment of Our Current Dilemmas and Potential Solutions

A completely different twist on the storytelling that accompanies building models is to make the story an art itself. Here we describe the arts of acting, improvisation, and role play as the inspiration for thinking about the future. Utilizing this artistic medium, participants fully enact and engage in an alternate and possible future through expression and active creation.

To get ready and design the journey, there are three key activities. First, we create a scenario of the future to establish the setting for the action. Second, we engage participants in generating forecasts of the future, extending the scenario using a variety of likely events and situations that could be, but currently are not. The final activity is *writing and enacting the script*, where smaller groups are encouraged by facilitators who have been coached in telling a good story and delivering the story through acting and role play. Some basic ground rules are typically enough for a group to deliver an entertaining and enlightening story. Again, this is art for the masses, accessible to nearly everyone.

The method activates orbital learning in three phases. The scenario is the initial activation of the orbital experience. When the future scenario is depicted, usually through a combination of narrative and projected images, a new idea space is generated. We find participants being able to fill voids between what is and what could be and generate new interpretations and perspectives – ideas emerge. The session then turns to participant engagement in building their own forecasts. These forecasts need not be perfect nor even accurate, in fact, we have found some of the more absurd futures make for a better story and unlock unseen possibilities. Sometimes playing with what is surely not possible opens in the mind further to unseen possibilities.

Finally, we have the performance of the story or script as the final opportunity for orbital learning. This happens on two levels – one as performer and another as audience. Doing something, expressing something has a different impact than thinking about the same subject. We find that the actors experience the future differently than the audience and have different learnings. We encourage personal journaling about the experience shortly after telling the story, more on this soon. For the audience, they have the opportunity to be entertained, to observe, and to make additional connections. While it is helpful again for audience participants to journal on the experience, we have found that questions or prompts help accelerate their ability to unpack and record learnings. Mixing in a bit of surprise through improv can really add some fun twists to the storytelling and acting.

Harvesting learning in this situation is a bit challenging. It is important to find a way to capture each story and we recommend two approaches. One is to have the group actually write a script, and while it may not be perfectly performed, it provides a record. The second and perhaps preferred method is to video record the story. While this has many advantages, it may not always be practical. A second recommended strategy for harvesting is individual journaling on the experience. It may only take 15 or 20 minutes, but embedding some quiet time, either after each individual performance or after a collection on them, really allows each participant to better understand and reflect on what happened and what new possibilities emerged for them. Finally, we like the whole group to debrief as a way to push the learnings even further and identify consensus characteristics of the potential futures and unique ideas that manifested

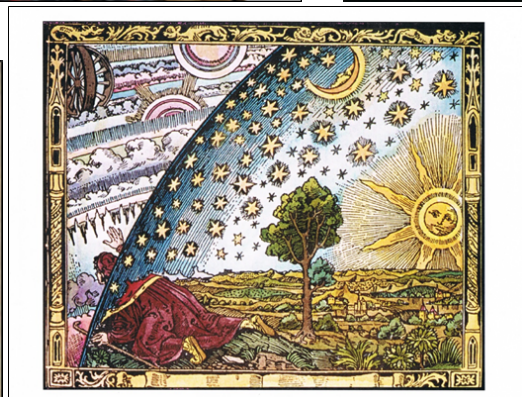
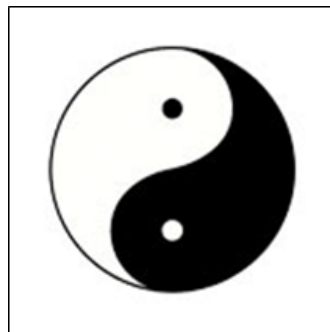
during the performances. We recommend creating an archive of these three methods for harvesting learning; the stories can be used in the future for further provocation.

Visual Imagery as a Catalyst for Exploring Values, Perspectives and Extension of Future Thinking

We live in a highly visual culture and visual imagery is everywhere. Somehow, we never tire of it. Our brains light up in response to it. Our emotions kick in instinctively and our imaginations appear to revel in the perceptual intrigues even the most ordinary images can be heir to. To utilize visual imagery as a tool for activating imagination, personal perspectives and future thinking is to work in most everyone's comfort zone. While a smaller number of us may feel capable and comfortable drawing images, the threshold for participation in viewing visual imagery is virtually non-existent. Pictures tell stories and we love stories. Pictures can be provocative or pull at our heartstrings. Pictures can be puzzles, illusions, astoundingly beautiful or shockingly horrific. They are worth a thousand words. Taking tips from artists and advertisers over the centuries, teams of researchers and facilitators have designed an impressive array of visual tools with which we can extend our thinking and prime our individual expressiveness.

Perhaps the best known tool of this kind is called Visual Explorer and was designed by a group at the Center for Creative in Greensboro, North Carolina. In essence, it a set of more than 100 vivid and suitably diverse images which can be spread on the floor along the periphery of a large room where participants can stroll as they search for one or more images they freely associate with an issue, question, challenge or personal attribute. The pictures selected by participants become the subject of personal reflections, guided journaling and finally facilitated small group conversations where the pictures can be shared and explored for what they might signify and potentially reveal about the issue or subject at hand. Skillful facilitation of this process is crucial to the harvesting of rich outcomes. The pictures themselves are the catalysts for launching minds and hearts in curious exploratory motion through the idea space surrounding the focal point of their orbital journeys.

As a sample of this experience, here below are seven visual images utilized in a small scale version of this activity developed by John Cimino and known as Visual Primer.



The questions which follow form the outline of the facilitation process guiding participants through their orbital journeys. The journey unfolds in three discrete phases, each phase beginning with quiet personal viewing of the seven images followed by a response to the prompts of a particular question. The questions and prompts are progressive, each one inviting a deeper exploration of a participant's inner terrain.

Round One: Take a look at each of the seven images which follow and make a brief note or two of what each image conveys to you – a thought, an impression, a message, a value, an emotion, an insight?

Round Two: Secondly, which images do you find yourself drawn to most?

Round Three: In what ways do they connect with who you are, the issue we are exploring or the desired future we are seeking?

As with the Visual Explorer activity, the initial processing of the images via Rounds 1 through 3 should be accomplished by each participant working on his or her own as guided by the facilitator. The small group conversations follow. On the heels of small group conversations, a plenary discussion can debrief the overall experience harvesting the most significant outcomes, insights and trajectories for future explorations. What's more, a number of images will have been identified as hallmarks of the group's journey and strategy crafting. Finally, it's worth noting that this particular activity affords experience designers and facilitators tremendous latitude for converting it to a variety of purposes simply by varying the inventory of images and customizing the set of questions, particularly question #3.

Summary and Conclusions

In the first half of this article, we took a fresh look at how we experience the arts and the processes they set in motion linked to perception, imagination, memory and the senses. We then introduced an *orbital model of thinking and learning* as an effective way of exploring the idea space surrounding whatever we might designate as our subject or point of focus. Referring back to the arts, we showed how arts experiences can serve as an efficient and powerful *catalyst* for launching our attentions into that idea space affording us satellite views of our subject from a variety of perspectives.

In the second half of our article, we endeavored to unpack this arts-based methodology into a series of six steps: (i) creating mental readiness, (ii) the designer's tools for guiding the activity, (iii) activation and immersion in the orbital experience, (iv) debriefing and processing the experience, (v) opportunities for extension learning, and (vi) final synthesis, discernment or recycling of the experience. We followed this with four sample applications of the methodology at different scales and drawn from different art forms: *The Concert of Ideas and Harvest of Learnings* using music, poetry, theater; *Modeling Collective Vision* using clay and other small manipulables modeling of future scenarios; *Engaged Enactment of Dilemmas and Solutions* using acting and improvisation; and *Visual Primer* using visual imagery as catalyst for future thinking.

Throughout all of these experiences and applications, participants move through three basic mindsets or internal states. The first state is *engagement or readiness*, the process of enlisting a willing spirit of wholehearted participation. The second state is all about the participant's *creative response* to the arts-based catalysts and orbital journey. The third state is that of *discernment, making sense* and identifying outcomes. The orbital nature of the experience affords the time and space for an unhurried 360 perspective seamlessly modulated through our senses, our imaginations and the felt experience of our emotions. The approach is indirect, rather than linear and one dimensional, at once appropriately distanced and surprisingly intimate, precisely the way of all great art, universal and personal at the same time.

Our hope for this article is first and foremost as an invitation to play, an invitation to jump in and experiment with the myriad ways the arts can inflect, inspire and enrich our thinking. Strategy crafting is an affair of the heart as much as the mind, a process challenging our imaginations, intuitions and our willingness to act. To *craft* strategy means we must work skillfully, smartly, artfully calling upon all our faculties. After all, the vessel we would construct must be seaworthy, as secure and watertight in rough seas as in calm. Finally, our creation must inspire confidence, dedication and ownership, all those “trickster” qualities of our nature too slippery to grasp with mere logic.

It is in our nature to dream, to seek new horizons and to act to make those horizons visible and achievable. Consider the work of art your work, the work of bringing the future into being.