



The Creative Instinct

How Big Ideas Happen

Nikos Acuña

All ideas aspire to exist, to take action, do something valuable, and live among mortal men.

Ever wonder why good designs simply make sense? It's like something just clicks in our perception that tells us, "That's it. This is how it should be." And it so often reveals itself through a cathartic "Aha!" moment.

I wanted to explore the psychology of this moment—the psychology of innovation. I was interested in revealing its essence—that which makes things new, and strives toward knowledge and a state of perfection. This essence is creative and destructive, optimal and disruptive, stable and dynamic, personal and collective, chaotic, self-reflexive, physical, psychological, fragmented, and unified—all at the same time. This journey led me to the source material of life itself.

I learned how the imagination works. I learned how all knowledge moves from darkness to light, how all big ideas come from the same big idea—that we were put on this earth to create, and not merely to survive. I learned that all big ideas come from the same substance and evolution is part of a bigger story—it's the story of where we came from and where we're going.

Innovation has become a buzzword over the past several years, but people still don't know what it really means. I think this is because when you start exploring how ideas manifest, you get caught up in esoteric abstractions. It's difficult to pin down how ideas start to gain structure and substance. But this is exactly what interested me. Everything that has ever been meaningful in this world was born from someone's imagination. Everything in this world, including us, started out as an idea, a shadow of possibility. This process is a grand transformation that aims to find new combinations with materials that already exist. These combinations strive to move toward a more optimal form than its current state.

Every substance in this world, matter or otherwise, comes from chaos in some flavor of primordial soup—especially ideas. If we create a chaotic environment of knowledge in our mind, externalize our ideas frequently in broad strokes and rough drafts, assemble them in a shared space in which they connect and converge, and refine them diligently, intriguing epiphanies will follow.

The essence of an idea lies in the unconscious mind.

Big ideas are tied to our creative instinct and exploration. This is because creativity is an idea exchange that, when facilitated properly, results in groundbreaking innovation. Creative commerce starts with the inception of ideas, so we must embark on a personal journey to examine the intrinsic processes embedded in creativity and innovation from a variety of perspectives.

All progress is driven by the same process—it's the same universal pattern of innovation. It's a universal stream of consciousness seeking better ways to flow that each of us can tap into. It's a process that seeks optimal forms. All knowledge wants to spread the way all mass wants to move freely across the earth. This is why trees look like rivers and neurons in the brain. It's all part of the same flow ecosystem. Visionary ideas mature through iteration. You build; you break. You create; you erase. You start again. You press the restart button, and then you stop to have a drink. Meditate. The thinking happens while doing. The epiphany often comes when you're not thinking.

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All ideas come from the unconscious mind. They seek to be expressed onto the world. So we externalize our ideas. We build prototypes. We draw sketches. We write rough drafts. Only then can we see the imperfections of our ideas. Only then can we make our visions into reality. Once a prototype or first iteration of any project is created, a new potentiality of that prototype is inherently expressed by the act of creating it—as its producers can immediately find ways

to improve it, remove imperfections, and make modifications that will move it toward a more optimal design. This is design intelligence and the essence of the creative process.

All ideas have evolved from the integration of other ideas. All ideas worth noting are diversified memes that have found unique and optimal designs. Ideas are not mere “sparks” that take place in the mind; rather, they are tree-shaped neural networks that connect and collide with one another, creating new formations and structures in the brain. These networks of ideas are liquid in form—protean, in that they have the ability to create even more networks of unlimited potential and structural complexity. This is how innovation behaves as we continue to push the limits of possibility in business, technology, science, and the arts. Ideas seek to replicate and connect with other ideas to find even more highly evolved forms.

From a microscopic perspective, the inception of an idea is more like a tree-shaped network that branches out to connect with other neurons, like rivulets and rivers that flow into one another. These new idea networks are more likely to be formed within dense, collaborative environments. These environments seek new ways to spread mass through flow channels and function like blood vessels, capillaries, and veins. These environments are shared spaces of collaboration. They're liquid in form because they're both static and dynamic—they can hold an assembly of properties together but can change in shape, whereas a solid form maintains

both its properties and its rigid structure. Ideas move through these platforms and liquid networks, creating unlimited connections that drive creativity and innovation.

When we realize that our mind is a creative platform—a vast network of networks—we experience a revolutionary and profound transformation. New possibilities emerge. The process of realization and transformation is the essence of life. It means that everything in this world has an inherent purpose—and that is to find its optimal form. This is why we are constantly trying to improve ourselves, why we venture out into the unknown, why we have children, and why we want to be the best in the world at what we do.

The more creative we become, the more resourceful we will be. We can transform ourselves and everyone around us. These connections, and this archetype of innovation, uncovers the building blocks of life itself, revealing our origins. Innovation is intrinsic to essence, and essence is intrinsic to the act of creation.

The remarkable mind knows no limits. Clarity in vision is clarity in purpose.

Creativity and innovation seem to take different forms, yet every form is a fractal pattern—they are self-similar no matter what the scale. A self-reflexive fractal design is a structure in which the whole is visible in each of its parts. Consciousness is a fractal pattern, and this pattern reveals the creative instinct and the ultimate archetype of innovation.

If we build a platform to collect scattered ideas in one place, these fragments will start to take on new meaning no matter how scattered they are. Creation is an evolutionary art.

It comes down to the possibilities that can be formed with each new combination of ideas and the meaningful connections between them. Einstein created these connections. Steve Jobs combined artistic ingenuity with technology to create optimal and intuitive brand experiences. What would happen to our ideas if we cultivated them in a disciplined way? What if we approached our challenges from a wide range of perspectives? We could gain wisdom from a new kind of creative platform. Perhaps we simply want to make our ideas thrive. The challenge is when we need to crank out meaningful work on a consistent basis. To fully explore the possibilities of visionary creativity, we must deconstruct the process and understand its essence.

The dynamic processes of creativity and innovation move across vast platforms. The result is a clear path to distinction. Understanding how creativity and innovation work together will revolutionize the way we think about the world. Creativity and innovation are perpetual, transformative, and definitive elixirs that anyone can harness to approach any personal or business challenge. These elixirs also reveal the purest elements of life and why artists are driven to express this source material in countless forms to the world through their art. This is creativity's gift. It's what Lewis Hyde calls the commerce of creative spirit.

These stories present gift exchange as a companion to transformation, a sort of guardian or marker or catalyst. It is also the case that a gift may be the actual agent of change, the bearer of new life. In the simplest examples, gifts carry an identity with them, and to accept the gift amounts to incorporating the new identity. It is as if such a gift passes through the body and leaves us altered. — LEWIS HYDE

DESIGN INTELLIGENCE: HOW OPTIMAL FORMS EMERGE

Good design emerges when engaging in the creative process. We can outline the opus that's been simmering in our mind for years, or wireframe the new website for our business. Now's the time to sketch a model of what we want to build. We can outline a user's experience on a whiteboard or architect an experience through the eyes of our audience. It helps to make a task list of everything that needs to happen to reach a goal. The important thing is to take action. The masterwork will reveal itself in due time.

Visionaries see things not as they are, but as they could be. Ideas come from the unconscious mind. Platforms illustrate how innovation occurs on many levels. From a physiological level, an individual's brain makes myriad connections to new networks through synaptic activity and neural formations. A parallel process takes place on a subconscious level. This is where creative transformation occurs. It shapes our experience and our memories.

But there's a process in our brains that facilitates the internalization of data and the externalization of information. This process creates mindshare networks—memes that live within shared spaces and platforms that mutate to achieve more optimal designs. These platforms enable creativity and innovation to occur. Innovation is found in these environments—within multiple digital platforms and within our mind. These environments are not just twice as innovative. They're seventeen times more innovative. They amplify the process, organize new species, and push the limits of possibility.

Design seeks purpose. Life is a prototype that perpetually benefits from new ideas. Design is essential, inherent, and elemental. Look around, and you'll find countless challenges to tackle, mysteries to solve, people to serve. There's hope that we're coming out of an abyss, but crises will ensue and we must be prepared. Technologies evolve, but stability seems to be crumbling beneath us. There are assembly lines with kids still working for a dollar a week, unfriendly materials that won't decompose, old models stacked up in junkyards. There's garbage dumped in landfills, nuclear waste, pollution. Competition drives innovation, but now we must work together for a more significant victory. The corruption of resources must be remedied.

There's a stronger force at work. The new framework of innovation must focus on eliminating processes that destroy the earth—eliminating waste by creating remarkable product life cycles. There are infinite new designs just waiting to be discovered.

THE NEXT BIG IDEA: SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

Let's be real: business is driven by profit. We keep pushing products for mass consumption because money makes the world turn faster. Big business feels an inherent need to grow bigger, which means we need more products flying off the shelves. But economic success won't provide us with ultimate fulfillment. Economics is only part of the story. Design, like marketing, is focused on selling goods—despite the inclination toward refined aesthetics. Anything produced for mass consumption contributes to pollution and global warming, and that makes designers and their constituents key influencers in an ecosystem that has a significant effect on the environment.

If we can shift our focus from a commodity-driven culture to an intrinsic value-amplifying culture, perhaps consumers will find more meaning in their lives. We need to build a better gift economy. We need to create products that are alive and sustainable with extended life cycles. We need to focus on what's essential. We must focus on evolving flow platforms that create shared and mutually beneficial perspectives.

The most significant challenge of our lives has yet to come. All of our strengths and resources will be tested. The utility of design intelligence must be extended beyond the profits of individual enterprises. We need to redesign the ecosystem and make producers and consumers mutual

stakeholders in elevating brand experiences. It's about building sustainable platforms through visionary brands.

We must strive to leverage our intelligence and ingenuity to save the planet. It's been proven that the survival of the fittest dynamic in business can make you rich. But now survival of the fittest is about being the most innovative in terms of contributing to eco-capitalism. This is not only an extremely profitable and fast-growing industry, but it adds value to our lives like never before.

True innovation isn't just an improved experience; it's metaphysical art. Innovation and evolution are symbiotic, so learn how to leverage the channels that flow to become optimal designs. Produce authentic gifts, and innovation will come. Seek the value that exists on an experiential level, a psychological level, and a physical level.

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Visionary innovation comes from within. Those who choose to transform the world will do so. Change is a choice.

Innovate within your domain, but branch outward beyond your industry. Work with colleagues in other fields. A new framework will emerge, a new mindshare. What we really need is a new worldview that focuses on the significance of both individuals and the global collective mind.

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The new paradigm calls for fat-free products—designs that resonate with simplicity, designs that amplify beauty and form and function in seamless ways. We must move into a unified optimal experience, a psychological platform that creates consciousness. According to Adrian Bejan, the author of *Design in Nature*:

The rise of civilization, the spread of technology, the wider spread of goods and ideas, this is the story of humanity: the creation of new and better systems that flow across the Earth's crust. Since the Industrial Revolution we have been witnessing the emergence of an additional design that enhances performance of the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere. The new sphere is the global flow of human-and-machine species. Each of us is much more than a naked body. Because the homo is sapiens, life is becoming easier during our lifetime. From the mirror to the bookshelf and the street, we have enlarged ourselves with knowledge, which means everything: machines, shelter, food, and links all over the globe. We are flowing internally, in our organs. We also flow externally, through every move and sound, from the planted fields to the schoolyard, from the horse to the airplane, from the telephone to the Internet.

The more knowledge we attain, the more humble we should be. Approaching life from this perspective keeps us grounded and leaves our minds open and flexible. By asking new questions, we elevate our aptitude for self-discovery. We explore new ways to solve problems because the questions we ask are more profound. When people tell me to think out of the box, I tell them that there is no box. The best answers always lead to even better questions.

SHAPING VISION INTO ACTION

People fail to articulate their vision with enough clarity, leading to missed targets. It's hard when we don't even know the right problem to solve. But the goal is not a roadmap. There are no roadmaps for being a visionary creative genius. Luckily, there *are* processes that we can apply to create our own path toward visionary innovation:

- Get inspired. Internalize stimuli.
- Keep track. Go back to it later.
- Externalize. Put the vision to paper. A rough iteration is fine.
- Envision success. Give it form and function.
- Think bigger, globally. Cultivate long-term goals.
- Think smaller, and act locally. Cultivate short-term goals.
- Build an innovation platform. Feed ideas.
- Model the experience. Who has achieved the same success?
- Review and refine goals. Have they changed?
- Ignite. Find metaphors and anecdotes that are relevant to the creative agenda.
- Incubate. Let the ideas simmer.

- Internalize. Read something inspiring.
- Put it to paper again and refine. Take the amplified scene and bless it with creative genius.
- Write the goals one more time. What does the vision look like now?
Repeat this process to shape the ultimate vision.

We may or may not realize it, but every project we've ever worked on was an evolutionary and metaphysical creative act. But our ideas rarely come out exactly the way we first envisioned them. We need to refine as we create. That's how the creative process works. We push our ideas into the world and refine them tirelessly. We complete the project and create another one. We constantly seek ways to improve our life. We make decisions to keep what works and toss what doesn't. Failure is a portal of discovery. We shape ourselves into the people we want to be—this is personal innovation. We're conscious of what we need to do in order to satisfy our needs or to get “ahead” in life. These are all aspects of the creative process.

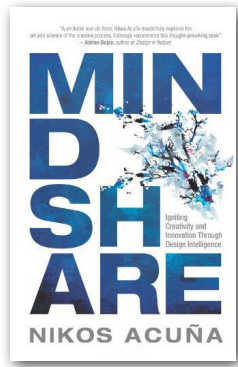
Organizations and individuals can use design intelligence to be more innovative by creating optimal experiences, and they can become more distinctive and successful as a result. This is part of our essential nature—our creative instinct and how to use our creativity to live a more fulfilling life. Being aware of this process has the potential to help us design a better world.

This is collective intelligence. This is why all great ideas are a culmination of other great ideas. In his book *Out of Our Minds*, Ken Robinson explores pivotal changes in thinking that revolutionize industries and fields of study across the globe. “A new paradigm may emerge when a new idea or method—what Susan Langer calls generative ideas—runs with tumultuous force through existing ways of thinking and transforms them.” New ideas reshape and reframe previous ways of thinking. They cast a completely different light on subjects, forever changing the way we approach them. This is design intelligence at work. With change comes opportunity. We must learn how to leverage these dramatic shifts taking place today and create innovation strategies that align with global transformation. So let there be light.

How do big ideas happen? Just pay attention to innovation’s essence. This essence suggests that building a remarkable brand, overcoming any challenge, and achieving anything in life can be found in understanding one truth: innovation is driven by the same inherent creative instinct that fuels our desires, seeks pleasure, strives to be better, and dares to discover new worlds.

It’s a process that seeks optimal design, shifts from chaos to order, from that which is unconscious to that which is conscious—a metaphysical process of transformation that strives toward knowledge and a state of perfection. 📖

Info



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