

PART ZERO

Art, the Comfort Zone, and the Chance of a Lifetime

Why Make Art?

Because you must. The new connected economy demands it and will reward you for nothing else.

Because you can. Art is what it is to be human.

The Icarus Deception

Just south of the Greek island of Samos lies the Icarian Sea. Legend has it that this is where Icarus died—a victim of his hubris.

His father, Daedalus, was a master craftsman. Banished to prison for sabotaging the work of King Minos (captor of the Minotaur), Daedalus created a brilliant escape plot, described in the myth that we were told as children.

He fashioned a set of wings for himself and his son. After affixing the wings with wax, they set out to escape. Daedalus warned Icarus not to fly too close to the sun. Entranced by his magical

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ability to fly, Icarus disobeyed and flew too high. We all know what happened next: The wax melted, and Icarus, the beloved son, lost his wings, tumbled into the sea, and died.

The lesson of this myth: Don't disobey the king. Don't disobey your dad. Don't imagine that you're better than you are, and most of all, don't ever believe that you have the ability to do what a god might do.

The part of the myth you weren't told: In addition to telling Icarus not to fly too high, Daedalus instructed his son not to fly too low, too close to the sea, because the water would ruin the lift in his wings.

Society has altered the myth, encouraging us to forget the part about the sea, and created a culture where we constantly remind one another about the dangers of standing up, standing out, and making a ruckus. Industrialists have made hubris a cardinal sin but conveniently ignored a far more common failing: settling for too little.

It's far more dangerous to fly too low than too high, because it feels *safe* to fly low. We settle for low expectations and small dreams and guarantee ourselves less than we are capable of. By flying too low, we shortchange not only ourselves but also those who depend on us or might benefit from our work. We're so obsessed about the risk of shining brightly that we've traded in everything that matters to avoid it.

The path that's available to each of us is neither reckless stupidity nor mindless compliance. No, the path that's available to us is to be human, to do art, and to fly far higher than we've been taught is possible. We've built a world where it's possible to fly higher than ever, and the tragedy is that we've been seduced into believing that we ought to fly ever lower instead.

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Your Comfort Zone (Versus Your Safety Zone)

For a long time, the two were one and the same. The mountain climber who knows when she's outside of her safety zone feels uncomfortable about it and stops—and lives to climb another day.

Your entire life has been about coordinating your comfort zone and your safety zone. Learning when to push and when to back off, understanding how it feels when you're about to hit a danger zone. Like the fox, we've been trained to stay inside the fence, because inside the fence is where it's safe—until it's too late.

We don't have time to reevaluate the safety zone every time we make a decision, so over time, we begin to forget about the safety zone and merely pay attention to its twin sister, the comfort zone. We assume that what makes us comfortable also makes us safe.

The fence holding us back is no longer there, but we still feel comfortable with the old boundaries. Now that a revolution has hit, now that the economy is upside down and the rules have changed, we have to confront an obvious truth:

The safety zone has changed, but your comfort zone has not.

Those places that felt safe—the corner office, the famous colleague, the secure job—aren't. You're holding back, betting on a return to normal, but in the new normal, your resistance to change is no longer helpful.

We made a mistake. We settled for a safety zone that wasn't bold enough, that embraced authority and compliance. We built our comfort zone around being obedient and invisible, and as a result, we're far too close to the waves.

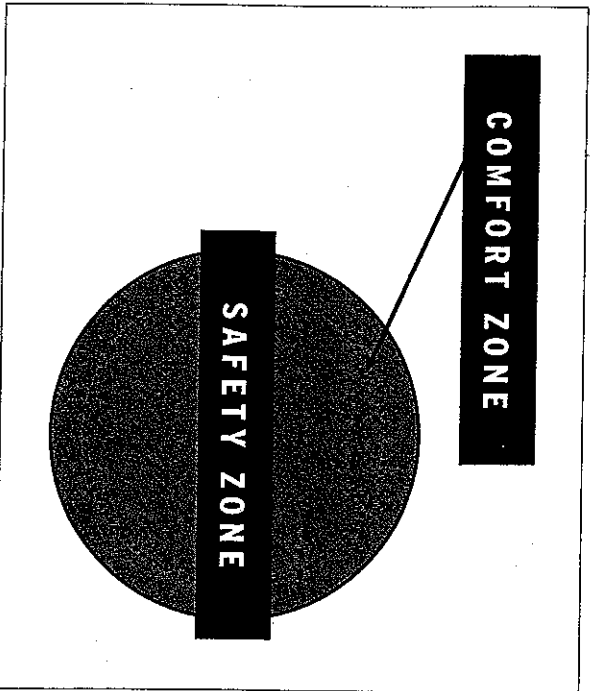
You can go to as many meetings, read as many books, and

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attend as many seminars as you like, but if you don't figure out how to realign your comfort zone with today's new safety zone, all the strategy in the world isn't going to help you.

It's simple. There's still a safety zone, but it's not in a place that feels comfortable to you. The new safety zone is the place where art and innovation and destruction and rebirth happen. The new safety zone is the never-ending creation of ever-deeper personal connection.

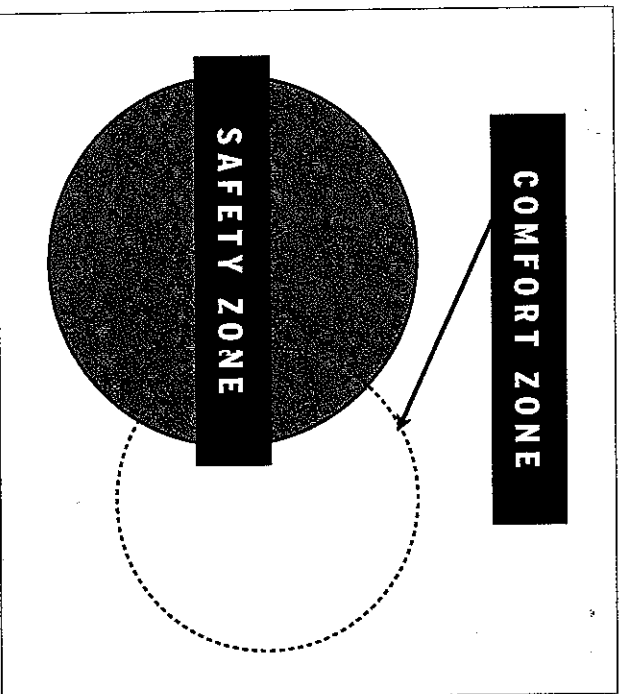
Moving to a new safety zone is a little like learning to swim. It's clearly better to have the ability to survive (and even have fun) in the water, but for a long time it's not comfortable. Recognizing that the safety zone has moved might be the prompt you need to re-evaluate your comfort zone.



Successful people align their comfort zone with the behavior that keeps them safe.

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But what happens when the place of safety moves . . . and you don't?

If you become someone who is uncomfortable unless she is creating change, restless if things are standing still, and disappointed if you haven't failed recently, you've figured out how to become comfortable with the behaviors most likely to make you safe going forward.

Art Is the New Safety Zone

Creating ideas that spread and connecting the disconnected are the two pillars of our new society, and both of them require the posture of the artist.

Doing these two things regularly and with abandon is where the

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new safety zone lies. Maintaining the status quo and fighting to fit in no longer work, because our economy and our culture have changed.

The bad news is this: Artists are never invulnerable. This safety zone isn't as comfortable as the last one was. It took a hundred years for us to be brainwashed into accepting the industrial system as normal and safe. It is neither, not for long.

Forget Salvador Dali

When you hear the word "artist," do you picture the slightly crazed Dali or the self-destructive Jackson Pollock? Perhaps you've been trained to imagine that you need to be someone like Johnny Depp or Amanda F. Palmer in order to make art.

This notion is both dangerous and wrong.

Oscar Wilde wrote that art is "new, complex, and vital." Art isn't something that's made by artists. *Artists are people who make art.*

Art is not a gene or a specific talent. Art is an attitude, culturally driven and available to anyone who chooses to adopt it. Art isn't something sold in a gallery or performed on a stage. Art is the unique work of a human being, work that touches another. Most painters, it turns out, aren't artists at all—they are safety-seeking copycats.

Seizing new ground, making connections between people or ideas, working without a map—these are works of art, and if you do them, you are an artist, regardless of whether you wear a smock, use a computer, or work with others all day long.

Speaking up when there's no obvious right answer, making yourself vulnerable when it's possible to put up shields, and caring

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about both the process and the outcome—these are works of art that our society embraces and the economy demands.

Tactics Are No Replacement for Art

Understanding cutting-edge business concepts like the Long Tail and the Tipping Point and Purple Cow and GTD and the rest is worthless if you don't commit. Commit to the frightening work of flying blind, of taking a stand, and of making something new, complex, and vital—or nothing much happens.

These cutting-edge strategies and tactics seem to promise a pain-free way to achieve your goals. You can read about a new strategy, find a guaranteed, impersonal way to achieve, point the industrial machine at a new market niche or a new sort of note-taking technique or buzzword and, presto, results without pain. Ideaviruses will be unleashed, points will be tipped, and tails will get longer.

Alas, there isn't a pain-free way to achieve your goals.

I've read these books. I've written some of them. And I love them all, but the ideas are not enough without commitment. They're not enough because strategy is empty without change, empty without passion, and empty without people willing to confront the void.

I've seen the frightened looks in the eyes of an audience of music industry execs as they contemplate the death of their industry (and the possibilities that lie in its rebirth). I've heard the ennui in the voice of yet another manager at yet another endless meeting. And I've witnessed countless opportunities squandered by people who could have taken action but didn't. Not because they couldn't figure out what to do but because they weren't willing to do it.

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Microsoft and Sony Records and the local freelancer have all squandered clear and obvious opportunities—not through ignorance of what was on offer but because it was easier to avoid committing to a new way of thinking.

Strategy and tactics live on the outside, in the cold world of consultants and spreadsheets. They are things we do without changing the way we think. Art, on the other hand, is personal, built on attitude and vision and commitment.

This is a book about committing to do work that is personal, that requires guts, and that has the potential to change everything. Art is the act of a human being doing generous work, creating something for the first time, touching another person.

This is a book about why each of us should make art. Why it's worth the price. And why we can't wait.

The world is filled with ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Art Is Frightening

Art isn't pretty.

Art isn't painting.

Art isn't something you hang on the wall.

Art is what we do when we're truly alive.

If you've already decided that you're not an artist, it's worth considering why you made that decision and what it might take to unmake it.

If you've announced that you have no talent (in anything!), then you're hiding.

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Art might scare you.

Art might bust you.

But art is who we are and what we do and what we need.

An artist is someone who uses bravery, insight, creativity, and boldness to challenge the status quo. And an artist takes it (all of it, the work, the process, the feedback from those we seek to connect with) personally.

Art isn't a result; it's a journey. The challenge of our time is to find a journey worthy of your heart and your soul.

Not an Artist?

That's the easy answer. Artists are other people. They don't dress or act or do work like we do. They're not required to go to meetings, they're full of themselves, they have tattoos, and they have talent.

But of course, this is nonsense.

When you were rewarded for obedience, you were obedient.

When you were rewarded for compliance, you were compliant.

When you were rewarded for competence, you were competent.

Now that society finally values art, it's time to make art.

Quality Is Assumed

We assume that you will make something to spec.

We assume that the lights will go on when we flip the switch.

We assume that the answer is in Wikipedia.

All we're willing to pay you extra for is what we don't assume, what we can't get easily and regularly and for free. We need you to provide the things that are unexpected, scarce, and valuable.

Scarcity and abundance have been flipped. High-quality work

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is no longer scarce. Competence is no longer scarce, either. We have too many good choices—there's an abundance of things to buy and people to hire.

What's scarce is trust, connection, and surprise. These are three elements in the work of a successful artist.

The New Scarcity

One kind of scarcity involves effort. You can put in only so many hours, sweat only so much. The employer pays for effort, because he can't get effort he can count on for free. And the eager-beaver employee expends extra effort to make a mark but soon learns that it doesn't scale.

Another kind of scarcity involves physical resources. Resources keep getting more scarce, because we're running out of them. Paradoxically, we're also running out of places in our houses to store our junk and running out of room in our bodies to store what we eat.

The new, third kind of scarcity is the emotional labor of art. The risk involved in digging deep to connect and surprise, the patience required to build trust, the guts necessary to say, "I made this"—these are all scarce and valuable. And they scale.

Here Come the Noisemakers

You are chaos, and there is nothing to keep you out.

When network engineers think about the security of the network, they begin with a firewall. The firewall is designed to keep unwanted information and viruses out of the system.

The Internet doesn't have a firewall. We're all able to connect.

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We each represent the ghost in the machine, the noise, the one who might change everything.

What you feed the network changes what you get back. The network connects people to one another, people to organizations, and best of all, people to ideas.

This new network celebrates art, enables connections, helps tribes to form, amplifies weirdness, and spreads ideas. What it cannot abide is boredom.

If you want to write, here's a blog. Write. Today, writers like Xenia Jardin and Danielle LaPorte reach millions without the blessing of big media.

If you want to sing or make videos, well, sure, YouTube will happily show your work to the masses. Judson Laipply has already entertained more than a hundred million people with his short film—a video that cost exactly zero to film.

If you want to share an invention or fund a project or topple a government, the connected economy makes it easier to do that than ever before.

Can you imagine it getting *less* open? This is just the beginning.

Revolutions bring total chaos.

That's what makes them revolutionary.

A Nonhierarchy of Artists

The painter in front of a blank canvas. The architect changing the rules of construction. The playwright who makes us cry. The doctor who cares enough to call. The detective who cracks a cold case. The diva with a new interpretation of a classic. The customer

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service rep who, despite the distance and the rush, makes an honest connection. The entrepreneur who dares to start without permission or authority. The middle manager who transforms the key meeting with a single comment.

You?

The Evolution of "Fine Art"

James Elkins points out that schools of art used to divide the arts into only two categories: fine art and industrial art.

Then the intellectuals expanded the categories to: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry.

From there it's a quick leap to: performance, video, film, photography, fiber, weaving, silkscreen, ceramics, interior architecture, industrial design, fashion, artists' books, printmaking, kinetic sculpture, computing, neon, and holography.

To which I'd add: entrepreneurship, customer service, invention, technology, connection, leadership, and a dozen others. These are the new performing arts, the valuable visual arts, the essential personal arts.

Welcome to the Connection Economy

The value we create is directly related to how much valuable information we can produce, how much trust we can earn, and how often we innovate.

In the industrial economy, the stuff we made (literally stuff—widgets, devices, and O-rings) comprised the best assets we could build. Fortunes belonged to men who built railroads, lightbulbs,

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and buildings. Today we're seeking something a revolution apart from that sort of productivity.

The connection economy rewards the leader, the initiator, and the rebel.

The Internet wasn't built to make it easy for you to watch Lady Gaga videos. The Internet is a connection machine, and anyone with a laptop or a smartphone is now connected to just about everyone else. And it turns out that those connections are changing the world.

If your factory burns down but you have loyal customers, you'll be fine. On the other hand, if you lose your customers, even your factory isn't going to help you—Detroit is filled with empty factories.

If your team is filled with people who work for the company, you'll soon be defeated by tribes of people who work for a cause.

If you use your money to buy advertising to promote the average products you produce for average people, soon you'll run out of money. But if you use your money to make exceptional products and services, you won't need to spend it on advertising, because your customers will connect to one another and bring you more.

The connection economy has changed how you get a job and what you do when you get to that job. It has changed how we make and listen to music, write and read books, and discover where to eat, what to eat, and whom to eat with. It has destroyed the mediocre middle of average products for average people who have few choices, and it has enabled the weird edges, where people who care find others who care and they all end up caring about something even more than they did before they met.

The connection economy enables endless choice and endless

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shelf space and puts a premium on attention and on trust, neither of which is endless.

Most of all, the connection economy has made competence not particularly valuable and has replaced it with an insatiable desire for things that are new, real, and important.

New, Real, and Important

Those are three elements that define art.

The connection economy functions on a steady diet of new, real, and important. The connection economy builds a new asset, one that we can measure and value now for the first time. Suddenly, it's not the building or the rules or the packaging that matters; it's the bridges between people that generate value, and those bridges are built by art.

Art is difficult, risky, and frightening.

It's also the only option if we choose to care.

The Opposite of Coherent . . .

It's not incoherent.

There's only one way to organize a deck of cards in order. There's just one way to stack the dishes according to the manual. The industrial economy embraces coherence.

Art, on the other hand, is almost never coherent. It's messy and comes in fits and starts. It's difficult to write a table of contents or outline for. It's unpredictable.

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And it demands our attention. It works the way our brains do, not the way our machines do.

It's impossible to talk coherently about art. That doesn't mean you can't understand it.

The opposite of coherent is interesting.

Changing Your Framework for Success

Competent people enjoy being competent. Once you're good at something, changing what you do or moving to a new way of doing it will be stressful because it will make you (momentarily) incompetent.

Art is threatening because it always involves moving away from the comfort zone into the unknown. The unknown is the black void, the place where failure can happen (and so can success). Our instinct, then, particularly if we're successful at one thing, is to avoid the unknown. To stay in the comfort zone and ignore the fact that the safety zone has moved.

No one taught you how to do art. There are generations of thinking about what it means to challenge your fear and create something worth talking about—something that changes people—so you don't have to start from scratch. If you decide that it's important to stop complying and start creating, the first thing to do is change your framework, the worldview you bring to your work.

The framework changes what we see and changes what we tell ourselves is important. And the revolution is tearing your old framework down.

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The Chance of a Lifetime

No one enjoys watching their house burn down. Revolutions do that. They destroy the perfect, disrupt the status quo, and change everything.

And then they enable the impossible.

The chance that each of us has is clear: The connection revolution is shuffling the deck and enabling new organizations and new ideas to thrive. Someone is going to be leading us; someone is going to be exploring the edges; someone is going to be creating things of incalculable value.

What happened yesterday is over. Tomorrow the door is wide open, and this is your chance to connect.

I Categorically Reject Your Cynicism

Art is not for "other people."

All of those people who you say are your artistic heroes . . . All of those people who have made such a difference in the world . . . None of those people were ordained. None of those people were preapproved. None of those people were considered all-stars at an early age.

So please, please don't tell me you have to be a born artist to do art. I'm not buying it.

Your Pain Is Real

It's the pain of possibility, vulnerability, and risk. Once you stop feeling it, you've lost your best chance to make a difference.

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The easiest way to avoid the pain is to lull it to sleep by finding a job that numbs you. Soon the pain of the artist will be replaced by a different sort of pain, the pain of the cog, the pain of someone who knows that his gifts are being wasted and that his future is out of his control.

It's not a worthwhile trade. In the words of Joseph Campbell, you're doing art "for the experience of being alive." The alternative is to be numb, to lull yourself into the false sense of security offered by the promise of the rare well-paid job where you are doing someone else's bidding.

The pain is part of being alive. Art is the narrative of being alive.

Like a growth spurt for a teenager, the pain of facing the void where art lives is part of the deal, our stretching into a better self.

Redefining Courage

Courage doesn't always involve physical heroism in the face of death. It doesn't always require giant leaps worthy of celebration. Sometimes, courage is the willingness to speak the truth about what you see and to own what you say.

In order for there to be courage, of course, there must be risk. It doesn't take courage to open the refrigerator, because there's no downside. No, courage is necessary because owning our point of view brings risk. When you speak your truth, you have opened a door, allowing others to speak to you, directly to you, to your true self.

**Courage is telling our story,
not being immune to criticism.**

—Brené Brown

If It Doesn't Ship, It's Not Art

Art always involves a collision with a marketplace, an interaction with a recipient, a gift given and a gift received.

You can plan and sketch and curse the system all day, but if you don't ship, you haven't done your work, because the work involves *connection* and the generosity behind it. It's entirely possible that one day your insight will be discovered and that it will touch someone or make a difference. But if you hide your contribution from us, you can't be considered an artist, because it's not art until a human connection is made.

We're not waiting for you to tell us about your notebook filled with ideas. Tell us about the connections you have enabled and the impact you have made instead.

What Do You Make?

Make connections.

Make a difference.

Make a ruckus.

Make a legacy.

The economy has rescinded the simple offer of "Do what you're told, play it safe, and you can make a living." Making a living is now harder than ever. The alternatives are up to you.

We've been trained to prefer being right to learning something, to prefer passing the test to making a difference, and most of all, to prefer fitting in with the right people, the people with economic power. Now it's your turn to stand up and stand out.

**Most People Don't Believe They
Are Capable of Initiative**

Initiating a project, a blog, a Wikipedia article, even a unique family journey. Initiating something particularly when you're not putatively in charge. We avoid these acts because we've been trained to avoid them.

At the same time, almost all people believe they are capable of editing, giving feedback, or merely criticizing.

That means that finding people to fix your typos is easy. Finding someone to say "go" is almost impossible.

I don't think the shortage of artists has much to do with the innate ability to create or initiate. I think it has to do with believing that it's possible and acceptable for you to do it. We've had these doors open wide for only a decade or so, and most people have been brainwashed into believing that their job is to copyedit the world, not to design it.

Quick Question Before We Go On . . .

Do you think we don't need your art, or are you afraid to produce it?