

Afterword

Ideation and Exploring and Mapping the Unknown

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It is the year 2021 and I am in enforced isolation in Cambridge, UK. The enforcer, my government is effectively under orders from a virus – COVID-19. An unseen, microscopic entity – some say not quite a living thing – which has devastated our wonderful knowledge filled world. Globally, we are in retreat from an organism so basic, compared with ourselves that there is no way to compare. Everything we know collectively has been of no avail. And yet – for the future hope has sprung – not from what we knew or had capability to do – but through a collective admission – that perhaps if we explored the realms of what we do not know – or even do not know the extent of what we might not know – we might save us from ourselves. The means whereby vaccines have been developed so fast to counter the COVID-19 pandemic owe much to a species of entrepreneurial thinking that admits to the value of ignorance as a possible starting point. What a wonderfully coincidental surprise to receive today, information about new thoughts from my mentor about Creative Ignorance, Professor Piero Formica. I am looking forward to the time when with the engagement of students from around the world we may see stimulated the writing and publication of a collection of pieces focussed on the title ‘MAPS OF THE UNKNOWN – Creative Ignorance in the Quest for a Better World’. In the meantime we can enjoy a feast of forward-looking narrative and re-imagination on the subject of those who venture into unexplored territories of the mind and ‘IDEATE’ – what a wonderful new word. Ideation – ‘Creation in the mind’.

Piero Formica, resident now in Bologna, but of international renown and, amongst other things, Founder of the International Entrepreneurship Academy, challenges us in the words just read, to stir ourselves from any incipient lethargy of mind and journey with him along pathways new, as he did with earlier writings such as *Stories of Innovation for the Millennial Generation*. Today Piero’s student and academic followers are many and some, from Nigeria, India, the Gulf Countries, Estonia, Sweden, and Italy are joining forces to push further the boundaries of his outrageous propositions about Creative Ignorance. Outrageous is here used as a complimentary descriptive. Like disruptive, it conjures in the minds of some, negative

concerns and anxiety. But outrage and disruption have been essential in moving the mountains of conventional wisdom that so often have been barriers to progress and enlightenment. It was once believed the world was flat and imprisonment or death could result from expressing a contrary view – even if the thinker such as Galileo – should be the perpetrator. Brilliant physician William Harvey, in the seventeenth century, delayed writing about his work on the human circulatory system – life-changing new knowledge – for fear of persecution. Indeed, long after he described and proved his theories – those wedded to the mistaken earlier beliefs that we had two circulatory mechanisms – not one – argued for his insanity and some threatened to end his life. We could find many more examples.

It is exciting and heartening that a movement is now abroad vocal and gaining momentum – inspired by Piero's thought provoking and philosophical prose. Path creators who are Ideators change the world. Often at great pains to themselves whilst on the journey. Ignaz Philippe Semmelweis was driven mad in the nineteenth century, years after proving that the terrible toll of deaths in Viennese hospitals from childbed fever could be all but eliminated if those clever doctors would just wash their hands in between examining the unfortunate mothers recently delivered of healthy babies. His reward for his work and discoveries was to become a derided outcast – eventually driven to insanity. His tragedy which proved one of the greatest realisations in medical science – the definition of sepsis and infectious disease – exemplifies unfortunately the reward awaiting many who may be described as 'the creative ignorant'. Ideators must face challenge and derision. They offer disturbing and troubling thoughts and directions which militate against the comfortable and the ordinary.

Entrepreneurs are Ideators and they have changed the world. I despair that the term is so narrowly applied. Often apportioned to those who start companies and make fortunes (or fail to). Entrepreneurial thinking to Piero – and to others amongst us is so much more. Quoting from earlier words of wisdom I have read from Piero and others – I feel much more able to identify with entrepreneurs as those who 'By choosing the journey along the road less travelled, path creators make huge changes in their personal lives and in the industries that they disrupt by their ideas'.

It is immensely encouraging to look forward, having seen so far, only review copies of some of the work recently generated by Piero and his students and associates in addition to this current work. I have been given glimpses of re-imaginings and new pathways to be mapped and explored as a result of this movement inspired by thoughts outrageous and disruptive. The COVID-19 pandemic is not something any of us would wish upon any world or age. But it has shaken conventional wisdom and behaviour and forced new thinking and the admission of relative ignorance. It will lead to drastic changes in behaviour as well as thinking. When risk becomes a norm, most of us undergo change – knowing or unknowing. To have a collection of next

generation thinkers from a variety of cultural backgrounds – leading our thoughts on Creative Ignorance and the discipline of Ideation, is exciting – and to explore with younger minds ‘the unknown unknowns’ might be revelatory. Not only do we have the ‘wisdom of ages’ in these present thoughts and words of Piero Formica, but the promise of next-generation followers inspired to commit imagination to expressions in words we can all share.

In my own experience, as an octogenarian, and one very close to medicine and medical practice and research and the healthcare industry, it has been exhilarating to see mindsets and approaches changed in the quest for life-saving solutions to desperate and dire human suffering and circumstances. Regulatory mechanisms and reservations have been overcome by openness to innovation and acceptance that the unthinkable may in extremis be thought and acted upon. Such a pity it takes the fear of more deaths to enable the immense potential of the human brain to be exercised with constructive abandon. But I see it happening around me today. Which is not to say that ignorance is all, nor that a lack of organised thinking is obsolete or to be abandoned. I believe that Ideation and the recognition of the value of Creative Ignorance can live alongside the wise observations of such as Jules Verne – who emphasised the importance of timing when he wrote ‘*There is nothing in the whole world more powerful than an idea whose time has come*’. Creative Ignorance can be the generator of such ideas – without which action may not take place at any time. I can also reconcile my belief in the importance of the well-trained mind and mental processes to be important alongside the need for Ideation – and the proposition of another great and different French thinker, scientist, Louis Pasteur – who emphasised that ‘*Chance favours the prepared mind*’. The words of an Ideator indeed.

As 2021 proceeds to sweep away the trauma and sadness of 2020 it is encouraging to be able to look forward to the surprises I expect to be awaiting us in future publications. The great early explorers produced maps to chart their journeys and to enable others to follow where the path creators had preceded. I love the concept of capture of word maps describing prospective new territories. ‘Maps of the Unknown’ would be a great topic and title for publications exploring these exciting unexplored territories. And all of this in a quest for a Better World. My hope is that we will all be challenged by the provocative and open-minded expressions I anticipate will be presented to us in such exciting publications. For the present we have a great deal to think about having been stimulated by ‘*Ideators: Their Words and Voices*’.