

Creativity as a Matter of Urgency

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Escalating capabilities and use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) across industries have sparked multiple debates worldwide, birthing questions from the ethical—What sort of governance should we apply to AI's use?—to the epistemological—How do we exercise control over our beliefs in an AI-filtered world? What are the roles of intention, meaning, subjectivity, and truth in this world?—to the ontological—What does it mean to be human? Certainly, when Descartes wrote “Cogito ergo sum” (“I think, therefore I am”), he had not considered algorithmic cognition. Joining this debate, tech futurist Lindsey McInerney shares valuable insights into AI's rapid permeation into most aspects of human life. She cautions that we must utilise AI with consciousness and intention, and constantly exercise our intellect, strategic thinking, imagination and creative muscle in order to retain—rather than outsource and lose—that which makes us most profoundly human.

Creativity is a deeply human thing. It is stimulated by our subjective and nuanced lived experiences, our ability to process and to feel emotion. Creativity comes to us in our dreams and heartaches; it lives in our imagination. It comes from our ability to bring together different parts of the human experience, wrestle with them, struggle—and turn them into something inspired. In art, we translate pain into beauty and find meaning where there was none before.

As the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) comes rushing in, we are called to re-examine what it means to create and to be human. Critically, we need to ask how we will remain both creative *and*

human, and not surrender the essence of what makes humanity special, even as we welcome AI agents into our lives. Nurturing creativity has never been more urgent.

I've spent my career looking deeply into technology. What has fascinated me most is technology's human impact. No matter how good things seem, humans always strive for better. We've built technology to support us in living consistently better lives. The leaps we've made since the internet became ubiquitous have been on a scale unimaginable, even 50 years ago. Since OpenAI launched ChatGPT in November 2022, the leaps have exponentially accelerated, ushering in a new era of technological growth.

So far, we've only seen the very beginning of how humanity will leverage AI. But the change it will bring is as incredible as it is inevitable. Many are in awe of how AI allows them to express themselves. Others are warning that over-reliance on AI will mark the end of creativity, or perhaps worse, usher in what some friends and I have been describing as an “era of average”. In this scenario, the places we normally encounter creativity would become mundane, consisting almost exclusively of AI output. Life as a human would become uninspired.

While I do believe there is a risk of moving towards an era of average, I'm also excited about how AI can enhance our ability to create if we find ways to use it both consciously and intentionally. Creatives have already begun to blend this technology into their work. In many ways, AI has the potential to democratise creativity, liberating big ideas from minds that don't have the ability to take them much

**“We must use AI consciously—
keeping our intellect, creativity, and
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further than thought. Getting things right might even permit us to be our creative selves more regularly: relieving us of mundane tasks, allowing us to reallocate that time to the things we love, create more, dream more, and spend more time in the liminal space that allows us to be inspired. This optimism doesn’t come without consideration for potential downsides, however. Governments and governing bodies, parents and teachers, indeed all of us will have to consider how to most purposefully use this technology, to ensure that we bend the arc of AI towards good.

So much of this new technology has delighted us. It feels creative and novel. What is less predictable is how the use of AI will affect humans and our creative minds in the long term. We’ve been here before. When social and digital media was put in the hands of the masses via mobile phones, we were so excited about the ability to connect with one another that few of us paused to consider the possible downsides. Since then, we’ve learned that these beautiful apps, which have no doubt done much good, also came with dire consequences for many. The mental health of young people has never been worse, with studies showing a direct link to social media use. This doesn’t even speak to some of the other challenges social media has introduced, like misinformation and polarisation, or the decline in real world connection. And yet AI is not going away, and

it would be a disservice to humanity to not find ways to leverage what could well be the most powerful tool of our time.

Liberating Ideas, Birthing More Creativity

Some of the world’s most creative, living voices haven’t been heard yet. Big ideas, bold thinking, and innovative concepts are stuck inside brilliant minds and imaginations. Why? Because despite having a big idea, many people lack the skillset or knowledge to bring it to life. AI promises to change this. There simply has never been a faster way to turn an idea from thought to reality. AI has opened up a world where natural language prompts—common human language—can become a moving picture, an image, or even code. People with no experience building software can launch anything they can dream up and describe, shifting the question from “who will build it”, to “who will imagine it”, and “who will have the language to prompt it”. If you can articulate your concept to a large language model (LLM), it can deliver a working prototype with a codebase almost instantly. If you can describe what’s in

your mind's eye to an AI platform, it will convert your words into a drawing or even a presentation deck right away, allowing people to express themselves where they previously couldn't.

But with this simple “creative power” comes a risk: the slow erosion of our imaginative muscles. When anything can be generated instantly, we may stop struggling, sketching, tinkering or wrestling with ideas ourselves. And with that ease, we risk outsourcing the very process that makes us uniquely human: the messy, magical act of figuring things out. Over time, this might lead us to lose our ability to have big, bold, creative ideas at all.

I've felt this first hand as I adopted other technologies. In 2003, I found myself in Paris for the first time. Smart phones didn't exist. The internet was still in its relative infancy. If I wanted to write emails to my family members with email addresses back home, I needed to find one of the internet cafes scattered throughout the city. For a few Euros, I'd buy an internet connection by the minute—it was expensive! Yet within a few days, I could navigate the city with ease, without the technologies we enjoy so much today. I quickly built a mental map, orienting myself by the Eiffel Tower, the Seine, Notre Dame, and Sacré-Cœur. I never felt lost.

Fast forward to today. For over a decade, my smartphone and apps like Google Maps, City Mapper and Waze have been my navigational crutches. Despite living in the UK for nearly 12 years, I rarely drive anywhere without Waze guiding me. When it comes to getting to places and mapping out cities, I just don't have the topographical mapping command that I once did. That part of my

brain, the one that builds mental maps, has atrophied. My sense of direction has faded. Not because I lost the capacity, but because I stopped using it.

We risk the same thing happening with creativity. If we default to AI for every blank page, every new concept, every first draft, we risk losing the subtle internal signals that guide and shape our originality. Just because AI *can* help us express ourselves, doesn't mean we *should* skip the generative tension that gives rise to great ideas. The danger is not in using the tool, but in forgetting how to use ourselves.

Exercising our Creative Muscles

Because AI will be so ubiquitous and accessible, we will need to model elite athletes in the way we stay disciplined in training our own thinking. It's always easier to sit on the couch and turn on the TV than to get out and run, train, or push weights. But when an athlete steps on the court in a competitive arena, they can't fake it. They've either done the reps and built the competitive muscle, or they haven't. Not too long from now, in moments when we need to be creative, we'll have either done the reps and built the capability or we'll be outpaced by someone who did. If we've leaned too heavily on AI and lost those muscles, we just won't be able to win creative games.

This extends to how we hire and nurture creative talent. We are already seeing creative

jobs in marketing and advertising being heavily augmented, if not completed entirely, by AI. The speed at which an LLM can create decent copy or a weird and maybe viral advertisement—think of the Kalshi AI generated ad that launched during the NBA finals in North America—is not only impressive but, in many cases, more than good enough, given the cost. The Kalshi ad cost just US\$2,000. But the actual cost, if we begin to rely on AI too heavily, far exceeds potential and inevitable job loss. The cost will be our ability to think and create as humans. It will be the death of the brain trust inside our companies. Many businesses may find that in 10 years, they simply won't have much internal thinking capacity at all.

It takes years for senior creatives to gain the muscle required for bold, creative work. Companies that rely too much on AI to replace junior creative roles won't have senior, dynamic thinking talent in the future. We can't afford to make the mistake of rushing to an AI future without being disciplined in continuing to train human ingenuity and the mental muscles behind it. A balance must be struck. And while it will be tempting to use AI for tasks that used to be completed by junior talent, the future won't be so bright when young minds haven't been given the opportunity to be big thinkers earlier in their careers.

Each of us is now more responsible than ever for our own learning. A recent MIT study made this clear. Students who used ChatGPT to write SAT-style essays showed lower neural engagement and weaker critical thinking skills than those using Google or no tools at all. When we use AI to think for us, our brains eventually check out. Tools like ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini can write, brainstorm, even reason. But if we let them do all the thinking or all the creating, our

own skills will atrophy. In this new era, owning your learning, sharpening your judgement, and staying intellectually engaged isn't optional. It's essential.

It's important that we begin thinking right now about which parts of our brains we are willing to outsource to AI, which cognitive muscles we might be okay to allow to relax. Equally, we should be carefully thinking about which ones we want to keep sharp. Our ability to dream, imagine, create and be inspired should not be on the table. Creative and strategic thinking are fundamental to who we are as human beings. They are things we want to stay sharp at, even as AI becomes a bigger part of our lives.

So how should creatives use AI? While it might sound like I'm ringing alarm bells, and dissuading the use of AI, that couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, when I teach my university course "The Future of the Internet", I encourage my students to use AI in every lecture, and on every assignment. *How* they use it is key. Fundamentally, they continue to flex their cognitive muscles. Every interaction with an AI model is thoughtful and intentional. Like my students, we can't seek easy answers.

Collaboration, Iteration, and Speed

Many of us spend time creating in vacuums. For whatever reason, we don't have consistent partnerships that help to drive us. And yet often the best creative breakthroughs don't

happen in isolation. They happen in conversation, in tension, in collaboration. Take one of my favourite bands for example, The Beatles. As individuals, John Lennon and Paul McCartney were (are) brilliant. But together, they were generative. They pushed each other in directions they would likely have never gone alone. Their contrasts made their music textured and daring. McCartney's polish refined Lennon's rawness. McCartney's meticulousness tempered Lennon's chaos. Later in their careers, when the two were known to write more separately, knowing that the other would hear, tweak, or challenge their work raised the creative bar. There are many similar stories where creative partners drive new outcomes, entirely different from what individuals can do alone.

This dynamic is mirrored in how many artists and creatives are already working with AI. Not in replacing themselves or outsourcing their imagination, but augmenting and challenging it. AI is becoming a creative sparring partner, a mirror, and even a mild antagonist. When worked with thoughtfully, AI becomes less like a ghostwriter, and more like sitting down with a co-conspirator who has infinite patience, a large memory, and zero ego. It can be used to iterate quickly, test alternate perspectives, remix influences, and break out of creative ruts. It can be like having a partner on call to throw creative juice into a room when things go quiet—a source of infinite “what ifs”. It's a great feedback loop when you're feeling stuck. It collapses the time between inspiration and execution, making the early, murky phases of creative development in many ways faster, freer and more experimental. Such a world, where more of us have creative partnership, feels special.

Eliminating the Mundane, Carving Out Creative Space

A world where more of us have time to create feels even more special. And yet all of us spend time on mundane and boring tasks. Spreadsheets, billing, email, managing content, formatting, organising, fact-gathering, researching, scheduling. These things take time; they take brain power and mind muscle that we need not give away. Instead, we could spend more time engaging with other humans or on creative work itself. Equally, gaining early feedback, notes for improvement, or alternate perspectives on what we've created to eliminate our own bias and help us deliver better first drafts might help us push our work further and faster, making us better creators overall.

The Road Ahead

Multiple commentators are predicting that many of today's jobs will soon disappear. The main casualties? Knowledge workers. One of society's key challenges is how quickly this will happen—think the next five years, not even the next decade. This is an incredibly compressed amount of time to adapt. While much of what is to come simply can't be predicted given how unprecedented this technology is and how quickly it is developing, one thing is clear to me. We absolutely must lean in to the best of what

makes us human. Dreaming, Imagination, Inspiration, and Creativity must be pursued at all costs. Ecosystems like Singapore, with significant technological penetration, coordinated policy approaches for the arts and innovation, and its confluence of cultures and creative genres, will offer early signs of how to do this. But ultimately, it will be a challenge for us all.

“Logic will get you from A to B, imagination will take you everywhere.”

- Einstein □

About the Author



Lindsey McInerney is a globally recognised advisor, operator, and keynote speaker, focused on the future of business, technology, and culture.

As the former Global Head of Technology & Innovation at AB InBev, the world’s largest brewer, Lindsey led enterprise-scale digital transformation and launched one of the company’s most widely recognised brand activations in immersive digital spaces. She has since co-founded two companies, raised \$9M in funding, and advised a wide spectrum of clients including global brands, public figures, and C-suite leaders.

She serves as Scholar-in-Residence at McMaster University, where she lectures on the future of the internet, and works privately with a select group of leaders, helping them navigate change and define what’s next. Her TEDx talk on “The Return to the Humanities in the Age of AI” has been widely shared, and her work has been featured in *Forbes*, *Adweek*, *Vogue Business*, *CoinDesk*, and more. In 2023, she was named to the Thinkers50 Radar List of global business thinkers shaping the future.

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