

WHEN I RUN

physical activity as a tool to conquer creative blocks

Sarah Glusnitz, born in 1990, studies Interactive/Media/Design at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. She is an illustrator with a fascination of the human body and its correlation to art.

INDEX

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| Index | 3 |
| When I Run | 5 |
| Introduction | 7 |
| Chapter I | 15 |
| Chapter II | 29 |
| Chapter III | 37 |
| Chapter IV | 47 |
| Chapter V | 65 |
| Chapter VI | 79 |
| Conclusion | 87 |
| Endnotes | 93 |
| Bibliography | 98 |
| Acknowledgments | 103 |

When I Run

*When I run, it doesn't mean much-
it's a world with a streak across it,
and I run up and down or flat along that streak
to make the wind sing the way it sings sometimes*

*to go around things. When I run,
it doesn't mean there aren't roads or cars
to go around, and I wear soft shoes with
no place to go and only a waving circle*

*in mind to make the run complete.
When I run, it doesn't mean the world,
except for shoes, but definite places
to step - next and next-to-next -*

*and then only a touch. When I run,
slowly, it all goes past, and with it
those who did right or wrong, or didn't,
and Earth - it also follows a streak in space.¹*

by Marvin Bell

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Body and mind are interwoven and exist in the same realm. Running can help increase the connection between both as well as strengthen each component. Marvin Bell wrote a poem about running and how it makes one forget about the world. Bell wrote about how it doesn't matter where, how fast or when you're running. The only thing that matters is, that one is running. He talks about himself in the poem, gathering inspiration during the run and connecting body and mind.

Connecting body and mind is something that is already known as far back as Ancient Greece. Ancient Greece has given the modern society the Lyceum, the Olympic Games and even democracy as well as philosophy and mythology. In Greek mythology one often comes across the connection between body and mind, which Bell is talking about. Heracles as a figure in Greek mythology showed how embedded physical activity is in life. Through his strength he conquered the twelve labors, but not without using his mind to trick his way out of impossible seeming tasks. On his part, the persona of Heracles inspired countless of writers and artists.

INTRODUCTION

Almost every creative^A person has experienced the phenomenon of a creative block at least once in their lives. A creative block is also known as writer's block, though it does not only apply to writers in particular. Creativity^B is born from the mind and while trying to keep one's brain sharp and attentive, one uses brain-training programs such as Sudoku. It is forgotten what is most accessible and obvious to the body: physical activity^C.

Creativity cannot always flow, but sometimes gets blocked instead; known as the creative block. Dealing with the greatly feared creative block myself, made me want to go on a journey to explore the possibilities of escaping the creative limbo. I came across physical activity as a tool that is open to almost everyone and is easily embedded into daily routine. One could call it a loophole in creative limbo. An easily utilized tool to conquer creative blocks.

A This is the definition used for the word creative: "Inventive, imaginative; of, relating to, displaying, using, or involving imagination or original ideas as well as routine skill or intellect, esp. in literature or art." - Oxford English Dictionary. oed.com. Web. September 15, 2015.

B This is the definition used for the word creativity: "The faculty of being creative; ability or power to create"- Oxford English Dictionary. oed.com. Web. September 15, 2015.

C This is the definition used for physical activity: "Physical activity is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure." - World Health Organization. who.int. Web. September 16, 2015.

INTRODUCTION

The utilization of running, the most rural form of exercise, is beneficial to stimulating our minds and is therefore the most natural and healthy way to overcome a creative block.

In order to be a productive creative one will need to get into a physical active state on a regular basis. It can overcome creative blocks; history, mythology as well as research show that a physical active state is beneficial for one's mental health as well as one's ability to learn and process new ideas.

Including physical activity into one's life is neither difficult, nor time consuming or irrelevant, but comes naturally to everyone. Different research reveals the physical connection body and mind have. People needed research to clarify what most recognize from when they were younger. Starting with school one had to exchange being active for sitting still on a chair. Being confined to a chair and keeping the body still, results in a mind that is equally stagnating. Luckily there seems to be a new trend, which literally moves away from the chair. Standing-desks and treadmill-desks get introduced throughout a broad spectrum of companies and freelancers. Reawakening one's instinct to keep body and mind active together.

INTRODUCTION

Physical activity does not only keep the body healthy, but more importantly the brain. Running in particular is natural to humans and is a great tool to overcome a creative block. The chemical reactions in one's brain are proof of the positive effect running has. Nevertheless a fair amount of artists chooses recreational drugs over physical activity; jeopardizing their health, their lives and eventually their art in the process. Some artists even insist, that creating without recreational drug abuse is not resulting in anything worthwhile. Others veto, stating their special relationship with physical activity as a great source for inspiration and a tool to conquer creative blocks. It begs the question why physical activity and running in particular is not used more often in creative environments or is utilized directly by artists. Physical activity should be part of everyone's artistic practice.

CHAPTER

I

The third labor of Heracles had him hunt a deer. It took him over a year to accomplish this task.¹ While it isn't written that he did this by foot, it is presumable. It is unlikely, that he chased the animal through thicket, forest and over mountains by horse or even carriage. It would have been way too impractical. It is said that the length of the ancient Olympic stadium was set at the distance Heracles could run in one single breath; a little more than 192m.² Taking into consideration that this probably is exaggerated, it still points out that bipeds can run more steps within one single breath than quadrupeds. Because of this advantage Heracles was able to hunt and capture the deer. It is interesting to see that this conscious knowledge has been there for thousands of years.

“All running mammals are restricted to the same cycle of take-a-step, take-a-breath”.³ All but the human being. Evolution works on the principle of survival of the fittest. To understand the evolution of human beings one has to start with its very beginning. It appears, that the human being evolved from being a quadruped to a biped, because of a physical advantage. This advantage seems to be the possibility of freeing the lungs from the impact of the forelegs and therefore stepping out of the “one-breath-per-locomotion-cycle”.⁴ Another advantage is the ability of sweating. Other than most mammals, humans cool down by sweating great amounts of water. Most mammals can only cool their bodies by breathing. Both abilities make the human being superior to other mammals in hot environments.

Stepping out of the ‘one-breath-per-locomotion-cycle’ gave humans the ability to proceed in persistence hunts. A persistence hunt is when a group of runners, runs another mammal to death. These hunts can take place over hours or days, but in the end the persistency and determination of the runners win over the physical disadvantages of the other mammal. It will die of superheating. To prove, that there is

such a thing as persistence hunts, the mathematician Louis Liebenberg, went out into the Kalahari to find the last “six true hunters”⁵ and learned how to hunt an antelope with the simple tool of running. Back in the early development of the human beings determinations and persistence was what helped during hunting. Without those skills, no food. Without food, no survival. Thus running can be used as a primal tool to trigger one’s determination to help “achieving personal excellence in one’s work”.⁶ It is the most rural and pure form in which the primal instincts get triggered.

Walking uses equal locomotion, thus is comparable to running. “Walking at [one’s] own pace creates an unadulterated feedback loop between the rhythm of [one’s] body and [one’s] mental state”.⁷ In Ancient Greece, Aristotle introduced the Lyceum, a school and place for scholars to discuss thoughts. This school is also known as the Peripatetic school; it’s meaning deriving from Aristotle’s behavior of walking about while lecturing.⁸

Aristotle was not the only one who walked about while thinking. Besides historical figures such as Nietzsche, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Blake

and Iain Sinclair there are many modern day writers out there who use the same techniques.⁹ Take the example of the Runner's World editor Joe Henderson for whom running and writing are inseparable. One needs the other.¹⁰ "The pace of [one's] feet vacillate with [one's] moods and the cadence of [one's] inner speech".¹¹ Thus the inner speech/voice can influence our movements and vice versa.¹² When one is working on a project, there usually is an end goal one wants to achieve. Determination can help one to reach that goal. Determination is a skill that lies deep within humans. It's a primary instinct, which unfortunately got buried over time.

For a long time running was the only and fastest way of transportation and when all else fails one always has one's feet to carry one from point A to point B. According to Murakami, he learned "most of what [he knows] about writing [...] through running every day".¹³ "How much [he] should be aware of the world outside, and how much [he] should focus on [his] inner world"¹⁴ are only two of the lessons learned. Naturally it is different for everyone in how far one should be aware of the both worlds. Though walking for long times outside can invert the feeling

of space.¹⁵ The outside space starts feeling as comfortable as being inside. And with this comfort the thoughts can flow easily. In order to be able to apply this knowledge to one's own creativity, one has to try it out. Sometimes it only takes a couple of times running and sometimes it takes weeks or months before one is able to actually listen to their inner voice.

Several writers went for long walks during creative blocks or to gather inspiration. Nietzsche is known for his hour long walks through nature. According to him being inside and being static burdens the writer. Only getting your body moving can free one from those burdens and free the mind.¹⁶ Nietzsche knew that walking helped him write and so he utilized this as a tool to gather inspiration. He even said to "sit as little as possible; do not believe any idea that was not born in the open air and of free movement - in which the muscles do not also revel".¹⁷ Rousseau also knew that sitting is not the right position to let your thoughts flow. Rousseau says being able to create, being inspired was only possible while walking.¹⁸ This knowledge has been there for several decades, but appears to have taken a backseat over time.

From an early age, people are forced to sit still behind a desk and only use their minds to think creatively or otherwise. Getting punished for being physically active in class results in generations who don't know how to take advantage of the connection between body and mind. Instead the physically active personalities get labeled hyperactive. Wondering whether some minds just crave for physical activity in order to work more creatively. The urge of some people to move and engage their body while learning shows that there must be a natural connection between body and mind.

Today there are also schools, which encourage learning in one's own way. Those schools include the Waldorf/Steiner schools and the Montessori schools. Many of those schools offer eurhythmy, a form of dance/ motion class, in their curriculum and encourage children to express themselves through movement. With the help of the Torrance test of creative thinking ability Earl J. Ogletree detected that students attending a Waldorf school have higher creative abilities in average than students of state schools.¹⁹ Howbeit these school merely exists for primary and middle school levels and not High School level

education. The British actress Tilda Swinton co-founded the Drumduan Upper School so her kids could enjoy the same creative school environment at High School level. Drumduan Upper School takes a different view upon education. It is welcomed to avoid sitting at desks at any time and they have neither exams, tests nor hierarchy. It simply gives the space to develop oneself.²⁰

While the Drumduan Upper School encourages their students not to sit whenever possible, most of us sit on any occasion. Yet one might have noticed, that being in a sitting position all day at the office, often results in tiredness, less productivity and even work blocks. Back pain and headaches are often to be found within those sitting behind a desk all day. Nowadays most people sit down while working, writing, creating. Taking a regular design office into consideration, one sees tables with laptops and big screens. Creatives being hunched over, while sitting on a wooden chair, which is more than bad for one's posture. While there is the necessity to do some of the work at the computer, there should be the option to do this while being physically active.

Besides sitting, other positions people work in include lying down, standing or walking. While sitting can result in back pain, lying down won't. Though lying down reminds your body of the most relaxed and laziest moment of the day: sleep. It is assumable that lying down will result in even less productivity. This leaves the options of standing and walking. Before it became commonplace to work in a sitting position, people of the nineteenth century were using standing desks.²¹ As history repeats itself some people started to use standing desks once again. There is plenty of upsides to the use of a standing desk, some of them are: increased metabolism, increased fitness, increased lifespan, less chance of getting Diabetes Type II and higher energy levels.²²

To combat the issues of sitting down and enhancing the positive effects of the standing desk, the treadmill-desk took deskwork to another level. People are often skeptic of treadmill-desks, not realizing that they've might have used this concept before. The concept relates strongly to reading a magazine on a treadmill in the gym.²³ Several researchers back up the use of a treadmill-desk. One of those is

Dr. James Levine. He has conducted multiple studies, which show an increase in health. One study even took into account whether people liked working at those desks. The result: 299 out of 300 people liked the use of a treadmill-desk. With pilot projects among places like Arizona State University and Google, the treadmill-desk is slowly moving into offices.²⁴

Someone who has taken a treadmill-desk into use is Rose George. She is not only a writer, journalist, blogger and is giving TED talks, but she is also a marathoner. She explained how she built herself a treadmill-desk and started writing while walking. Before she would experience bad posture and aches as a result of sitting; even injuries would occur more often on the side she was leaning on more heavily. After working on the treadmill-desk her problems started to decrease.²⁵ It speaks for itself that purely through walking more, the body gets more exercise and becomes therefore healthier. A healthy body has a positive influence on our brain. A treadmill-desk seems to be a solution for eradicating the unhealthy sitting from our daily working routine.

CHAPTER

III

In mythology the Olympic Games were founded by the demigod Heracles to honor his father Zeus; after Zeus helped him to finish one of the twelve labors. The founding of the Olympic Games included running as one of the primary competition sports. One of the most famous winners of the ancient Olympic Games was Milon of Kroton. Besides being known for his physical accomplishment, Milon of Kroton was also known to be a pupil of well-respected philosopher Pythagoras. Already the Ancient Greeks knew that body and mind could only thrive through training both equally.'

CHAPTER II

Today, the concept of a healthy mind hasn't changed. Thousands of years have past and it is still common knowledge that body and mind thrive together. The mind is the source from where our creativity springs. Creativity is a skill that separates us from other living creatures. Creativity brings inventions and improvements to life. Many creatives struggle with the constant pressure to perform and to act out on their creativity; this often manifests in creative blocks. Being creative can be exhausting for the brain, the machine behind all creations. The brain, like a machine, does not only need fuel in order to work but equally requires to not be overworked.

Both, the inner and outer world, are essential to the exploration of creativity. Running can teach great lessons about creativity, but most important, "what running does is allow [creativity] to happen".² Running can make one aware of an idea one was holding on so tightly for days, but secretly knew it was a dead end. Running lets you explore the outer world, which can leave impressions. One will later be able to use those impressions in one's work. Running can simply give one's brain a break and therefore a fresh view on things when

one gets back. Creativity happens inside people's heads first, though it needs room to grow and evolve. Dr. George Sheehan states, that "Creativity must be spontaneous [, that] it cannot be forced [,] cannot be produced on demand".³ Being a creative is often frustrating, especially when creative blocks keep occurring in front of one.

A creative block could happen to anyone who engages in creativity. The degree to which one is able to use one's brain is sponsored by the ability to give it enough fuel to work. A creative block often occurs when one is under pressure. This can be induced through one's life, fears, career, a lack of inspiration or simply distraction.⁴ These problems derive from a mind that is unfocused and that is overworked. We are generally very aware of those problems. Being aware of having a creative block causes stress voluntarily and involuntarily. In order to tackle a creative block one has to tackle their problems; tackle the stressor.

CHAPTER

III

While most of Heracles tasks involved him being very physically active, some were equally challenging to his mind. During his fifth tasks he had to clean the stables of Augeas within one day. Artfully he rerouted a nearby river through the stables, solving the problem creatively. From what we know today, we can only assume that Heracles' fitness had a positive impact on his ability to come up with creative solutions to his problems.

CHAPTER III

It is considered common knowledge, that exercise keeps one's body healthy. Though it is not only one's body that profits from exercise, but equally one's brain. Neuroscientist Wendy Suzuki went deeper into researching the effect of exercise on the brain in her book *Healthy Brain, Happy Life*. She realized that exercising on a regular basis boosted her attention span and made her a better writer.²

The brain is an organ that grows primarily in the years between infancy and adulthood.³ During adulthood the brain will only grow within the area that is responsible for smell recognition and the hippocampus. The hippocampus is an area "deep inside the temporal lobe, [it] is crucial for the formation of long-term memories; it's also involved in aspects of mood and imagination".⁴ However, what can grow can also shrink. Stress, an important factor within creative blocks, can make the brain literally shrink. Studies in rodents have shown, that stress generates high levels of the hormone cortisol. The hippocampus is very responsive to changing cortisol exposure; short exposure equals better performance of the hippocampal brain cells, while long exposure damages those brain cells.⁵ Bottom-line is that

stress can make one's brain shrink and therefore one can utilize less brain cells for imagination, which plays an important role in creativity.

In order to be creative one needs imagination, besides endurance and productivity it is the thriving element behind creativity. The hippocampus is also known for its role in imagination. While creativity itself involves several other parts of the brain it also taps into the hippocampus to utilize imaginative thinking.⁶ Thus a larger hippocampus offers more brain capacity for imaginative thinking.

An experiment on rats showed, that rats raised in an enriched environment and rats raised in an impoverished environment create different amounts of new brain cells. A rat that lives in an enriched environment and therefore has the opportunity to exercise (run) created more new brain cells in the hippocampus and later on performed better in learning and memory tasks.⁷ This experiment conducted by Marian Diamond has also proven "that not only were there more dendritic branches but more synaptic connections, more blood vessels in the brain [], and higher levels of good brain chemicals like the neurotransmitter acetylcholine and particular growth factors".⁸

As one might have noticed in their own life, when oxygen levels are low in a room, one's concentration level drops. When one breathes fresh air on the other hand concentration levels are as high as possible. Blood transports this oxygen to our different organs, so when exercise helps creating new blood vessels in the brain it equals more oxygen for the machine that runs our body. Besides that, the brain, like a machine, needs to be cooled down. The more blood vessels are present, the better the cooling unit for one's machine. Opening the window allows the blood in the body to be chilled, while the heart then pumps chilled blood towards the brain. When a machine heats, it works less accurately or stops working at all. One more reason to take care of one's own machine.

The so-called runner's high is prove to why one's brain profits from running. A study by the University of Arizona "provides the first evidence that interspecific variation in neurotransmitter signaling may explain differences in locomotor behavior among mammals".⁹ While exercising one's body produces Endocannabinoids/ Anandamide, which activates cannabinoid receptors in the brain. The same receptors, which get activated by THC. THC is found in the Cannabis plant from which recreational drugs as

Marijuana and Hashish get produced. The receptors activated are situated in the reward center of the brain, thus the feeling of the runner's high; "produc[ing] pleasant feelings of relaxation and pain cessation similar to those often described by [...] pot smokers".¹⁰ All exercise produces Endocannabinoids, but running appears to produce the most. Results of an experiment by Arne Dietrich, PhD "showed that both the runners and bicyclists had significantly more Anandamide in their blood after exercising, with the greatest increase among runners".¹¹ The reason appears to lie within the producing of physical stress. Other "activities don't produce as much stress [to the body] as running"¹² mainly because one doesn't "need to support [one's] own body weight while exercising".¹³

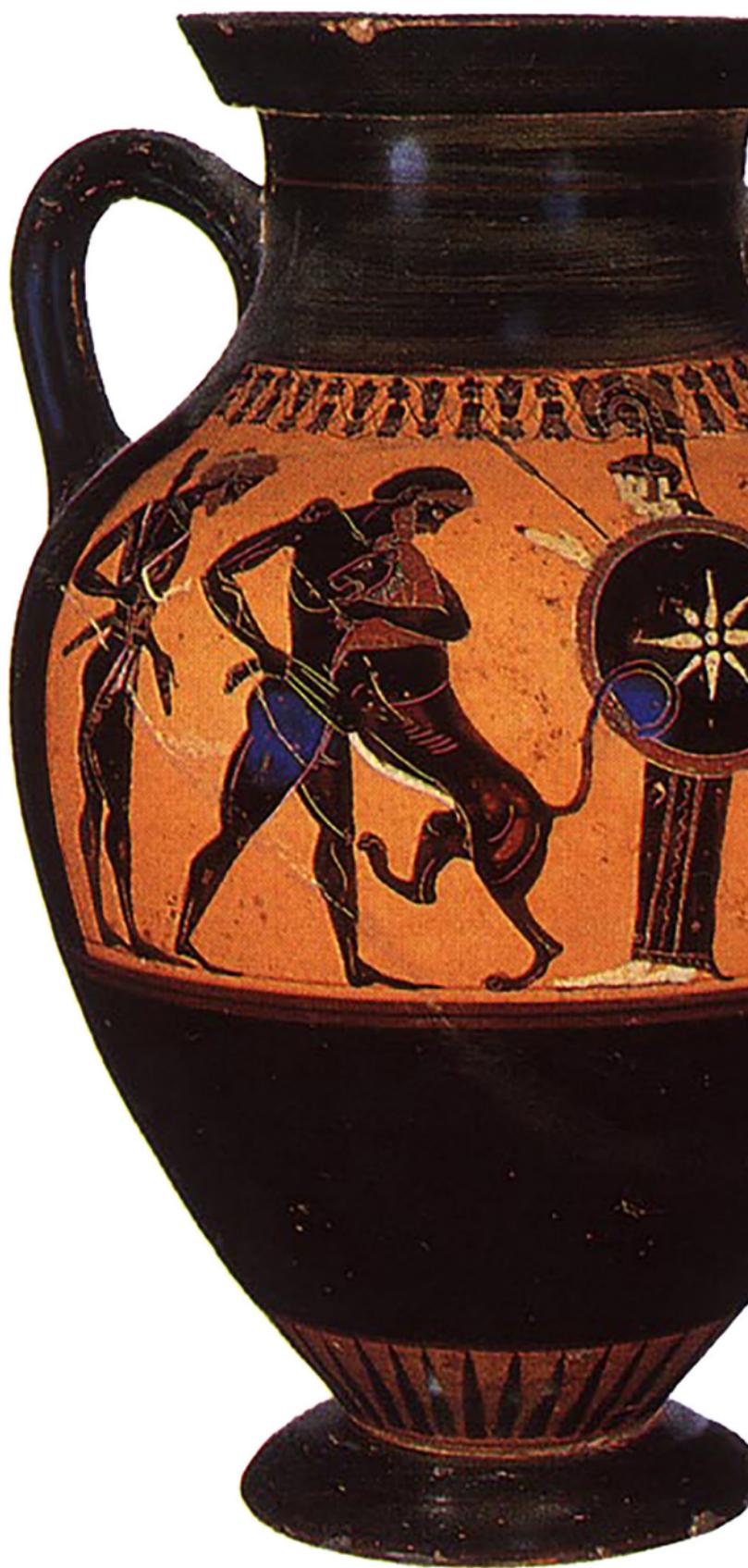
Sports are a form of physical activity that has a higher intensity of energy expenditure compared to walking in a slow pace down the street. Physical activity releases several substances in one's brain. One of those substances is Anandamide; a substance docking onto the same receptors linked up by different recreational drugs. The higher the intensity of the physical activity, the higher the flow of substances, the

CHAPTER III

higher the possibility of experiencing a runner's high. Since the endogenous substances are linking up the same receptors, the question forms itself whether sport is addictive. It is even considered a substitute for recreational drugs and used as a tool for recovery.¹⁴

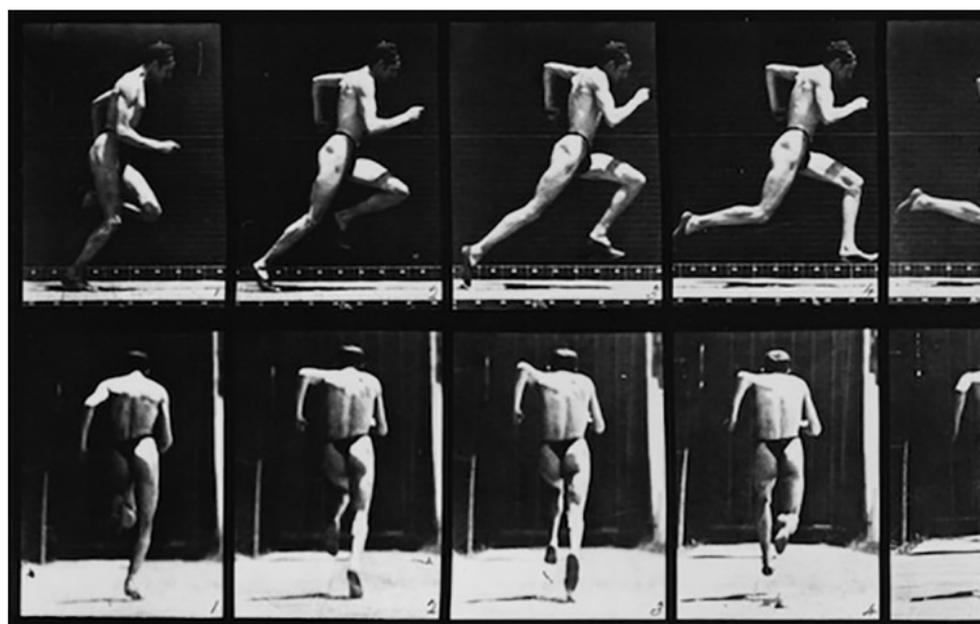
CHAPTER

IV



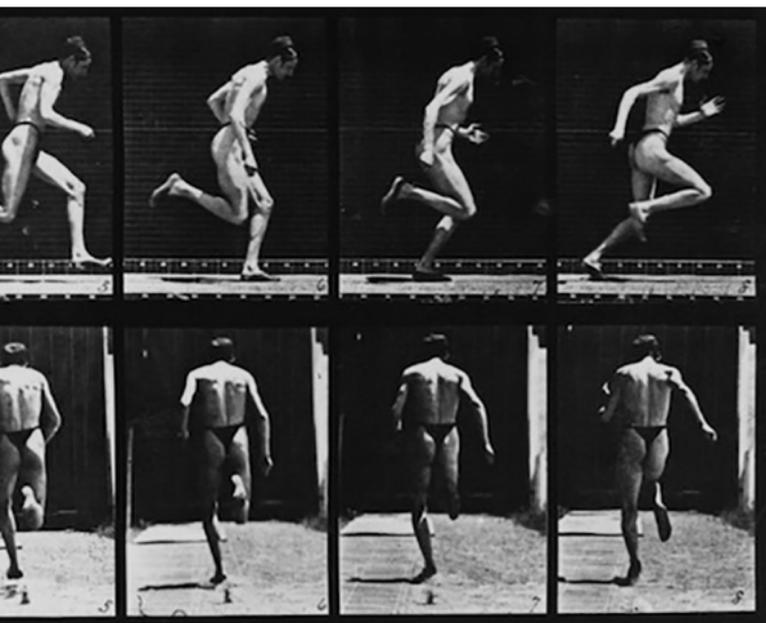
Heracles strangling the Nemean Lion; Iolaos, Athena, Mercurius - Swing Painter ¹

While Heracles might only be a mythological fabrication, he had great impact on the actual world. We do know that he inspired a great pallet of writers, painters and sculptors. They depicted him on vases, formed sculptures in his image and sung of him in verses. His figure influenced the art world on many levels as well as many cultures.



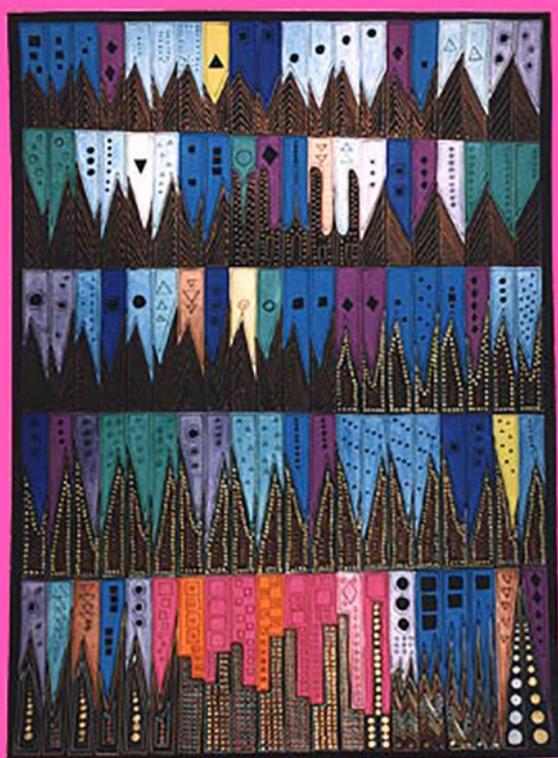
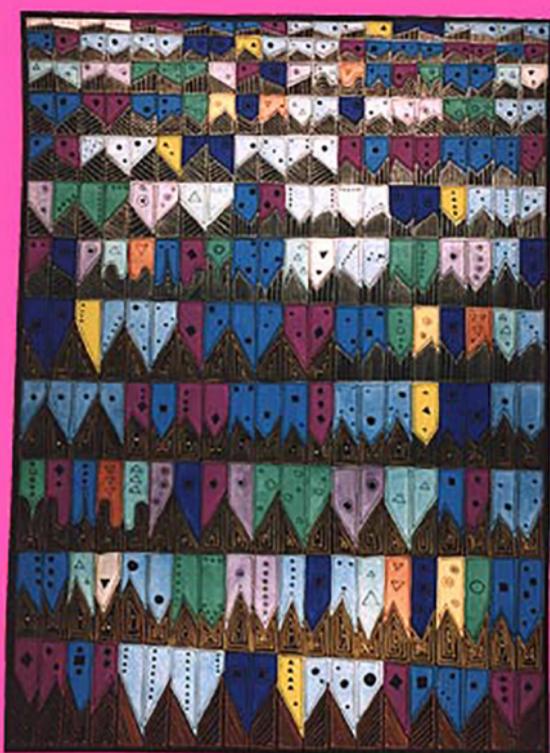
CHAPTER IV

Eadweard Muybridge was an artist who studied movement in his work. He lived from 1830 to 1903 and had a big influence on his time.² He photographed different stages of physical activity in animals and humans. He photographed runners, boxers, fencers and more. A main part of his research of humans was to depict the modern American man. Most young males he photographed had two main characteristics: athleticism and intelligence. Most of his subjects were students or athletes of the University of Pennsylvania. His work changed the perception of the ideal man of a whole generation. The connection he made between body and mind might not have been initial, but nonetheless it was what came of it. It showed the “new ideal masculinity - competitive, athletic and psychically as well as intellectually able.”³



Animal Locomotion - Eadweard Muybridge ⁴

CHAPTER IV



Unravelling Boléro - Anne Theresa Adams ⁵

While Muybridge made a connection between body and mind away from his own experience, Anne Adams made another connection solely in her mind. Anne Theresa Adams was a Canadian artist, that is known among other things for a painting called 'Unravelling Boléro'. Born in 1940 she first pursued a career in science, while later finding her way back to art. Adams painted 'Unravelling Boléro', which is a literal representation of a music piece, while being unknowingly sick.⁶ Later on Adams was diagnosed with Primary Progressive Aphasia, which let her unable to communicate properly through speech or writing.⁷ It appears that while Adams decreased mentally on one hand, her brain made new connections in other parts that increased her creativity.⁸ The same thing happened to the maker of the correspondent music piece. It is interesting to see, that the pattern of repetitiveness and endurance in their art shows so strongly. While there is not a direct connection to physical activity, they both show that endurance and repetitiveness are two things weighing in on creativity. Both things are triggered by physical activity.



Judo e teatro - Yves Klein ⁹

A few years earlier than Adams, in 1928, Yves Klein a prestigious French artist was born. From a young age Klein was enthusiastic about physical exercise and joined a judo club. While he actively pursued his judo career and moved around the world for it, his life went past and he found writing and painting as an outlet for his thoughts.¹⁰ Judo is a very traditional sport, that is focused on inner balance and bringing your opponent out of balance through minimal effort. Judo requires a lot of discipline and mindfulness for one to be successful at it. It equally requires one to be intuitive and creative with reacting on



the opponent's movements. Klein was a high ranked Judoka, thus must have been surely disciplined and mindful. Judo and art took a big part in his life, so it is no surprise that he combined his two passions, illustrating his book about judo and hanging monochromes in his Dojo.¹¹ He went as far as using Judo as an active part in the creation of art. Staging two women partially covered in paint and having them use Judo to apply this paint on a canvas lying on the floor.¹² During the years he became a more and more elaborate painter. Though evidently Klein ran into a blockage and consulted what he learned in Judo. While Judo taught him to be technically perfect at first, just to be able to break that rule in competitions, he realized the same was applicable for the arts.¹³

Thomas Kuijpers is a young Dutch artist, whose work involves collections and photography. He claims to have suffered a creative block not too long ago when he was unable to create, because of money issues. Thinking about earning money in order to survive, paralyzed his creative process and all he was able to do, was looking at vacancies. Once the money issues were resolved and the stressor eliminated, he was back on track.¹⁴









CHAPTER IV

In an interview¹⁵ it became evident how unaware Kuijpers was of the influence that physical activity has on his creative process. When first asked about the physical activity he engages in in relation to his creative process, he denied using it at all. While being very involved with his art, the first thing he stops doing is exercising in order to be able to focus all his energy on his art. To him, sports is purely for health and recreational purposes and has little to do with creativity.

While asked about substance abuse in relation to his art on the other hand, Kuijpers thinks that it does have some influence. In his experience alcohol can stimulate his creativity, when he starts drinking while already at work. Though it suffocates any sprout of creativity, if he starts drinking before he starts creating. Thomas Kuijpers talks about his creative process as starting out from an interest in a current event. He starts collecting information and conducting research. It is a necessity for him to work on several projects at the same time for the simple reason of distraction. He won't allow himself to get bored with one project; for if he gets bored, he gets stuck.

CHAPTER IV

Projects sometimes run into a dead end and get cast aside in a box; just to come back to it at a later moment and continue. The reason for putting a project aside, is that after a while of distracting himself with other topics, his mind has the opportunity to process the information. Thus he gains new insights and can continue with the project.

In retrospective he noticed that endurance plays a big role in his search for the core of a project. Besides endurance he also noticed determination and dedication to be important for reaching the end goal. Kuijpers says, that while he is busy with collecting and processing ideas, he only really pushes through once he starts getting physically involved.

At first physical activity left the impression on him, that he would have to become a top athlete in order to utilize it for his arts. Reflecting on his work process he came to the conclusion, that once he gets his hands involved, gets up from his chair and starts moving, he is engaging in said physical activity. Getting physical with his artwork seems to be most stimulating to him; he even says it works like an elixir.¹⁷

CHAPTER IV

Physical activity does not necessarily have to be a sport, but can be simply getting your body moving. After talking with Kuijpers it became evident that the pillars of running play a big role in his creativity. Determination, persistence, dedication and endurance are things that get triggered through running and are needed in the creative process. Thus it seems reasonable to consider running as a tool to push through the creative process. It leaves one wondering what would happen if the artist in question would start using running as a tool.

CHAPTER

V

Heracles was given twelve labors and had to endure enormous amounts of hard tasks in order to be free once again. Running requires a set of skills in order for one to be successful at it. Running requires those skills, but simultaneously enhances them. Those are endurance and determination.

Although physical activity is not commonly seen in an artistic environment, recreational drugs are. Thus it is not surprising that many artists have openly admitted to recreational drug use and little talk about the influence of physical activity. The recreational drug use and its connection to some of the greatest artists show how creativity flourishes when the brain is triggered in the right ways. Recreational drugs dock onto the same receptors in the brain as the neurotransmitters that get released during exercise. Musicians as Amy Winehouse, Kurt Cobain or film director Lars von Trier were heavily users of recreational drugs. For two of them it ended in an early death. Lars von Trier is now sober, but fears for his creativity and is unsure whether he will be able to continue making good movies now that he is sober.¹ Lars von Trier even goes so far to claim, that no one could ever be interested in art created by a sober person, giving Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones as an example. To him creating under influence is committing 100% to art, to creation. Intoxication leads a mysterious approach into creation and only therefore it becomes interesting. Being sober means to him not being fully committed to the act of creating and thus it cannot result in good art.²

Lars von Trier points out that only art created under influence is interesting. Considering artists as Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones, he has a valid point. It is understandable why one would choose recreational drugs or alcohol over an hour long run in the forest; simply because it is easier to pop a pill and swallow it down with a big sip of whiskey, than it is to get the motivation to get out and engage in physical exercise. Unfortunately many great artist who did create under influence are now dead or in rehabilitation.

During rehabilitation sport is considered a substitute for recreational drugs. A rehab center, which uses Sport as a substitute is the New York based ‘Odyssey House’. The ‘Odyssey House’ staff knows that sport triggers the same areas in the brain as recreational drugs. Thus they choose marathoning as a sport to tackle addiction. Together they prepare to run the New York City Marathon every year proving to them and others, that they’ve beat their addiction.³ Another rehab program from the United States called ‘Phoenix Multisport’, is using sport actively as a substitute for its participants. According to a participant of the program, sport fills the void that is left behind by the recreational drug. It also seems to help developing higher

self-esteem, supporting one in one's goals. Eventually physical activity has not only positive effect on oneself, but also one's life.⁴ Sobriety asks one to exclude negative influences from one's life. This often results in less to no social contacts and lots of free time. Sports can fill this void and connect one with new and healthy social relationships.⁵ One of the people who profited from this program is writer Mishka Shubaly. He is now an Ultra-runner and found his way back to writing. With a book about his recovery in relation to sports, *the Long Run*, he is a best selling author.⁶

Ægir Þór Þórðarson is an Icelandic Artist, Animator and Musician. To him, sport was a way out of his substance abuse. Þórðarson is a recovering drug addict and has been sober for more than 17 years. In an interview he explained that recreational drugs actually killed his creativity. At first the drug use amplified it, but slowly started to replace it. In a moment of clarity he realized that he has done nothing creative for the past one and a half years. Having an addictive personality, he knew he would need a substitute. Always being into sports, had him choose physical activity because a substitute for recreational drugs during his recovery.⁷





While recreational drugs are widely accepted in artsy environments, people consider physical activity as weird or silly. Þórðarson often bumped into those problems and felt like he didn't belong. Once he got past that thought, physical activity became an energy outlet for him; something to free his mind. During exercise his world would compress to the next 20 seconds, anything else wouldn't matter. In moments like this he would be in a different world, away from creative blocks. Once done, Þórðarson had a fresh mind. Suddenly ideas, thoughts, solutions would pop into his head and he needed to run off to his workshop without even taking a moment to shower. While recreational drugs appear to him as a shortcut to creativity, physical activity is anything but. One has to be aware that it takes hard work, determination and focus to be able to utilize sports. According to Þórðarson it is important to balance sports and creativity, since either one too much leaves no time for the other.⁹

Recreational drugs and alcohol have a destructive influence on our health, whereas sports has merely positive outcome. While during recreational drug use one needs more recreational drugs every time to sustain the same feeling,

physical activity works the other way around. While one's body builds up a resistance for the recreational drugs, one's body lowers its resistance when it comes to physical activity. The more one exercises, the easier it gets, the quicker one reaches the moment of ecstasy that distracts one from current problems. In addition to that, sports trigger endogenous substances to flow instead of adding exogenous substances to the body. Endogenous substances should be favored for their occurrence is natural to our bodies, while exogenous substances are alien to our bodily system and therefore can have negative influences.

There are plenty of theories out there on how to free one's mind and how to conquer a creative block. Some of them advise one to get distance from one's work or just "letting the block happen rather than resisting it".¹⁰ Others talk about the need of endurance, change of mindset and resolving personal issues.¹¹ Alex Cornell for example recently wrote a book about conquering creative blocks. The first tip of advice he gives is that "the physical world is ultimately the source of all inspiration. Which is to say, if all else falls: take a bike ride".¹² He does not only suggest to go outside, but also to engage one's body in physical

exercise. Therefore a bike ride can easily be replaced by running, the ultimate and most rural form of exercise.

Other creatives talk directly about the utilization of running. Haruki Murakami wrote a whole book, *What I talk about when I talk about running: a memoir*, about running and how it “made [him] stronger, both physically and emotionally”.¹³ Murakami also said, that while running, one can possibly make “significant discover[ies] about [one]self in the process”¹⁴ and that “being active every day makes it easier to hear that inner voice”.¹⁵ This is why Murakami usually tries to empty his mind and not think about anything in particular. While emptying his mind during a run, a void is created. Ideas and thoughts float like clouds in that void and hardly ever mean something specific. Though on occasion an idea for a novel pops into his mind.¹⁶

Not only Murakami wrote about the connection between running, writing and life, but also journalist Christopher McDougall, and Dr. George Sheehan who is a bestselling author and lecturer as well as an accomplished runner. Sheehan compares running with being a poet, being an artist. Through running one can gather “a new perspective of

CHAPTER V

[one's] inner world, some new insights on life, a new response to existence and [oneself]".¹⁷ He coupled running closely to life and shares insights on the positive influence running had on his body as well as on his writing.

CHAPTER

VI

Heracles as a figure of Ancient Greece is still present today. Not only are the stories about him still taught in school, but also even movies are created about him. The modern society should not only take him from Ancient Greece, but should consider taking other inventions from this area as well, such as the peripatetic school.

Some people might be opposing to the idea that physical exercise is a legitimate way of overcoming creative blocks. Merely, because either they do not enjoy any form of exercise, like recreational drugs better or question how physically impaired fit into this idea. Stephen Hawking is an example for those who have a brilliantly working mind, but are unable to engage their body in physical exercise. Unable to move, Stephen Hawking will have to find other ways of resolving a creative block. While Hawking hasn't talked about creative blocks, it is unlikely that he hasn't experienced them considering that he wrote numerous bestsellers and scientific papers. Fortunately there are plenty of other methods how to overcome creative blocks. Those range from redefining the problem to looking for patterns.¹ Anne Adams was one of the artists, who used patterns in her work excessively. What most of those other methods have in common is that they focus purely on the mind. They look at the creative block as a solely psychological blockage; happening only in one's mind. The methods neglect that a creative block can be so severe that it influences one physically.

In addition to that, the same study, which has proven that running is inducing the neurological process that gives one the feeling of the runner's high, has also admitted that it might not work for everybody. This has to do with the fact, that for the endocannabinoids to be produced in a high enough amount in order to make us feel the runner's high, we need to engage our body at a high intensity workout. Not everybody is able to "adequately exercise at the intensity required to elicit a significant change"² in the endocannabinoid levels and therefore there is a group of people who "do not gain similar psychological benefits from exercise at a lower intensity".³

Looking back one can say that Ancient Greece was a time full of innovations and enlightenment. Adapting their habits of walking into modern society could lead future generations to a new age of enlightenment. The ideal creative environment of generations to come should include physical activity. Like so many innovations society has taken from Ancient Greece, it seems as time has come, that society reintroduces the peripatetic school. A school that teaches while walking. Changing the way society learns, can change the way society

CHAPTER VI

thinks and wires events to one another. Besides reinstating active schools, the introduction of active office spaces is needed just as much. Hereby the focus lies within physically active working, rather than offering a gym, which people rarely use. One could even go as far as making any art school, creative office or otherwise a chair free zone. Artists, writers and other creatives will start walking at their desks, choosing stairs over elevators, running errands by foot and not car or pacing the room while thinking. Future generations could grow up believing in physical activity for the sake of creativity and health.

CONCLUSION

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Even though there is a numerous amount of solutions to creative blocks, there is not a single one that is universal; this includes physical activity. There simply is no key to unlock all the unique machines of the world's creatives. While there is no master key, there are several keys that can be modified and adjusted to a single creatives need. One of those keys is physical activity.

Physical activity can induce the runner's high. It is a natural, endogenous way of kick starting one's brain. Whether and if one is able to experience it, depends on one's own wiring of the brain. To one person it might be the ultimate solution, while the next will never encounter it. In order to find out whether it's applicable to oneself, one would have to engage in a trial period. Though the runner's high is beneficial for resolving creative blocks it is not exclusive. Even if a person will never experience a runner's high, it doesn't result in physical activity being insignificant to resolving creative blocks. Physical activity still has plenty of advantages.

Regardless whether one feels like getting physically active for creativity or not, one should consider it as an option. In case it is not resulting in

CONCLUSION

conquering the creative block, at least it will be beneficial for one's health. Abusing substances or sitting nine hours a day can result in health issues such as addiction or problems with one's back. Getting physical can start with changing one's desk to a standing-desk. A quick and easy fix to a severe obstruction of creativity. Considering making a do-it-yourself-treadmill-desk should've crossed one's mind at least once. Finally one should remember that a run or walk wouldn't do any harm. The worst that can happen is increasing physical health, which can result in a longer lifespan.

Conquering a creative block through physical activity, could make one feel like Heracles. Successfully passing one's personal labors and instigating a revolution of physical activity throughout the creative world. Instead of establishing the next Olympic Games, one will be part of a foundation for a new generation of artists whose creativity will thrive through exercising both mind and body in symbiosis.

As Marvin Bell already put into words, running is essential to the creative. Running unites body and mind. To stop thinking about the world, but start feeling it instead is inherent to the

CONCLUSION

creative process. Creativity springs from deep within us, so do feelings. Feeling the world is understanding it. When I run, I often run outside. Sometimes I run in my mind. When I run, it doesn't matter that my mind is stuck, because my body isn't. Body and mind thrive together. So when I run and my mind is stuck, I drag it along until it follows willingly. When I run, I'm not using a tool, but embracing what has always been part of me. When I run there is no creative block. When I run: I just run.

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Thomas Kuijpers

Ægir Þór Þórðarson, Ægir the Artist

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Royal Academy of Art, the Hague, NL