

CREATIVITY & SURVIVAL

BUILDING A WORLD RENAISSANCE USING THE AMERICAN MODEL

BY

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Challenge and Response

Two forces attack the West like pincers: They are Islamic fundamentalism and Chinese expansion. Each must be resisted until it has been reformed or fades away. That task is fully within our capabilities if only we are able to understand the unique value of our heritage and its relevance to the next developmental stage in the human enterprise.

Then we will be able to summon the will, the confidence and courage to lead.

Both impending forces, one nation-state, and the other a pan-national proto-state, represent existential threats to freedom, but each has a distinctly different vulnerability:

Modern **China** represents an unstable authoritarian bureaucracy without a viable ideology...communism as such having been thoroughly discredited. That regime's *raison d'etere* is that of a street juggler, playing with borrowed balls; and its vulnerability is the same as the juggler's. Fatigue is inevitable, but China cannot afford to stop tossing those balls. While we are all distracted with this performance, China is exporting goods by the shipload but not ideas, nor ideology. As secure as they seem in public, China's political rulers do not sleep peacefully at night.

On the other hand, **militant Islam** is exporting a culturally transmitted ideology, but no goods or services – unless you count a dwindling oil production built entirely with Western technology. Sharia law¹ (in its currently dominant interpretation by

¹ Nominally, Sharia law is the sacred law of Islam. As a practical matter Sharia law is that which is applied by Islamic judges, or qadis. In practice there are at least two major schools, the Sunni and the Shi'a. To be clear, however, Shari law is seen by all devout Muslims the will of God. Leaving aside polygamy and the not-insignificant matter of the supremacy of Islam over competing secular laws, there are several bright hot friction points *vis a vis* liberal Western jurisprudence...to put it mildly. Notably absent in the fundamentalist versions of Sharia law is the full legal equality of women, freedom of religion, speech and association. As interpreted by Islamic radicals, Sharia law has justified the murder of women for wifely misconduct, the killing of apostate Muslims as in an errant author, scholar or intellectual, and other shocking deviations from the traditions of Western intellectual and social tolerance. Sadly, the exceptions to Islamic fundamentalism, at present, are simply that – mostly individual, not broadly institutional. A reformation movement in Islam is to be encouraged but we can hardly be asked to wait.

fundamentalist Islamic judges) is an artifact of a profoundly intolerant and illiberal mindset, one that has yet to undergo any general reformation of the kind that rescued the other major religious traditions from the curses of violent conversions, witch hunts and the mass murder of apostates.

In its current form, militant, fundamentalist Islam represents a truly atavistic assault on the core operating principles of Western civilization. When we look at the tepid and ambivalent response to this multi-threaded assault in Europe and elsewhere in the developed world, reasonable minds entertain legitimate concerns about the future of liberal civilization. Militant Islam's weakness is that its *ideology* cannot be made to blend with any free, law-abiding Western civilization, except as a fully autonomous, embedded enclave, always seeking to break out and reshape the host in its own image.

Roots of the Western Ambivalence

The loss of nerve in the West is a mystery at first. But three questions contain the key to the puzzle.

Why is the freedom we claim to care about so important?

Why are we so ashamed of our success?

What ideas and ideology do we honor that are of any value to the rest of the world, especially to those former colonies and “oppressed peoples” that we feel so guilty about?

Sadly, the dominant Western intelligentsia continues to answer these questions as follows:

We value freedom, only individually and “selfishly”, but are constrained by the multi-cultural ethos from advocating it for everyone. Because we think, “we are all so different, even to the level of core values”, we therefore conclude that “freedom might not be a universal good.”

We feel post-colonial shame because we've bought into two fallacies:

- (a) Accomplishment and prosperity are achieved at the expense of those who don't have those things; this is the zero-sum game, envy-fear fallacy-neurosis.
- (b) We are stuck like limpets to the side of a ship with the sins of our remote forebears (people whom we have never met) for the foreseeable future; this is the “blackmail me forever” fallacy-neurosis.

We are unable to articulate an ideology justifying and supporting our own civilization because we are confused, dispirited and – not to put too fine a point on it – we have allowed a concerted attempt to demoralize us to succeed.

And these lame answers explain everything. Recall that Winston Churchill was a **liberal** in the context of British politics of the day. How far from that great and robust tree have modern “progressive” liberals fallen.

If Western civilization will not or cannot defend itself, no one outside culture will take up that cause, let alone allow itself to be recruited. I detect a loss of cultural self-confidence that eerily echoes the decline of the Roman imperial model two millennia ago. Put simply, something is missing from the heart of contemporary Western secular culture. The West is experiencing a failure of nerve.

Modernity, as such, is no more likely to save our version of civilization than the aqueducts and advanced road engineering of ancient Rome were able to save the Roman Empire from decline and ultimate dissolution.

The Creative Imperative and its Implications

A confident new stage in the evolution of Western civilization is at hand. Its basic principles can be captured in these general assertions:

- (1) Human life is a basic good, and civilization is our single most important social technology, a life-protecting discovery that has greatly empowered us, its members, to rise out of the “short, nasty and brutish”² existence of humans as precocious simians.
- (2) Without a robust, intelligent, creative-adaptive capability, any civilization eventually fails; and given the increased risks presented by human technological capabilities, human life may not survive the failure of modern civilization.
- (3) Human creative activities are an interdependent whole, the parts of which cannot long be separated from their various forms, expressions and modalities, nor can they be divorced from the civilized conditions in which creativity flourishes.
- (4) None of this can be sustained over time without a set of robust set of life-affirming, freedom-protecting norms and principles that in turn become the foundation of civilized institutions, the moral infrastructure, if you will, of a creative civilization.
- (5) Therefore the human creative enterprise requires a protective civilization endowed with laws and a constitution designed to actively safeguard life, liberty and the creative pursuits of its members.

We are living at the dawn of what later generations will call the *creative imperative*. As a vision, it has the power to drive a major reformation of the way we will look at culture, government and politics. That reformation is greatly needed, and it is at hand. The process begins everywhere that capable people gather to conduct a reappraisal of the *human creative enterprise*, its foundations, the conditions that it needs to thrive, and its proper place in the pantheon of modern civilization.

² As Thomas Hobbs, the 17th century British thinker, who first introduced the notion of the “social contract”, described his fellow humans in a “state of nature”. See Chapter 13, in “The Leviathan”. Though Hobbes was a royalist, he was among the earliest writers to make the case for certain inalienable rights.

A Political Reformation

The new vision will enable a new, constructive inter-partisan dialogue. This will be made possible by the recovery of liberalism from the grip of bureaucratic authoritarian ideologies and the liberation of conservatism from its establishmentarian roots.

At present, the American partisan divide looks very much like one of those inheritance disputes that rip families apart. In this instance, the inherited legacy over which the children are squabbling is creative freedom. Consider that typical paleo-republicans are enthusiastic about creative activities primarily when they are commercial innovations, but remain somewhat indifferent to artistic creativity, except as an avocation. Yet paleo-democrats are enthusiastic about artistic creative creativity, but are unenthusiastic about creativity in industry and commerce, except as a mundane fact or an opportunity to generate taxable revenue streams.

But this is not just an American conversation. Consider that the workers' paradise of Soviet Russia was so sensitive about the ongoing drain of creative artists that visas were denied and monitors were assigned. And all this took place while the drain of creative *commercial* talent, and its internal suffocation via the party bureaucracy, brought down the economy and ultimately collapsed the system itself.

The hope for the reform of China and militant Islam lies with the profound longing – well embedded in the human spirit – for free creative expression.

Creativity and liberty are indivisible.

But the first steps forward involve the resumption of a quintessential American conversation. Consider that, among the founders of the United States, were polymaths like Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin, both inventors. Consider that, unlike any other post-revolutionary constitution in world history, the American Revolution explicitly provided for patent and copyright protections for creative innovations.³

Perhaps one of the least appreciated elements at the very roots of the American founding will turn out to be the most important. The abiding respect for *creative activities* in the context of a free civilization was manifest in the lives of key founders and the founding document itself, the constitution.

The long range implications of this are great: The American model, always relevant, is just now entering stage center as the vanguard of change in the world. We who count ourselves Americans are in the unique historic position to promote a powerful justification for a world renaissance based the American experience.

³ **Article 1, Section 8** - “To promote the Progress of Science and Useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.”

The USA as a universally replicable model of a constitutionally supported creative civilization in which protected liberties support the widest possible array of creative innovation. This is not simple jingoism. The USA is a powerful idea *and example*.

The nexus between liberty and creativity is so powerful and ultimately persuasive that it will eventually rescue China and other authoritarian bureaucratic states from their fear-driven repression of freedom.

Survival and the Creative Engine

Civilizations come and go but the ones that tower over the rest – and that will have the best chance of surviving – are the ones that foster and promote human *creative* potential. This was true when the wheel was invented and it remains true as we humans struggle to keep up with biological pathogens that threaten to outsmart our most advanced antibiotics and anti-viral therapies.

I don't like to use apocalyptic rhetoric, partly because it's so overused, partly because it promotes reflex over discussion, flight over engagement, short term folly over long term realignments. Western civilization did not end when challenged by the Nazism and Stalinism of the last century...but it might well have been gravely, even irreparably damaged. We who followed were saved when a critical mass of courageous men and women who rose up to answer the Burkean⁴ challenge of that age.

Were it not for Pearl Harbor and 911, the USA might have slept at the switch too long.

This is why the gradual, incremental challenges to civilization, the stealth erosions of its foundations and our confidence are truly more dangerous than an overt attack. Were our civilization to drift into a bureaucratic torpor, allowing its vital creative centers to wither (or worse, to be suppressed), we will have disarmed ourselves. Intelligent, proactive adaptation is needed for the unexpected, the unpredictable, the non-mundane - those non-routine event and challenges that will inevitably threaten our core survival. The earth has interred the remains of hundreds of civilizations who perished of the same malady: the failure to creatively adapt to potentially fatal challenges. A vital creative culture, once suppressed, cannot be magically reconstituted on demand.

There will never be a time when humanity can survive for long (let alone thrive) without robust creative communities working (and playing⁵) in an atmosphere of productive, life affirming freedom. This lesson and its implications should be, but are not yet obvious – this, in spite of the huge benefits human creative accomplishments have brought us in the last 1,000 years.

⁴ Edmund Burke (1729-1797, the British liberal who founded modern conservatism) reminds us from the grave that for evil to triumph, it only needs the good among us to do nothing.

⁵ There is a fascinating body of information that links playful activity to creative achievement. It seems that recreation and creation are joined at the hip. Eric Hoffer has pointed out that the first working model of a steam engine was a toy for Roman children ignored by their bureaucratic elders.

In contrast with our ancient and medieval ancestors, those of us who live in the developed areas of the world enjoy clean hot and cold running water, the benefits of heating, air conditioning and refrigeration, the pleasure of rapid communication with friends and strangers across the world, and the ability to listen to – even witness - concerts and performances that were once exclusive fare of royalty and the very, very wealthy.

Many of us moderns complain about “quality of life” issues, but in very significant ways, the day-to-day lives of former peasants and serfs are more luxurious on a practical level than their former lords, kings and queens.

Common Genius

A telling feature of the modern creative efflorescence is that former “commoners” have entered the game as creative geniuses. As the autodidact longshoremen philosopher Eric Hoffer put it, “The common people are lumpy with talent.”

The Beatles of Liverpool would have been minor minstrels at best in 11th century England. Albert Einstein might not have survived at all, let alone have enjoyed the benefits of a proper education in the Germany of the 13th century. Part of the modern creative efflorescence is the emergence of zones of protected freedom. Had Albert Einstein remained in the Germany of 1937, he would have been incinerated.

It is no accident that, whenever authoritarian regimes seize power, the most creative members of the captive civilization attempt to leave. Nor is it just by chance that the truly free societies of the world are the ones that have fostered the efflorescence of creative energy and accomplishment of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

A study of human creativity is needed and ongoing, but some lessons are clear enough right now. A great deal has been written about the history of technological innovation as a separate topic, but little if anything has been done connecting this creative efflorescence to the Renaissance periods of European history.

Leonardo Da Vinci was the emblematic crossover figure between the artistic and “practical” achievement,⁶ the classic Renaissance man, yet too many models of civilization feel free to repress some creative activities while attempting to control and

⁶ Among the most valuable sources for further research: *The Lever of Riches*, by Joel Mokyr, Oxford 1990; *Structures of Change in the Mechanical Age: Technological Innovation in the United States, 1790—1865*, by Ross Thompson, John Hopkins 2009; *Technological innovation as an Evolutionary Process*, John Ziman, Ed., Cambridge University Press 2000; *The Timetables of Technology: A Chronology of the Most Important People and Events in the History of Technology*, by Brian H Bunch & Alexander Hellemans, Simon and Schuster 1993; *An Encyclopedia of the History of Technology*, Ian McNeil, Ed. 1990, 1996 Routledge; and *Fortune is a River, Leonardo Da Vinci and Niccolo Machiavelli's Magnificent Dream to Change the Course of Florentine History* by Roger Masters, Penguin 1998, 1999.

exploit others. It is now clear that human creativity cannot be compartmentalized, that the conditions for it to flourish are common to all of its forms.

Our creative activities cannot be compartmentalized, in part because the conditions of creative freedom and the protection of intellectual property are the common seed conditions for all creativity, whether “artistic” or “practical”. But any attempt at compartmentalization fails also because the manifold areas and modalities of innovation, inspiration, and discovery that engage the human creative mind are elements of the same general process: they can take place in the same life, the same community and the same civilization. They cross fertilize each other. The impact, richness and value of creative activities in all their forms far, far exceeds the sum of the constituent elements.

The contemporary lesson that has yet to spread across the globe is this: Creative activities flourish in zones of protected freedom and liberty, particularly where the fruits of innovation – artistic and technological – are legally protected as earned property. The model of a free, independent creative civilization was a new development in human history. Foremost among these models in world history is the United States of America, the constitution of which enshrines free speech, free commerce, patent and copyright protections among the many other blessings of freedom.

I believe the survival of the human race is riding on the success of that experiment.

Creative Artists and Capitalists

It is not coincidental that the technical or so called “industrial” creative innovations since 1700 have collectively done more to improve the lot of the so-called common people than all the previous creative innovations in art and science combined. We should not forget that the epicenter of these innovations, of their inspiration, application and development, was and still is the United States of America.

Late in the 20th century, the understood scope of human creative activity was broadened to include technology. This was a key insight of the American, former soviet émigré, novelist / philosopher, Ayn Rand⁷. It follows that any civilization that aspires to be a creative one must create and sustain a free economic system and robust protections for creative expression and free communication. In other words, there are certain moral and practical principles that make up the foundation of an explicitly *creative* civilization. Providentially, these moral and practical principles were set out in the American founding documents.

⁷ The daughter of a commercial family whose property was confiscated by the Soviets, Alisa Zinov'yevna Rosenbaum escaped to the USA, eventually changing her name to Ayn Rand. In her breakout novel, *The Fountainhead*, the nexus between creative freedom and intellectual property is explicit, and in *Atlas Shrugged*, the underlying links between artistic innovation, invention and commercial freedom are central to the storyline. Her philosophical writings, loosely grouped under the rubric, *Objectivism*, have been scathingly dismissed by the left as amoral. But Ms. Rand’s passion for creative freedom as a *moral* imperative was a specific commitment that transcended “mere” greed and belied the parodic attempts to marginalize an original, serious ethic, sharply relevant to the modern human condition.

While creative activity flourishes in an intensely free society, **it withers in a bureaucratic tyrannical one.** No wonder America is the paradigm exemplar of the creative society.

Creativity's Moral Center

I am proposing here that the protection of all creative activities requires a life-affirming, liberty respecting ethos, comprehensively and robustly protected by legal system anchored in a deep respect for the underlying moral order. And to make these protections real and enduring, robust legal institutions must be dedicated to the protection of ordered liberty as enshrined in a governing constitution. As we Americans have learned, the institutions on which liberty depends include an authentic constitution that includes a concrete bill of rights, a method for their enforcement, and a robust system of checks and balances against the concentration of power.

Almost every benign creative innovation in the last two hundred years represents the happy confluence of at least four elements:

- A. Creative freedom;
- B. Protection of the creative process either via a powerful patron or a robust patent / copyright intellectual property system;
- C. Especially, from the 19th century, the operation of the risk-incentive-profit sequence;
- D. A life affirming moral order and an anchor and a guide. {I expand in this theme briefly in "Weimar's Despair & Pixar's Rules" below.}

The insight that a civilization should provide the foundations of law and peaceful transitions of power is incomplete. The atavistic forces that would cripple or destroy Western civilization carry a sharp lesson for us. When the Taliban took over on Afghanistan, creative people were forced to flee. While the spread of an authoritarian and fanatical theocracy that animates the jihad against the West minimally meets the definition of "a civilization", it is manifestly hostile to the full range of free human creative endeavors. This prompts us to take up the simple, but profound agenda that will transform the conduct and defense of all modern civilizations for centuries to come. The task of furthering the expansion of creative civilizations and defending them – and their free institutions - has *from now on* become the overriding goal of the human enterprise.

Protecting the Creation-engendering Infrastructure

Creative activities flourish under conditions of protected freedom, and the creative activities that sustain civilization are not limited to the creative arts but include commerce, exploration and technology. Capitalism, in the form of free commerce, restrained only by reasonable, impartial laws designed to protect honest transactions and public health and safety, is the necessary ally of creative freedom in all its other manifestations, and vice-versa. Recent developments in information technology have blurred the interface between copyright and patent, content and delivery system, and in

the same way information technology has fully bridged the gap between “mere” technological invention and art.

Electronically recorded and transmitted music and images, increasingly available and at decreasing unit cost, have made music from Beethoven to Beyonce, drama from Shakespeare to the Matrix, available on a hand held device almost anywhere on the planet earth 24/7/365.

Censorship has become more difficult at the same time that intellectual piracy and the glut of raw talent clamoring for attention have made individual creative endeavors less profitable for the individual aspiring artist.

But the information technology explosion has generated a parallel explosion in the creative arts. Tracking the constantly expanding numbers of movie and television productions during the 20th century is like tracking the first nanosecond of the Big Bang or the first second of a nuclear explosion.

Among the new art forms, still in their infancy (at by the development standards of pre-modern eras) are these:

- Movies, live action;
- Movies, animated;
- Movies, live action or animated with computer generated effects;
- Digital photography
- High fidelity, surround sound;
- Light Sculpture;
- Augmented natural music (think of the amplified rock guitar and the electronic keyboard)
- Electronic music;
- Interactive “smart” sculpture;
- Stage plays or events enhanced by the forgoing;
- Video games;
- Virtual reality constructs, including fully recreated live concerts & interactive fiction....

Notice here the blurring between creative content and the technologies and modalities of expression and communication; and note that patent, copyright and trademark protections are necessarily interwoven.

Notice, as well, the exponential increase in the synergies of creative forms, music, words, shapes, narratives, such that a given work cannot be reduced to any one discipline or art.

Never before in human history has so much of the entire creative output of the human race been so readily and instantly available to so many people at such low cost. And note also, the modern sense of threat felt by certain authoritarian regimes as measured by their

attempts to control and restrain creativity except as it directly serves the needs of their own power brokers. *They cannot be allowed to prevail.*

To survive and flourish over time, a civilization must provide robust, proactive protection for all peaceful creative activities – and the special conditions of freedom in which the human creative enterprise flourishes. In this new paradigm, creative activities (and the concomitant freedom of expression and communication) are to be defined very broadly, including but not limited to the free exchange of political ideas, art forms, cultural, spiritual and esthetic creative products, technological innovations, and human exploration of the cosmos.

As to all of these creative expressions of our humanity, the protection of intellectual property and robust firewalls against censorship are paramount among the creation-friendly conditions that civilizations are now charged to provide.

The universal goal of purposively fostering creative civilizations means that the idea of American Exceptionalism is not jingoism, but the epicenter of an uncompleted world revolution.

The Expanding Creative Nodes

In the ancient and medieval worlds the centers or nodes of creative activities were so rare that they could be numbered in the handful for an entire millennium. Today, if they were illuminated all at once, a nighttime satellite picture of the world light up with their glow.

Just where are these modern creative nodes?

Consider one list of the top 25 world cities in technology – a study giving special emphasis on cyber-technology: **Boston, Paris, Amsterdam, Vienna, New York, Frankfurt, San Francisco, Copenhagen, Lyon, Hamburg, Berlin, Toronto, Stuttgart, London, Munich, Milan, Stockholm, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Tokyo, Rome, Kyoto, Washington DC, Shanghai, & Düsseldorf.** [Source: 2thinknow Innovation Cities™ Program: www.innovation-cities.com]

Robust creative arts communities are thriving in **every high-tech city in the top 25, with the exception of Shanghai**, where the creative arts do not thrive, except as an underground avocation.⁸

Lists like this one provide a small glimpse into the pervasive and strong correlations between the creative arts and creative technological innovation. In the modern setting, they tend to thrive together. This pattern emerges even more vividly when we expand

⁸ “Chinese Authorities Raze an Artist’s Studio” New York Times, January 12, 2011. “Mr. Ai’s studio was to be used as an education center and a site for artists in residence.” ... “Everything is gone,” he said. “It’s all black now. They finished the job at 9 o’clock last night.” http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/13/world/asia/13china.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=china%20artist&st=cse

our understanding of creativity, and look closely at some of the smaller, but highly significant nodes.

For example, the Seattle metro area includes both Microsoft and its spin-offs, and a robust arts community. The San Francisco metro area includes Silicon Valley and another brilliant arts community. Little Israel, given its small population, represents a striking confluence of high-tech innovation and cultural vitality. “The World Economic Forum has designated Israel is one of the leading countries in the world in technological innovation” LINK <http://www.ittn.org.il/news.php?cat=22&in=0>.

That connection is always multilayered. Techno-innovators prefer to live and work in culturally interesting areas. Many of the arts have strong crossover appeal. For example music, mathematics, the graphic arts and aspects of computer technology turn out to be cross-disciplinary, and their creators tend to share crossover interests. Note that the only two *Chinese* centers that make the innovation lists are *Hong Kong*, where freedom of expression is alive, and the *Shanghai* region, where creativity is sharply channeled into business enterprises, but suppressed in other activities.

Professors Sean Chen (Department of Asian Studies, Furman University) and Kirk Karwan (Department of Business & Accounting, Furman University) have collaborated in a study of “*Innovative cities in China: Lessons from Pudong New District, Zhangjiang High-tech Park and SMIC Village.*” An abstract of their study is telling:

“Although the pace of development in Chinese cities over the past decade has been unprecedented, future economic progress in China may be increasingly constrained by limitations in the social structures that serve to attract skilled labor. ...Although much of what has been seen in Shanghai and Pudong is consistent with recent theories of city innovation, central control of the CDLC leaves open the question of whether the Shanghai model is a sustainable one. In particular, the influence of multinational enterprises (MNEs) in recognizing and supporting social innovations is likely to be essential to future success in Shanghai.

“The question is whether these innovations will be allowed to continue or if they will be controlled by central authorities in a way that will derail attempts to attract the necessary high-tech human capital.” Web link: <http://www.innovation-enterprise.com/archives/vol/10/issue/2-3/article/2627/innovative-cities-in-china-lessons-from-pudong>

Overcoming the Suffocation Effect ***Mindless Bureaucracy as the Enemy of Creativity***

The term, “mindless bureaucracy”, is redundant. Bureaucracy **is** the hierarchical mechanization of human relations. Bureaucrats are a necessary annoyance when their role is confined to its proper scope, the routine, efficient administration of mundane, repetitive approval processes. But bureaucrats become an unnecessary evil when they are empowered to become the primary means of social control.

Here are some of the early lessons:

- The bureaucratic, egalitarian state is incompatible with healthy, ongoing creativity. The creative mind, by its very nature, abhors bureaucracy, disturbs sameness by introducing novelty -- and creative achievements are inherently unequal.
- Corporate bureaucracies can interfere with creativity in much the same way as governments can, but the condition is correctible when competitive forces from non-bureaucratic enterprises emerge, provided that the marketplace is kept sufficiently free.
- An overarching, life-affirming moral ethos supporting core moral boundaries is essential to the long term survival of the “creative engine”. Weimar’s despair is a caution (see below).
- Individual creative communities thrive in a setting that provides order, rules and constraints that give syntax and continuity to creative evolution. Pixar’s rules (see below) are instructive.
- All creative activity - as distinguished from chaos – is conservative in the sense that novelty is the unexpected realignment of existing elements, following established organic patterns. The enduring fruits of creativity always represent new order that is intelligible by the old, but nevertheless was unexpected, novel and surprising until after the fact.

By its very nature, the creative engine cannot be directed down the expected and predictable path without killing it. This is a good thing because the really dangerous challenges that we will face in this century and those that follow will be the least expected ones, the kind that will require an extraordinary capacity for creative adaptation.⁹

Weimar’s Despair & Pixar’s Rules

⁹ I find David Brooks on the same page. In the New York Times, he wrote, “The new sort of competition is all about charisma. It’s about gathering talent ... because people are most creative when they collaborate face to face). This concentration of talent then attracts more talent, which creates more collaboration, which multiplies everybody’s skills, which attracts more talent and so on. The nation with the most diverse creative hot spots will dominate the century.” And he points out the function of the patron, business or government is to facilitate, not dominate. “So it is with government in an innovation economy. Entrepreneurs, corporate executives, line workers and store managers handle the substance of the economy. Government tries to nurture settings where brilliance can happen.” David Brooks, “The Talent Magnet”, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/25/opinion/25brooks.html?_r=1&ref=opinion .

Creative accomplishment requires boundaries without oppression. Mozart was an exuberant innovator but worked within the musical syntax and language that was developed by Bach and Hayden. Beethoven was a revolutionary who took that language and syntax a step farther into new, romantic-heroic territory.

The PIXAR animation studios have created vivid, engaging fantasy works with enduring value, among them the *Toy Story* features, *Ratatouille*, *Nemo*, *UP*, *Monster's Inc.*, *Carz* and *Wall*E*. Wide creative latitude is accompanied by plausibility rules that govern the created world. The toys of *Toy Story*, for example could not teleport, change size, or exert superpowers. In the presence of children and adults they fell and remained inert.

“The core separation into world, character and story is a good example of our most fundamental decomposition. Experts in environments can concentrate on discovering the rules of the world. Character specialists can make believable actors from bugs or lamps or toys. Storytellers can concentrate on what happens and why. Each process informs the other, inspiring a new environment with a story point or a different way to see a character against a fresh background.”

From UC Berkeley explanatory essay released by PIXAR

“[W]e try to stay as true as you can because there’s a certain veracity, you know, you get stable when you create a set of rules for the character and for the environment, it stabilizes the viewer and helps them experience the world in a much better way. You can lose yourself in the story much better if the rules are consistent, you don’t have to think about them anymore. We all know that when we watch films, rules are all over the map or it’s inconsistent, the continuity doesn’t make sense, you start thinking about it.”

Interview with PIXAR producer Darla Anderson

Structure and a common language of collaboration are evidently essential. But what are the special conditions that foster *constructive* creative activity? Is there a need for an underlying moral context? Contrast two signal transformative events in human history, one recent and one not.

There was a burst of creative energy in the Weimar Republic of Germany, 1919-1933, ending with Hitler's ascent to power. The Weimar Republic was born during the crippling reparations following Germany's crushing defeat in WW I, and under pressure from left and right, it experienced a burst of cultural energy characterized by a mood of bleakness and failure (often described as “modernism”), manifested in the literature of geniuses like Brecht and Mann and the atonal music of Berg and Schoenberg.

This bleak ethos found political expression the theories of the so called Critical Theorists of the Marxist Frankfurt School. One prominent thread in the Weimar cultural mix was a Marxist-inspired attack on traditional beauty; the beauty “worship” of romanticism was portrayed as part of the ideology of capitalism (much as religion was denounced as the “opiate of the people”. One sympathetic writer described the role of “modern” music as a

“message of despair”. The Weimar cultural period, whatever its incidental value to world culture, contained a dominant anti-life ethos that ultimately crippled the very creative process itself, marking the beginning of popular alienation from the “elite arts.”

The predictable result was a catastrophic loss of confidence in the value of liberal civilization itself, and a psychological opening for Nazism. The failure to honor moral boundaries and the concomitant undermining of life affirmation within the creative community of Weimar, undermined the commitment to creative freedom, and led directly to the loss of all freedom in the Hitlerian nightmare.

There was a far earlier burst of creative energy in Florentine Italy that sparked a Renaissance that led directly to modern Western civilization.

There are many differences between these two events, of course. But I think that the core difference was that the first Renaissance was grounded in a life-affirming, morally grounded discipline, while the Weimar experiment was not. One development flourished in traditional, morally fertilized soil, and the other died in a despairing, almost nihilistic backwash, opening the door to the holocaust.

China and the State Capitalism Fad

No full-on free-market capitalism has ever really been allowed to operate for long by the governments within which such markets operate, even though full-on laissez-faire conditions are not necessary, just a robust legal system that protects contracts, polices fraud and ensures reasonable safety and accountability.

“State capitalism” is the buzzword of the day, although it is nothing new on the planet. The mercantilism of the British Empire operated in the service of the Crown, exclusive franchises, i.e., monopolies, were the order of the day.¹⁰

China’s blowtorch economy is an artificial construct - a hell-bent effort to create a production-based economy capable of employing a half-billion displaced rural workers by flooding the world with underpriced goods. Starting from a base near zero, China’s GDP numbers are artificially large. But, within the booming Shanghai region, a bubble of comparative commercial freedom has been tolerated by nervous post-Marxist communist apparatchiks, while every other outbreak of creative activity is stamped out with ruthless, bureaucratic zeal.

As one Chinese business leader put it, “You have to understand that business is the only creative outlet permitted in my country.”

¹⁰ For a discussion of mercantilism as a general theory, see < <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Mercantilism.html> >. As mercantilism affected the colonies, see < <http://www.landandfreedom.org/ushistory/us3.htm> >. The policies of mercantilism were opposed by Adam Smith and John Locke, among others, but they reappeared under Germany’s National Socialism.

I am cautiously optimistic about the Chinese prospects for a peaceful, internal reformation particularly after 2012. Every knowledgeable adult in China remembers not only Tiananmen Square 1989, but they vividly recall the image of that towering white statue, holding a torch, “The Goddess of Democracy”.

Like Voldemort in Harry Potter, one does not publicly talk of these things inside mainland China, let alone name them. But that same Lady still stands on Liberty Island against the backdrop of Manhattan. She and the American example are universals.

Our Unique Calling as Americans

Over the rest of this decade and in the following years, we will need to aggressively promote a deeper and more explicit understanding of the nature and function of creative communities, those periods of efflorescence from Medieval Renaissance through the high-tech bloom, and of the tendency of creativity to emerge and flourish under some forms of governance and not others.

I am morally certain that such an understanding will be the key to human survival in the 21st century. The Creative Imperative may begin here in the USA but it will not be contained. A commitment to creative freedom will drive the remaking of conservatism into a generous new model, and it will rescue liberalism from its socialist & progressive ideological bonds. The ensuing dialogic will be part of an America-inspired Renaissance that will transform the world. The task of inaugurating that renaissance begins with liberty-friendly minds here and in the world at large, a growing enlightened cohort of thinkers and doers who can connect the dots between **all** life-affirming creative endeavors and the comprehensive conditions of freedom that they need to flourish.

Renaissance minds of the world unite. The only thing you have to lose is your pessimism, your ambivalence and the future of civilization.

Jay B Gaskill

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