The Nature of True Freedom III: Creating A Shared Image of the Future

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In creating the conditions for "true freedom," it is essential that a society not only provide "freedom from" (Fromm's negative freedom) but also provide "freedom to" (Fromm's positive freedom). Positive freedom to do something, in turn, is sustained only if a society has defined or is in the process of continually defining and redefining a clear and exhilarating image of its own purpose and, in particular, its own future. According to Fromm (1941, p. 256):

> Looked at superficially, people appear to function well enough in economic and social life; yet it would be dangerous to overlook the deep-seated unhappiness behind that comforting veneer. If life loses its meaning because it is not lived, man becomes desperate. People do not die quietly from physical starvation; they do not die quietly from psychic starvation either. If we look only at the economic needs as far as the "normal" person is concerned, if we do not see the unconscious suffering of the average automatized person, then we fail to see the danger that threatens our culture from its human basis: the readiness to accept any ideology and any leader, if only he promises excitement and offers a political structure and symbols which allegedly give meaning and order to an individual's life. The despair of the human automaton is fertile soil for the political purposes of Fascism.

Arendt's Vision of the Future

Hannah Arendt ([1948] 1966) comes to a similar conclusion as she describes the conditions leading to the rise of totalitarianism in midcentury Europe. She speaks of the loss of a sense of purpose or defining image of the future during the years immediately following World War I. The world had been changed profoundly by the war, and at least Europeans had lost all sense of bearing and any sense of human values or rights. Displaced people were wandering from country to country with no sense of home or identity. At the same time, there was a desperate effort to reassert a sense of nation and of race.

It was a time, according to Arendt ([1948] 1966, p. 268), when there seemed to be nothing more pervasive than a diffuse sense of hate, the universal substitute for a sense of hope in the future:

> Hatred, certainly not lacking in the pre-war world, began to play a central role in public affairs everywhere, so that the political scene in the deceptively quiet years of the twenties assumed the sordid and weird atmosphere of a Strindbergian family quarrel. Nothing perhaps illustrates

the general disintegration of political life better than this vague, pervasive hatred of everybody and everything, without a focus for its passionate attention, with nobody to make responsible for the state of affairs—neither the government nor the bourgeoisie nor an outside power. It consequently turned in all directions, haphazardly and unpredictably, incapable of assuming an air of healthy indifference toward any thing under the sun.

To what extent does Arendt's description of 1920s Europe ring true today in Europe and elsewhere? Perhaps the world that was created after World War I continues to exist: a world without a grand narrative to connect the past and the present or a clear image of a sustainable future (a connection between the present and the future), Certainly, the heirs of those displaced people continue to roam the world. If some were finally given a home, it has usually only been at the cost of displacing other people (for example, the Palestinians). Furthermore, the rise of nationalism and racial hatred throughout Europe and many other countries in the world is evident. Is the second decade of the 21st Century a repeat of the 1920s, and are new forms of terrorism fueled by hatred to be prevalent in our near future?

Dystopic Visions of the Future

While we can look to the past for evidence of the impact that the loss of a common purpose and sense of the future can have on our society and for clues as to our own future, we can also look to more contemporary times. The astute social observer, Christopher Lasch described a culture of narcissism which he came to believe typified the 1970s in the United States and other Western countries. His observations still seem to be appropriate and related to the challenge of forging a viable vision of the future (Lasch, 1979, p. 193):

> The culture of narcissism is not necessarily a culture in which moral constraints on selfishness have collapsed or in which people released from the bonds of social obligation have lost themselves in a riot of hedonistic self-indulgence. What has weakened is not so much the structure of moral obligations and commandments as the belief in a world that survives its inhabitants. In our time, the survival and therefore the reality of the external world, the world of human associations and collective memories, appears increasingly problematic.

Lasch identifies the absence of both durable social structures and ample psychological resources in a world saturated with narcissistic individualism (Lasch, 1979, p. 193):

The fading of a durable, common, public world, we may conjecture, intensifies the fear of separation at the same time that it weakens the psychological resources that make it possible to confront this fear realistically. It has freed the imagination from external constraints but exposed it more directly than before to the tyranny of inner compulsions and anxieties.

At this point, Lasch (1979, p. 193) turns to the obsessive consumerism that is also identified by Fromm (1955) in one of his later assessments (in the United States) of an escape from freedom:

The inescapable facts of separation and death are bearable only because the reassuring world of man-made objects and human culture restores the sense of primary connection on a new basis. When that world begins to lose its reality, the fear of separation becomes almost overwhelming and the need for illusions, accordingly, more intense than ever.

Another image of our possible future speaks further to the social impact of the loss of a sense of a sustainable future. This image comes from the movie *Mad Max* and the novel, *The Road*. In this film and novel, much as in Hannah Arendt's Europe of the 1920s, the world has just experienced a major catastrophe. The world is coming to an end. The few survivors of the global holocaust live in a world without purpose and probably without a future. In the last days of the world, these men and women remain in a state of intoxication and violence.

As in the case of 1920s Europe, many of the survivors in *Mad Max* and *The Road* have become homeless, rootless wanderers, finding no identity or acceptance in a world that they did little to either create or destroy. The existential despair that was portrayed by 20th Century European authors such as Sartre (1993) and Camus (1989) and (following World War II) by psychoanalysts such as Ludwig Binswanger (1963) (in Europe) and Rollo May (2007) (in the United States) is vividly enacted in *Mad Max* and *The Road* (2006).

It is particularly insightful in *Mad Max* to note that the adult survivors paid no attention to their children, the next generation, who would have held their collective future in their hands. The one child in *Mad Max*'s society is an abandoned urchin who receives no care from any one. A world without a future apparently has no need for and takes no interest in its children. By contrast, there is one child in *The Road* who is cared for in a world without care—so a short-term, intimate commitment to care is possible (though painfully ironic).

Multiple Visions of the Future

A clear, straightforward and bleak image of the future is portrayed in Christopher Lasch's narcissistic and in images conveyed by authors and moviemakers who couple existential despair with the end of the world as we know it. By contrast, Kenneth Gergen (1991, pp. 6-7) suggests that the challenge is not one of confronting a single, distressing future, but is rather one of confronting multiple images of the future (and images of the present day as well). Gergen proposes that contemporary men and women are saturated with many partial and superficial images of self and the future:

> Social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of self. For everything we "know to be true" about ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt and even derision. This fragmentation of self-conceptions corresponds to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships. These relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an "authentic self' with knowable characteristics recedes from view. The fully saturated self becomes no self at all. Each reality of self gives way to reflective questioning, irony and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The center fails to hold.

A single coherent image of the future is difficult to achieve because in our emerging postmodern world it is not clear whether such an image is even needed, whether it is desirable, or whether it is possible. In arguing for a clear, coherent, and compelling image of the future, do we mean to imply that there need be only one image in any one society? Such would be impossible in a postmodern world without being based on an intolerable fanaticism—perhaps a "friendly fascism" (Gross, 1980) that would appeal to the present-day version of the 1950s "authoritarian personality" identified by Adorno and his associates (1964) or Eric Hoffer's (1951) "true believers". Hopefully, the 21st Century replicas of these long-standing escapes from freedom will not prevail. Responsible citizens will reflect on and appreciate not only their own personal values, beliefs, and actions, but also those of people embracing diverse values and belief who wish to take quite different actions.

What might a society look like in which multiple images of the future are embraced? Ogilvy (1979, p. 59) offers the image of a multidimensional person living in a multidimensional society. This person lives in true freedom when he or she is able to resist "deterministic forces of socialization"—what we have described as the pervasive illusions of freedom. He or she is able to discuss and debate this resistance with other people in this society so that the resistance does not become "blind and senseless rebellion." Under these conditions, according to Ogilvy (1979, p. 59) "a multiplicity of well-founded interpretive

schemes giving objective support to several interpretations of social interactions" are available to this individual and society. Perhaps this is the way in which true freedom is engaged.

Along with Ogilvy, many postmodern social theorists and observers (for example, Bauman, 1992, pp. 150- 152), question the need for a single unified image of the future, arguing instead for a more process-oriented (Whiteheadian) notion of future imaging. Democracy, according to William Hastie (quoted in Gross, 1980, p. 349) is "a process, not a static condition. It is becoming, rather than being. It can easily be lost but is never fully won. Its essence is eternal struggle." This description regarding the delicate and often elusive entity called "democracy" seems to be particularly salient in 21st Century politics in the United States (and many other countries). From this more process-oriented and contextual perspective, it is in the political, economic, psychological, sociological, and even spiritual process of formulating a new image of the future that a society finds its coherence and sustaining integration. To arrive at a single image or even several related images is absurd in the fragmented postmodern world of the mid-21st Century. However, the act of searching out such an image or set of images might be appropriate and essential for a viable community or society—and for the emergence of true freedom.

A Postmodern Future of Differentiation and Integration

What, then, will be the nature of a society that manifests true freedom? Is it possible for our preliminary and tentative reflections on Freedom in 1994 (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994) to be expanded into a dialogue regarding the nature of freedom in 21st Century Eastern Europe and the United States? It would, of course, be presumptuous of me to formulate a detailed plan for Hungary, Estonia, or the United States. However, our interviews and observations in Eastern Europe align with some of the observations made by Gergen—and Ogilvy in particular. In 1994, Berne Weiss and I suggested that we must do an effective job of creating, recognizing, and making use of diversity of type, function, and character. This is a process called *differentiation* (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Bergquist, 1993).). At the same time, we must find, hold, and celebrate the traditions, values, myths, and stories that bind members of a society together. This is a process called *integration*. True freedom in any society might require a balancing and interweaving of both differentiation and integration.

With freedom comes the potential for greater diversity, specialization, individualism, and fragmentation, as well as greater nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism, and regionalism. Freedom calls for a comparable increase in integrative functions. A void is left when authoritarian regimes collapse, when the monolithic state bureaucracy is dissolved, and when the overarching ideology and political doctrine (in Eastern

Europe this was Marxism) and vision of a future society is discredited. In its place must come a new, integrative vision (or integrative process of deliberating about a shared vision). A new, genuine sense of community must be built on something other than just hatred for another people or doctrine. The integration must occur at both the personal and societal levels. Moreover, the integration cannot simply occur through the reintroduction of centralization of vision and functions. The former Soviet Union provides a compelling example of centralization having failed miserably.

Arrogance and Friendly Fascism

It is particularly important for those of us who come out of an American liberal tradition, given our predisposition to want complex social problems to be addressed through centralized, governmental functions, to reconsider our expectations of government providing systemwide solutions. We need to establish a closer relationship with our personal social responsibilities as an expression of our freedom. Hannah Arendt ([1948] 1966) reminds us in her analysis of bureaucratic racism in European colonialization that social reform motives can all too easily translate into arrogance regarding our justifiable authority to intervene in the life of (that is, to conquer) another person in order to bring her or him "true" knowledge, values, and perspectives on life.

I bring in the challenging insights offered by Bertrand Gross (1980) at this point. Gross is an avowed liberal who has a long, impressive history of service to the federal government. He provides his own confession regarding the often-inappropriate role of centralization in liberal thought. "For many years," Gross (1980, pp. 4-5) observes, "I sought solutions for America's ills—particularly unemployment, ill health and slums—through more power in the hands of central government. In this I was not alone. Almost all my fellow planners, reformers, social scientists, and urbanists presumed the benevolence of more concentrated government power."

Gross goes on to note the parallel between liberal centralization and the seemingly opposite centralization to be found in the conservative encouragement of unrestricted corporate growth in American society and suggests the nature of the major challenge that each of us now faces as social critic and activist:

> The major exceptions [to those who advocate the benevolence of concentrated government power] were those who went to the other extreme of presuming the benevolence of concentrated corporate power, often hiding its existence behind sophistical litanies of praise for the 'rationality,' 'efficiency,' or 'democracy' of market systems and 'free competitive' private

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enterprise. Thus, the propensity toward friendly fascism lies deep in American society. There may even be a little bit of neofascism in those of us who are proudest of our antifascist credentials and commitments.

The challenge, therefore, is to find means of integration that retain and promote diversity and to find sources of community that do not require centralization of control.

Images that Integrate

What will be the primary fabric of this new integrative yet diversified society? What is strong enough to hold people together in a single society that honors differences? In the past, images of society have often relied on economic images of the individual and society to provide the integration. This is no longer appropriate, if it ever was. It appears that Marxism was flawed, or at least limited from the first, because Marx restricted his analysis to the economic sphere and, more specifically, the sphere of production (see Triando, 1992, pp. 72-73). In many ways, Marx turned all of Europe into a sweatshop, ignoring the many variations in economic life and the presence of noneconomic life in the emerging modern nation states of Europe. Capitalism, or at least American capitalism, has been similarly restrictive in describing the factors that motivate people primarily in economic terms.

Whether from a Marxist or a Capitalist perspective, the economic person was in essence a product of the modern world (Bergquist, 1993). Regardless of the ideology being propounded, the assumption was made that profit and salary are the primary goals of life. The economic person was seen as an advance over the person as primarily a religious being or as merely an object (servant, slave, chattel). A secular "grand narrative" of primarily economic and political content was constructed during the modern era. It took on several different forms: communism in Eastern Europe, *noblesse oblige* in colonializing Western Europe (Arendt, [1948] 1966), and manifest destiny in the United States.

Those who have identified and documented the transition into a postmodern era have written about the decline of the grand narrative. There is no longer one commonly accepted story or legend (Arendt, [1948] 1966, p. 208) that justifies and provides a rationale for our collective behavior. As we enter a postmodern world, we find that postmodern people (and the postmodern society) are not exclusively or even primarily economic. They are a composite of several postmodern and modem forms (political, religious, cultural, and economic). Max Weber's (1958) description of humans as religious and culturally oriented is still valid. The composite also contains newly emerging, post modern images of men and women as ecological, international, and equality-oriented learners.

The New Postmodern Narrative

The new, postmodern narrative or vision of the future will and must be a hybrid of old and new forms. The failure of communism in Eastern Europe was the failure to impose a grand narrative based on the primacy of the economic sector of society and the state as the final arbiter of truth. The message from the fall of communism is the need for hybrid forms (Feher, 1992, p. 110). This, in tum, requires tolerance for (even enthusiastic embracing of) ambiguity. What Frederic Jameson (1991) calls the "troubling ambiguity" of postmodern society offers a major challenge for any striving toward true freedom.

The new narrative or vision of differentiation and integration must blend the best of both free market and socialistic systems, especially an emphasis on shared welfare. It must effectively incorporate the arts, humanities, and social sciences with economics and politics. Such a model will be challenging for both the right wing and the left wing (Feher, 1992, pp. 113- 114). The central remaining question is: will the new narrative or vision be coherent and sustainable, or will it as the postmodernists suggest be more of a process than an enduring product? We (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994) concluded from our observations and interviews in both Estonia and Hungary that in these two countries the new vision would be expressed primarily as an ongoing dialogue among many divergent forces in each country. This would be both the strength and the challenge of the experiences of freedom in Estonia and in Hungary.

Our extension into the future appears to be at least partially valid given the complex and often turbulent clash of ideologies in both countries since the early 1990s. Both countries have thriving economies—but remain a bit distant from the economic and political narrative offered by the Unites States—especially as this American narrative has fallen into disarray and polarization. The Estonians and Hungarians, like many other citizens of the 21st Century throughout the world, have witnessed what occurs when the rampant individualism of American society has led to violence, political extremism and a failure for Americans to engage a successful transition in national leadership. The future for both of these societies may have to contain a mixture of perspectives and elements—as will also be required in American society.

Polak's Image of the Future

What would a more diverse future look like in Eastern Europe or America? I seek to provide a particular answer to this challenging question and conclude this essay (and this series of essays on the nature of true freedom) by looking to the guidance offered by Fred Polak (1973). As a Dutch sociologist, Polak published a remarkable book about images of the future that brings to a focus the diverse perspectives I

have already offered in this essay. As in the case of *Harmony of Interest*, written by Anonymous (1849) during the 19th Mid-Century, Polak's *The Image of the Future* has been quite influential in the writing of many observers of contemporary societies (notably Kenneth Boulding, the Nobel Prize winning economist). While being influential, the writings of Fred Polak have not been widely accessible to the American reading public—as was also the case with Anonymous' Harmony of Interests. I have been fortunate to obtain an English version of his book, which was translated and edited by Elise Boulding (after she spent an entire year learning Danish, so that she could prepare this English version). Both Elise and Kenneth Boulding are to be thanked for their enduring efforts to make Polak's book more accessible—and for Ken Boulding (1956) to build on it in his own book: *The Image*.

Confronting the Other: The Numinous Future

For Polak, the Future is more complex and often illusive then that identified and analyzed by the social observers I have already sited. He writes about the Future as being profoundly Other—to be differentiated from that which has already taken place (the Past) and is now taking place (the Present). The Other that represents our Future is compelling, yet shadowy; it provides direction and motivation, yet is ever changing. I would suggest that Polak's Future resembled the powerful and elusive "numinous" that is described by Rudolph Otto (1923) and incorporated in the work of the psychoanalyst, Carl Jung (1938).

In what some scholars identify as the first "psychological" analysis of religious experiences, Rudolph Otto (1923) identified something that he called the "numinous" experience. In his now-classic book, *The Idea of the Holy.* Otto creates a new word, "numinous" (from the Latin word "numen" and paralleling the derivation of "ominous" from the word "omen"). Otto (1923, P. 11) writes about a powerful, enthralling experience that is "felt as objective and outside the self." Otto's numinous experience is simultaneously awe-some and awe-full. We are enthralled and repelled. We feel powerless in the presence of the numinous yet seem to gain power ("inspiration") from participation in its wonderment.

Using more contemporary psychological terms, the boundaries between internal and external locus of control seem to be shattered when one is enmeshed in a numinous experience. The outside enters the inside and the inside is drawn to the outside. As an example, I point to the horrible and dreadful images and pictures of gods in primitive cultures. They continue to enthrall us—leading us to feelings of profound admiration and often at the same time profound disgust. We view a miracle, in the form of a newborn child or the recovery of a loved one from a life-threatening disease. This leads us to a sense of the numinous. Somehow, a power from outside time

and space seems to intervene and lead us to an experience that penetrates and changes everything (though we don't know how). This sense of Other that is beyond knowable time and space is what Polak has identified as our Image of the Future. Some of us identify this as God's intervention to heal or save. Another perspective is offered by those who believe in the healing and saving power of Nature or Karma. A more contemporary perspective is offered by those who extoll the "miraculous" power of "modern medicine" or the capacity of human society to do good work. Regardless of its purported secular or sacred nature, this healing or saving power has numinous qualities.

Carl Jung built on and extended[i] Otto's portrayal of the numinous. He describes a numinous experience as one that "seizes and controls the human subject . . . an involuntary condition . . . due to a cause external to the individual. The numinous is either a quality of a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence causing a peculiar alteration of consciousness." (Jung, 1938, p. 4) Jung's notion of numinous is founded on experience and not just ideation. Much is also the case with Fred Polak, who proposes that an *Idea* of the Future is not the same thing as (and not as compelling as) an *Image* of the Future. Both the Future and the Numinous are compelling, elusive and frightening. They both pull us in and provide us with compelling images

To use the term of the chaos theorists, the Future and the Numinous are "strange attractors". The so-called "attractor" basins identified by researchers such as Edward Lorenz are powerful, prevalent and "self-organizing"—much as is the Future and the Numinous. The attractors are powerful and prevalent because any complex system seems to "have a natural tendency to [fall] under the influence of different attractors that ultimately define the context in which detailed system behaviors unfold." (Morgan, 2006, p. 254). The attractors are self-organizing in that there is no external source that dictates the way in which these attractors operate. The quality of numinous is deeply embedded in these dynamic attracting systems—perhaps that is why they were avoided by scientists for many centuries and why they are now of such great appeal to many scientists and non-scientists who are studying complexity.

Five Perspectives on the Future

Polak (1973, p. 2) offers five ways in which we tend to orient our perspectives on life to this challenge of our Future being the Other (and a source of numinostic uncertainty and even terror, as well as strange attraction):

> 1.Life cannot be purely transitory: there must be something more enduring. Man hopes for future grace.

> 2. There must be another realm into which man can enter.

3. Life should not be transitory and imperfect. Man rebels out of despair, but without hope.

4. Life is not as it appears to be. This world is an illusion, and the essential reality is veiled from man.

5. Life does not have to be the way it is. Man can reform and re-create the world after any image he chooses.

We see the third perspective vividly displayed in the forementioned pessimistic, existential images offered by the post-world war novelists and psychoanalysts—and perhaps in Lasch's description of an individualistic, narcissism-based future. We see two of the more optimistic perspectives on the future offered by social observers who come from a more theological orientation. Martin Buber (1958) offers us a vision that speaks to the first perspective—that there is something beyond our current concerns that deserves our commitment. *I/Thou* is about relationships that are embedded in a deep, caring love for one another on behalf of the ultimate Thou (God).

Paul Tillich (1948) offers a similar perspective—but it is somewhat more secular in nature. We find Grace in relationship to one another in society; however, this Grace is embedded in a full appreciate for all aspects of human history (including its atrocities) and the reform of human society. We find similar visions offered by other political, economic and religious leaders throughout the world and throughout history. Some of these perspectives remain inaccessible or not very compelling. Others have a numinostic and strange attractive appeal that has driven the decisions made by and actions taken within specific societies. For Polak, the key point seems to be the way that an idea is translated into a specific, tangible image.

The World of "Eidetics" (a general theory of images)

Fred Polak (1973, p. 5) notes that the future "not only must be perceived, it also must be shaped." This means that we must move from an idea about the future to a tangible image of the future. tangibility (I have tried to provide this tangibility in previous essays when offering specific examples). Polak believes that the future must be seen, heard and even tasted. As a palpable entity, the Future can be the focus of countless debates, deliberations, quarrels, shared moments on enthusiasm, collective inspiration, and collaboration. Images are formed in myths, legends, songs, and theatrical enactments. We live in a world of eidectics (images). We celebrate the potential of collective futures during our holidays, in our construction of monuments, in our enactment of parades, and in our faithful repetition of family rituals.

These enactments move us beyond idea to image. I would suggest that we as human beings are "homoeidetics" (lovers of images) -- just as we are *homo ludens* (lovers of play) (Huizinger, 1968).

Images are formed and changed by producers and consumers, and by capitalists and communists. Images saturate the lives of artists, bohemians and scientists, entrepreneurs and working men. They are formed and dictated by schools of morality and religions--there are good guys and bad guys in the image of a future. Organization men and rugged individualists, family members (husbands, wives and children, father and mothers) are guided by tangible images of possibility, potentials, attainable goals. The images of the future ultimately bring everyone to the table--as I have repeatedly noted regarding the characteristics of true freedom.

Spatial Eidetics

Polak (1973, p. 3) proposes that spatial images of the Future are a distinct Other (in relationship to our past and present reality and the state of our current world). They have taken many forms through time and have been roughly classified by Polak in the following seven categories:

Before this world: Images concerning an original state of nature a lost paradise, Eden, Arcady.

This world: Images of the Promised Land, the New Jerusalem.

Below this world: Images of Hades or Tartarus an oceanic or volcanic kingdom, a land of the dead, a land of shadows, hell.

Above this world: Images of the beyond, a Kingdom of Heaven, Olympus, empyrean.

Outside this world: Images of the Isles of the blessed, Atlantis, never-never land.

After this world: Images of Elysium, Valhalla, a hereafter, a resting place for spirits of the departed.

Beyond all worlds: Spatial images of a metaphysical-cosmic nature. which are essentially nonspatial and ethereal: The All-One, infinity, nirvana.

As Polak notes, images shape a society and are in turned shaped by the actions and resulting outcomes of a society's venture into its own future. The specific special position of the image relative to our present world is critical to shaping the response of any society to its immediate and future challenges. I propose that some of the images offered by the social observers we have already reviewed in this essay align with one of Polak's seven special categories. These largely secular observations have produced

both negative and positive images of the future. The world portrayed by some of our observers has either already fallen or will soon fall. We find a secular Hades (below the world) in many of the novels and movies of despair (such as *The Road* and *Mad Max*) that describe a lost future. The future described by Arendt and Lasch are almost as bleak, while the diverse futures described by Gergen and Ogilvy are quite challenging (if not depressing).

Conversely, images of Eden and the New Jerusalem can be found in many societies throughout history (particularly in the Christian world), while images of a world beyond our current world can be found in many Asian societies. More diverse and highly secular images are envisioned in the postmodern world I have described in this essay that balance differentiation and integration. Could such a balanced world of the future actually be built and maintained by people of good will and competence? Is this secular image sufficiently compelling (numinostic) to lead a postmodern society into the future? While many of the other images throughout history have been compelling and have guided the actions taken by specific societies, they have usually blended secular and sacred elements. Can a secular image such as the postmodernists are proposing win the day or are many 21st Century societies faced with the lost future portrayed by our less positive observers?

Temporal Eidetics

Images of the future have not just a spatial quality. The image can also assume a temporal quality. The future, after all, does carry us beyond the present time into a future time. With my colleague, Gary Quehl, I have described the state of generativity in human development as a temporal perspective on the future (Bergquist and Quehl, 2019). We care deeply about that which we care about—to quote Erik Erikson (1963). If genuinely generative, this caring must be sustained over time. It is even a matter of finding ways in which we can live beyond our current life. It is this intimation of mortality that has motivated many acts of generativity (Kotre, 1984).

Polak (1973, pp. 3-4) places the temporary character of Images in an historical context:

> Temporal images of the world have been variously projected into the distant future or, as in classical mythology, into the past. At certain times in history, eschatological images of the future have shouted "Soon! " Images projected into the past represent romantic idealizations of that past: the biblical paradise, the. Renaissance image of antiquity. The age of romanticism looked to bygone times, and our own century reveres the Middle Ages, a period despised by the Enlightenment. There is also a tendency today to idealize the wisdom of primitive man. The

aching nostalgia for the time of unspoiled beginnings represents a kind of vision of the future-an image of unattainability. These dreams of the past operate on the future, though indirectly. Mostly, however, it is the future that has attracted man's dreams, hopes, and fears. The future rather than the past is seen as holding the key to the riddle of his existence. Death itself, the one certainty, is the chief inciter of our thirst for knowledge of what is to come. Man has never been able to accept *Ignoramus, ignorabius* as his motto.

It is in the framing of Future Images within an historical context that we extract meaning and use this meaning to construct a barrier against the numinostic challenge of Death itself. It is at this point that Polak seems to be in agreement with Carl Jung (and Rudolph Otto) that Images are ultimately a matter of religion and theology. Images of the Future frame the very nature of life and death as a matter of the distinction between finite mortality (the current reality and world) and the wholly Other infinite and eternal Future.

Images and Locus of Control

Given this sense of the Future as being of an entirely different substance than anything in our current world, then how do we engage with and influence this Future? Polak addresses this question by distinguishing between images of the future that are based on an assumption of primary, irreversible essence and those based on an assumption concerning the capacity of human influence. Polak offers the following terms and draws the following distinctions. *Essence-optimism* and *Essence-pessimism* both assume that the future is not in human hands, but is instead in the hands of God, fate, nature, or some other external, powerful force. These images are aligned with what psychologists have identified as an external locus of control. Conversely, *Influence-optimism* and In*fluence-pessimism* are directly aligned with an internal locus of control--the assumption being made that the future resides in the heads and hands of people (individually or collectively). Building on this distinction, Polak (1973, p. 17) concludes that:

> . . . the most negative image of the future grows out of a combination of essence-pessimism and influence-pessimism. In this view of life chaos overrules cosmos from beginning to end, and man can do nothing except resign himself to the inevitable."

I have introduced the concept of external and internal locus of control in previous essays when describing and analyzing ways in which a potential for freedom are viewed by different members of a society. I suggest that both perspectives on control are required when building a society where true

freedom reigns supreme. However, in considering this integrated and balanced perspective regarding locus of control, I am reminded of the powerful images of chaos that are exhibited in the Babylonian saga of Marduk and Tiamat (and replicated in the Old Testament stories of Noah's ark and the great flood). This image is one where an external locus of control reigns supreme. Represented in the real world by the yearly flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers of the fertile crescent in Mesopotamia, the mythic telling of a massive war between chaos (Tiamat) and order (Marduk) offers us a compelling (and numinostic) image of a Future that is completely outside our control. Our Future is an Other that allows us only to observe, narrate and become victims of outcomes produced by external forces that create our collective future. A similar flood of pessimism can be found in the narratives of Arendt, Lasch and many of the postmodernists I have cited.

Beyond the Babylonian myths, we can look to Judaic and Christian theology for other examples of external control—but also for examples of integration. I have written about "Grace" in previous essays and propose that it offers an image of integration. There is one form of Grace that resides in external control. This is the Grace to be found in Essence-optimism—it is granted by God (in traditional Christian theology). Conversely, there is a form of Grace that resides in an internal realm of control. This is the Grace to be found in the I/Thou relationship established on earth that was identified by the Jewish theologian, Martin Buber (1958). This is also the Grace to be found in the history of human caring and forgiveness identified by the Christian theologian, Paul Tillich (1948). These forms of Grace are not totally beholding to God's benevolence. These are forms of Grace based in Polak's Influence-optimism.

Grace that resides in the domain of Influence-optimism and is informed by an internal locus of control is forged on an anvil I have described in previous essays. Grace is forced on an anvil of shared commitment to higher purposes (a harmony of interest). It is an anvil of balanced individual rights and collective responsibility. Influence-based optimism and a sustained internal locus of control require recognition and reconciliation of all aspects of past human history. It is a Grace of I-Thou that allows for and is enabled by the forgiveness that comes not from God, but from neighbors (from all over the world) who we have wronged. It is a grace that allows us, finally, to even forgive ourselves (Bergquist and Pomerantz, 2020).

Discernment and the Future

How do we find (or construct) this anvil of Grace? Polak (1973, p. 20) offers some suggestions: "The future works upon the present only to the extent that the present can receive the challenging images it

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broadcasts. Man has to be tuned in to the right wave-length." In medieval times, this tuning to the right wavelength was called "discernment." The mystics were to learn how to discern which messages they were receiving came from God and which came from Satan. Both God and Satan had control of very powerful modes of communication--as they still do today via social media, the Internet and polarized cable networks. Discernment was thus necessary if the mystics were to be agents of God or agents of Satan.

According to Polak (1973, p. 20) "adequate response can be nothing less than a comprehensive and inspiring vision of the future." This suggests that discernment in contemporary times requires that any viable image of the future must be systemic (comprehensive) and appreciative (inspiring). These two criteria to be used in receiving and engaging a specific vision have advocated and illustrated throughout this series of essays on true freedom. It is this type of systemic and appreciative image of the future that can produce Grace. It is what Polak (1973, p. 21) labels "a renewed influence-optimism which can lift us out of [what Polak identifies as] the lethargy of our present essence-pessimism."

This is all well and go—but compelling visions are not just tidy, secular creations of humankind. As Polak notes, they seem to come from outside regular human experience. They are forms of the "Other" and are numinostic in character. How then does one discern the numinous? How does one discern its source? Does it come from a Godly (or at least humane) source, or is it aligned with humankind's "worst nature" (the present-day evil that seems to pervade our 21st Century world)? Furthermore, how does one categorize and confine that which resides outside categories and eludes confinement? As I noted in a previous essay in this series, Carl Jung (1938) suggested that structures need to be put in place that enable us to confront and somehow find coherence in the numinous. He identified the Catholic church as a primary source of this structure in early European history, until such time as the Protestant Church shattered this structure and forced its followers to address God (and the numinous) directly.

According to Jung, it is only with the imposition of totalitarian structures (such as the Third Reich) that Protestants were protected once again from the numinous. Jung suggests that an experience of the numinous is quite frightening and often not welcomed. He proposes that we build societal norms and institutional structures to protect us from the numinous. It may be the case that we sacrifice true freedom for protection from the numinous. We find the challenge of discernment regarding competing visions of the future to be quite challenging precisely because of their awe-filled, numinous quality. We look away from compelling visions and seek an indirect interpretation of (and buffering from) these visions through institutional structures that are often, as Jung suggests, authoritarian in nature.

The Future as Strange Attractor

Whether or not Jung is correct in linking the Third Reich and ultimately the Holocaust to the threat of numinous experiences, we certainly can acknowledge and respect the power of anything identified as the Other (such as Polak portrays the Future). We can recognize that the Future has many properties associated with all attractor basins. They are powerful, compelling and self-organizing. As Morgan (2006, p. 254) notes, some of these compelling attractors "pull a system into states of equilibrium or near equilibrium, [while] other attractors have a tendency to flip a system into completely new configurations." We might find that some images of the future similarly are reconfirming of current directions (thus establishing continuity and equilibrium) while other images are "revolutionary" in nature and compel a "flipping" of the future into a whole new dynamic and structural realm—much as Malcolm Gladwell (2002) identifies in his description of "tipping points" and Argyris and Schon (1974) identify as "second order" change.

Polak (1973, p. 4) seems to be saying something similar to what Jung and the chaos theorists have said when he suggests how human encounter the Future:

> The domain of the future . . . . is without boundaries. Yet it is only by drawing boundaries in the thought-realm that man can produce a problem that can be grasped and worked with, and it is only by redrawing the boundaries of the unknown that man can increase his knowledge. No problem so persistently defies our skill at drawing boundaries as the problem of the future, and no problem presses quite so hard on our intellectual horizons. In the act of searching out the future, Homo sapiens crosses the frontiers of the unknown and is transformed from the man of action, who responds to the moment, to the man of thought, who takes account of the consequences of his actions. He leaves behind the familiar universe of sight and sound and surveys the universe of the unseen and unheard, continually bringing small fragments of the unknown back with him out of the darkness and adding them to the known. Who can say whether this building up of the known diminishes the unknown?

Like Jung and the Chaos theorists, Polak describes a future that is unfamiliar and without clear boundaries. Polak's future seems to be a variety of attractor that disrupts rather than reinforces societal equilibrium. It should be noted, however, that Polak's (1973, p. 4) account of how human beings actually address the challenge inherent in this challenging encounter differs from that offered by Jung and the chaos theorists:

Man is not easily discouraged, however. Everything drives him to accept the challenge of the unknown. The instincts of preservation and reproduction demand it. All economic activity is an answer to this challenge; the primitive nomad gathering fruits and nuts and the modem industrial magnate are alike answering the call of the unborn tomorrow; so are the men who chart the seas and those who chart the heavens. No man, not even the suicide, can leave tomorrow alone. The suicide but hastens tomorrow in his impatience.

It is at this point in his exceptional study of world cultures that Polak (1973) offers an important statement about the relationship between compelling images of the future and the future of societies who hold or do not hold such an image. He describes the way in which the Other is confiscated and brought into societal reality.

The Future of the Future

While Polak believes that revolutionary Futures can be realized, he also notes that without this realization, a society is likely to fall into disrepair—displaying the characteristics of dystopias such as I have previously identified in this essay. Polak writes about the inevitable decline of civilizations that do not have a defining image of their own future. In *The Image of the Future,* he extensively documents the demise of societies in which no defining purpose animated a commitment of energy, dedication, and resources toward some shared future.

Here is a summary of his often-disturbing proposition (Polak, 1973, p. 19):

> The rise and fall of images of the future precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of cultures. As long as a society's image is positive and flourishing, the flower of culture is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the culture does not long survive. The secret of Greek culture, which came to its second flowering in the Renaissance, lies in the imperishable harmony of its image of the future. The endurance of Jewish culture, reborn today in Israel, lies in its fervently held image of the future, which has survived diaspora and pogrom alike. The prognosis of the dying Christian culture—if it can be said to be dying—lies in its dying image of the future.

It is at this point that Polak (1973, p. 19) offers his provocative challenge:

> The primary question then is not how to explain the rise and fall. of cultures, but how to explain the succession of shifting images of the future. How do virile and forceful images of the future

arise, and what causes them to decline and gradually fade away? Furthermore, how do the successive waves of optimism and pessimism regarding the images fit into the total cultural framework and its accompanying dynamics?

In alignment with Polak, I propose that the future of any society resides in large part in its collective image of its own future. Furthermore, true freedom is inevitably interwoven with the presence or absence of a compelling image of the future. The loss of true freedom typically accompanies and contributes to the decline of a civilization in large part because its citizens see no need to fight for their freedom. There is nothing that they particularly wish to do with it other than escape from it. This escape can take several different forms. Members of a collapsing society can rely on authority or become saturated in consumption. Escape can also take place through widespread substance abuse—be it alcohol, opiate, gambling or pornography (take your pick). Alternatively, the escape can take place through the creation of a future that is nothing but an illusion. With reliance on (and even worship of) an illusory Future, members of a collapsing society do not have to acknowledge the absence of a truly viable Future nor mourn the loss of a once compelling and guiding Future.

Without a compelling image of the future, we are unwilling to make long-term commitments with other people or even ourselves. Robert Jay Lifton (1995) speaks of the "protean man" who has no clear sense of self or of the Future. Much as the Greek god Proteus could change his shape from wild boar to dragon to fire or flood, Lifton's protean man is constantly shifting his form and style without achieving any sense of coherence or purpose. We find ourselves, like Lifton's protean man, always being expedient. We are always changing our form, our roles, and our beliefs to adjust properly to a new social "reality."

In particular, we are unwilling to make a covenant with the next generation, ensuring them a viable society or a viable environment. Jay Ogilvy (1979, p. 153) suggests that "for the Protean Man a promise is more an oath of the moment, than a troth for all times." Margaret Mead once said that we should always have a child present at any meeting where we are planning for the future to remind us who and what we are planning for. "With rising insistence and anguish," writes Mead, "there is now a new note: Can I commit my life to anything? Is there anything in human cultures worth saving, worth committing myself to?" (quoted in Gross, 1980, p. 109). What about the adults in *Mad Max*? They have created a post-nuclear society in which there is little or no hope—and not much envisioning or planning-for a collective future. Why be concerned with the welfare of a child if there is no expectation that there will be a future in which the child will live?

In essence, it becomes increasingly difficult for the protean man to move toward commitment to anyone or anything given the fragmentation of our personal and collective image of the present, let alone the Future. Without a clear and compelling image of the Future, it is easy and very tempting to fall back on expedience or to remain in a noncommitment. Kundera (1984) describes this condition in the title of his famous book about freedom and the loss of freedom in Eastern Europe during the 1960s: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Alternatively, we regress to a simplistic frame and borrow an old and often destructive image of the Future from some authoritarian source. We become Adorno's "authoritarian" or Hoffer's "true believer". Tragically, we now regress with vengeance and stubbornness, having felt betrayed by those who have offered us a false truth and have portrayed a Future that can never be realized. Having found no alternative image to motivate or sustain us, we are inclined to become the protean men and women described by Lifton.

Conclusions

Today, we are faced with a particularly difficult challenge regarding the creation of a viable image of the Future. First, we find this task difficult because there are so many alternatives available to us. At each corner and every turn, we find some contemporary guru who is selling his or her own distinctive image of the best Future, or the probable Future—or the Future from which we should escape through drugs, transcendence, or even (in a compound in Waco or a jungle in South America) death. Because we have lost our "grand narrative," we are inclined to accept many partial, superficial, and manipulative "narratives" that are not very grand by any standard. A protean stance awaits us.

Ultimately, a new image of the Future in any society must be built on our love of and concern for the welfare of our children and the next generation in our society. This commitment reflects the position I have taken in previous essays concerning the balancing of rights and responsibilities and the harmony of interests. We must find or create a foundation of what Paul Tillich (1948) calls "Grace" that is interwoven with Martin Buber's (1958) "I-Thou" commitment to a greater good and higher purpose. The challenge inherent in this set of statements is great—perhaps only a dream rather than a potential reality. A bit of Don Quixote's quest for a better world. At the very least, it is an inter-generational project that is worth our sustained dedication and action.

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