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Worldview and the branding of the Psyche

Market, Branding and their Emerging Philosophical
Foundations

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[Abstract: This paper is a introductory look into how marketing techniques and vehicles are attempting to engage paradigmatic elements to generate sales by attaching specious meaning to consumerist practices.]

Worldview and the branding of the Soul

It's my observation that over the last decade we, in the first world West, are being woken from the 'coma' of our egocentric and voracious consuming hedonism. And the awakening is not pleasant. It is, at least to my mind, much like the waking of a person to a vitally important potentially life changing day, from a short night sleep after a binge drinking session, realizing that they must get up, but are so exhausted they ...'just want ten more minutes sleep'. It's that place between asleep and awake that wants to feel better, but knows going back to sleep will only cause more problems....so what do I do?

The 'market' is starting to experience something of this as well and as many as can, have tried to come up with ingenious strategies by which we can pitch a 'market' analgesic for this waking consumer. If the product or brand cannot serve to give them that metaphorical 'ten minutes more sleep' it will try and at least slow, if not ease, the waking process...but time is running out! Awake the West will be, but to what and what will it seek to embrace in this emerging cultural space?

Which world view, which philosophical and anthropological paradigm was responsible for the 'free market' we now all so frantically seek to have a slice of? What was foundational for and key elements of the framework of what is know as the 'Western First World' culture and the technology, economy, democracy and the 'Reason' behind it all? If we are serious about marketing and branding in a 'vener' obsessed and often, substance bereft culture already drowning in a deluge of over used clichés and images, where do we need to look? Is this emerging marketing and cultural problem, merely an effect issue or is it 'cause' based? Will answers to this malady be found in better vehicles to manipulate the consensus or is it fundamentally at the real core, a need for paradigm reevaluation?

Marketers and Branding experts have begun to realise this emerging reality and are clamouring for a share in this paradigmatic shift. Before we start trying to develop 'patterns' or 'shapes' for pitching to this pending emergence, we need to 'grow up' as it were, and realise that what people are requiring is not more 'stuff', although that's what the consumerists need to move, if our economies of personal wealth are going to march on. However, what they do need (not necessarily want) is purpose and ultimately, meaning. Marketing of course has moved somewhat to this space and employed 'branding' methodology rather than simply sales strategies to procure not just the consumer's purse, but some degree of allegiance.

Yes, in the consuming hedonist coma all 'pleasure' focused strategies were employed regardless of cultural consequences. Whatever stimulated or aroused a person was engaged in courting the purse; sex, fun and the 'good times' were staple, however in time, saturation of the market by suppliers and companies competing in tighter markets with more players and fewer financially endowed punters, meant new strategies were needed to ensure a continuing profitable market...Evoking allegiance was now the new endeavour – how to secure loyalty and the return business.

How does one do this in a culture that has it all, is waking up from 'consumer hedonism coma' and is seeking something more significant? The answer for the marketing gurus has been to try and fill the vacuum of meaninglessness left as the result of the abandoning of the Judeo-Christian values that had not only brought about the ability of the West to create such prosperity, but also the reasons and metaphysical imperatives necessary for the same to survive.



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Of course one tactic (rather than strategy) is to try to, if not ignore then deflect from, this emergence and bolster the 'coma' creating elements. Blunt techniques of intensifying the sense and self gratification are ramped up, but alone they can just 'weary' the masses, so for this 'ramping up' to work one must manufacture the consensus of which everyone approves - media images of sexualisation, 'me first', and 'must have' have to be paraded in such a manner that strongly suggests that this behaviour is normative, regardless of the levels of gnawing discontent that may be being felt, or dysfunction being experienced by the individual. Of course, in isolation, this individual has no benchmark or reflective tool to further explore the discontent and just supposes – thanks to the propaganda – that what is presented is normal as everyone else seems to have embraced these priorities and attempts to shrug off the angst because they don't want to be the 'only ones' not basking in this well-crafted but completely hollow existential placebo!

Yet, this tactic too is beginning to lose some of its edge as the 'soul' begins to try and articulate its growing discontent. What then must be added to the blunt deflection mechanisms is processes that will strip away even the attempt to investigate and articulate the deeper questions; processes that 'dumb down' the masses so they are easier to coerce or seduce into remaining captives to this easier to manipulate 'coma-esque' state.

"In an era of television catatonia and retail therapy, will free citizens chose to 'imagine, think and reason in a "truly human" way' or are they conditioned or predisposed to pursue a stream of pleasurable episodes and never fulfill their capabilities and thus their potential as humans?...Modern consumer capitalism encourages anodyne conformity and one-dimensionality, and an intolerance of those who wish to break out of the expressions of individuality manufactured by the market.....The absence of inner freedom...is the dominant characteristic of modern consumer capitalism, a social system that cultivates behaviour driven by momentary impulse, temporary emotions and moral and intellectual weakness. The very purpose of the marketing society is to make us the slaves of our passions." ¹

Clive Hamilton's scathing critique of the (from any reasonable ethical perspective) questionable methodology of manipulation, I think is evidence of not only the academic communities awareness of this reality, but more so the wider communities awaking to it.

It appears the inevitability of death still has some weight in, if not challenging, then at the very least informing this issue. Whilst death will for the most part cease 'brand loyalty', and will slow down consumerist drive, it does not necessarily end it. With products and procedures on offer for the deceased, money is still to be had from the departed; anything from cryogenics to state of the art fully sound equipped coffins. Despite this, death, even in the consumerist West, signals something, even as Journalist Neal Lawson contemplated in a short article he wrote for the UK's Guardian on the passing of Apple CEO Steve Jobs.

"Death in a secular society is a crucial factor in the consumerisation of society. If we know we are going to die, then we have to fill the void with something – anything to avoid, deny or put off the inevitable horror of the end of our life...Apple electronics have filled the gap as much as any brand. But electrical equipment, no matter how well styled, can only be so much of a distraction. In the end, life has to be about more." ²



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I would argue final statement in the above excerpt is the question we are all looking for the answer for – what is life really all about? Lawson, of course fails to submit any real answer to that pressing question.

These papers, discussions and comments are in increasing ways putting a voice (by creating awareness) to the masses, caught in their ‘freedom-less individuality’. So more strategic methods and tools must be engaged if the ‘market’ is going to not merely hold, but survive.

One clear revelation that has issued from this cultural shift is that Marketers and the Brand peddlers have got to move beyond trying to merely sell product, now they much more need to sell context. In so doing they are going to have to give some kind of ‘depth’ to their ‘worldview’ of the version of capitalism and consumerism that they have created. So now they are endeavouring to create a meaning system around the goods or services they provide to elicit the allegiance they believe they need to secure their brand success. The problem is, ‘things’ don’t give meaning. As and ‘icon’ they may provoke some thought for reflection or induce recall, but they cannot give us the answers to the ‘why we are here or how we should live?’ And even the very engaging and schedule filling pursuit of ‘acquisition’ will not answer the big question that even the remarkable author Leo Tolstoy, by his own admission, said nearly drove him insane when he asked... *“What meaning has my life that the inevitability of death does not destroy?”*³

If we are to be serious not only about product placement, profile, allegiance or even customer obsession, we are now, whether we want to or not, having to look to more substantial brand anchors to diminish consumer transience. And more, these cannot be simply well oiled pocket emptying tactics veiled by the veneer of a ‘profound’ sales pitch, they must deliver in substance and form, what will evoke a sense of meaning, not just ‘feel good’ association and one dimensional identity. I want to take you on what is ostensibly a very brief journey to introduce you to some data that will hopefully take you to a reflective space that is immersed in the sincere, authentic and integrous, not merely the clever, cute and manipulative.

The ensuing thoughts will certainly provoke a variety of responses, and for many perhaps a cynical dismissal, but these rudimentary thoughts are only the ‘tip of the iceberg’ so to speak when it comes to finding foundations and anchors in an ever increasing Post, post-modern and confused world....

In his landmark and thoroughly researched work ‘THE VICTORY OF REASON’, prominent sociologist Dr. Rodney Stark – (University Professor of Social Sciences at Baylor University) not a religious man, gives us a refreshing and confronting look at the rise and prominence of the Western World view. The following excerpt summarises much of this worthwhile and very objective volume...

‘Christianity created Western Civilisation. Had the followers of Jesus remained an obscure Jewish sect, most of you would not have learned to read and the rest of you would be reading from hand copied scrolls. Without theology committed to reason, progress and moral equality, today the entire world would be about where non-European societies were in, say, 1800: A world with many astrologers and alchemists but no scientists. A world of despots, lacking universities, banks, factories, eyeglasses, chimneys and piano. A world where most infants do not live to the age of five and many women die in childbirth – a world truly in the ‘dark ages.’

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The modern world arose only in Christian societies. Not in Islam. Not in Asia. Not in a 'secular' society – there having been none. And all the modernisation that has since occurred outside Christendom was imported from the West, often brought by colonizers and missionaries. Even so, many apostles of modernisation assume that, given the existing Western example, similar progress can be achieved today not only without Christianity but even without freedom or capitalism – that globalisation will fully spread scientific, technical and commercial knowledge without any need to re-create the social or cultural conditions that first produced it.”⁴

The sentiment expressed above in the conclusion of Stark's work is also borne out by the candid, if not risky, remarks of one of China's leading scholars...

“One of the things we were asked to look into was what accounted for the success, in fact, the pre-eminence of the West all over the world. We studied everything we could from historical, political, economic, and cultural perspective. At first, we thought it was because the west had more powerful guns than we had. Then we thought it was because you had the best political system. Next we focused on your economic system. But in the past twenty years, we have realized that the heart of you culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West is so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life is what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don't have any doubt about that”⁵

If that wasn't enough, yet another Philosopher and Sociologist, Jurgen Habermas, who interestingly enough describes himself as a methodological atheist made the following emphatic statement...

“Christianity and nothing else is the foundation of liberty, conscience, human rights and democracy, the benchmarks of Western Civilisation. To this day we have no other option than Christianity! We continue to nourish ourselves from this source. Everything else is postmodern chatter. Ironically Christianity gave Europe it's universities that educated the new atheists, the liberty that permits them to propagate their views and the law that protects them. As influential intellectual atheist John Gray points out, the new atheist defends liberal freedoms without asking where they came from!”

We see in a snap shot, what a thorough historical investigation emphatically verifies, that the Christian worldview has brought the civilization and prosperity we, in the first world, now so enjoy (often shamelessly). Yet our new found success in the 'modern' context has led us to an amnesia inducing and culturally dangerous arrogance. We have forgotten not only, upon what this liberty, reason and subsequent success was predicated, but also the 'Theological' underpinnings necessary to sustain the equitable use and governance of this sought after, if not 'favoured', cultural space.

We have not, in our new prosperous technocracy, remembered from where we came and why! One of the consequences of the 'theologically' amputated world view, is that we now think ourselves 'clever' enough to believe that we did this only in our own humanistic endeavours and now have no need for the Theology that not only spawned the worldview, but the subsequent conducive culture for all the remarkable liberties and successes we now enjoy.

However, as stated earlier we have entered into a time of cultural peril, where the very fabric of our humanity is tearing, despite all the technological and economic advances that have

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promised to bring us comfort and ease. There is a 'dis-ease', particularly in the first world West, a growing malady which threatens the very essence of what makes us distinctly human and it is our emerging generation which are in greatest peril.

The well respected Australian epidemiologist Richard Eckersley had a great deal to say about these concerns in his latest work...

*"Young people have a particular vulnerability to the failure of the modern Western Culture to do well what cultures are supposed to do: **provide webs of meaning that shape the way people see the world, locate themselves within it and behave in it.**"*⁶
(emphasis added)

When the concepts, function and management of technology, economy and even democracy are abandoned to the government of 'self' or an individualistic world-view, then culture and the human person will suffer. When the foundational 'Cultural Anthropology' has stripped from it the compassionate, philanthropic, egalitarian and altruistic components birthed in the grace, mercy and omni-benevolence of the teachings of Jesus Christ about the Divine order we facilitate disintegration. When we ignore the origins and discovery that were implemented in the 'reason' of the Judeo-Christian truth of our origins, then our 'ends' and 'means' are being separated and disintegration will be hastened. The 'product' or if you'd prefer, the effect of this new meaning bereft econ-technocracy with wealth creation for the few being the goal, will create its own ethos, take on a life bereft of the Transcendent and the benevolent means used to develop it.

So, when technology and economic success were abdicated to, and they have gained ascendancy over what makes us human, then the production of comfort and ease for these parameters are prominent in the governing ethos. Subsequently, ideology, community and humanity suffer, as reflected here by Sociologist Z. Bauman

*"... 'individualisation' is a fate, not a choice. It consists in transforming human identity from a given into a task, and making the individual responsible for the task and for the consequences. The double-edged consequences, for personal and social life, of this fundamental change in the relation of individual and society are spelled out in chilling detail: the individual's new 'freedom' to define their own identity comes at a high cost."*⁷

When individualism dominates then egoism becomes the default mode. This only adds negatively to that the emerging unhealthy ethical and social frameworks needed to manage, the now myriad of personal needs, urges and aspirations it produces. And these, of course, are as convoluted as the individuals they attempt to 'manage/govern'.

Yet there is a growing disillusionment with this econ-technocracy, as it is not satisfying our humanity. The more aggressively we sought 'happiness' or well being in the arena's of wealth, comfort and pleasure, the greater our resistance to their lures grew. Sociological terms like 'hedonic adaptation' became part of our culture, to explain the immediate thrill of experiencing the new pleasure or purchase, but then to only have that 'feeling' of exhilaration more quickly abate with each experience. A cultural anhedonia is setting in. In reveling in our new found prosperity and possibility, and simultaneously neglecting the meaning (not in it for there is none, but foundational to it) we are becoming increasingly wearying of the toll such meaningless pursuits are exacting from us.

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So, what do we do? Our innate and imperative yearnings (hunger if you like) for meaning, and sustainable meaning with substance, have not abated. Yes, this metaphysical hunger may have been temporarily subdued by the 'products' of modernity, but we are becoming increasingly more suspicious that such a diet will eventually kill us, and we need to again find an alternative and healthy world view that will truly satisfy this longing.

This awakening to the need for something greater has led to more frantic reaction, rather than a calculated response to finding an alternative, thus we enter the era of the Post post-Modern. Why reaction? The 'bath water' of this post modern culture and its 'reactive states', tends to respond one dimensionally to an issue without considering all the parts, so you get a situation where the metaphorical 'baby' of Judeo-Christian Values that constructed the ease, prosperity and comfort we all enjoy, gets thrown out with the 'bath water' of Post-Modern relativism. So in essence we want the 'outcomes' of ease, prosperity etc but want to ignore, or worse, discard the framework (but not motivation) that created such an environment. But if left to its own, now, Godless devices, this will become not only spirit, but soul destroying.

So, armed, not with reason, rationale and altruistic intention, but rather still with the 'Self' and the intensifying of 'self actualisation' and all that implies, we seek a new cultural ethos and new paradigm to give us meaning in our egocentric pursuits. However, we must understand that without a commonality of a 'socio-spiritual' script by which we can all find objective society benefiting wisdom in, we will then have instead, an endless entourage of subjective psycho-social combatants all attempting to gain ascendancy in being cultural architects.

Having taken a brief but important foray into the imperative world of the social sciences, what does it all mean for the marketer and Brand promoter?

The first question to subjectively and then collectively answer in your teams is ...How do I find substantive, spirit and soul transforming, not just satisfying, meaning in this Econ-technocracy? **(The idea that not only better technology, but its primary use is for personal wealth creation is what rules our culture)** After brainstorming about that question it is then important to become revolutionary in asking...How as a 'Brand Promoter' **(any group of individual who seeks to have their brand gain and maintain prominent exposure in the market place)** do we become key architects in this new regime and get set in this 'scene'?

Remember, while your products and technologies may assuage the ever increasing need for stimulation and comfort, they will not and cannot placate the metaphysical needs – The why, not just how, of my existence. The Econ-technocracy may contribute some momentum to the answering of some superficial aspects of *Second Order** Questions; they will not satisfy those of the *First Order*.*

In this emerging space many may even embrace neo-paganistic ideologies and practices in an attempt to 'intensify' the urges, sensations, feeling and comforts my individualism still craves, but we are still facing the same impending and inevitable risk of being dissatisfied, yet in an even shorter amount of time.



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What we as branding agents, as pseudo cultural architects need to do if we are going to break into new market spaces, is be willing to look at what will genuinely engage and recalibrate culture.

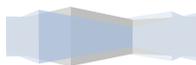
Those who don't have comfort and ease pursue it. Those who have it want to intensify it. If the consumer hedonistic framework doesn't permit that, I will go to the metaphysical and engage whatever methodology of means that will stimulate or assuage the 'feelings' I believe make my life worth living. However, when that is all done, and for most in the West it is, then the options are narrowing. Do I engage in the futility of nihilism and court despair or do I busy myself with a 'cause' or egoistic kindness. Or do I seek and find sustainable meaning and purpose, that doesn't merely intensify 'my' existence but transforms life and takes it to an arena that sets us all free to find, know and live out our Makers best?



Branding?

Paradigm or Perspective?

Overused buzz words, or
quintessential influencers that
need to be evaluated and
reevaluated?





As companies, organisations or individuals, we need to be constantly 'calibrating' if we are going to not merely look like what we purport to be, but indeed be what we have declared ourselves to be – But 'calibrating' to what?

Branding – both collectively and individually permeates every part of life experience. Branding is so much more than merely the promotional exercise of 'marketing', it is a declaration – a promise of who and what we are. As we all understand, Branding is promoting the consistency, clarity and character of the group/person and the underlying promise these qualities point to. **What is your 'promise'? What is it about you and what you do that is consistent, clear and has character? What do you want that to be? Let's start pondering....**



Question one: Do you do what you believe or simply believe what you do?

All of us are influenced by 'perceptions'. Perception is generated from perspective and paradigm. Do you have influence over that process or are you merely influenced by it? If we 'trade' solely on reputation, then we need to be able to have control over and constantly monitor that veneer. However, this can be easily undermined. It has been said, "Reputation is what others think about you, Character is who you really are". The key here is to have a strong clear, consistent character which builds your reputation, not the other way around. The group/person who functions in the latter can weather any storm. Those who invest only in the former will for the most part, simply end up believing what they do and are easily swayed by every fad, fashion or flavour, instead of moving forward in principle, formula and strategy.





Question Two: What do you see yourself

becoming? What do you see that people will see in your brand?

This question is a starting point. Start to perceptually engage what you have before you. Using your faculties of reason, logic, imagination and creativity. However, it is the next two questions that are key to helping you see more fully and in turn release your faculties further do develop a real 'vision'.

What are you looking at? But most importantly...

Where are you standing?

Where you stand determines what you look at, and what you look at determines what you see, keep this in mind always. If we are going to actualise our corporate or individual 'persona' - our 'influence', which will be articulated and sustained in our 'branding' (and all that means) then we must always seek to maximise our perspective



Oxygen for your 'BRAND'

In Jon Krakauer's book INTO THIN AIR the author gives an account of an ill fated Everest ascent in 1996, one that was tragic on a number of levels.

In one tragic event one of the leaders Andy Harris broke one of the teams key rules – staying on the peak past deadlines. A brief account is as follows... Andy, on his descent became in desperate need of oxygen. He radioed to the base camp informing them of his difficulties and that he had come upon a stash of oxygen bottles left behind by others, all empty, well so Andy believed. However, this was not so, in fact they were full and left for that very purpose.

The base camp pleaded with Andy to use the bottles, but he was convinced they were empty. The tragic irony is that the very thing he needed to, not only survive but fully function, was in his hand, but its absence in his brain made him unable to recognize, appreciate and partake of it.



Story Debrief

This story while tragic is a timely warning for us to take stock. What can we learn...

1. In branding we must first clearly define guidelines and stick to them.
2. If we find ourselves outside those guidelines communicate to the team, revisit the principles.
3. When confused seek out and take the advice of the key people who have laboured with you in creating the paradigm for branding and listen to them.
4. When you seem to be asphyxiating remember the 'oxygen' of clarity, consistency and character that your promise is based on, will sustain you. Don't be duped into abandoning it for the sake of a mere 'flashy sales gimmicks and a ongoing trusting relationships are the collateral you need, then allegiance is imperative, only branding of integrity will facilitate this – what you have in your hand is what you need.





Andy harris needed a **V.I.E.W.**

- ✦ **V – Values:** what you and yours believe to be of the utmost importance in developing your branding, which will determine...
- ✦ **I – Image:** What will this look like in visual form, what thoughts and emotions will it evoke? This in turn will determine...
- ✦ **E – Expression:** The 'How' that image will be presented and reinforced. Finally we must consider the...
- ✦ **W – Way:** The 'strategy' and 'process' by which these things will be sustained. How and what will it look like in 5 years? Will impression and reputation still be synonymous with the character, clarity and consistency of who we are? Will it have grown and what strategic processes are in place to ensure this is sustained?

...and so do YOU!



Reflect

- ✦ Branding, much like 'Vision' needs both 'Reference points' and 'Resources' - what will yours be?
- ✦ Values are the foundational cornerstone to your 'V.I.E.W.' However, what are they predicated on, what informs those values? These are questions we'll start looking at in this paper.

Endnotes

1 Hamilton, Clive "The disappointment of Liberalism and the quest for inner freedom" (Discussion Paper Number 70) © 2004 The Australia Institute. (pp 1-2)



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2 Lawson, Neal *“Steve Jobs: a stylist for a consumer society”* Guardian Newspaper,
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/07/steve-jobs-consumer-society-apple>

3 Tolstoy, Leo. *“A Confession and other religious writings”*– This translation first published 1987 Penguin Books – London (Translator and editorial matters © Jan Kentish 1987(p 13)

4 Stark, Dr. Rodney *‘THE VICTORY OF REASON’* © 2005– Random House Publishing group, (p 233)

5 Aikman, David *“Jesus in Beijing – How Christianity is transforming China and changing the global balance of power.”* (Published 2004 Perseus Distribution Services) as recorded by– Regmery Washington DC. (5)

6 Eckersley, Richard. *‘Well & Good – how we feel and why it matters’* © 2004 (p 162)

7. Bauman, Zygmunt *“Liquid Modernity”* © 2000

*. ‘Second Order Questions’ i.e. Who am I? Where am I going? Who is going with me?

*. “First Order Questions” i.e. Why am I here? What is life all about? What of the problem of evil? Is there a God?

