



## Hypocrisy as the Path of Success

What it takes for new ideas to prosper and the paths they're pressured to pursue.

*“Hypocrisy has its own elegant symmetry.”*

— Julie Metz

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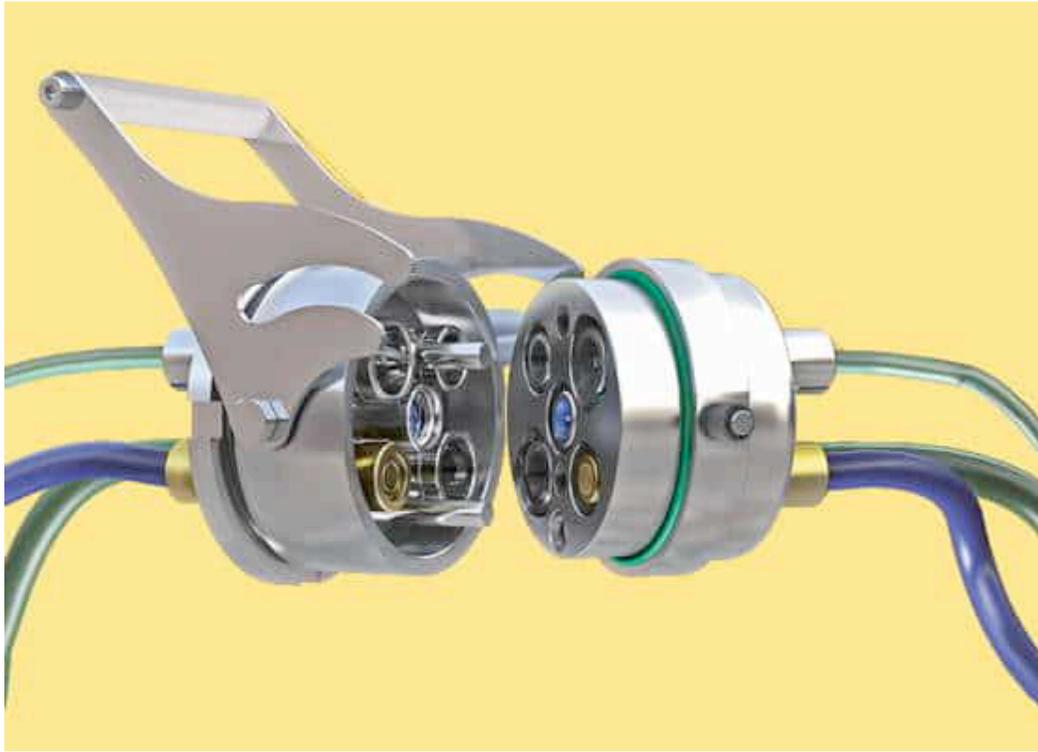


## Success

Structures emerge from things that fit together. Structures are built more from similar things than from things that are different. In order to join, two things need only complement each other where they connect. At the same time, connectors are more likely to support larger structures if they support each other in other ways, too.

In nature, as in behavior, structure emerges from a common blueprint. That does not mean a unit is built of identical parts—in fact, uniform identity is rare in nature—but rather it's built of complementary pieces.

It's not easy to build a larger structure using a smaller blueprint especially when the structure is large, and it's even more unlikely when it's subject to a diversity of forces. It is amazing, if you think about it, that animals can mate and reproduce at all. But rather than be amazed, we all implicitly adhere to what's called the anthropic principle which says, “the universe is the way it is because if it wasn't, we wouldn't be here.”



## Connectors

I learned about the connector business from my client Ed. He bought and sold used electrical connectors. Over time—with changes in technology, materials, and specifications—electrical connectors change, but the need for connectors grows. If you think about it, a connector is a critical component. If an electrical connector fails, the assembly will fail. It can be the weakest link in any chain.

A connector must succeed at two contradictory things: it must both bridge a gap, and it must allow a gap. That is, it must both form a connection that's so good that its presence is not noticed, and it must also support a disconnection so complete that it leaves no trace. We take connectors for granted, but we should not. Life is built on connectors: hemoglobin, chlorophyll, and serotonin. There is nothing simple about them.

The most amazing connector is DNA. It connects generations and we don't really know how it does it. We're told it's the blueprint for proteins. Proteins are complex molecules. A single cell can hold forty million proteins, and your body has fifty trillion cells, and fifty thousand different proteins. You can play with proteins all day and you'll get no further. Saying DNA carries the blueprint for proteins tells us nothing about how we get put together.

On the other hand, we would likely be correct in saying that we understand the gold-plated, twist connector. It made possible the assembly of high speed, low impedance communication facilitating everything from telecommunications, to radio astronomy, to aircraft carriers.

Consider the lowly zip-lock bag. A simple connector and a miracle of plastic engineering that has doubled the shelf-life of your left-overs.



## Mimicry

In nature, mimicry is the foundation of survival. Mimicry connects separate elements of the ecosystem in a way that supports a cycle. Mimicry is not just an insect protected by looking like a twig, or a flower attracting a bee, it's also the force behind a mother bonding to a child, and later disconnecting to foster independence. The first supports continuity, the second ensures separation. These are two functions that define a connector, and both are critical for the survival of the species.

Connection has been going on for a long time. We've heard of the Miller–Urey experiment performed in 1952. Here, the building blocks of life were created by bombarding a rich, thin, chemical soup with heat, pressure, and electricity. The experiment was thought to make a big difference, but it didn't tell us much.

We see connections developing everywhere, more or less without precedent. That's really the crux of the issue: is there a precedent? Is there a blueprint? Who knows what is needed to make the connection that starts everything off? Is it random? Does it require energy? Is it divine?

There is something deep going on here. Something foundational is embodied in the lowly connector: why do structures develop? To put it another way, why do connections evolve?



## Creativity

I am a self-declared expert on creativity. Like Ray Bradbury's *Illustrated Man*, I've got the tattoos to prove it.

In Bradbury's story, a man is covered in tattoos that have the supernatural ability to show visions of the future. In one sense, the tattooed man was a vehicle for stories. But the illustrated man also embodies the idea that our skin is our connection, and we're never sure whether reality exists outside or inside our minds. Creativity is the force of illusion born in the mind, envisioned through us, that creates the world.

My book *The Learning Project* is an exploration into creativity. It explores learning, which is synonymous with creativity. I spoke to people from all walks of life and all stages in their lives because I felt learning can only be understood broadly. I wrote to Ray and asked him for an interview. He declined saying he was too busy and too ill. He did endorse the project, though, which I thought was awfully nice.

It's hard to know if you're creative. You'd think it was easy but, almost by definition, anyone whose work is appreciated is not so creative, and anyone whose work is very creative is not appreciated. It does not follow that unappreciated work is creative, and there is the conundrum.

We celebrate the work of Van Gogh, Picasso, and others. Weren't they creative? They were creative before they were accepted, but once they were accepted they were no longer so creative—at least not in the same way. Creativity is a relative thing; it involves being unique. It's all about how things fit together.

Creativity is a connector in search of a partner: a man looking for a woman, parents looking for a child. Every bridge starts with an invitation. Once the bridge is built the idea is no longer creative: it has been created. First it invites, then creates, then facilitates. After that, the pattern repeats.

Cubism was creative before people could see such things in the abstract. Once they could, cubism became a language, not an invitation. After that, there were lots of cubists. Perhaps not all of cubism's invitations have been accepted; not all of the connections have been made. Picasso's *Guernica* was an invitation to understand the insanity of war. That invitation has not been deeply understood.



## Unwanted

Understanding that creativity precedes facilitation explains social behavior. Facilitation is celebrated and creativity is not. Be too creative and you're castigated.

Even speaking creatively is frowned up except in protected environments. Comics are allowed to make fun of serious things only because they are powerless. They trade freedom for discretion, agreeing only to speak what others think but fear to say, but not to say what others fear to think.

In art, what stimulates is creative, what fails to inspire is derivative, and what conflicts is offensive. So too, in science and business. These amount to definitions of utility, not creativity. Creativity is never wanted. Give someone power and their actions are judged by their immediate result, not their creative potential. Who celebrated Jesus in his lifetime? The fishermen, not the politicians!

I consider this a cautionary tale. I do not want to say anything that might be too disturbing to the powers-that-be. I have done a lot of that already, and have been disrespected for it. Now, I am super down on authority, but I don't underestimate it, either. History is always reliving the story of the Titanic.



## New Inventions, Old Conventions

It amuses me to publish ground-breaking research. It's refreshing. I've written a few of those pieces and I expect I'll do a few more. This work is universally overlooked, and one should not expect otherwise. I've been told I am not smart enough by the same experts who privately admit they're not smart enough. After a while, you get the picture: no one knows where to go in the dark.

Powerful scientists, like powerful politicians, think conventionally. They rarely rock the boat. They believe in the boat. They love the boat. They are the boat. After all, they invented it!

The reason there are few Einsteins not because they are rare, but because they are rejects from the connector factory. They embarrass the institution.

The first rule of all institutions is that the Emperor must be revered. Authority reigns even when decisions are disputed. This rule is all the more firmly enforced when the ruler is inept. In those cases, the ruler, lacking virtue, is a proxy for everyone else.

It's OK to assassinate the prophet because no one can keep up with them, anyway, but not a person who represents "the every man." To attack that person is to attack the common dream. That's why no one cares if a monk immolates him or herself, but many will care if you burn the flag. This is no surprise. It's the "will to live" at an institutional level. We see something like this in all life forms.

Institutions create leaders to mimic our desires in the expectation that we will bond to them, and then to it. By mirroring our personal values we become connected to our government. This was a creative act when we first formed government, but now it's the status quo. What's good for GM is good for the nation or, as Donald Trump recently said, "You have no choice but to vote for me." This was a backward way of saying, "I am everything you hope for."



## What Everyone Wants

Everyone wants the change that moves them forward, but not the change that moves them back. We demand advertisements that claim riskless returns, unjustified rewards, and a free lunch. We buy those products with little understanding of the long-term. And because of a variety of inequitable situations in the world, we have believe in this advertising. It has delivered high returns.

The success of much false advertising is the disparity of wealth. As long as there are two groups, one with less and another with more, it's possible for one group to buy-off the other. And here "buy-off" could be purchase, take over, or simply enslave. The buyer gets the lunch and the vanquished pay for it.

Those with less could be the lower class, the powerless, immigrants, foreigners, the infirm, or the disadvantaged. Exploitation can also rest on natural resources: as long as there is free energy to be had, we can get more than we pay for.

A gallon of oil derives from seventy tons of vegetation and 100-million years of "fermentation." The earth grows about 4 tons of vegetation per acre per year. We extract 300-million gallons of oil each day. This means our modern world burns a year's worth of fossil vegetation each day.

This is a wildly crud approximation because not all this vegetation was turned to oil, and we can't get it all, anyway. Still, it gives some support to the notion that fossil fuel isn't sustainable. Given the known oil deposits it's been estimated we only have 53 years of oil left. That's hardly anything, given what happens when we run out.

For the last hundred years we've been cashing in on a free lunch that explains, more than anything, the exponential growth of Western civilization. And while we decry our dependence, we're only getting more dependent: the world-wide consumption of oil increased by 100-million gallons each day thirty years ago. It

has now slowed down to a rate of increase of 40-million gallons each day.

This is how life works: all life needs free energy, and we're no different. And it's not inherently unsustainable over a reasonable time frame—as long as the sun shines. It just collapses when the system is poorly designed. Once we settle on a sustainable method of harvesting energy—assuming we can scale it up to meet our demands—our system should not collapse. At least not for lack of energy.



## Good-News Advertising

We want return without risk, a sustainable solution to all our problems. We buy the concept, and the concept is the connector between our efforts, which creates potential, and our actions, which use energy. We want to make the best investment. We don't know the future; advertising is all we have to go on.

I listened to the conference call for third quarter results for the company FuelCell. The focus was on supply chains, market growth, and manufacturing cost. This was the most sophisticated of public discussions, and almost nothing at issue had a horizon beyond a few years. The long-term growth prospects were accepted on faith, which is another way of saying no one had any better idea of what to expect.

We line up with cash in hand. We form our lines based on our feelings, and we've already decided which story we like the best. We are ready to invest—be that in fuel cell technology or the colonization of mars—and we want to be reassured.

There is a kind of auction theory at work here: by the time we get to the front of the line, that point where we have to make a decision, our values are pretty well set. There is a consensus on what to expect. There may be doubters and dreamers, but they, also, have their camps. Value, such as it is, is baked in the cake. What makes everyone nervous is surprises.

We don't want surprises because we know surprises go both ways. As long as there are no surprises there is not a lot of shifting of votes. We'd like to see our predictions come true, but we hope that's not the result of a surprise. We hope future changes confirm our expectations because otherwise the whole process is in doubt, as are our prospects for survival.

Someone has an idea, and it's championed by a company or an individual. We'll call them "the author." They have no resources, but they have potential. They are hunting for resources. They're looking for investors.

The investors have the resources, they're looking to make their resources grow by investing in someone else's farm, so to speak. They know the author will take a cut, and they're looking for what's most attractive. They want promise without fear, return at low risk. They want assurance but, even more, they're attracted to the dream, a dream that has them in the picture.

As people, investors are complicated but—like the analysts in my conference call—they line up behind a simple dream. Those that will invest have bought the dream and want to be sold. They're not asking for the truth, they're asking for the dream. In the words of Donald Trump, if the authors want the vote, they have no choice but to offer the dream.

So there it is: the author's hypocrisy is the foundation of their success. It's not false advertising, it's the attraction of getting more than one pays for in a world of uncertain returns. Getting others to sign-on does not guarantee the idea's success, but it goes a long way toward the author's success.

That's the success that counts most: not the success of the dream, but the success of those who pitch it. Those who can pitch and sell dreams will determine what's on order in the future.



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