

The Good, the Bad, and the Evil: The Myth of the Genius

A quick Google keyword search of the following names plus the word 'genius' produced the following results:

Vannevar Bush 21,300 hits

Buckminster Fuller 61, 300 hits

Andy Warhol 1,060,000 hits

Rem Koolhaas 18,100 hits

I would not go anywhere close to concluding the order or amount of genius based on this search, because the search for 'Peter Lunenfeld' plus 'genius' yielded 360 hits, 99% of which were repetitions of the same quote by him on artist Doug Aitken. Therefore, algorithmically speaking, there is no measure of genius.¹ There is, however, based on these searches, a public opinion of these makers' genius.

The term genius points at various levels of the subconscious or the meta-physical: it is the spirit one is born with; the quasi-mythological personification of something immaterial (e.g. of a virtue); inclination, or temper of mind; prevailing character or spirit and the body of associations connected with, or inspirations that may be derived from it; natural ability or capacity; native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation, or practice; instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery. Often contrasted with talent.² Talent is the *learned* capacity to perform, often with the minimum outlay of time, energy, or both.³

¹ Disclaimer: The search was not done for a measure of PL's genius, but out of curiosity if the ubiquitous word of the seminar has been a remotely possible article topic by PL.

² Oxford English Dictionary search term *genius*

³ Wikipedia contributors, "Skill," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Skill&oldid=288496650> (accessed 1 June 2009). Edited by author.

Talent and genius can also be interchangeable in that both are accomplished with ease, with no obstacles, and with pre-determination to achieve a desired result.

The absolute opposite of the genius, are the hero. The hero sacrifice their own needs in an obstacle-ridden journey, where most times they do not know what they are doing. They share with the genius their journeys, where the search is not for the meaning of life, but for the experience of life.⁴ These paths at times are in opposite directions, at times parallel and at times cross over to reveal that genius stems from the collective consciousness, and heroism is truly individual; genius is appraised while in the process, without knowledge of the result of such blind-faith, while heroism is appreciated only after the process. The genius is over-rated, and the hero is over-looked until her/his time has passed. I will explain further by studying the four makers, and by first looking at the topoi for genius and hero—topoi in terms of conventions and themes, as well as imagined and realized places. I will follow with comparisons and groupings of the makers' makings and their paths to understand their roles as either heroes or Evil Genii, and what the implications of each role is on their environments.

I have grouped Rem Koolhaas with Andy Warhol as a 'match' based on my speculation that both draw from Capitalism; and Vannevar Bush with Buckminster Fuller as 'opposites' though they both draw from loss. There is no guarantee that any of the makers will be definitively identified as hero or genius, only speculations.

The Topoi of the Evil Genius

The Evil Genius is the archetypical character.⁵ We may know of him as a behind-the-scenes schemer who manages to take control of the logic of his minions and skew their

⁴ Joseph Campbell in conversation with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*. Broadcast on PBS, June 21, 1988 – June 26, 1988. Professor Campbell does not speak of genius and talent and only comments on the journey of the hero as a mythic journey, where contrary to popular knowledge that the purpose of the journey is for seeking the meaning of life, it is in fact for seeking the experience of meaning.

⁵ I am always conscious of using non-gendered pro-nouns, and intentionally use 'he' for the Evil Genius. The Evil Genius is male, where as the female villain is typically a witch, or Matron figure (Queen, step-mother, Head-Mistress, etc).

perception of good and bad. I am not well versed in Descartes to provide deep discussion on his philosophies, but can extract from what he outlines as the Evil Genius, as an opposing and powerful entity who can deceive any well-heeded person, not allowing them to distinguish reality from dream by creating illusions of the world when there may be no world and of the body when there may be no body.

I shall then suppose, not that God who is supremely good and the fountain of truth, but some evil genius not less powerful than deceitful, has employed his whole energies in deceiving me; I shall consider that the heavens, the earth, the colors, figures, sound, and all other external things are nought but illusions and dreams of which this evil genius has availed himself, in order to lay traps for my credulity; I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing myself to possess all these things.⁶

Thinking in Descartes metaphysical terms, the influence of the Evil Genius stresses the agency of the deceived body and how it will chose to react in response to it. The Evil Genius is stripped of agency and neutralized, as it is in his accepted and natural character to be deceitful. In this model, the Evil Genius is a separate (though not necessarily embodied) body in opposition to the hero, the one who possess the free will to accept or reject illusions and behave accordingly.

When considered in psychological realms, many an Evil Genius suffers from delusions of grandeur. This is when he considers his work as victories and acts of heroism. The Evil Genius and the hero become one body with no conflict of interest. This model is popular in science fiction. In *Tips for Writers*, science fiction novelist Ben Bova gives a dedicated point to “No Villains.”

In the real world there are no villains. No one actually sets out to do evil. Yes, there are madmen and murderers and rapists and crooked politicians and greedy land developers and all sorts of villainous behaviors. But each of those people believes that he is doing what is necessary, and maybe even good. Every tyrant in history was convinced that he had to do the things he did for his own good and for the good of the people around him.

⁶ Descartes, Rene (Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, trs.). *The Philosophical Works of Descartes in Two Volumes. Rendered Into English By Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross.* Cambridge University Press, 1931. P.147

Fiction mirrors life. Or, more accurately, fiction serves as a lens to focus what we know of life and bring its realities into sharper, clearer understanding for us. There are no villains cackling and rubbing their hands in glee as they contemplate their evil deeds. There are only people with problems, struggling to solve them. Just as your protagonist is struggling to solve her problems, your antagonist is struggling to solve his. It's all a matter of viewpoint.⁷

This model is also the closest model to our lived reality.⁸ I will develop this further in individual analysis of each maker.

The Topoi of the Lone Hero

If genius is a characteristic one is born with and has a natural ability for, heroism comes about from a transformation of consciousness by trials and revelations. The protagonist is chosen serendipitously, given a physical instrument and the psychological commitment to embark on a journey in unknown exile and with no definitive end.

The hero—the individual—is an image of the totality of his or her society. There is no separateness of the self and the all, and in either case of the genius or the hero, they are both of the Zeitgeist. Therefore self-identifying with the hero's character equals the success of the hero⁹ just as believing in the genius' claims equals his success. However, the success of the hero relies much more strongly on public opinion—groups of people

⁷ Ben Bova [2008-01-28]. "Tips for writers". <http://benbova.com/tips2.html>. See tip no.5. Retrieved on 1 June 2009.

⁸ I specify 'lived' as a term used in opposition to 'virtual', specifically in regards to gaming. In *Gamer Theory* (Harvard University Press, 2007), McKenzie Wark's analysis of *Vice City* is a good example where the player commits acts accepted to be wrong in the real world. Acknowledged evil acts are a necessity for survival (winning) in *Vice City* and most game worlds. It is the logic and law of those worlds and one cannot be judged in terms of their actions within those places.

⁹ Ben Bova [2008-01-28]. "Tips for writers". <http://benbova.com/tips2.html>. See tip no.4. Retrieved on 1 May 2009.

"Remember that the reader wants to be the protagonist. If your protagonist is really memorable, the reader will bleed when he bleeds, laughs when she laughs, shudder when he's frightened and exult when she triumphs.

Make your protagonist as wonderful as you can, but give him a powerful weakness, a potentially fatal flaw. Your protagonist should have an internal problem, a crisis within her soul. This not only makes the protagonist believable, it makes him sympathetic. Nobody can feel very much for a person who has no weaknesses. Superhuman heroes belong in comic strips, not in serious fiction."

banded together under a common interest, belief, desire, etc. A precursor to the blind acceptance of the hero is based on the hero's social role and duty, desirably conducted selflessly and ethically. This is evident in the mythologies of the hero where s/he is able to move forward only when s/he attracts followers along the way through no act of convincing and justifying of the inherent truth of his or her journey other than through his or her character, generally one with a fair amount of honesty and naïveté; the Evil Genius on the other hand strongly relies on convincing through constructed truths.

The question that arises from the comparison of the hero and the Evil Genius is of truth and discerning either side's relation to it. As Foucault points out the concept of truth is not absolute and is the product of "race struggle", by which I will take to be, for means of identifying the hero set against the Evil Genius, the struggle between good and evil, where the truth is revealed upon the ending of the struggle. All acts of good and evil are situated in events. "A truth comes into being through those subjects who maintain a resilient fidelity to the consequences of an event that took place *in* a situation but was not *of* it".¹⁰ Whether these truths are good or bad is a matter of viewpoint.

The Truth of the Situation_ Warhol's Heterotopia and Koolhaas's Atopia

"Small, Medium or Large. And how many?"¹¹

Capitalism is a situation society is placed within. Rem Koolhaas and Andy Warhol successfully occupied the place of Capitalism by creating and owning events within it. Should it come as a surprise that both draw from commodity fetishism and identify their works in measures of Capitalistic consumerism? Within the place of Capitalism, Koolhaas and Warhol not only occupy(ied), but create(ed) new places, respectively an atopia and a heterotopia, both of which are real places holding conflicting spaces: heterotopia is an "elsewhere," simultaneously real and unreal space; atopia is an

¹⁰ Badiou, Alain. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Verso, 2002. Translated by Peter Hallward. Translators notes, p.x.

¹¹ Fairbrother, Trevor. 'Skulls', in *The Work of Andy Warhol*, edited by Gary Garrels, Dia Foundation, New York 1989, pg. 96.

ambiguous placelessness that is simultaneously “everywhere”.¹²

Warhol created and occupied a heterotopia, The Factory, which was a place as unreal as it was real, filled with those who did not conform to society’s standard of normality. The Factory’s heterotopia was subdivided into two distinct heterotopias, one of play and the other of games; play being voluntary and games, calculated, and both of which were controlled by Warhol, the Evil Genius. In terms of play, the Warhol Superstars were in a symbiotic relationship with Warhol in which each generated fame for the other. The result of their fame was play and partying. But this very element of being a “Superstar” was a key player in Warhol’s game of “Screen-tests” which were filmed from early 1964 to November 1966 where those with potential “star” quality would be seated in front of a tripod mounted camera, asked to be as still as possible, and told not to blink while the camera was running.¹³

Returning to the topos of the Evil Genius, clearly Warhol relied on delusional space and constructed truths (such as fame and stardom from association with him and his work). However, his Evil Genius becomes truth only through the fidelity of his subjects to Warhol’s constructed events within the situation of Capitalism.

Koolhaas’ take on Capitalism is not as clear-cut as Warhol’s. On the one hand he critiques what he refers to as “junkspace” (shopping malls), which is the product of Capitalism. On the other, he is involved in the very creation of junkspace because he asserts that Capitalism creates culture (Prada) and therefore it is necessary.

If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, junk-space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet. The built product of modernization is not modern architecture but Junkspace. Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while

¹² I am using a part of Wark’s definition of atopia and will redefine other parts of it as it fits to my list of truth situations. I believe all ~topia terms to be flexible and open to redefinition based on its author’s choices.

¹³ <http://www.warholstars.org/filmch/screen.html>. Retrieved on 2 June 2009.

modernization is in progress, its fall-out.¹⁴

Koolhaas continues to describe (in a sixteen-page list of non-paragraphed blackness of words) junkspace as pretending “to unite, but it actually splinters. It creates communities not of shared interest or free association, but of identical statistics and unavoidable demographics, an opportunistic weave of vested interests. Each man, woman and child is individually targeted, tracked, split off from the rest.”

Junkspace is synonymous with game space in that it is an ambiguous topology of continuous space. In *Gamer Theory*, Wark describes atopian space as “a real enclave within imaginary social space. The possibility of atopian space is a result of the impossibility of adequate and effective spatial and social quantification and calculation.” He uses atopia in relation to the game space of *Vice City*, where if utopia holds qualitative relations, atopia favours quantitative relations with no commitment or stability.¹⁵ He further identifies it as both a space of continuity and isolation, two elements of interest in Koolhaas’ work.

In 1969 Superstudio imagined a topology of a horizontal capital: *The Continuous Monument, An Architectural Model For Total Urbanisation*—a continuous mirrored structure stretching across cities and nature, eventually covering the planet and extending into outer space. Superstudio developed the Continuous Monument through a series of collages that depicted a futuristic dystopian vision of total urbanization engulfing Manhattan, except for “a bunch of ancient skyscrapers, preserved in memory of a time when cities were built with no single plan”. In 1972, and inspired by Archigram, Superstudio and the Berlin Wall, Koolhaas produces *Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*, a collaborative thesis ending his studies at the Architectural Association.

¹⁴ Koolhaas, Rem. *October*, Vol. 100, Obsolescence. (Spring, 2002), pp. 175-190. Also printed in Inaba, Jeffrey, Rem Koolhaas, and Sze Tsung Leong. *The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping / Harvard Design School Project on the City 2*. Taschen, 2002.

¹⁵ Wark, McKenzie. *Gamer Theory*. Harvard University Press, 2007. [121].

“Once, a city was divided in two parts. One part became the Good Half, the other part the Bad Half. The inhabitants of the Bad Half began to flock to the good part of the divided city, rapidly swelling into an urban exodus. If this situation had been allowed to continue forever, the population of the Good Half would have doubled, while the Bad Half would have turned into a ghost town. After all attempts to interrupt this undesirable migration had failed, the authorities of the bad part made desperate and savage use of architecture: they built a wall around the good part of the city, making it completely inaccessible to their subjects.

The Wall was a masterpiece.”

The agency of a continuous space of architecture is once again revisited in *Delirious New York* with the “Culture of Congestion”¹⁶ by which the combined roles of architecture and urbanism create culture within the connective spaces of the two, the everyday spaces of interaction. The continuity and simultaneous isolation of urbanism and Capitalism have played constant roles in his work since then, for example the designs of a master plan for Dubai, a city denser than the real Manhattan, with a Death Star on the waterfront, is junkspace par excellence.

Koolhaas has a ‘talent’ for situating Capitalism on a Möbius strip, the quintessential atopian topology, allowing him to follow no rules.

The Truth of the Situation_Bush’s Dystopia and Fuller’s Utopia

Fredric Jameson states that utopia is a political issue situated in Socialism, an alternative to Capitalism. He also observes that there needs to be differentiation between utopian text and utopian impulse, which is detectable in everyday life. I do not intend to do a political analysis of utopia and dystopia and will look at them within conventional bounds of their topoi, what we more-or-less accept them to be. The space of text and everyday life in regards to all four -topia of each maker will be addressed in the following section.

¹⁶ Koolhaas, Rem. *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manual for Manhattan*. Oxford University Press (NY), 1978.

Someone's utopia is always another's dystopia, and though pitched against each other, they are not polar opposites. Utopia is an "imaginary enclave within real social space,"¹⁷ the opposite of atopia, according to Wark's definition that I have chosen to use. Dystopia plays against utopia in that it holds atopia within it. To clarify I will use Vannevar Bush: The aftermath of the atomic bombs was unarguably dystopic, however it held within itself the space of science where the atom bombs were realized. That space parallels Vice City, a city of no moral judgment where all criminal acts are justified since the laws governing Vice City are criminal to begin with. Therefore, in a world run amok of un-justified attacks of large magnitude, is another attack wrong?

The topos of the Evil Genius contains the one of the Mad Scientist. The Mad Scientist can be either on the antagonist side (Dr. Strangelove) or the protagonist (Doc in *Back to the Future*). Either archetype has physical characteristics, none of which Vannevar Bush or Bucky Fuller possess. However, both share the commitment to a "truth-procedure, which begins only with some sort of break with the ordinary situation in which it takes place—what Badiou calls an *event*."¹⁸ The defining event for Bush and Fuller was from loss. Fuller's was loss of a young daughter which he blamed himself for and led him to the question he faithfully pursued all his life, "Does humanity have a chance to survive lastingly and successfully on planet Earth, and if so, how?" Bush's was to prevent loss to the Axis (of Evil), the Germany of WWII, further defined by the German occupation of France in 1940, which prompted him to speed up his efforts in scientific research of new weapons.

Though the events for both scientists are initiated by a common emotional factor stemming from loss, their individual truth-procedures are led by different desires. Bush does not hide the fact that his desire was for superiority, power and political dominance, but not necessarily of the United States of America, but of himself. Fuller's desire is blatantly visible in the question that ignited his journey, which is a desire not

¹⁷ Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future (Poetics of Social Forms)*. Verso, 2005.

¹⁸ Badiou, Alain. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Verso, 2002. Translated by Peter Hallward. Translators notes, p.ix.

for power but empowerment and not solely for him, but all of humanity. Fuller's science has a conscience, while Bush's science, and conscience, is questionable. François Rabelais asserted five centuries ago: "Wisdom does not enter a malevolent soul, and science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul."

An essay by Robert Eden begins with a quote by Camus.¹⁹ Eden attempts to prove why the break from nihilism has been difficult for social scientists—even though nihilism rejects the social sciences by advocating scientific rationalism—and whose moral hero, Max Weber, had said (well before Camus) that Nietzsche was wrong, that there were indeed moral values, and that science could serve ethical forces by demanding clarity about values:

. . . if all of us who come from Nietzscheism, from nihilism, or from historical materialism, said in public that we were wrong and that there are moral values and that in the future we shall do what is necessary to establish and illustrate them, don't you believe this would be the beginning of a hope?²⁰

Neither Bush nor Fuller, to my knowledge were nihilists in the contemporary sense that values are falsely invented.²¹ Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), the leading Russian anarchist and advocate of anarchist communism, defined nihilism as the symbol of struggle against all forms of tyranny, hypocrisy, and artificiality, and for individual freedom. All evils, nihilists believe, derived from a single source—ignorance—which science alone would overcome. Bush and Fuller fit Kropotkin's nihilism in two different ways: Fuller used science to eradicate ignorance; Bush used ignorance to further science. Both used a set of values to meet their ends; Fuller's was constant and Bush's surfaced in July of 1945 in the journal *The Atlantic Monthly*, where he published his seminal essay 'The Way We Think', and later in 1949 in his book *Modern Arms and Free Men* where he writes of seeing by faith, religious or not, the feeling of "validity in the

¹⁹ Eden, Robert. "Bad Conscience for a Nietzschean Age: Weber's Calling for Science." *The Review of Politics* 45, no. 3 (1983): 366-92.

²⁰ Camus, Albert. *Notebooks*, 1942-51

²¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Nihilism," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nihilism&oldid=294918159> (accessed 5 June 2009).

heart's desire and conviction that good will is not a delusion".²² Are these collections of disclaimers, confessions and visions the beginnings of a new hope?

The lag in time of values is how I define the topology of these two makers.

Conclusion_Real Space and Paper Space

Each of these four makers—Fuller, Bush, Warhol and Koolhaas—simultaneously produced two topologies of space: real space, what they physically construct, and paper space, what they philosophically and theoretically construct.

Jameson continues on the topic of utopia, "that the very possibility of Utopian space is itself a result of spatial and social differentiation." In text, differentiation is benign because it is portioned off and bounded within paper space. Therefore, in text, all space is utopian because it avoids conflict. It is only when utopian space is manifested in real space and attempts to shift it that we are faced with the different values and qualities of space—utopia becomes fundamentally unreal; dystopia becomes fragmented into heterotopia, and atopia constantly shape-shifts to the needs that arise. These topoi once released into real space build the collective consciousness and join the "tissue of citations"²³ eliminating the single genius as the source.

²² Bush, Vannevar. *Modern Arms and Free Men* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1949) pp 263-264.

²³ Barthes, Roland, and Stephen Heath. *The Death of The Author. Image, Music, Text*. Vol. Fontana communications series, [London]: Fontana, 1977.