



IDEOLOGICAL NECROPHILIA

By Yovani E. Chavez R. *

While necrophilia is an abnormal paraphilia consisting of a strong sexual interest in corpses, ideological necrophilia is an atypical fixation for dead ideas.² It is a paraphilia based on the love for strategies, theories, and dogmas that were successful in the past, but not today. It causes the refusal of new ideas, evolution or change. It causes deviant theoretical justifications, inadaptation, mental stagnation, and visionary blindness in those who suffer from it. The term 'strategy' takes its etymological root from the art, science, and leadership of a military general; however, ideological necrophilia is present everywhere.³

The first symptom of this phenomenon is Blindness by Success. After World War I, France built the Maginot Line to defend itself against Nazi Germany. It was a massive military defensive line extending for thirty kilometers; however, the Nazis outflanked it to make useless.⁴ It is a synonym for a strategy that creates a false sense of security.⁵ In today's world of business, there are many Maginot Lines. For instance, because of decades of worldwide domination in the photography industry, Kodak was convinced that their strategy was invincible. When in 1975 Steven Sasson, who was a Kodak employee, invented the first digital camera, Kodak executives ignored the potential of this new technology and disregarded it.⁶ Like the Maginot Line, Kodak was blinded by decades of economic success and was unable to adapt to its strategy. Likewise, despite inventing the mouse at Palo Alto Research Center, Xerox did not capitalize on its

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The views expressed in this article are the author's alone, and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the DKI APCSS or the United States Government.

² Moises Naim, "What Is Ideological Necrophilia? From Mao to Trump, Some Leaders Are Blindly Fixated on Dead Ideas," *The Atlantic*, February 24, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/02/ideological-necrophilia-trump-venezuela/470742/>; American Psychological Association, "Necrophilia," *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2020, <https://dictionary.apa.org/necrophilia>.

³ Online Etymology Dictionary, "Strategy," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/strategy>.

⁴ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Maginot Line," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maginot-Line>.

⁵ Merriam Webster Dictionary, "Maginot Line," *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, 2020, [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Maginot Line](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Maginot%20Line).

⁶ Chunka Mui, "How Kodak Failed," *Forbes*, 2012, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chunkamui/2012/01/18/how-kodak-failed/#b4499426f27a>.

own.⁷ Xerox was so successful in developing printers that it did not value the potential of this invention in business. By the same token, many people do not evolve or value change because of past victories. People in this state do not aspire for better ideas because they feel comfortable in the status quo. They get stagnated by past victories in the academic, political or economic world. As a result, blindness by success kills any sense of vision because it does not allow evolution or change.

The second symptom is the need to eliminate prophets. Ideological necrophilia requires the elimination of potential prophets of evolution or change because of their revolutionary ideas. A prophet is someone who defends and proclaims new ideas or principles.⁸ However, the elimination of the prophet is the best solution for an organization, people, or company that suffers from ideological necrophilia. For instance, in 1633 the Roman Inquisition condemned Galileo Galilei for defending his discovery of the earth's motion around the sun.⁹ Similarly, in 1985 Apple's executive board fired Steve Jobs, who was one of Apple's founders, because it was not prepared for new ideas nor change.¹⁰ However, for those who suffer from ideological necrophilia, it is suitable to affect a prophet's professional career. For instance, in 1916, Italian military leaders arrested, court-martialed, and sent to prison Colonel Giulio Douhet because of his revolutionary theory about air power.¹¹ The Italian military could not see the revolution that planes would create in years to come.

Someone could think that Douhet's case was something from another culture; however, the ideological necrophilia knows no borders. Despite being a war hero and predicting the Pearl Harbor attack, General William 'Billy' Mitchell was court-martialed in 1925 because of his innovative ideas about the preeminence of air power.¹² The military establishment could not see the importance of creating an independent and technological air force that could be of strategic importance. Billy Mitchell's ideas challenged the status quo and former authorities affected his military career.

Ideological necrophilia can take place at state levels. For instance, in 1933, Nazi Germany burned over 20,000 books at Berlin's Opera Square to destroy any form of intellectualism.¹³ Nazi Germany refused to tolerate ideas that were contrary to its own ideology. Similarly, ideological necrophilia can include the closing of universities and imprisonment of academics.

The third symptom is fear of change. Change, innovation or transformation always generates profound disruption in any system. Human beings and companies have the tendency to fixate on assumptions and well-established ideas. For instance, Blackberry fell into complacency and did not innovate because of fear

⁷ Stephen Miller, "Former Xerox CEO Funded Fabled PARC but Failed To Harvest Innovations," *The Wall Street Journal Digital*, 2006, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB116683961391258359>.

⁸ Cambridge Dictionary, "Prophet," Cambridge Dictionary, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/prophet>.

⁹ Maurice Finocchiaro, "February 2016: 400 Years Ago the Catholic Church Prohibited Copernicanism," *Origins*, 2020, <http://origins.osu.edu/milestones/february-2016-400-years-ago-catholic-church-prohibited-copernicanism>.

¹⁰ Joel Siegel, "When Steve Jobs Got Fired By Apple," *ABC News*, October 6, 2011, <https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/steve-jobs-fire-company/story?id=14683754>.

¹¹ Robert Dudley, "Douhet," *Air Force Magazine*, April 2011, <https://www.airforcemag.com/article/0411douhet/>.

¹² C Glines, "William 'Billy' Mitchell: Air Power Visionary," *History Net*, 1997.

¹³ Christoph Hasselbach, "When Books Were Burned in Germany," *Deutsche Welle*, February 10, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/when-books-were-burned-in-germany/a-43725960>.

of losing what it already had gained.¹⁴ Blackberry cellphones had made such an enormous impact on business that its executives could not see the need to evolve. Likewise, despite leading the tech industry, Sony could not adapt to new market tendencies and failed to innovate.¹⁵ The Walkman culture revolutionized generations of people that Sony executives felt comfort and refused to change. The fear of change or innovation is present even in academic environments. For instance, despite his focus on attrition warfare, inadequate ways of conventional war, and inexistent centers of gravity, many military institutions insist on teaching and training its officer on unpractical Clausewitz's theory that dates from 1832.¹⁶ New concepts of hybrid warfare, gray zone, space combat, and cyberwarfare render old theories inadequate.¹⁷ Likewise, many business schools have been revolving around dead management theories that are useless and unpractical. Sadly, the fear of change leads to the love dead theories that are no match for new challenges of today's world.

The fourth symptom is rationalization, which builds an internal system of justifications for the need to love and keep alive ideas that are past their due date. Famous cases of ideological necrophilia, like that of Karen Greenlee, offer insight into the rationale that a person can develop to justify this condition.¹⁸ Practitioners of ideological necrophilia similarly rationalize about the importance of keeping and refurbishing dead ideas, theories, and dogmas. For instance, British military leaders delayed the mechanization of the army until the 1930s because of its foolish rationale to continue using horses despite the evolution of modern conflicts.¹⁹ Likewise, many people found reasons to oppose the creation of the U.S. Space Force in 2019.²⁰ As a result, many people found reasons to oppose its creation and joked about this new idea.

For those who suffer from ideological necrophilia, it is always easy to find reasons to ridicule, criticize, or reject when something is new and revolutionary. Ideological necrophilia is a devastating condition that can affect people, organizations, companies and nations. It can manifest symptoms of blindness by success, need to eliminate any prophet, fear of change, and rationalization in order to love, refurbish, and justify the application of dead ideas, dogmas and theories. Leaders and organizations have fought against this threat, but while many have succeeded, others have succumbed to the tentacles of this condition. In this information abundant world, it is now time to remove and discard any love or desire for dead ideas, theories, and dogmas.

¹⁴ Vlad Savod, "BlackBerry's Success Led to Its Failure," *The Verge*, 2016, <https://www.theverge.com/2016/9/30/13119924/blackberry-failure-success>.

¹⁵ Tabushi Hiroko, "How Sony Failed to Keep up with the Tech Revolution," *Mint*, April 16, 2012, <https://www.livemint.com/Companies/WSFk5Ck18LpCGHKaBcFogM/How-Sony-failed-to-keep-up-with-the-tech-revolution.html>.

¹⁶ Jamie Schwandt, "Why We Should Stop Teaching Clausewitz," *Task & Purpose*, February 27, 2019, <https://taskandpurpose.com/opinion/just-say-no-to-clausewitz>.

¹⁷ Yuriy Danyk, Tamara Maliarchuk, and Chad Briggs, "Hybrid War: High-Tech, Information and Cyber Conflicts," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 2 (2017): 5–24, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.16.2.01>.

¹⁸ Jim Morton, "The Unrepentant Necrophile: An Interview with Karen Greenlee," in *The Apocalypse Culture*, ed. Adam Parfrey (Feral House, 1990), 28–35, <http://www.nokilli.com/sacto/karen-greenlee.htm>.

¹⁹ David French, "The Mechanization of the British Cavalry between the World Wars," *War in History* 10, no. 3 (2003): 296–320, <https://doi.org/10.2307/26061761>.

²⁰ Beyond Nuclear International, "Space Force Is No Laughing Matter," *Beyond Nuclear International*, May 31, 2020, <https://beyondnuclearinternational.org/2020/05/31/space-force-is-no-laughing-matter/>.

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September 2020*