



A CONVERSATION WITH HOWARD BLOOM

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This month, the Postil is pleased and greatly honored to publish an interview with Howard Bloom, who started in theoretical physics and microbiology at the age of ten and spent his early years in science. Then, driven by the desire to study mass human emotion through the lens of science, he went into a field he knew nothing about, popular culture. He founded the biggest PR firm in the music industry and worked with superstars like Prince, Michael Jackson, Bob Marley, Billy Joel, Queen, AC/DC, Aerosmith, Billy Idol, Joan Jett, Styx, Hall and Oates, Simon & Garfunkel, Run DMC, and Chaka Khan. Bloom went back to formal science in 1988 and, since then, has published seven books on human and cosmic evolution, including [The God Problem](#), [Global Brain](#), and [The Lucifer Principle](#). Called "next in a lineage of seminal thinkers that includes Newton, Darwin, Einstein, [and] Freud" by Britain's Channel 4 TV, and "the next Stephen Hawking" by Gear magazine, he is the subject of BRIC TV's documentary, [The Grand Unified Theory of Howard Bloom](#).

Grégoire Canlorbe (GC): As an entrepreneur in the public relations industry, you were particularly active under the Reagan era. How do you explain that the eighties saw both a return to some conservative values and an explosion of creativity and coolness in music and movies?



Howard Bloom (HB): That's a very good question. I've never thought of that connection before. My wife had been a socialist when I met her in the 1960s. And then in the 1970s she became a conservative. So she was siphoning money out of our bank account and giving it to Ronald Reagan's political campaigns—without telling me. She knew I hated Reagan. But I never connected Ronald Reagan with what was going on in popular music at that point. In the 1960s popular music was the music of rebellion. Rock music was about raising your fist and saying to adults: "I have a right to be an individual. I have a right to exist." Rock was in tune with the hippie philosophy: "Don't trust anyone over 30." And, "We're here to overturn the establishment." In other words, rock and roll was part of a rebellion whose political activists were working to toss people our parent's age out of power. That was the 1960s. But there was no overt philosophy—there was no ideology—of rebellion in the 1970s and the 1980s. However if you look at the attitude of the artists who emerged, it was sheer rebellion.

Joan Jett got onstage and raised her fist. And the way she raised her fist was the strongest part of her message. She was a woman. And as a woman, you were expected to be like Grace Slick or Janis Joplin: the guys had the guitars, the power instruments, and you did not. You simply crooned into the

microphone. But Joan was saying: "I'm going to take over the fucking guitar, myself. I have the power. I own the power on stage. And I am going to rebel as a self-contained entity not needing the "weapons" of "males with guitars." My band? Hey, that's just an extension of me." Joan's was the rebellion of girls who had been raised with working mothers. And for a middle class girl to be raised by a working mother was something brand new. It was a result of the invention of indoor plumbing, the washing machine, the drier, and the dishwasher. Women were no longer the slaves of water-hauling and clothes washing. And the women's liberation movement had given them the freedom to compete with men in the workplace. Now the daughters of these liberated women had a very new experience of what it meant to be female. And that sense came to a head in Joan Jett. Or it came to a fist. But as for men, I mean, look at several of my other clients. Billy Idol also raised his fist in a gesture of rebellion. Did the anger of these fists have anything to do with the Reagan era? It's hard to tell.

John Mellencamp also came to the lip of the stage with his fist raised. If you were here, I could show you the difference between the raised fist of each of those three artists. Each made a slightly different muscular statement—a statement made with muscles. And then, there were bands that were already slipping into acceptance of a parent's generation, and acceptance of an older generation. Not rebellion, but acceptance. And those were bands like Spandau Ballet, Berlin, which were both my bands, and a bunch of others. Later, the whole attitude of rebellion would disappear from popular music. At least, it would be minimized significantly. In fact, Michael Jackson would live with his mother, his father, and his brothers—an unthinkable act among the rock rebels. And that business of raising your fist on stage would no longer be part of the package, if you were a rock 'n' roller. In Michael Jackson it would be replaced by fierce pointing.

The Reagan era was relatively prosperous, which was good. And it's only when you have a prosperous age that kids can afford to be thoroughly rebellious, because when you have an age like the 2000s and the 2010s, when adult kids are still living in their parents' houses, kids can't afford to rebel. They need the comfort, the shelter, of their parents to move forward. So, that helps explain why the attitude of rebellion disappeared. And I don't see rebellion in the music, today. Admittedly, listening to music has totally changed. Working with music has totally changed. I listen to Pandora. I don't know the era of the bands that Pandora is playing to me, but to me, that attitude of rebellion has gone—maybe I just don't understand these bands well enough. I don't know the physical stance, the muscular message, of bands like The Eagles of Death Metal and the Queens of the Stone Age or of stars like Joe Bonamassa and Jack White—not to mention trans-racial artists like Keb Mo.

GC: Your babies, Prince and Michael Jackson, both died in the past ten years. How did you react to learning of their disappearance? As a critic of hard ecologism (or eco-nihilism), how do you assess the lyrics of Jackson's pieces such as "The Earth Song" or "Heal the World"?

HB: Michael Jackson died on my birthday, June 25th, 2009, and I always felt I had conversations that I needed to complete with Michael. It took me years to realize why. My initial response when I started getting calls from the manager of Michael's brothers in roughly 1982 was, "No, I don't want to work with the Jacksons." The Jacksons were easy. If you have a talking dog, the dog can get on the phone and say "Michael Jackson," and any editor in the country will drop everything and offer the dog a cover story in exchange for an interview. And I don't do easy things, so I was not interested. I do hard things—I do crusades. And then, I got a call from the Jacksons' manager, the same guy I'd been saying no to for four months, saying, "The Jacksons are gonna be in town this weekend, and they'd like to meet with you." And, Grégoire, you know my background. I did not grow up with other kids. I did not grow up with adults. I grew up with guinea pigs and lab rats and an aquarium full of guppies. So I didn't know about normal human rituals, but I had heard this phrase that if you want to say no to somebody, if you're going to be a mensch, if you're going to be a real man, you have to say no to their face.

So I agreed to a meeting with the Jacksons and I took the elevator up to the 54th story of the Helmsley Palace Hotel on Madison Avenue at 50th Street in Manhattan. And I walked down the corridor and I knocked on the door, and the door opened four inches. And the minute the door opened, I knew I was going to have to work with the Jacksons because you could see these four guys plastered up against the wall as if something really dark and ominous was in the room, and nobody could tell what it was. And it took me about 10 or 15 years to figure out what I felt the Jacksons had hired me for. Once I finally figured it out, I realized they had hired me to save their brother's soul. Because there was trouble—there was big trouble. So, when Michael died, I felt that my job was not finished. I had not succeeded in my task. The whole story of tracking down the villain who did Michael Jackson is in my new book *Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me: a Search for Soul in the Power Pits of Rock & Roll*.

Michael spent 50 years on this planet, and for 25 years, he was rising towards superstardom. The biggest superstardom anyone had ever seen. Then for 25 years, for half of his life, he was dangling on the cross. He was crucified by the press, of all things. And I felt that the job of saving his soul was unfinished. And I felt the conversations that we were missing, that we had never had, that we should have had. But I always thought there was plenty of time, and then, all of a sudden, the night of my birthday, as a present, I got the news that Michael Jackson had died. I was devastated—I was floored.

The story of the night I was told Michael Jackson had died is in the opening chapter of *Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me*. When they closed the coffee shop where I was working in those days for the night, I went up to the park for my walk through the meadow, looking up at the stars. And then, I was walking back from the park down the street. And normally, the streets in Park Slope, Brooklyn, at that hour—it was about 12:30 at night—are abandoned. They're deserted in my neighborhood. But that night, there were two kids, about 19 years old, sitting on a stoop. And as I walked past them, I heard a voice.

I had my headphones on, so I didn't know what the voice had said. I was listening to a book. And then, I realized when I got another hundred feet down the street that it had said, "Michael Jackson is dead." And I wondered, "Are they saying that to me because they know that I've worked with Michael Jackson? Or, are they just saying that to anybody who passes by?" So I turned around and walked back up the street and took my headphones off and said, "What did you say?" And they repeated, "Michael Jackson is dead." And I said, "Why did you say that?" expecting that they would say they knew me from the Tea Lounge, the cafe where I worked. And they just said, "We're trying to tell everybody."

So it became obvious that they were saying it to me because I was a generation or two older than they were, and they wanted nobody over the age of 30 to get away without realizing that a greatness had passed, that somebody of tremendous importance had just died. And I don't remember whether I told them that I worked with Michael or not, but knowing me, I probably did tell them. Michael's death was shocking. As I said, I still have conversations I need to finish with Michael. And one of the most disturbing things about death is its finality. You can no longer talk to those people who are gone—not at all. There is no longer any chance whatsoever of having a conversation.

Prince is a whole different matter. I felt more in response to Michael. Look, when I was 10 years old in Buffalo, New York, no other kids wanted me. My parents didn't have time for me. So I had been alone since I was an infant. One afternoon I was in my living room and there was a book open in my lap. And the book said the first two rules of science are these: "The truth at any price, including the price of your life." And it told the story of Galileo and they got it all wrong. As if he'd been willing to go to the stake to defend his truth. That was false. Galileo swore that everything he'd written was false in exchange for house arrest. But I needed the heroic version of the story. The book said that the second rule of science is, "Look at things right under your nose as if you've never seen them before, and then, proceed from there." And it told the story of Anton van Leeuwenhoek—it got a bit of that wrong, too. He was one of the two men who invented the microscope. But those two rules became my religion. And Michael Jackson was the living incarnation of those two rules; he was those two basic rules come to life. The

first rule: "The truth at any price, including the price of your life" is the law of courage. Michael had courage. He would not let anybody fuck with his kids. And the second law: "Look at things right under your nose as if you've never seen them before" is the law of curiosity, awe and wonder. And Michael had awe, wonder and surprise in a degree that I had never expected to see from any quarter.

Prince and I had something in common in that we had both built our own mini-societies. I helped put together, by accident, the hippie movement. Since other people's cliques wouldn't have me, the only cliques in which I could live were cliques that I fashioned myself, and Prince had that quality too. You know, when he was a teenager in Andre Cymone's basement, he put together a culture—a mini-culture—his own mini-culture based on the idea that sex will liberate you, sex will set you free, and that sex will make violence unnecessary. That was actually an idea he got from the culture that I had helped start, the hippy culture. Remember, our motto in the hippy movement was "make sex, not war." We created a sexual revolution. Though we didn't actually start the ideas of that revolution—that idea of free love got started around 1800, 160 years earlier. But I did not have as many unfinished conversations with Prince. He was so vigorous in the whole time that I knew him. He was so well built despite the fact that he was only five foot two, or something like that. It was impossible to imagine him being gone.

And so, there wasn't as urgent a need to finish a conversation with him, though I did feel I had unfinished conversations with him. After all, we'd risen together. I'd helped take him from an unknown 19 year-old—that's what he said he was at the time, he may have been 22—to superstardom, and I had used everything that I had ever learned in years of studying star-making in order to get him there. And we did have things to say to each other. But it wasn't the same thing. Michael was to me twice as important as anybody I had ever met in my life—at least twice as important as anybody that I had ever met in my life.

Prince, for all of his remarkable workaholism and all of his tremendous productivity and all of his astonishing ability to command an audience on stage, was a normal mortal. Michael was not like a mortal at all. Michael was like an angel or a saint. In other words, he was the living incarnation of some sort of divinity—specifically, the divinity that comes from his astonishing degree of awe and wonder. "Earth Song" is probably my favorite piece of Michael Jackson's music. It's just gorgeous, musically. The lyrics aren't anything special, because they're about standard ecological clichés. But remember, Michael was not just a lyricist; he was a musician. He spoke through his music. He spoke through his dancing. And what a powerful song that "Earth Song" was!

So, Michael was showing you his soul through his songs, through co-writing things like “We Are the World,” “Earth Song,” and “Man in the Mirror,” which basically says, “If you’ve got something important to do, start it now”—the same message as “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” a T.S. Eliot poem I grew up on. Michael showed you where his values were with those songs—although, not completely. If I hadn’t spent the night that I described in the book, sitting in a trailer outside of a huge studio complex, listening to his explanation about why he was canceling his tour, and then, trying to give him an explanation of why cancelling his tour would do damage to the kids that he took so seriously—the tens of thousands of kids he carried around in his heart—I would never have understood Michael’s intense commitment to his audience, to his kids. Again, that’s a story in *Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me: a Search for Soul in the Power Pits of Rock & Roll*. And it’s an amazing story.

But Mother Nature loves those of her kids who, like Michael Jackson, oppose her most. Nature proceeds by breaking her own rules. And we are the next generation of nature’s lawbreakers. We carry nature into her future by inventing new things. For 13.7 billion years, nature has been going from nothing but a big bang of space, time and speed to an increasingly complex universe, from elementary particles to atoms, from atoms to giant sweepings of atoms called galaxies, from galaxies to the stars and planets, and then, to big molecules and life. In other words, nature has never stopped creating in the entire 13.7 billion years of this universe’s existence. And we are just her next tools for creation. So, we have an obligation to create. We have an obligation to innovate. We have an obligation to break nature’s laws—on behalf of nature and her restless creativity.

Now, this isn’t to say that we have an obligation to destroy the ability of this planet to sustain life, far from it. But it’s we humans—specifically us Western civilization humans—who invented the idea of ecology and invented the idea that we should “heal the world” instead of destroying the ecological systems on the face of the planet. And this is the very first time in human history that we’ve had massive protest movements that have been given institutional sanction, that have been made a part of the system. And it’s the first time in human history, in the course of the last 150 or 200 years, that we have had peace movements, that we have had anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism movements—and then, ecological movements. We have had Greta Thunberg shouting “How dare you?” just like Michael Jackson was singing “All I wanna say is that they don’t care about us.”

But even that is unnatural, to have protest movements. And it’s through those protest movements that we have self-correction mechanisms. The job of humans is to do things as unnatural as plants taking to land, as trees taking to the sky, and as the invention of photosynthesis. Because that is the way the

universe proceeds. She breaks her own laws. She busts through her previous limitations. Nature rebels against the shackles of her nature. She constantly springs what my books call shape shock and supersized surprises. And nature, or the universe, never goes backwards. When she seems to go backwards, as when she exploded her first stars, a million years into those stars' existence, she uses that catastrophe to create whole new realities. Long before those star deaths, when the first generation of stars was born, there were only three different kinds of atoms: hydrogen, helium and lithium. And in the collapse of dying stars, nature created eighty-nine new kinds of atoms. That's what nature does with the process of destruction: she creates.

GC: You are regularly travelling into Asia for professional reasons. How do you account for the fascination that Asia and especially Thailand turned out to exert on the eighties' action movie—with John Rambo (played by Sylvester Stallone) seeking refuge in Thailand... or Jean-Claude Van Damme defeating a Thai champion to the acclamation of a crowd that calls him "the white warrior"?

HB: I've been in Seoul, Korea, twice. One of those visits was to keynote a United Nations conference on governance. I've been to Chengdu, China, once. I've been to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, twice. First, to put together a two-day intensive training program for CEOs and general managers called "Re-perceiving leadership," and the second time, because I co-founded and co-chaired the Asian Space Technology Summit. So, that's my Asian experience. Oh, yes, I went to Kobe, Japan, to lecture on harvesting solar power in space and transmitting it to Earth.

We - the West - started dealing with Asia two thousand years ago when the Silk Road was opened and China started exporting silk to Rome. The wives of Roman senators - the wealthiest women in Rome - tried to one up each other by wearing the ultimate status symbol, robes made of Chinese silk. And then, we fell out of contact with Asia again when we, the West, lapsed into our dark ages, and contact began again with Marco Polo about 1250 A.D. China has been a land of riches and it's been a land of wonders for those two thousand years. China, through almost all of those two thousand years, has been the greatest exporting nation on earth—and the most innovative. Plus, we're so fascinated with societies that are radically different from ours that we developed exploration and anthropology. China has almost always been ahead of us. Except in curiosity about other societies—to China, societies outside the boundaries of the Chinese empire were too barbaric to merit attention.

In the West, the idea of anything strange and exotic attracts us. At least, it attracts us when we're not in dark ages. When we are in dark ages, we pull a blanket over our heads and hide—we don't want to

know about things that are alien. But we are so fascinated by alien cultures that we dream up alien extraterrestrials, people from other galaxies. And many of us are certain that these aliens exist and that they've been making contact with Earth for a long time. The difference and the strangeness are exhilarating - especially the strangeness of a culture that's almost as old as ours, being only about two thousand years younger, and which has produced astonishments, marvels! I mean, the Japanese and the Chinese invented the use of tea as a beverage. They invented the teacup, the saucer, and the fine porcelain these things are made of. They invented the teapot and the tea ceremony. They invented all of these things that to people like Voltaire were mesmerizing.

Voltaire lived in a time that was fascinated by Asia, fascinated by India, fascinated mostly by China, and also fascinated by Japan. And we've been attracted to Asian culture ever since because of the East's radical difference and the light that difference has shed on our own culture. Thailand, specifically, I can't answer that question, except Thailand was Ceylon, and Ceylon seems to have played a big role in the Thousand and One Arabian Nights, in the story of Sinbad the Sailor. And until the last 100 years, Ceylon was a magical place, a place where strange and magical things happened.

GC: Clint Eastwood, who spoke favorably of Trump in 2016, instead announced his support for Michael Bloomberg in the coming 2020 presidential election. To what extent do you recognize yourself in such an endorsement?

HB: I was hoping that Bloomberg would become the Democratic nominee for President. Bernie Sanders is a brilliant man, and one of his brilliances is his ability to boil an entire platform down to five sentences, something that Hillary Clinton definitely was not able to do. And another of Bernie's brilliances is to be honest if he's asked a question, like four days ago: "How do you feel about the Russians, about the idea that the Russians are supporting your election?" he was asked by a reporter. He came to the camera and said immediately, "The Russians had better get out of our elections!" I wish Donald Trump would say that. But for all of his brilliance, Bernie Sanders doesn't understand the capitalist system.

The Western system, the system I outlined in *The Genius of the Beast: a Radical Revision of Capitalism*, has brought material miracle after material miracle to the face of this Earth. And the Western system is based on a balancing act between private industry, government and the protest industry. Or, to put it differently, the genius of the Western system is based on a balance between socialism and capitalism. Government provides things like roads and the Internet, which government invented. DARPA (the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) invented the Internet. You could call that socialism if

you wanted to. Then there's the protest industry, which we talked about a minute ago: the peace movement that received the tool of civil disobedience in 1848 from Henry David Thoreau; the anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism movement that had its first global conventions in 1899, and the environmentalist movement. And when you keep those three elements in balance—private industry, government, and the protest industry—you have a brilliant system that produces astonishing results. But Bernie doesn't understand the private enterprise part of the system. He doesn't understand billionaires. He thinks there should be no billionaires whatsoever.

Right now the American government space program at NASA is dead—it's absolutely down. It's spending huge amounts of money, but it's not accomplishing anything, at least when it comes to humans in space. It's accomplishing wonderful things when it comes to doing science in space, science done with automated equipment like our wildly successful Mars Rovers. But the only thing that's keeping manned space alive and showing us hope for the future—for getting beyond this planet, for putting towns on the moon and putting cities on Mars—is Elon Musk, a billionaire, Jeff Bezos, another billionaire, and, possibly, Richard Branson, another billionaire. But that initiative is not coming out of governments at all. If we didn't have billionaires, we wouldn't stand a chance of gardening the solar system and greening the galaxy. We wouldn't stand a chance of bringing space to life by bringing life to space.

First billionaires buy things that only they can afford. Then 20 years later, we can all afford them. But it takes the billionaires cutting through the interference. It takes billionaires carving out the next step, or at least, being there to pay for the next step. Michael Milken, the guy who invented junk bonds, has founded a cancer research institute that's doing some very important work. Bill Gates is funding very important stuff all over the planet. We need billionaires. Frankly, we don't need billionaires who are billionaires because their fathers made the money, or their mothers made the money. We need billionaires who are capable of making the money themselves because in order to make those billions, they have to make a major contribution to society. Bernie doesn't understand that.

Bloomberg does understand that. He started as just a normal middle-class kid and he built an empire that's worth 59 billion dollars. He built it by offering new services and improvements on old services. He has managed and organized people by the thousands. Donald Trump never managed much more than about four employees, or maybe 10 at most. Donald Trump was running a very small business based, to a large extent, on lying and cheating. But Michael Bloomberg has done it the honest way. Michael Bloomberg is a failure in debates. But he has demonstrated his platform through something more

important than words on a debate stage. He has demonstrated it through actions. Look at the charities that he has been supporting very generously over the course of the last 20 years: leading the anti-gun movement and underwriting education for inner city black kids who do poorly in the public education system.

My cousin Deborah Kenny founded something called the Harlem Village Academies that take kids at random off the streets of Harlem and put them through an education that helps them get into college. Then her kids stay in college - they graduate. It's remarkable. And Bloomberg has funded these educational programs. He has funded an entire anti-gun organization. My nephew has been one of his community organizers for those anti-gun groups. Bloomberg has funded environmentalist organizations. He doesn't need to win in a debate. He wins through the actions that he takes.

GC: President Trump is occasionally said to have introduced a "punk" spirit in politics. Yet Donald Trump has established himself as a womanizer; as a President he is now establishing himself as a man of peace, breaking with the interventionist neoconservative doctrine, as well as endeavoring to set up peace in the Middle East between Sunni nations and Israel—and to trigger the fall of the Mullahs in Iran. From this angle, is he not rather in line with the hippie motto "Make love, not war"?

HB: That's a very interesting way of looking at things. We'll eventually see the impact of what Trump is doing. You know, the economy did very well under Barack Obama for the last six years of Barack Obama's term. It did very well under the first three years of Donald Trump. In fact, it set new records during those three years. Then came the Covid-19 virus and ended the longest period of economic growth in American history. However, the Obama administration created more jobs in its last three years than the Trump administration created in its first three years. Remember the first rule of science, the one that I latched onto at the age of ten, the rule that Michael Jackson embodied: "The truth at any price, including the price of your life." One of the things that bothers me about Donald Trump is that Trump tells 12 lies a day, and he just makes it up as he goes along. He has no allegiance to the truth. And his truth changes every day—he contradicts himself. And I can't stand that—I just cannot stand that destruction of truth. To me, a democracy depends on truth. So does the successful conquest of Covid-19.

I didn't read Trump's peace plan when it came out. I was probably busy appearing on the radio or something and researching another topic. But before the peace plan was announced, Trump's plan was to get the Saudis and the other Sunni nations together and get them to make peace with Israel so that

the Sunni nations could take advantage of Israel as an ally; and so together they could face off against Iran. This is exactly what Saudi Arabia wants to do. It wants to lead an alliance against Iran. The Saudis are scared to death of Iran. I, as a Zionist, very much welcome peace with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Dubai, and all of the middle-eastern Sunni countries. And I am horrified that the world lets Iran get away with having its people chant in the streets, "Death to America, death to Israel," because the Iranians really do mean death.

They can't rain death down upon the United States with their missiles—at least not yet—but they can do it with Israel very easily. And I am appalled that the world tolerates it when Iran puts: "Destroy the Zionist entity" as a slogan on the sides of its missiles as it test-launches them. I'm appalled that the world would allow an entire nation to get away with an overt genocidal policy. So, what Trump is doing in the Middle East looks good to me. The difficulty is when Trump is gone. Of course, Trump has no intention of ever going, and Trump wants to be replaced by his son Donald, and then by his daughter Ivanka. But if Trump is ever gone, there is such revulsion against Donald Trump in the United States that that revulsion will also be used against Israel because Trump is just poison in the minds of American Democrats. And I'm a Democrat and a liberal. So it's tricky for me to acknowledge that Trump has done some things that I approve of.

GC: In his [autobiography](#) Billy Idol recalls his collaboration with you on the occasion of a hectic episode of his career. "In late February 1987, I found myself on another coke-smoking binge, walking into a police anti-crack sting in Washington Square with another lady friend, Grace Hattersley. Everyone else in Manhattan had read in the newspaper that day that there would be a police operation in the park that night. The police only insisted on arresting one of us, and Grace kindly decided to take the fall for me. A true gift, since I could've been deported had it been me who was arrested. Nonetheless, it ended up on the front pages of all the New York papers. "Just prior to this incident, I had taken a meeting with my press agent, Howard Bloom, who was telling me we needed a major press event to help announce the tour, so when I saw him the day after the front-page exposure, I said to him, "Well, how's that for press coverage?" and he responded in an exasperated tone, "I didn't mean that kind of press." The story didn't end there. Grace gave a press conference, mentioning that she was my girlfriend, which enraged Perri, who decided to call her own press conference to announce that she was my real girlfriend. The day after Grace's media chat, Perri appeared at hers, opening up her shirt to display a leopard-print bra to the photographers as she exclaimed to the assembled press: "I'm Billy Idol's girlfriend. I know something like this may split up some people, but we've been through a lot." That settled it. When I headlined Madison Square Garden later that year, I opened the show with an insider's remark, "From Washington Square to Madison Square," and the audience roared with laughter." How do you

remember this tragicomic incident for your part? How do you assess the present situation of Billy Idol's career with respect to that of Mick Jagger or Iggy Pop?

HB: I think Billy's book is brilliant - and it's brilliant for what it reveals. What disturbed me about Billy was his use of drugs. And I thought he was only on cocaine. But it turns out, when you read his book, that he was not only on cocaine; he was on heroin and he was on alcohol. Then, it also turns out that he was freebasing cocaine. Well, I actually knew about his free-basing. But to discover in his book just how hideously he was into drugs was horrifying for me. And, through his book, to see that he's gotten off of those drugs and can write about it is, to me, admirable. God knows what my response was. I vaguely remember that incident in the park that Billy is talking about, but the most important thing that I remember was trying to save Billy's life, and trying to save him from drugs. And, hopefully, we accomplished that because he was on his way to death. And that would have been terrible because he's actually a brilliant man. And he certainly lives out his personality in a very big way.

So, I'm glad we managed to stop him. I mean, basically, what happened was this. His parents came into town, and I was very upset about what was happening to Billy with drugs. And his parents met with everybody on his team. And all the people on his team said, "Oh, Billy's doing wonderfully. He's doing just fine!" because they didn't want to lose their jobs. Being associated with Billy Idol meant money, and it meant power to them, although it hadn't when I first started with Billy. His career was about to die when I started with him. I came up with a strategy that basically brought him back to life and made him a source of money and power. But his parents were getting false reports about Billy. They had us come into the room one by one. So, finally, they had me come into the room where they were sitting, and I said, "Your son is killing himself, and we have to stop him."

I explained the drug problem to his parents, and his parents took him away from his manager Bill Aucoin. Bill Aucoin was also freebasing and would destroy his own career with freebasing. Unfortunately, because I loved working with Bill Aucoin, Billy's manager—I loved the man. But it's that crusade to get Billy off of drugs that I remember the most about working with Billy. I last saw him about seven years ago on New Year's Rockin' Eve, a TV New Year's eve celebration, which is a big deal in the United States. I was astonished. He looked in the same physical shape that he had when he worked with me. He was ripped. It was hard to believe. I mean, you look at Christina Aguilera back from her heyday and how she looks today; and back then, she had this gorgeous figure, and now, she's a little plump, round thing. And Billy has not succumbed to age at all.

I haven't heard what he's doing musically today. My Pandora station never plays me Billy Idol. So, I don't know what his music is like these days. It's my impression that he is still an icon, that he is still some sort of a musical force and some sort of a personality. But I can't be sure because, you know, media is fragmented these days, and I don't follow music journalism at all. I'm too busy doing politics and science. I've tried to reach out to Billy a couple of times, but I haven't gotten any answers back. However I did get a series of emails and calls from his manager recently asking me to be in an upcoming documentary on Billy. And when I went into Manhattan to do the interview, the documentary's director promised he would let Billy know how deeply I still feel about him. We'll see if that message gets through.

GC: In your book *The Genius of the Beast*, dedicated to cracking the mysteries of Western creativity, you introduced the notion of an immaterial form of capital—one made from our Promethean dreams. You called it the “infrastructure of fantasy.” Did the way you came up with that idea have something to do with Billy Idol's song “Flesh for Fantasy”?

HB: That's a good question. I don't remember the lyrics to that song. But my concept is to take things from the realm of fantasy into the realm of flesh, and turn them into realities, which is something we humans do better than any other creatures on the face of the Earth. In fact, to the best of our knowledge, we're the only ones who have fantasies. Much as we spend time studying animal behavior, we haven't seen fantasies in animals. So, to the extent that Billy's song is about moving things from a rebel fantasy to the realm of reality, I'm all for it. We are nature. And all of the things that we admire and think are natural are as unnatural as could possibly be.

Take a tree, for instance. About roughly 400 to 600 million years ago, just after the Cambrian explosion, plants took to land, despite the fact that this was quite a fanciful proposition. I mean, plants needed water to survive. It was water in which life pulled itself together. The idea that you could take plants to land, a place with very little water, was completely unnatural. Land in those days was all virgin rock, and rock was hostile to life. Stone didn't contain the water that life needed to keep its cells alive. After all, most of a cell is water. And where were you going to get the water to sustain a cell if you left the ocean behind and you went to the surface of this very hard, impenetrable rock? In addition, there were ultraviolet rays, the radical climate change of summer, fall, winter and spring, and a multitude of other threats on that hostile, barren surface. For the first plants to get to land was an impossible proposition—and totally and completely unnatural. And yet plants did it. And the first plants that evolved on the land were capable of getting about three inches high.

That's almost eight centimeters. But going "Fuck you!" to nature's most basic law, the law of gravity, and lifting themselves three inches high was violently and radically unnatural. And then came trees, and trees were even more of a "Fuck you!" to nature. They were even more unnatural. They lofted themselves thirty to sometimes one hundred and fifty feet high. Which means they had to lift 100 gallons of water a day from the earth to the sky just to survive. That's totally going against the law of gravity. And remember, gravity is one of nature's most basic laws. So if you and I had been sitting around a coffee table at the beginning of the universe, back in those days, I could have proven to you that trees could not possibly exist. But the fact is that nature advances through the efforts of her unnatural children—through having children who will be unnatural and defy her. And everything futuristic that happens with this universe—everything that defines the future of the universe—takes place through those rebels who are unnatural, who are as unnatural as Joan Jett, John Mellencamp, and Billy Idol raising their fists.

Even when we start inventing technologies, we're no different than trees. I mean, plants have invented photosynthesis. That's radically unnatural. It means taking things that don't exist—waves, pulses of electromagnetism called light. Those pulses are not even stuff; they're not material at all. And the first photosynthesizers captured those photons of light and turned them into power sources for the process of life. That is a technology, and it's a radically unnatural technology to take something that isn't material and turn it into energy, a technology that harvests an immaterial thing for a material purpose. So the inventions that we've made are very much like photosynthesis. They are radically unnatural, but only to the extent that a tree is radically unnatural or that photosynthesis is radically unnatural.

GC: In Global Brain you evoked at length the immemorial fight between the increasingly interconnected human species and the worldwide intelligence of bacteria, viruses, and microbes, especially zeroing in on the confrontation between the globally proliferating HIV and the planetary brain of scientists in the last decades of the 20th century. Do you see history repeating itself with the current epidemic of Covid-19?

HB: Absolutely. Viruses and bacteria, the world of microbes, have incredible creative powers and incredibly adaptive abilities and are constantly doing research and development. And the task of humanity has been to outpace the world of microbes in doing R&D. Just a few years ago, it took two months to sequence a virus. And with the novel coronavirus—the virus that causes Covid-19—sequencing only took days. Less than two weeks—but that's not enough. We don't have a vaccine to fight Covid-19. We don't have a drug to treat those for whom a vaccine is too late. Though

we are testing nine existing drugs in double-blind studies. But we need to get our research and development stuff in order so that we can really do a crash program to come up with a vaccine against this virus. Right now [May 2020] the Covid-19 is beating us. It's outpacing us—it's winning the race.

GC: In devising a new version of a godless metaphysics, one highlighting communication and creative self-organization "from quarks to humans," you modeled the cosmos as a big bagel. Could you tell us more about it?

HB: I came up with the Big Bagel Theory in 1959 when I was working at the world's largest cancer research laboratory, The Roswell Park Memorial Institute in my hometown of Buffalo, NY. I was trying to solve the CPT problem in theoretical physics. The CPT problem—the charge, parity, and time problem—is this: if matter and antimatter are created at the same time in equal amounts, where is all the anti-matter? So, imagine a bagel with an almost non-existent hole, and at the instant of the beginning of the universe, the matter universe comes out of that tiny hole and rushes up the top of the bagel and the antimatter universe comes out of the hole on the bottom of the bagel and rushes down the bagel's underside. The steepness of the slope coming out of the hole means that the matter universe and the antimatter universe are moving away from each other very fast. And then, you get to the hump of the bagel. And the fact that there's a hump means that the matter universe and the antimatter universe have slowed down. They've run out of the energy that it takes to push them apart. But the matter and anti-matter universe speak a common language: gravity.

So, they start whispering to each other with their gravity. And their gravity starts pulling them at an ever-accelerating speed down the outside of the bagel toward each other until the matter universe and the antimatter universe meet on the very outer edge of the bagel, annihilate each other, and become the next hole at the center of the bagel. So, in essence, the universe is this big recurring thing like a photon, which comes down to absolutely nothing, then rises to the height of its amplitude and then, comes down to nothing again, and then rises again. Our universe is doing that. It's first going up to the limits of its amplitude, which is at the very bulge of the bagel. And then, coming back down to nothing and then, rising to the height of its amplitude again. Or so Big Bagel Theory says.

GC: Thank you for your time.

HB: Thank you for all these years of friendship, Grégoire. That has meant a great deal to me.

In the lineage of [*How I Accidentally Started the Sixties*](#), Bloom has an autobiographical book, [*Einstein, Michael Jackson & Me: A Search for Soul in the Power Pits of Rock and Roll*](#) to be released in April 2020. Bloom also co-worked with Canlorbe on a (currently finalized) conversation book synthesizing the Bloomian journey into the universal patterns shaping cosmic and human history.

The [*image*](#) shows, "Impressions in a Dance Hall," by Jules Schmalzigaug, painted in 1914.

