

# THE CULTURE COMPASS

Orienting for Profit

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# SCHOOL OF



**@FARIS**

CO-FOUNDER  
& CHIEF THIEF  
**@GENIUS STEALS**

**PRE-2013**  
Chief Innovation Officer  
@ **MDC Partners**

Chief Digital Officer  
@**McCann NY** /  
@**Naked Comms**

**@ROSIEYAKOB**

CO-FOUNDER  
& CHIEF PRAGMATIST  
**@GENIUS STEALS**

**PRE-2013**  
Strategy Leader  
@ **360i** @ **Cake**  
@ **Saatchi NY**

Teacher  
@ **Miami Ad School**



# ***HOW TO READ THIS REPORT***

This has been written to be a readable expansive exploration. As such topics will be explained in writing, and then examples will highlight some innovations or elements that we believe demonstrate shifts in this axis.

The articles, sites and companies will **be linked from the images**, so you can dive deeper into any topic.

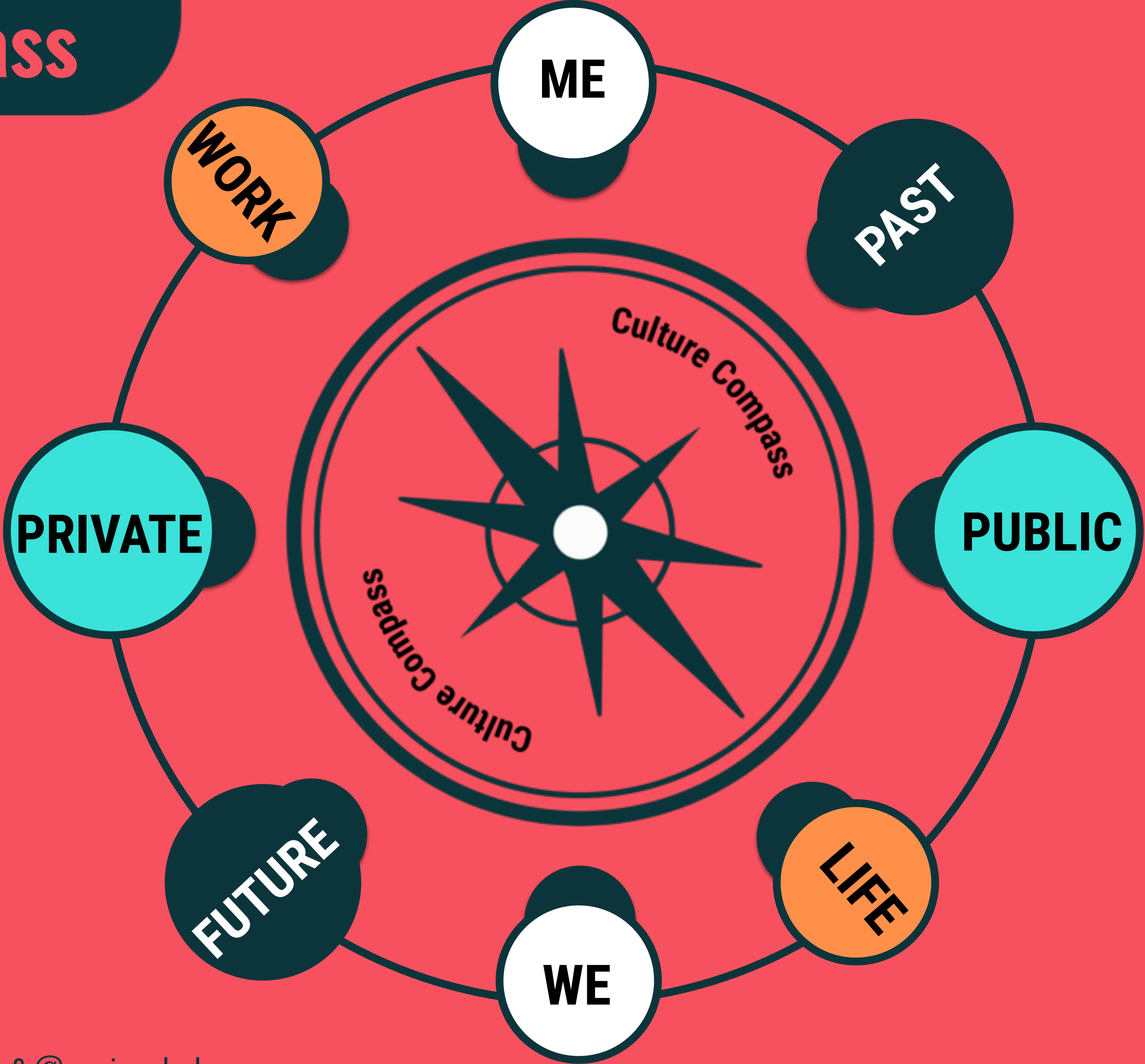
We aren't going to cover every axis, nor is this exhaustive, it's an attempt to look at some interesting things that we believe indicate movements in culture and business opportunities. We'll be releasing a new section each week in April. We'd love to hear what you think, over on Slack.

Rock ON.





# Culture Compass



# ***WHAT IS THE CULTURE COMPASS?***

The Culture Compass is a navigation device for understanding and predicting shifts in culture.

Across any number of vectors, culture swings like a pendulum, gaining momentum in one direction before reaching an apogee, only to swing back with ever greater force in the opposite direction. Even before cultures around the world reached the levels of polarization we currently see, things would move in one direction and then swing backwards, sometimes violently.

At the most macro, political level, it's hard not to have noticed how in the USA having its first black president seemed to lead to a lot of racism and the president that followed. In part, this is simply repackaging the idea of mainstream and counter-culture, which by definition exist in counterpoint to each other, shifting over time as some things that are fringe counter-culture get absorbed into the mainstream and monetized and so on.



## CORE CONCEPT: THE PENDULUM EFFECT

1 Also called pendulum law. *Physics*. A law, discovered by Galileo in 1602 that describes the regular, swinging motion of a pendulum by the action of gravity and acquired momentum

2 the theory holding that trends in culture, politics, etc. tend to swing back and forth between the opposite extremes






## FURTHER READING on CULTURAL PENDULA

### Newton's law of cultural change

Why do cultural movements seem to move in the equal and opposite direction to the movements which preceded them? And how can that energy be harnessed accordingly?

 **Gavin May** Oct 11, 2016 · 10 min read



<https://medium.com/@gavinmay/newtons-law-of-cultural-change-4a7eadd10659>



<https://thepatterning.com/2017/02/13/the-nostalgia-pendulum-a-rolling-30-year-cycle-of-pop-culture-trends/>



# Using the Culture Compass to find a holistic view

There isn't just one pendulum moving through culture however, there are many. We have picked a few of the most important ones here but we're sure you could think of some others. That's great. Please do and let us know. This is an abstract tool designed to help thinking and consider what will come next.

By putting them together we get a more holistic sense of what is happening because it's not as simple as a single axis and it's not as simple as just swinging backwards and forwards, driven by some invisible force, or the push and pull for power between the two broad political viewpoints we call left and right.





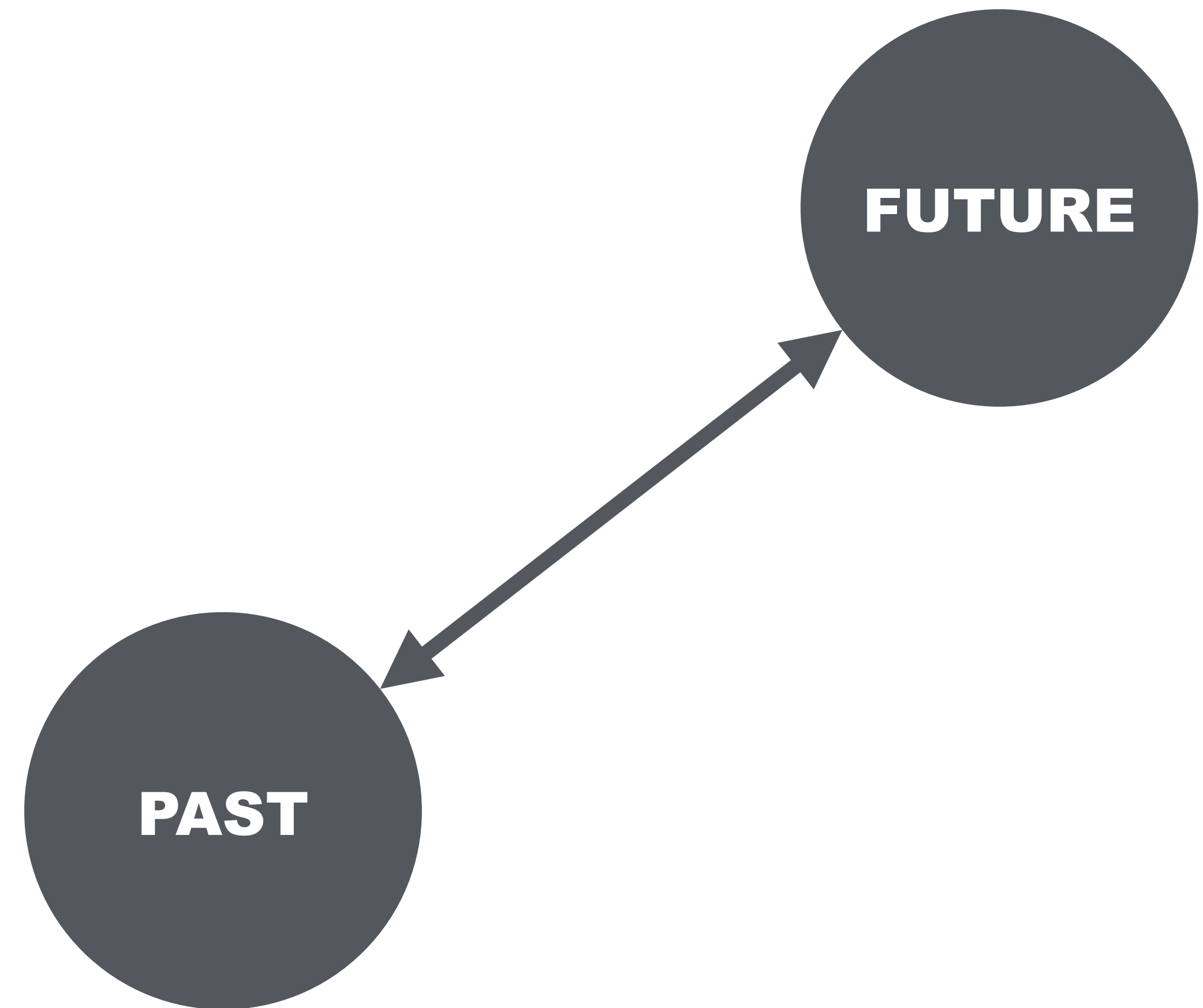
## Cultures have orientations around certain ideas.

One is the idea of the **Past vs Future**, which broadly maps onto these two poles:

**Conservatism:** seeks to preserve tradition (“commitment to traditional values and ideas with opposition to change or innovation”)

*and*

**Progressivism:** seeks change for the sake of equality (“support for or advocacy of social reform”).



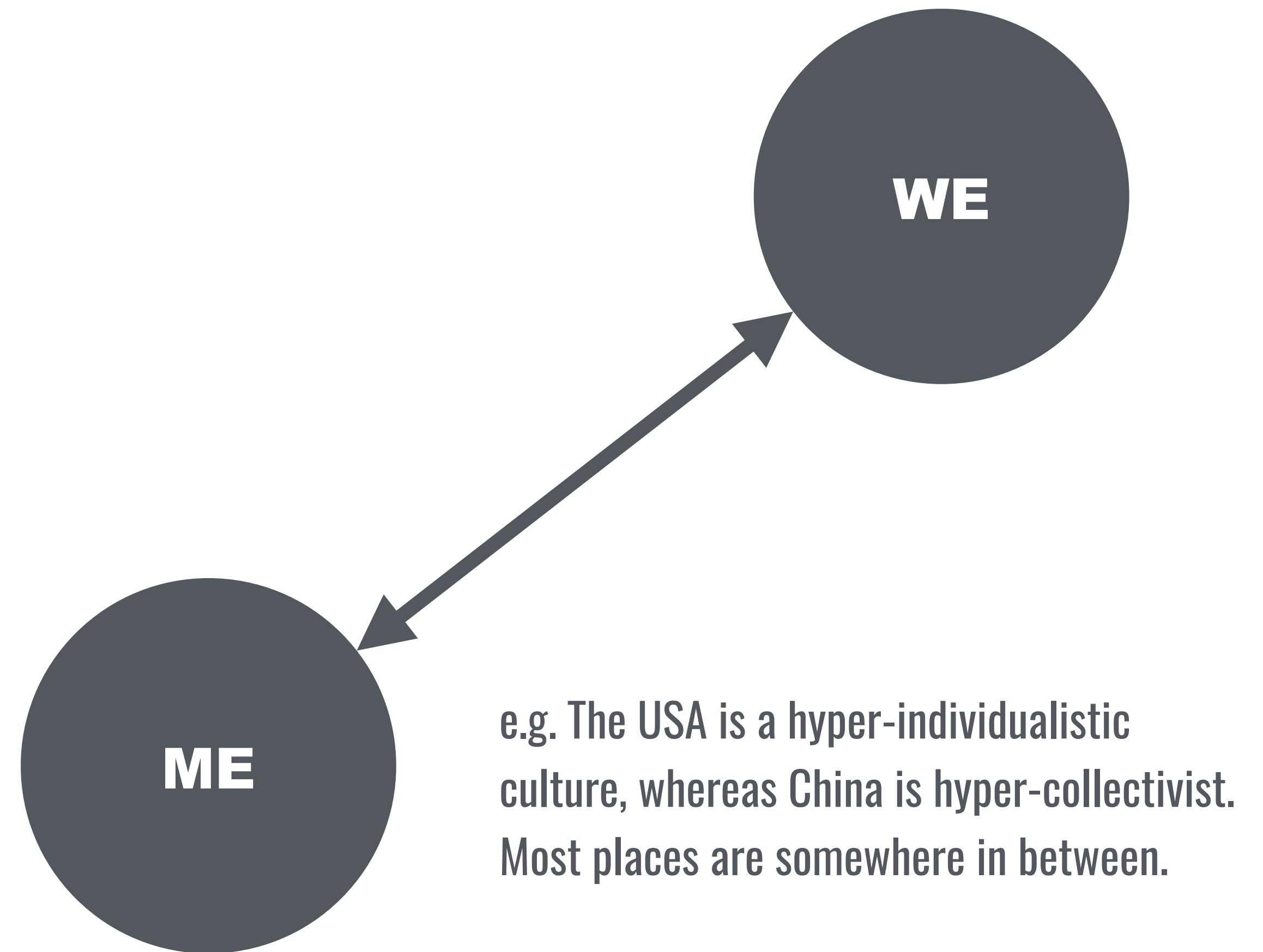
## Cultures have orientations around certain ideas.

Another important one is what we are calling Me vs We, which broadly maps onto

**Individualism:** favouring freedom of action for individuals over collective

*and*

**Collectivism:** the practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual in it.



***Often, there are pendulum swings between two forces.***

It's not that either are better, or worse, but rather that societies need aspects of both. However, they tend to orient heavily towards one for a time, which leads to the resurgence of the other, thanks to counter-culture. Highly individualistic societies struggle with the collective actions needed to control pandemics, but they also tend to create incentive conditions for people and businesses to take certain kinds of risks, and so on. Makes sense, right? **So, here's the idea:**

**Whenever a new innovation changes the dynamics of a category, or when massive exogenous events like pandemics force changes across categories, a **renegotiation takes places along these axes.****



# WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY A RENEGOTIATION?

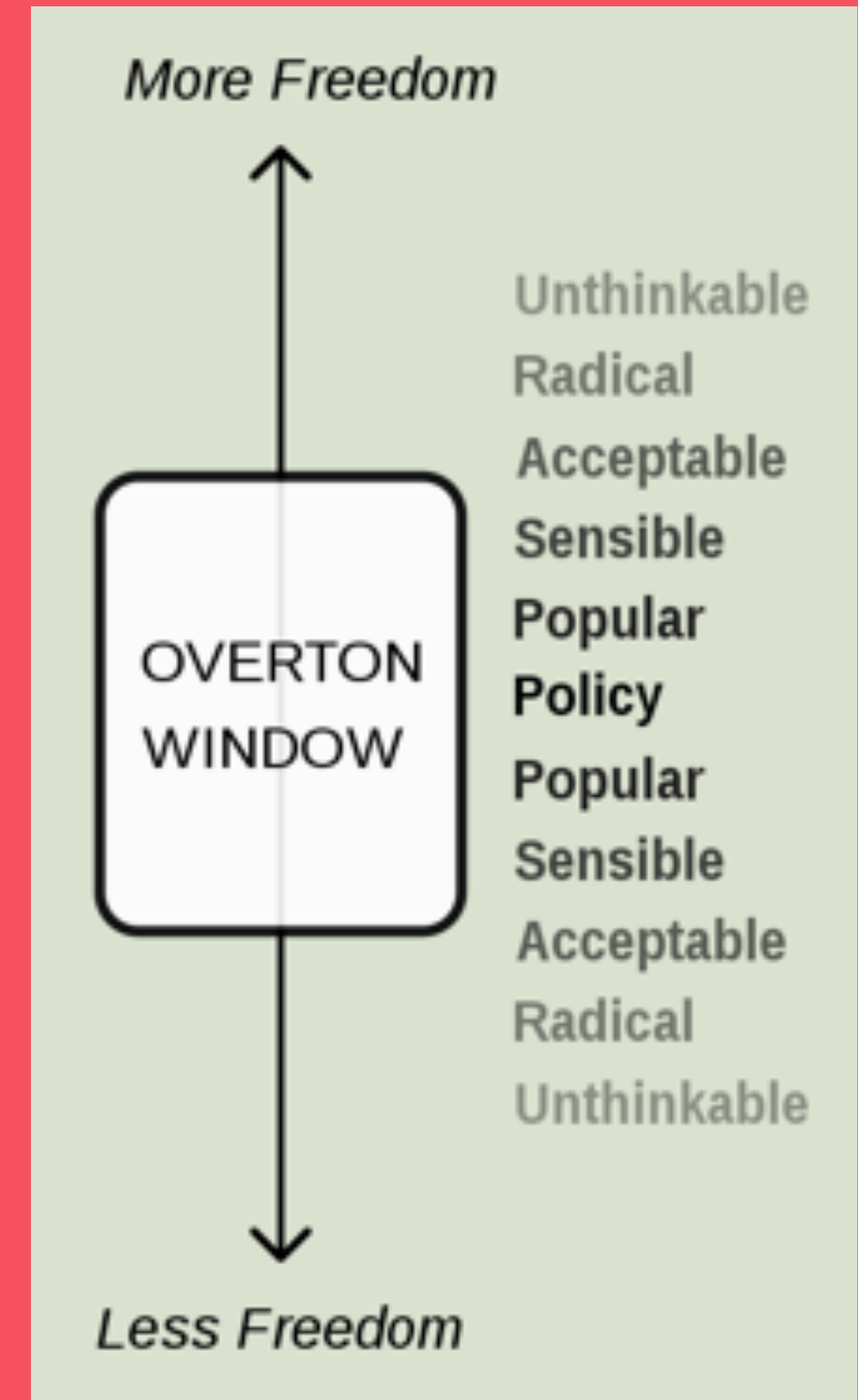
Good question. Let me answer it by talking about something else for a second.

The Overton Window is the range of acceptable discourse at any moment of time in culture. Originally it referred to the range of policies that were politically acceptable to the mainstream population at a given time, but the meaning has broadened. This happens. It basically refers to what we consider acceptable versus extreme, in lots of ways. Especially about politics and what we should and shouldn't say in polite society, which change all the time.

“Overton described a spectrum from “more free” to “less free” with regard to government intervention, oriented vertically on an axis, to avoid comparison with the left/right political spectrum. As the spectrum moves or expands, an idea at a given location may become more or less politically acceptable.

Shifting the Overton Window involves proponents of policies outside the window persuading the public to expand the window. Proponents of current policies, or similar ones within the window, seek to convince people that policies outside it should be deemed unacceptable.” - Wikipedia

## CLICK TO READ



## CORE CONCEPT: OVERTON WINDOW OF CULTURE

“It just explains how ideas come in and out of fashion, the same way that gravity explains why something falls to the earth. I can use gravity to drop an anvil on your head, but that would be wrong. I could also use gravity to throw you a life preserver; that would be good.”

Joseph G. Lehman, Overton’s boss at a Think Tank and popularizer of the term



# ***SO...WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY A RENEGOTIATION?***

When something big happens, or a challenger brand creates an innovation so powerful the entire market has to follow suit, it forces a movement along one of the Culture Compass axes, as ideas that were previously outside of the Overton Window become more acceptable and then normal. Such renegotiations will usually follow classic adoption curve dynamics in their spread through culture. But ultimately the Window moves because there has been a collective renegotiation about what is acceptable and appropriate to the mainstream, and what ideas are considered extreme or fringe.

Christmas was a social, public event until the Victorian era, when it began to shift into the home, becoming a private, family occasion.

Consider how Facebook started as a private network, locked to your university, but became a 'public by default' platform, because \$. Consider how Venmo makes your transactions public by default, and how Public, the share trading app, takes that one step further, turning trades, and gains and losses, into the stream of a social network. That which was Private becomes Public, as it were - that seems to be another important area that is being renegotiated. Uber made private driving public. Airbnb made private homes available to the public.





The rest of this deck highlights some interesting examples of these renegotiations that we have been tracking and thinking about.

These renegotiations are always ongoing, accelerated by the aforementioned interventions, and the shifts themselves create opportunities as what is social becomes private, or vice versa, for some parts of the population.

To capitalize on these shifts, companies also orient themselves to the context they find themselves in. Companies also have certain axes they tend to orient their thinking and behavior around. For example, depending on their point in their lifecycle and contextual factors, they tend to either focus on investing to grow, or cutting costs for profitability.



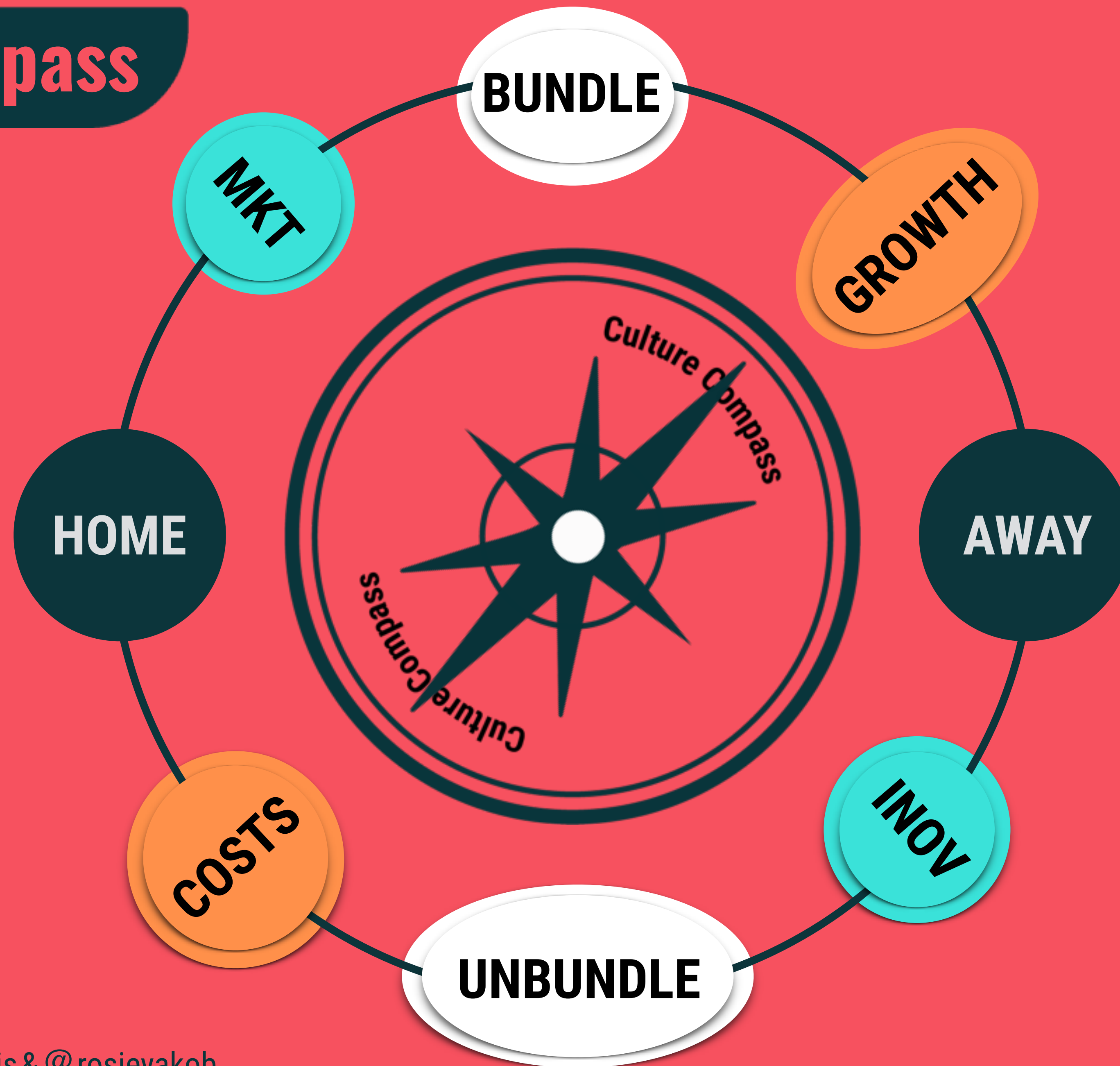
A company can sell or deliver its product or service in your home, or outside it. This renegotiation is in flux due to commerce, delivery and the pandemic. At the same time, work can either be done at home, or not at home, which is also going through a rather radical renegotiation.



So we made a Commerce Compass too, looking at business orientations.



# Commerce Compass





# ***WHAT IS THE COMMERCE COMPASS?***

The Commerce Compass maps orientation of business as they look to capitalize on opportunities created or exposed by the movements in culture.

The only two ways that companies can grow are:

**Marketing:** sell more things to more people for more money

Or

**Innovation:** find new things to sell

We'll look at the other axes later in the deck.



Part 6

**Future**



**Past**



# FUTURE VS PAST

When framed as political this axis maps to progressives vs conservatives as we said at the beginning but it's much larger than that. We can see that in the 1960s, and again in the 1990s, culture especially in the UK and USA was future oriented, excited about what was coming, trying to hasten its arrival. The techno-utopianism of the 90s was directly drawn from the 60s counter culture ideas and enthusiasm for the seemingly endless innovations that were coming to market, especially in the newly wealthy USA.

That orientation has shifted, looking backwards, as people got increasingly concerned about the present, for lots of reasons. Make America Great Again was originally a slogan for Reagan, and the entire pitch is a form of the Golden Age fallacy - things were better back in the day! Well, for some people, perhaps.



## 'The Fractured Republic' Explores How Nostalgia Led To Polarized Politics

June 7, 2016 · 4:39 PM ET

Heard on [All Things Considered](#)

 6-Minute Listen

 PLAYLIST



NPR's Robert Siegel talks with Yuval Levin about his latest book, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism*. He argues both liberal and conservative Americans' nostalgia for the past has led to today's polarized national life.

OPINION | CHARLES TAYLOR

## The myth of the GOP's golden age

By [Charles Taylor](#) June 13, 2019, 2:18 p.m.



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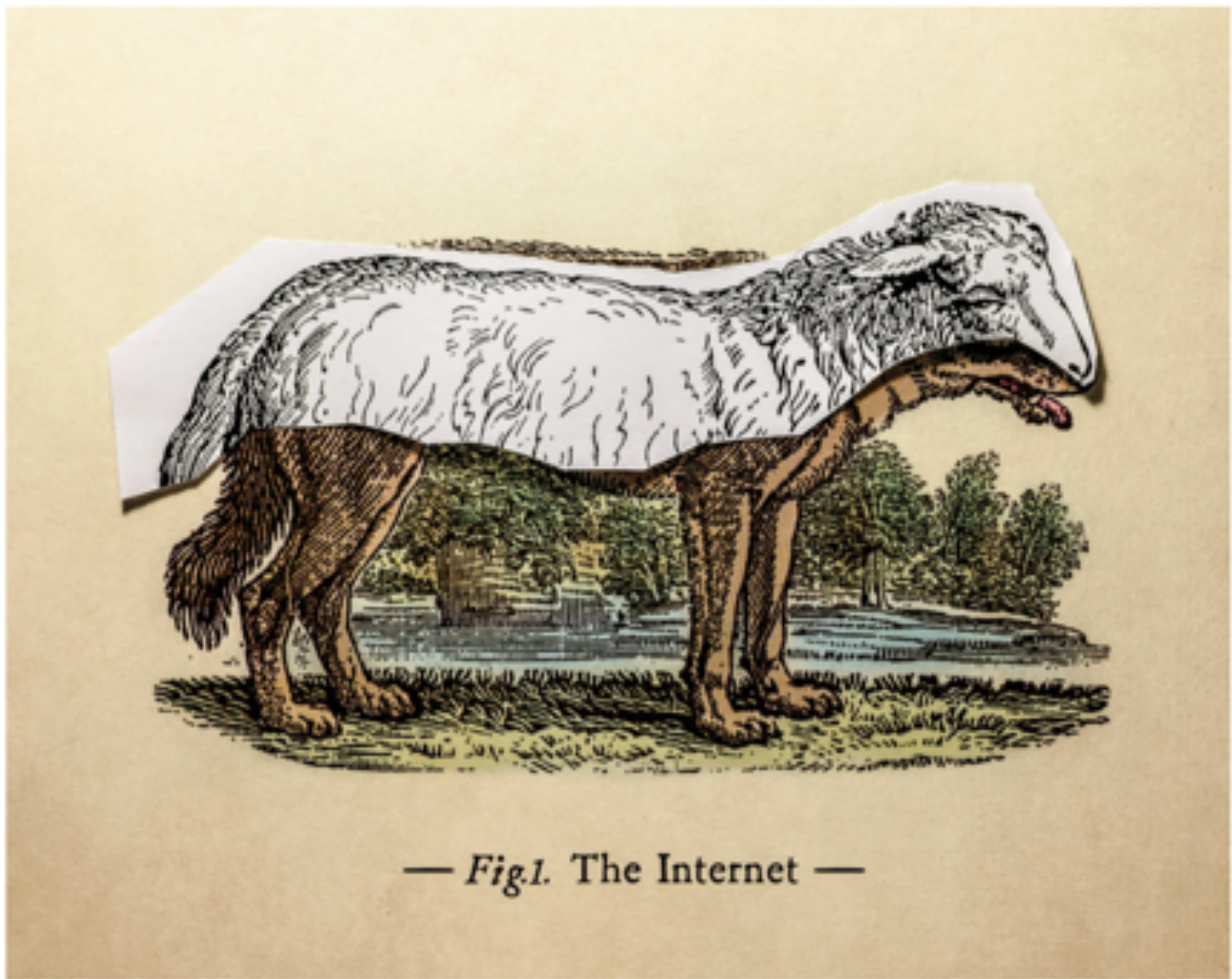
Toward the end of a [video released recently by the conservative anti-Trump group Republicans for the Rule of Law](#), Paul

Rosenzweig, a deputy assistant secretary of Homeland Security under George Bush, says, "Conservatives are all about conserving — conserving history, conserving morality, conserving the country." During this statement, we see footage of Ronald Reagan making a speech, flanked by a huge, flowing American flag.

Reagan's appearance gives the lie to the line promoted by anti-Trump right-wingers that Donald Trump is an aberration instead of the logical end of nearly 40 years of GOP destruction. There is a reason that Reagan's election has long been deemed the fulfillment of the radical insurgency that began with the nomination of Barry Goldwater in 1964, and a reason that, before 1980, the GOP considered Reagan too far right to represent it nationally.







— Fig.1. The Internet —

*From the printing press to the Internet, new tools have led to the dissemination of information—and misinformation.* Illustration by Javier Jaén / Source: Getty

A CRITIC AT LARGE SEPTEMBER 30, 2019 ISSUE

## THE DARK SIDE OF TECHNO-UTOPIANISM

*Big technological shifts have always empowered reformers. They have also empowered bigots, bucksters, and propagandists.*



By Andrew Marantz  
September 23, 2019



FEATURES

## STEAMPUNK FOR HISTORIANS

It's about Time

Scott P. Marler | Dec 3, 2018





# Sci-fi author William Gibson: how 'future fatigue' is putting people off the 22nd century

January 23, 2020 8.55am EST





**pop life**  
/chronicles  
with Lisa Respers France

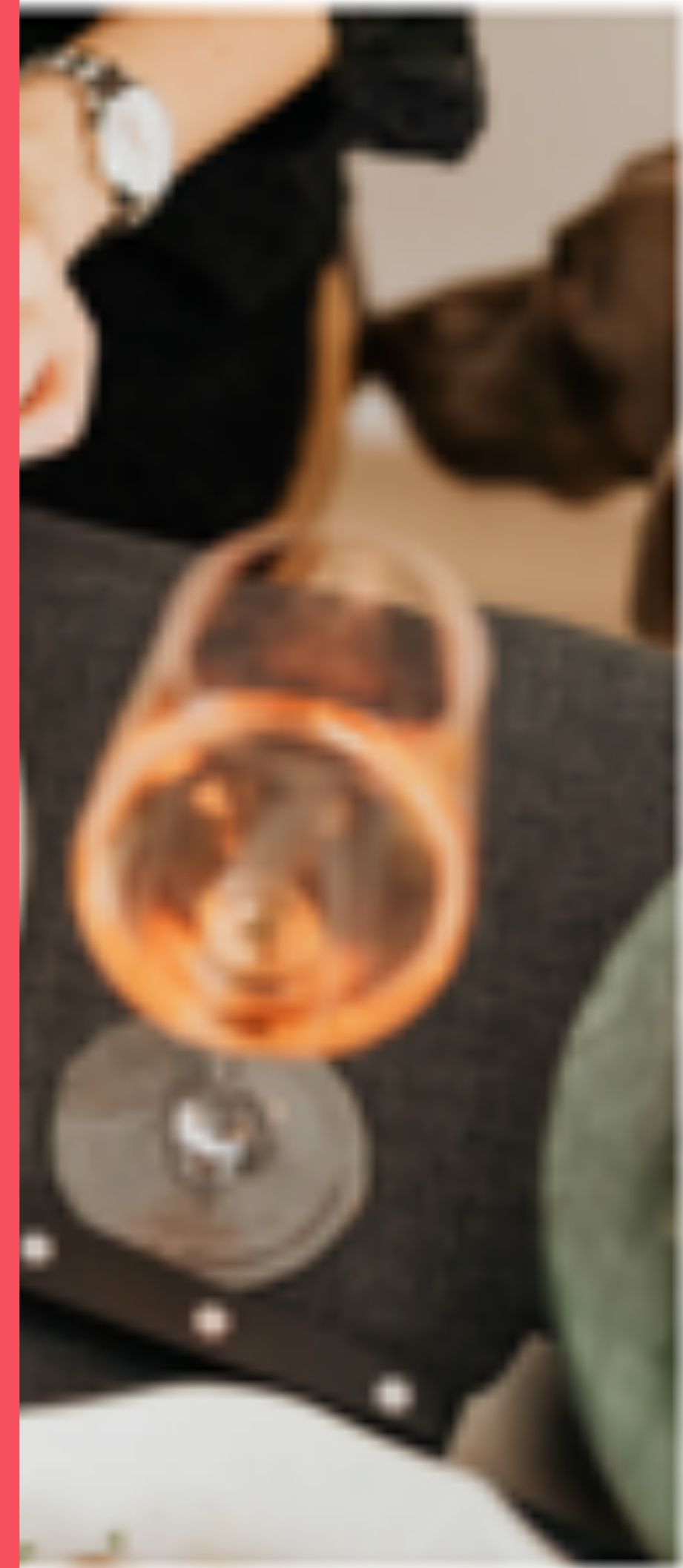
# Pop culture nostalgia can help ease the pain of 2020



Analysis by [Lisa Respers France](#), CNN

🕒 Updated 2:50 PM ET, Fri September 18, 2020





REPORT

12 Nov 20


## HOW STRESS IS CHANGING AMERICAN TASTEBUDS

During the pandemic, people are turning to food for comfort and stress relief. We're seeing a return to nostalgic favorites and also food as a medium for experience and discovery. So what does that mean for flavor?

Location **United States**

**79%** of US consumers have admitted to buying more comfort food



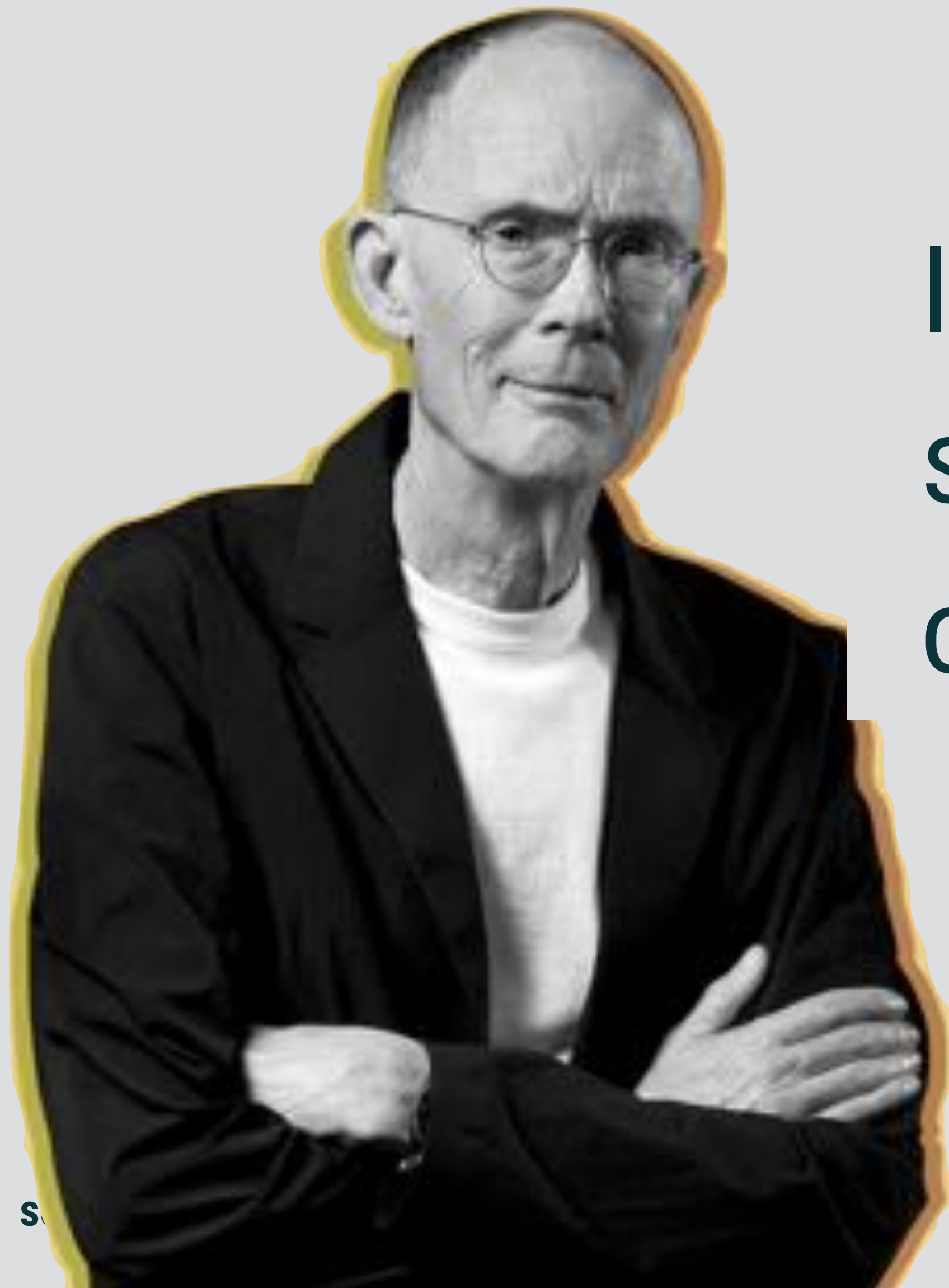


## From 'Top Gun 2' to 'Trainspotting 2': The nostalgia sequel is upon us

*Top Gun 2* has entered into production. *Bill & Ted 3* is happening. We've had *Tron: Legacy*, *Zoolander 2*, *Creed*, and – unfortunately – *Dumb and Dumber To*. There's no point denying it any longer: a new type of film has arrived. Let's call it the Nostalgia Sequel.

Nostalgia Sequel, *noun*: A sequel to a film or TV show released at least 10 years prior that has a perceptible sentimentality and/or affection for the preceding film/TV show. *Origin*: Late 20th Century – see *The Phantom Menace*, *Blues Brothers 2000*.





If you're fifteen or so, today, I suspect that you inhabit a sort of **endless digital Now.**

WILLIAM GIBSON







VANTY FAIR

THE MAGAZINE | JANUARY 2012

## You Say You Want a Devolution?

For most of the last century, America's cultural landscape—its fashion, art, music, design, entertainment—changed dramatically every 20 years or so. But these days, even as technological and scientific leaps have continued to revolutionize life, popular style has been stuck on repeat, consuming the past instead of creating the new.



Faris put together a lot of thoughts about how cultural nostalgia and regressive politics intermingled here

## ‘Member? How Toxic Nostalgia Built the Foundation for 2016

Hyper-Normalization of the Annus Horribilis



Faris Dec 21, 2016 · 16 min read

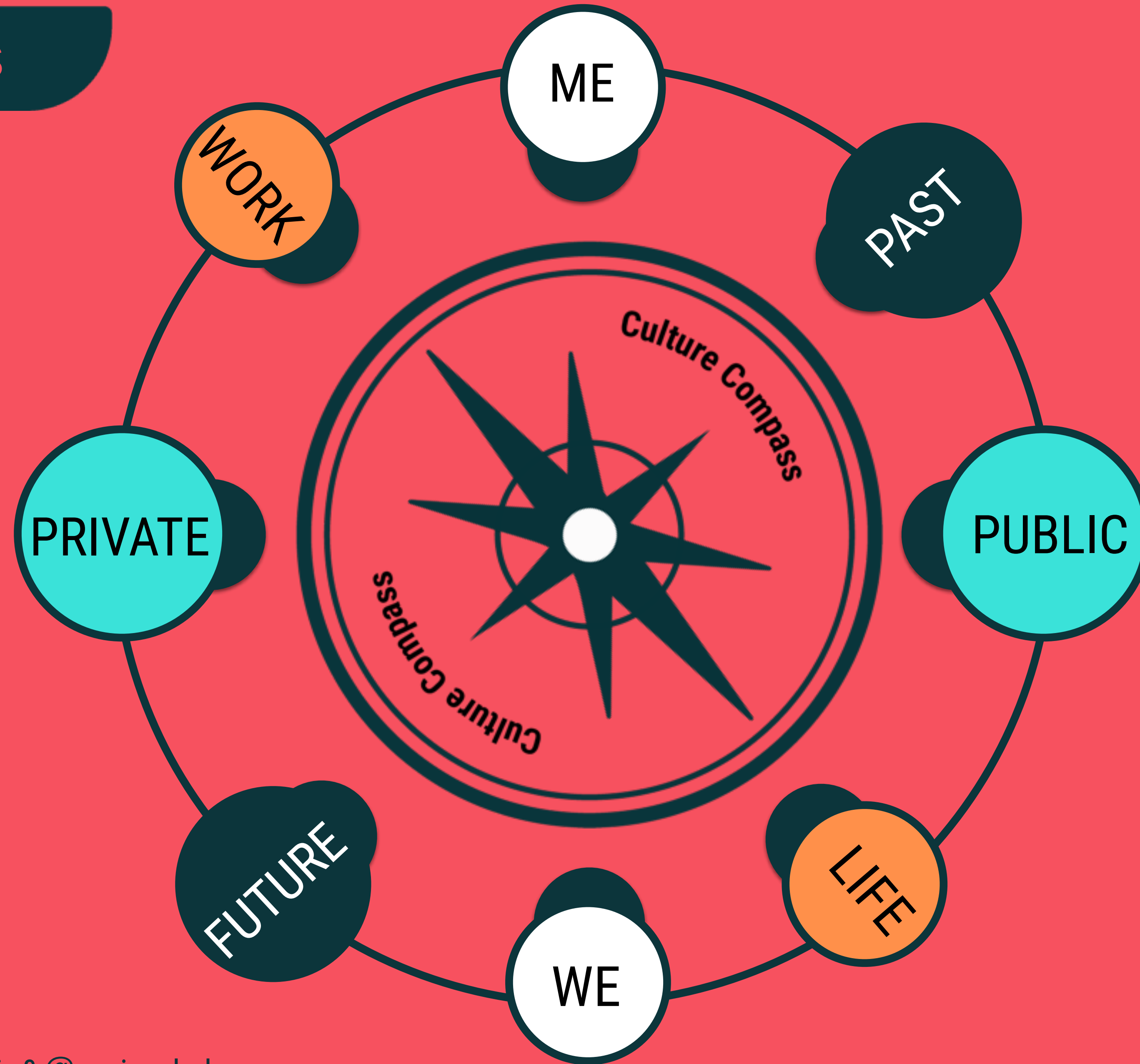




WELCOME

TO NOW

# Culture Compass



# GENIUS STEALS

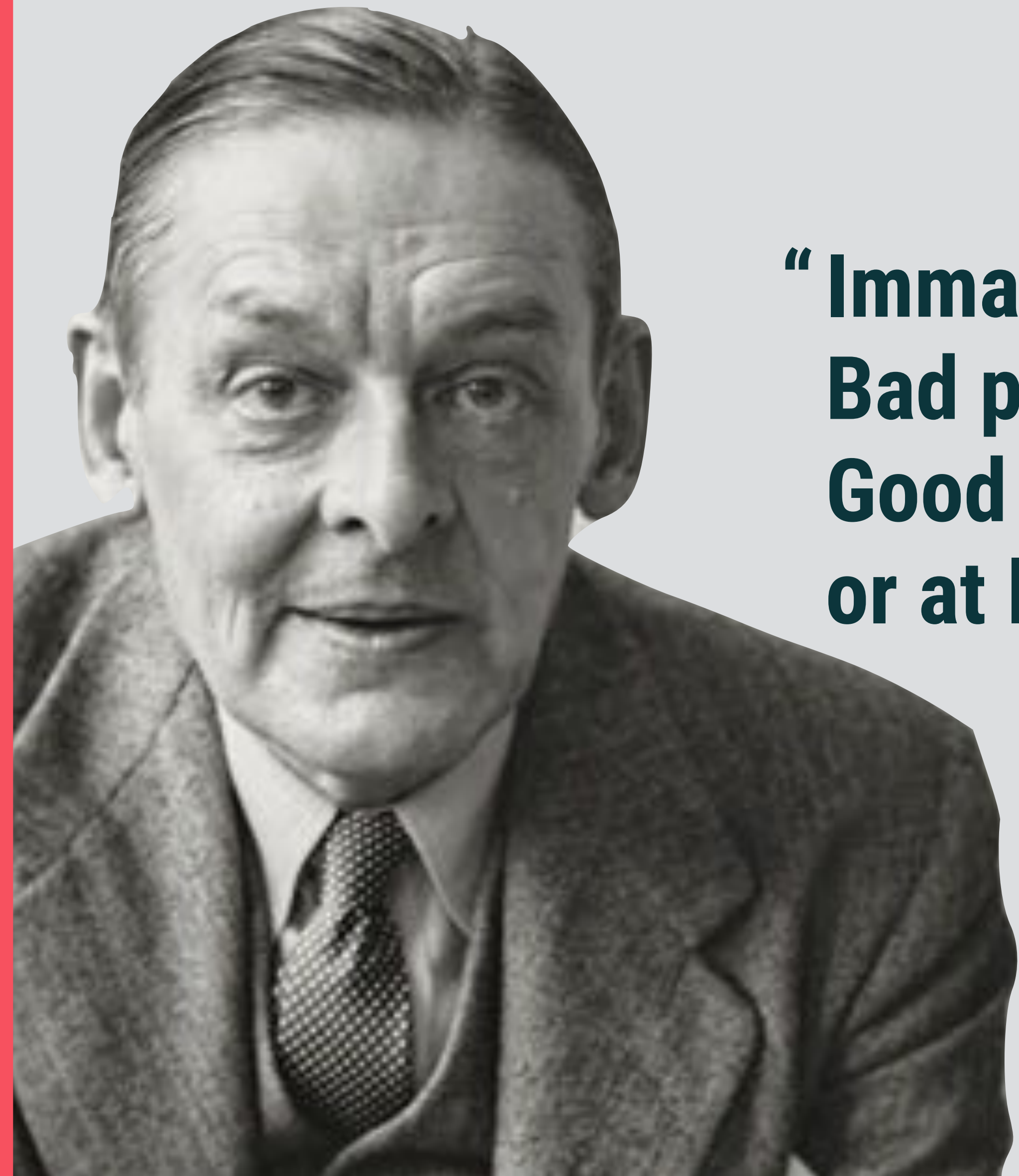
We believe that ideas are new combinations, built from the context of their time, and the opportunities exposed or created by shifts in culture.

We use innovations and inspiration to help others have ideas, but we don't believe in copying. The same is lame, although if you export an idea from one market to another it can be hugely successful. Look at FlipKart, founded by two former Amazon employees in India, which started at as an Amazon clone but then tailored itself to India's local needs. Take, combine, adjust, make better.

In August 2018, U.S.-based retail chain [Walmart](#) acquired an 81% controlling stake in Flipkart for [US\\$16 billion](#), valuing Flipkart at around \$20 billion. [Wikipedia](#)







**“Immature poets imitate; Mature poets steal.  
Bad poets deface what they take.  
Good poets make it into something better  
or at least something different.”**

- T.S. ELIOT





# Thanks

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