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The Eternal Now

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NCR Today

There are many hazards to working in the media: ego, self-indulgence, profit vs. creativity. But the biggest may be a certain loss of perspective, as the business chases after the newest new thing, convinced history is no guide and nothing is as it used to be.

Two articles in the Los Angeles Times are a quaint reminder that, wait-a-minute, human beings are always human beings and things really don't change all that much.

Columnist Patrick Goldstein writes about an old 1970 Life magazine article currently being circulated around town by Ari Emmanuel, the most powerful agent in Hollywood and brother of White House chief of staff Rahm Emmanuel.

(Washington has at least two things in common with Hollywood: powerful Emmanuels and that shared sense that everything is now different always.)

The Life magazine reports looks at Hollywood at the cross-roads: 1969 was a horrible year at the box office; big star-driven blockbusters failed dramatically and studios were slashing budgets and layoff off staff. How bad was it? Today, in west Los Angeles, there is a mega shopping center and office tower cluster called Century City. It was built on the former backlot of nearby 20th Century Fox Studios, which had to sell off the land to stay afloat after the big-budget musical 'Hello Dolly' crashed and burned in 1969.

Many of the interviews with studio moguls and industry agents of the time could have been recorded today, as Hollywood once again struggles with high-priced bombs and a bad economy. Ari Emmanuel's message = nothing is new under the sun. We made it through a similar crisis forty years ago, we'll get through this one.

As if to prove that nothing news and we can learn from the old, ABC tonight debuts a well-reviewed remake of a 1983 sci-fi classic, *V*. In her review, Los Angeles Times critic Mary McNamara notes that *V* works because it fits into that lineage of stories that have touched the human psyche for centuries.

In *V*, aliens come to Earth with a seductive promise of a better day, as long as we do exactly what they tell us to do. As McNamara notes, this human desire for the "big fix," for the deus ex machine, dates back at least to the ancient Greeks and always comes with dark and unintended consequences. Updated for a different era, *V* still strikes the same powerful chord it did in 1983 because certain stories just do that.

Both articles are welcome reminders that history and culture can be a solid guide in a world obsessed with moving forward and never looking over the shoulder. It's often the same stance the church takes: a gentle (or, okay, sometimes not-so) call of "wait a minute." Take a breath, look over your shoulder, give the rear horizon a quick check and then figure out how best to move ahead. Doesn't mean don't move forward: just do it knowing where you've been.

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