Both Freeman and George Dyson were astounding people, though Freeman may be viewed as more astounding by older generations and George by the younger generations, and in many ways were incredibly similar in that they both were dreamers in an age of dreamers and radicals: the 1970s.

With World War II over the world split into East and West and the Cold War began a massive arms race for both sides, allowing the development of crazy weapons such as the “Davy Crockett,” a tactical nuclear device that could be launched from a tripod, and with the launch of Sputnik, the race for the control of space. Paranoia swept the nation with the notion that the Russians could bomb us “back to the Stone Age.” And of course, a sense of national pride and a thirst to be the only superpower, or at the very least the greatest most advanced one, swept the nation. The United States was rapidly changing with the growth of the suburbs and the “Baby Boom” in the 1950s and 1960s.

In this time of uncertainty, physicists and engineers were sought for their ability to create terrible weapons and marvelous spacecrafts. This is where Freeman Dyson enters with his project: The Orion Project, which was an attempt to design a spacecraft capable of being propelled by nuclear devices detonated behind it and using the shockwaves the bombs generated. However, the solid fuel rocket by Dr. Wernher von Braun ultimately became NASA’s workhorse and Project Orion dissipated. Freeman, though, continued with theoretical physics and published other otherworldly ideas including the Dyson Sphere, which is an impossibly large sphere surrounding a sun for energy. After this, he began working for a group of intellectuals called “JASON” where he and others met yearly to discuss the nature and evolution of warfare and physics. He joined “JASON” because they allowed him to continue to think and to design new ideas while being paid and without interference.

However, Freeman had fathered a child (actually six, but George is the important one in this case) during the “Baby Boom,” and now that these children were reaching maturity in the 1970s; they were very different from their parents in many aspects. First of all, the rise of “rock and roll,” which glamorized sex and drugs, the older and more prudent generation did not like nor understand. With the rise in standard of living, more and more children were going on to higher education where free thinking was value and encouraged by educated leaders to explore new thoughts. Because of this, the Civil Rights Movement gained power and people began to think more and more about the environment. Pacifism too became immensely popular and war much less so than previous generations.

George, growing up in this time of change, didn’t fit in: he was shy and reserved. Tradition education did not entice him but it would be untrue to say that he was not
intelligent. He fell in love with nature and canoes, so he started building them and living a bohemian lifestyle in the Pacific Northwest and Canada. There he wanted to bring back the baidarka, a three person kayak. He love kayaks and had built several before attempting the 6 person baidarka that he launch in Kennith Brower’s novel The Starship and the Canoe. While not being satisfied with it, he still had completed something no one else had, but why?

The why is far simpler than most people would think: because people like Freeman and George Dyson enjoy the process behind unrestricted thought and imagination. George Dyson accepted the “JASON” work because it allowed him to continue to do what he loved: think. Not necessarily go through with his ideas, but to enjoy the process.

George was similar in that it did not matter if he made anything he planned. For instance, the little house he had planned to build in Glacier Bay. Even though he did not build it he enjoyed the process thinking about it and designing it inside his head. He also mentally designed larger kayaks than his six person baidarka, but never built them because that was unimportant to the actual thinking and designing.

However, all dreamers are different. Freeman would think of space and theoretical physics or things that could basically be thought in an arm-chair. George, though, thought through his hands. The thinking process became the building process. Also his dreams were more akin to daydreams than the almighty physics. This does not mean that George’s dreams were different, but the process behind them and their outcomes would be different, mostly because George’s ideas were more easily accessible than Freeman’s.

Because of the fact that Freeman and George Dyson were dreamers many people saw them as anti-social or distant, but that was because they were busy thinking of new ideas of starships and canoes.

Works Cited

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