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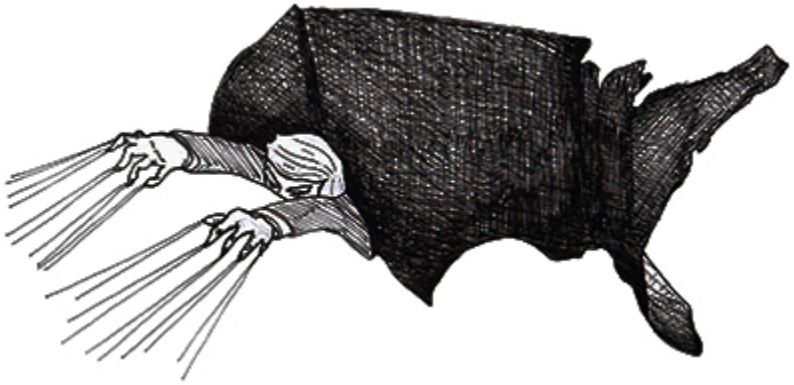

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# Wall Street v. Main Street within the Trump Cabinet

By | 2017: vol. 16, nos. 1-2

Too often, commentators have been content to characterize Donald Trump's cabinet as a collection of billionaires. The president does show a fondness for rich businessmen but to stop there is to erase important divisions among American corporate elites and ignore Trump's critique of the global trading system, which produced his victory.

Donald Trump is president today because he retained free trading Republicans as he added voters, often working-class Democrats, who think that bringing down the U.S. trade deficit and creating more manufacturing jobs in the U.S. should be the goal of economic policy. Can this electoral coalition become a governing coalition? No. The president is going to have to choose sides. The winner of the battle over trade will determine Trump's durability. Whatever the result, the issues Trump raised will not go away because they represent fault lines in the U.S. economy and politics, even though they often are eclipsed by the distractions and tweets.

In the U.S., unlike most other countries, the protest against globalization took the form of challenges within both major parties. For the first time in U.S. history, two insurgents indicted bipartisan trade policy — Bernie Sanders from the left, and Donald Trump from the right. When President Trump told the Congress on February 28 that he was president of the United States, not the globe, he was critiquing past policy. After World War II, both parties used trade policy to strengthen military alliances, develop the economies of partners, encourage foreign investment in developing countries, and expand the international rule of law. Traditional economic advantage was far down the list.

Granting access to the huge American market, even if it meant harming specific industries and permitting discrimination against American exporters, secured Cold War alliances. George Ball, President John F. Kennedy's undersecretary of state, assumed "we Americans could afford to pay some economy price for a strong Europe."[1] Providing Japan access to the U.S. market, when Europe mostly banned its products, would prevent Japan from turning to China or the Soviet Union. The U.S. was so much richer than Europe and Japan that it did not seem that Americans would pay a great price. But as Europe and Japan recovered and as oil became more expensive in the 1970s such global priorities became costly. The AFL-CIO led the opposition. Nevertheless, the policy was maintained and expanded. In 1977, Jimmy Carter said "free access to U.S. markets is a matter of ranking importance for our allies and almost all the developing countries of the world."[2] National Security Council head Zbigniew Brzezinski added that for the sake of the global order we must be prepared to undertake the "necessary sacrifices."[3] Even after the Cold War ended, Germany's president told President George Bush

in 1992, "[T]he size and strength of the American market is of vital importance to the rest of the world leading with us."[4]

This is the factual basis for Trump's critique.

Beginning with NAFTA in 1993, the American government went a step further by making it easy for corporations to offshore jobs to developing countries. By reducing labor costs and enhancing profits, NAFTA and its successors would solve America's "competitiveness" problem. Mainstream intellectuals, led by economists, made the case for corporate-friendly trade and investment agreements. They rejected concerns over labor and environmental standards.  They refused to craft alternate forms of globalization or to formulate national economic policies that aimed to create comparative advantage. Again, there was an opposition. A majority of Democrats opposed Bill Clinton's NAFTA. Still, the dissent did not reach presidential campaigns until this year. Why did the challenge come now? The Sanders and Trump campaigns were propelled by the Great Recession, which offered tempting targets, especially the banks and the political elites that supported the bail-outs. The swift recovery of Wall Street and the stagnation of many Main Streets fingered the role of financialization, which disconnected stock market performance and the real economy. Large rewards went to firms that stripped assets, outsourced, and offshored at the same time the middle class and working class were left with precarious employment. In 2015, the ratio of CEO pay to average earnings stood at 275-1.

Why did insurgency win among Republicans and not Democrats? Every election combines profound changes and contingent events. Initially it seems as if Jeb Bush or Marco Rubio, establishment Republicans, would win the primary which initially had 17 contestants. Donald Trump was such an outlandish, unlikely candidate that most preferred to direct their arrows towards other rivals. It was too late when elite Republicans recognized the peril. In contrast, the Democratic elite earlier on rallied around Hillary Clinton and unlike the GOP had a wall of super delegates to protect her.

Still, the upheaval produced by the Great Recession continued. Since the 1960s, the core of the Republican Party was suburban white middle class, small businesspeople, professionals, and managers. Republican economic policy – free trade, deregulation, liberal immigration policy, and low tax policy — was mainly determined by the big multinational corporations. The Bush and Obama bailout of banks damaged this alliance and produced the Tea Party, composed of elements from the GOP core, who railed against corporate welfare. They joined with libertarian capitalists like the Koch Brothers, who saw an opportunity to defeat the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) and privatize Medicare and Social Security. More mainstream capitalists tolerated this agenda as long as the Tea Party targeted unions and social services. The alliance continued through 2010 when Republicans won the House and deprived Democrats of their supermajority in Senate.

Unlike the political establishment, the Tea Party right supported stricter immigration controls. A large part of corporate America supported immigration and immigration reform. High tech

industries wanted access to skilled foreign professionals and labor intensive sectors like agriculture, construction, domestic service, child care, health care and hospitality relied on low wage immigrant labor. Both the Business Roundtable and the Chamber of Commerce oppose deportations. They wanted reform, a guest worker program, and some path to legal status.

The uneasy alliance between Tea Party and the big corporations ended in 2013 over the budget. Flushed with their victory in 2010, the GOP felt it was strong enough to legislate its agenda and President Obama believed he had to acknowledge the verdict. According to the proposed "Grand Bargain" of 2011, Democrats would have agreed to historic cuts in the federal government and the social safety net, in exchange for an increase in federal taxation. In the end, Speaker John Boehner withdrew the offer because the Tea Party opposed. This was the last straw.

Republican elites waged a campaign against the Tea Party to defend incumbents like Mitch McConnell. In 2014, they routed the rebels. Despite the Tea Party's ability to block discussion of immigration reform and force John Boehner out of Congress, calls by Tea Party to shut down government to block Obama's executive order on immigration failed. In December 2014 President Obama's budget passed, despite Tea Party opposition. Everyone thought the war was won.

But the Tea Party was reborn in the candidacy of Donald Trump. His hard line on immigration and his willingness to contemplate the notion of repaying the federal debt at less than full payment sounded a lot like Tea party talk. But he also championed an economic nationalism that rejected central tenets of the bipartisan neoliberal agenda – NAFTA, WTO, TPP. Although polls demonstrated that grass roots tea party members had opposed past trade agreements, its leaders – Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, Jim DeMint, – had been free traders.[5]

Trump's economic nationalism increased corporate opposition to Trump. Hillary Clinton received twice as much corporate money as he did. So, how did he win? Despite losing the popular vote by almost three million, voter participation among traditional Democratic segments fell everywhere, but decisively in several key "blue" states. The electorate included higher income voters in 2016 than in 2012 and among traditional Democratic voters – the less affluent, minorities, union households — Clinton obtained smaller percentages than did Barack Obama in 2012 [6]

Trump's ability to retain the Republican post 1960 voter base and reduced Democratic voting allowed him to eke out victory. The argument about why Democrats lost the white working class misses this larger point: In the 2016 election, Democrats underperformed among the entire working class—white, black, Hispanic, Asian.

On many issues Trump is intellectually promiscuous. Thus, the substitution of General H. R. Harwood for General Michael Flynn as National Security Adviser reveals that President Trump can tolerate vast differences on Russia, Iran, and Islam. Although we will soon discover what Trump really thinks, at this moment it is not clear what Trump's foreign policy will be. His

domestic cabinet appointments are from the far right. These choices reflect the rightward drift of the GOP as much as Trump's preferences.

But the heart of Trump's plans are economic. The most important jobs are head of the National Economic Council (Goldman Sachs banker, Gary Cohn), Secretary of Treasury (Steven Mnuchin, another Goldman alumnus who moved on to private equity), Secretary of Commerce (Wilbur Ross, private equity), United States Trade Representative (Robert Lighthizer, trade lawyer), and National Trade Council chair, (Peter H. Navarro, economist).

The distance between the first two and last three is a mile wide. Cohn and Mnuchin reflect the ideas of Goldman Sachs, which has been an architect and beneficiary of the global economic order. Lighthizer, Ross, and Navarro represent, in different ways, Trump's promises to reduce the U.S. trade deficit and create more U.S. manufacturing jobs. Unlike most of Trump's other appointees, each one has some support among "progressives."

Robert Lighthizer, a Republican, who served as deputy USTR during the Reagan years, has the support of progressive trade critics like Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. Wallach concluded that "Lighthizer is very knowledgeable about both technical trade policy and the ways of Washington, but what sets him aside among high-level Republican trade experts is that for decades his views have been shaped by the pragmatic outcomes of trade agreements and policies rather than fealty to any particular ideology of theory."[7] In short, he is not an orthodox free trader. Lighthizer has worked with the AFL-CIO on trade matters. Democratic Representative Sander Levin believes that he "understands the harmful impact of unfairly trade imports on U.S. workers and businesses."

The USTR was created in 1962 to remove trade negotiating from the State Department. Congress believed that State was sacrificing U.S. industries for its diplomatic priorities. Liberal Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois, an economist by training, claimed the department refused to admit that Europe maintained serious barriers. Explaining his vote for establishing the USTR, Douglas "concluded that the State Department could not be trusted to represent the Congress in economic matters."[8]

It did not work as intended and State still retained influence. Many USTR appointees were politicians who knew nothing about trade. For instance, Bill Clinton appointed Mickey Kantor as his first head. Whatever his political virtues, Kantor had no trade experience. President Obama also sought a politician, Ron Kirk who had recently failed in his bid to become US. Senator from Texas and was a lobbyist for an energy company. Negotiators from other nations, where trade is considered crucial to economic growth, are usually long-serving. In the U.S., turnover has been high. Lighthizer, with his knowledge of the law, experience negotiating treaties, and work in Congress, will be ready from day one and it looks as if he has already begun to act.

The new trade agenda document just published by USTR, probably written by Lighthizer, starts with the premise that the goal should be to "increase our economic growth, promote job

creation in the United States, promote reciprocity with our trading partners strengthen our manufacturing base and . . . expand our agriculture and service exports." This sounds banal expect for the fact that U.S. trade policy has long had goals to strengthen global alliances, developing the economies of allies, encourage foreign investment in developing countries, expanding the international rule of law. The statement explicitly rejects this past; "the notion that the United States should, for putative geopolitical advantage, turn a blind eye to unfair trade practices that disadvantage American workers, farmers, ranchers, and businesses in global markets." [9]

The document notes that the economic reality of U.S .trade results gave not lived up to the promise especially after 2001 when China joined the World Trade Organization. At his confirmation hearing on March 14, Lighthizer underscored that point and promised a more vigorous enforcement of U.S. trade laws, which in the past took a back seat to geopolitical considerations.

The two others, Wilbur Ross and Peter Navarro have been more controversial. Ross a billionaire investor operates in the world of distressed investing. In 2002-03, Ross made his name by buying and salvaging two big steel mills (LTV and Bethlehem Steel), which had been hobbled by cheap imports from Eastern Europe and Russia and poor management. Ron Bloom, who negotiated for the United Steelworkers of America, said that no one was willing to make an investment in the mills. For his efforts, Ross has won the endorsement of Leo Gerard, the president of the union. Gerard said that unlike many Wall Street investors who sucked capital out of the companies and left them to die, Ross "saved the companies and even restored some of the retirees healthcare benefits after a bankruptcy court wiped them out." He also turned to the workers themselves. Ross said "that fellow who has been standing behind a machine for 10 years, knows it better than the people who built it, really know what to do." Ross sold the mills and made a lot of money. But the mills are running and are very productive.[10]

His record in textiles is mixed. He has shipped jobs to China and Mexico but still kept some textile jobs in the U.S. Scott Paul, head of the Alliance for American Manufacturing, a union-business partnership that promotes American-made products, said "Wilbur Ross, he reminds me of a trauma surgeon, in a way, who's dealing with a patient who's in crisis. . . . You might lose a limb, but he's gonna save your life."[11] Ross has been a strong critic of American trade policy and like Lighthizer comes to his task with a vast amount of experience.

Peter Navarro, Trump's new head of a National Trade Council, is even more controversial. He holds a Ph.D in economics from Harvard and is most famous for a documentary film "Death by China," a lurid critique of China's role in the demise of American manufacturing. Nevertheless, the core of Navarro's critique has been confirmed by the less-caffeinated U.S.-China Economic and Security Commission and China expert Michael Pettis. Economist Dean Baker said "while Navarro makes many questionable argument in pushing his views on trade, his point that the trade deficit can reduce growth and employment is absolutely correct." [12] Navarro believes that China and Germany are currency manipulators, which aid their trade. He recently singled out Germany which has a trade surplus of 9 percent of GDP, the highest in the world. Although

it does not have its own currency, Germany has suppressed the real wages of its workers and encouraged a policy mix in the euro zone that has led to a weaker currency which makes an Airbus cheaper than a Boeing. Because the German surplus with southern Europe is also large, Germany has pointedly been criticized by the European Commission, especially in the wake of the Great Recession. Of course, the language was more diplomatic than Navarro's. Walter Manchau, an editor of the *Financial Times*, concludes, "Peter Navarro has a point."[13]

So, if his three economic nationalists have plausible resumes and ideas, can the administration and the Republican Congress implement them? Trump invites skepticism because of his extravagant language, implying that he will recreate the days of the 1950s and 1960s. Still, auto and steel have survived the waves of globalization and recession and continue to contribute to the U.S. economy, unlike the tech industry which at the first sign of trouble went to China. The Economic Policy Institute concluded that the US has lost 1.2 million computer and electronics jobs to China alone since 2001, when China joined the WTO. The twenty-first century economy will be dominated by autonomous vehicles and new materials made from lightweight metals. With a proper industrial policy, the potential for good jobs in these industries is significant.

The more significant question is can the Trump administration formulate a new trade policy. Polls suggest that the jobs/trade link is one of the issues on which Trump has popular support amid sagging approval ratings. Recently released 2016 trade data shows that the U.S trade deficit with China was $347 billion, almost half of the total deficit. One of the only first-day promises that he has not fulfilled was declaring China a currency manipulator. The executive order flurry has not included the widely expected termination of negotiations for a US China Bilateral Investment treaty which replicates key aspects of the TPP and NAFTA. This treaty, initiated by George W, Bush and almost completed by Obama would make it easier to offshore jobs to China. It would also give Chinese firms broader rights to buy US firms and other assets and would allow Chinese firms to attack US policies in extra judicial tribunals.

Perhaps the reason for Trump's failure to act is that two of his most important economic advisers Gary Cohn and Steve Mnuchin come from Goldman Sachs, a firm that is the Wall Street leader lobbying for the China treaty. Lighthizer, Ross, and Navarro have been outspoken critics of the treaty. Trump was silent on the treaty and currency in his speech to Congress. Does that mean that the Goldman Sachs position has already altered China policy?

On March 10, The *Financial Times* reported that there is a civil war within the White House over trade. NEC chair Gary Cohn has been adding staff on trade, including Andrew Quinn, a senior negotiator for the Obama administration's push for the TPP. Thea Lee, the top trade official at the AFL-CIO, and a member of the president's manufacturing council, thinks that "at the moment it appears the Wall Street wing of the Trump administration is winning this battle and the Wall Street wing is in favour of the status quo in terms of U.S. trade policy."[14] If Lee is right, Trump's hopes of making workers part of a GOP electoral coalition through new economic growth is a doomed mission. In short, the electoral coalition he cobbled together will be short-lived.

## Notes

[1] George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 191.

[2] Cited in Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 232.

[3] Zbigniew Brzezinsky*, Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-198*1 (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981), 314-15.

[4] Memcom with President Richard von Weizsacker, Apr. 29, 1992, 2, file Memcoms 3/3/92-4/28/92, 91109-007, National Security Council, Brent Scowcroft papers, George H. W. Bush Library, College Station, TX.

[5] Zaid Jilani, "Most Tea Partiers Think Free Trade Agreements That Tea Party Candidates Support Are Bad For The Country" ThinkProgress, Sept. 30, 2010 https://thinkprogress.org/most-tea-partiers-think-free-trade-agreements-that-tea-party-candidates-support-are-bad-for-the-7bd06e6157ae#.ttkpkia0g

[6] Those earning less than $50,000 made up 51 percent of US pop. They composed 41 percent of the electorate in 2012, only 36 percent in 2016; those earning over $100,000 a mere 17% of population rose from 28 to 33 percent; The electorate was more well off than in last three elections. If there were fewer voters earning less than $50,000, Hillary Clinton got less of them than did Barack Obama. He got 60 percent of those less than 50,000;, Clinton's share of these voters dropped to 51 percent. Black voters were 12% of the electorate; in 2012 they were 13 percent. Clinton got a smaller percentage of the black vote than did Obama.

[7] Vicki H.Needham, *The Hill*, Jan. 3, 2017.

[8] Steve Dryden, *Trade Warriors: USTR and the American Crusade for Free Trad*e, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 55.

[9] "The President's 2017 Trade Policy Agenda,"2017,"https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/reports/2017/AnnualReport/Chapter%20I%20-%20The%20President%27s%20Trade%20Policy%20Agenda.pdf

[10] "'Vulture or 'Phoenix'? Wilbur Ross, Risk-Taker, Is Eyed for Commerce Post," https://nytimes.com/2016/11/25/business/edealbook.wilbur-ross...

[11] Chris Arnold, “Wilbur Ross: The Best Commerce Secretary Pick Dems Could Hope for?” https://www.npr.org/2016/12/14/505258592/silbur-ross-the-est-com.

[12] Dean Baker, “Trump and Trade: He’s Largely Right,” Beat the Press, Feb. 21, 2017, https://cepr.net/blogs/beat-the-press/trump-and-trade-he-s-largely-right

[13] Wolfgang Munchau, “Peter Navarro has a point when it comes to Germany and the Euro,” https://www.ft.com/content/485bace6-ea0a-11e6-893c-082c54a7f539

[14] Shawn Donnan, “White House Civil War Breaks Over Trade,” *Financial Times*, Mar. 10, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/badd42ce-05b8-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9.

# Behemoth Revisited: National Socialism and the Trump Administration

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As Donald J. Trump, a *rentier* capitalist, television personality, and dilettante politician, became the unlikely winner of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, comparisons to 1930s Germany abounded in political commentary. Adopting themes, policy positions, and rhetorical styles reminiscent of National Socialists, Trump's ethnic nationalistic campaign promised to "Make America Great Again."

This was to be accomplished by cleansing the nation of "illegal immigrants," building a wall on the southern border with Mexico, excluding visitors from Muslim countries, locking up his political opponent, strengthening the military, and waging an enhanced war on terrorism. Trump further promised an "America First" economic policy that would repatriate manufacturing jobs by renegotiating trade deals and by establishing a regulatory and tax environment favorable to U.S. capital. During the general election campaign in the fall, Trump's campaign rallies drew larger, more effervescent crowds who chanted slogans of symbolic violence in response to Trump's increasingly strident rhetoric. Comparisons to National Socialism intensified after the election as Trump appointees with ties to the "Alt-Right" and European ethnic nationalist movements assumed prominent positions in his administration.

So, is Trump a new Hitler and is Trumpism a new form of Nazism? Rather than making simple assertions about similarities and differences between these two illiberal movements, this article approaches these questions with a (re) reading of the most detailed, classic analysis of the rise of Hitler, the Nazi Party and the Nazi state: Franz Neumann's (1944) *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944*.[1] Neumann, a labor lawyer, Marxist political scientist, and associate of the exiled Institute for Social Research, analyzed National Socialism as a contradictory structure of four "machines:" the machinery of the Nazi party, the apparatus of the bureaucratic-administrative state, the military, and industrial corporations in cartels, trusts and other monopoly capital forms. Tensions between these four machines were mediated by the Fuhrer or Leadership principle and by anti-Semitic "racial proletarian" ideology, both of which broke up class formation and class consciousness, atomizing workers into easily controlled and manipulated mass formations. As a social system, Nazism blocked workers from unifying against capital, preventing class solidarity and egalitarian democratic rights. Workers masochistically submitted to "leaders" while sadistically identifying as a racial "folk" superior to degraded, internal enemies.

Parallels abound between National Socialism and the Trump administration's positions and

ambitions. National Socialism and Trumpism shared a distrust of liberalism and fear of working-class solidarity that might challenge or overthrow capital. Both had an ambivalent relationship to the state, glorifying military power, hierarchy and obedience, and National Socialism further promoted an ideal of society "fused into the army."[2] National Socialism sought to invert liberalism's strong civil society/weak state by reasserting a particular form of state power over civil society. To Neumann, "the imperialism of German monopoly capitalism" had destroyed the economic foundation for bourgeois civil society that had depended upon small capital, handicraft industries and competitive trade. Monopoly capital had centralized, cartelized, and concentrated industry, forcing out small business and liberal civil society based upon it, leaving behind a "network of authoritarian organizations."[3] National Socialism did not seek to restore competitive small capital and civil society, but rather embraced the economic efficiencies that resulted from rationalization, concentration and bureaucratization.[4] Politically, monopoly capital dramatically expanded the pool of undifferentiated labor as small capitalists, craftspeople and tradesmen were displaced by big business. Enormous firms of great complexity yielded high efficiency, but reduced workers to an undifferentiated mass underneath highly technical administration.

The fallen or displaced middle-classes were one core constituency of National Socialism. But there were many others, including "the most diverse social strata … never hesitating to take in the dregs of every section, supported by the army, the judiciary, and parts of the civil service, financed by industry, utilizing the anti-capitalist sentiments of the masses and yet careful never to estrange the influential moneyed groups."[5] No single, stable ideology could tie these groups together. Neumann describes the ideological writings of National Socialists as "abominable, the constructions confused, the consistency nil. Every pronouncement springs from the immediate situation and is abandoned as soon as the situation changes."[6] Underneath "a mass of irrelevant jargon, banalities, distortions, and half truths" lay ongoing promotion of imperialism and the interests of monopoly capital.[7] Neumann's description of Nazi ideology mirrors contemporary analysts of Trump's confused pronouncements: the ideas are "constantly shifting," promoting "certain magical beliefs," including "leadership adoration … [and] the supremacy of the master race" but without system or consistency.[8] Like contemporary analysts of Trump's supporters, Neumann asserts that only a minority of Germans was ardent Nazi's. For most, its ideological message left them cold.

Both National Socialism and Trumpism were illiberal and critical of the weak political leadership of the "night watchman's" liberal democratic state."[9] Following Carl Schmitt, both reject the basic principles of liberal parliamentarianism: deliberation and debate, separation of powers, and universal law. To Schmitt, "rigid party discipline" meant that "debate is a fraud" and that "secret committees" made decisions behind closed doors so that the "publicity of the debate is a sham."[10] Since monopoly capitalism eroded the essential features of civil society (freedom of speech, assembly press, association), and since parliamentary procedures were ineffective, the desire for rapid decision, efficiency, and strength led to a glorification of executive power: hence, "all power to the president."[11] Trumpism clearly shares such a desire for executive sovereignty along the lines of Carl Schmitt.

## Schmitt's Decisionism, the Enemy, and the State of Exception

Carl Schmitt's "decisionism," which places the friend-enemy distinction at the center of politics, was the central political philosophy of National Socialism. In this philosophy, politics is organized by an essential struggle against enemies "who must be exterminated physically."[12] The political emerges when opponents, competitors, outsiders, subordinates, and challengers are redefined as "enemies" who can neither be tolerated nor accommodated but must be destroyed. The Nazi state was more authoritarian (hierarchical rule of leader over subordinates) than totalitarian (identity between ruler and ruled). Hence, hierarchical leadership was rooted in superior rank that was "valid against the people's will."[13] Nazi's viewed the state as the "form of life of the racial people" that provided "unconditional authority" for the state while maintaining (limited) autonomy for monopoly capitalism.[14] To Schmitt, sovereignty emergences in the capacity to declare and inhabit a "state of exception," a charismatic claim that sets aside rational-legal and traditional forms of law so that sovereignty is absolute, unlimited. Hitler famously assumed emergency powers that were sustained throughout the entire Nazi period: the Nazi state was in a perpetual exception, a non-ending state of emergency that provided Hitler supreme sovereign power.

"Adolph Hitler is top leader. He combines the functions of supreme legislator, supreme administrator, and supreme judge; he is the leader of the party, the army and the people. In his person, the power for the state, the people, and the movement are unified."[15]

Hitler was "sole legislator" whose will was the law, an embodiment of the executive, legislative and "infallible" judicial function, as well as supreme commander of armed forces, whose "power is legally and constitutionally unlimited."[16] A full appreciation of the nature of sovereignty and the absolute consolidation of power in the hands of Hitler as Fuhrer emerges from a review of the oath of office required of every soldier in the army: "I swear this holy oath to God; that I shall give unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, Leader of the Reich and the people, supreme commander of the army…" Similar oaths were sworn by all cabinet members and civil service office holders: "I swear that I shall be true and obedient to Adolf Hitler, the Leader of the German Reich and the people, that I shall obey the laws and fulfill my official duties conscientiously, so help me God."[17] These oaths of fidelity and loyalty to the person of Hitler contrast strongly against those sworn by U.S. soldiers: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States…"[18]

National Socialism was constituted by full Schmittian sovereignty, supreme leadership of a personal, idolatrous, *charismatic* kind that was unconditioned by rules, laws, regulations or universal law. The U.S. elevation of constitutional law to the position of sovereignty that could not (in ordinary times) be overridden or suspended by persons, has been a crucial defense against Nazism. This is what makes a "state of exception" so dangerous: the temporary suspension of the rule of law consolidates absolute sovereignty in the charismatically justified hands of a single person. Liberal democracies, including the U.S., have been rooted in the

separation of powers, deliberative decision-making, judicial review and, frequently, in multi-form array of jurisdictions (federal, state, local) that are inefficient and problematic from the standpoint of decisionism, but that serve as crucial circuit breakers against consolidated Nazi-like power. As Neumann reports, Hitler dissolved the power of individual states within the Reich to maintain state-level legislatures or to elect state officials. The Reich usurped all authority formerly possessed by states and municipalities so that authoritarian control was "complete from top to bottom."[19] It is difficult to imagine Trump (or his replacement should he be impeached) in possession of such sovereign power to remove all state governors and replace them with lackeys under his control.

Trump's rise to office occurred in the context of an almost non-existent legislative function in the U.S. Lawmaking, such as it was, during the 21st century, has been accomplished primarily through executive order or, in the language of Neumann, decree. The Schmittian state of exception similarly depowers the legislative function so that the executive absorbs lawmaking: Neumann describes the Nazi-era Reichstag as a "mere ornament." Similarly, the U.S. legislature has almost ceased to function as a lawmaking body. Congress and the Senate now serve primarily as a "check" or limit upon executive sovereignty: e.g. to advise and consent or to conduct investigations. Nazi criticisms of parliamentary deliberation and debate are strangely applicable to the U.S. situation prior to Trump. Though congressional and senate rules of evidence and procedure were nominally designed to facilitate high-quality debate and to optimize collective decision, such legislative debate rarely takes place. Party leaders in consultation with and command of corporate owners formulate public issues and policies outside of deliberation. U.S no longer deliberates issues in which representatives might change their minds or consider their colleague's words. Party discipline that aggressively punishes dissent prevents independent exercise of legislative judgment. Increasingly, actual law making has shifted to the executive branch that now serves as lawmaker in chief through executive decree.

## The Party over the State

Like contemporary Republicans in the U.S., Nazi's were primarily attached to and pursued the interests of party rather than country. As Hitler noted, "the state is not our master; we are the masters of the state."[20] Neumann characterized changing conceptions of the relationship of the Nazi party to the Nazi state by describing National Socialism both as a "movement state" and, using Carl Schmitt's phrasing, a "tripartite state," in which state, movement, and people (nation as racial *volk*) distinct from each other. The Nazi party provided leadership to all three parts, mediating between and uniting them. Neumann notes that in the USSR, the Communist party completely dominated the state; in Italy, the fascist state completely dominated the party; while in Germany, the Nazi state remained in tension with the party, united together by the leadership principle ("Adolf Hitler, who is both leader of the party and chief of state….").

The charismatic nature of Nazi party power brought it into contradiction with the "rational bureaucracy" of the administrative state.[21] The state was saturated with the characteristic traits specified in Weber's famous ideal type concept of bureaucracy: "precision, permanency,

discipline, reliability … rationality… impersonality … [action] without hate or passion … duty … without regard to person, with formal equality for everyone."[22] Charismatic authority operates on an entirely different logic – magical, emotional, unsystematic, vanishing — hence the party and its leaders by necessity rejected and attacked the administrative state because rational law and formal order were contrary to charisma. Decisionism, the supreme power of a sovereign under charismatic authority, depends upon the state of exception, which is by definition a suspension of bureaucratic, rational-legal authority. The fantasies of the Trump administration here seem fully aligned with its Nazi predecessor, as highlighted by Steve Bannon, Chief Strategist of the Trump White House, when he stated that a primary objective of the Trump administration is the "deconstruction of the administrative state" (see below).

The Nazi party as a bureaucratic structure was autonomous from the Nazi state to a remarkable degree, with its own party courts, its own party sources of revenue, freedom from state taxation and from state control. Yet, by the 1930s, the party had grow so large that it had itself become a massive bureaucracy with thousands of officials in leadership positions in both the party hierarchy and state bureaucracies, a paramilitary organization that rivaled many standing armies, massive youth organizations and leadership control over most of associations in civil society. Compared to Hitler, who was the most important architect and developer of the Nazi party and who was fully identified with the party as its leader, Trump's relationship to the Republican Party that he now leads was haphazard, even laughably accidental (he was registered as a Democrat in the early 2000s). Hitler's party had bureaucratic durability, despite its charismatic claims. Trump has built no party at all, but a mob of spectators with weak ties to party leadership. Hence, Trump's charisma rests upon a much more unstable footing: should he fail to prove his claims, there is no institutional structure to fall back on. Charismatic leadership is always a vanishing phenomena, and should Trump be impeached, quit, or become enfeebled, a "crisis of succession" will almost certainly arise.

Throughout Neumann's book, the paramilitary appears as a uniquely important structure in National Socialism. The S.S. and S.A. were under the command of party leadership and were autonomous from and immune to the state bureaucracy and from the directives of the official military.[23] Paramilitaries unleash all of the lethal violence of formal armed services, but without their rules, regulations and disciplinary controls. Germany had a long tradition of paramilitaries (militia) that served as retention structures for officers, soldiers, and munitions suppliers between formal military deployments. Paramilitaries such as the *Freikorp* mustered routinely, maintained discipline, traditions and systems of honor and were heavily involved in the extra-legal civil war after the end of WWI.[24] Trump's support was especially strong among gun enthusiasts and 2nd Amendment activists, including those with strong rebel-authoritarian tendencies and psychological attachment to myths of American outlaw biker gangs, badass militia, moonshine running stock car racers, and other cultural forms of anti-establishment rebellion.[25] Trump has even called upon his supporters to function as a paramilitary, asking them to harass and violently silence protestors at rallies and to ride Harley-Davidson's as a defensive shield against protestors at his inauguration. However, it is difficult to see his gun toting, 2ndAmendment defending supporters forming a party-directed standing army with sufficient strength, discipline and acumen to pose a threat to state-

sponsored armed forces (try to imagine a random collection of his aging, out-of-condition rally attendees marching in uniform, rifles at attention, vigorously goose-stepping in disciplined formation). Despite their admiration for Nazi militia, Trump supporters would simply not be able to function as a party-directed paramilitary equivalent to the S.S.

### Anti-Semitism and the Racial Volk

As a Marxist, Neumann analyzes National Socialism's "all-pervading anti-Semitism" as an ideology that disrupted working class solidarity and class-consciousness. Rather than identify as a proletariat vis-à-vis capital, anti-Semitism encouraged German workers to identify as a racial people (*volk*) vis-à-vis an exploitative, racialized enemy: "racism and anti-Semitism are substitutes for the class struggle."[26] The emphasis upon racial identity integrated German (Aryan) workers into a racial state while negating class struggles against capital. Anti-Semitism substituted the "Jew" for "capital" as the Schmittian political enemy that organized politics and society along racial, rather than class, lines. Jews were "held in readiness as a scapegoat for all the evils originating in the socio-political system."[27] Racial identity was not only implicated in definition of an internal political enemy, but also in the definition of external enemies and the project of German imperialism, defined as conquest of subordinate racial peoples. Together, anti-Semitism and racial identity supplanted class struggle with civil and imperial war.[28] The social psychology of National Socialism, following Fromm, was sadomasochistic: insignificant, isolated persons forced to submit to leaders with compensating discharge of sadism directed at internal and external enemies. Liberal democracies thrive when democratic characters embrace equality, spontaneity, and free development. National Socialism, on the other hand, was fully hierarchical. Anti-Semitism provided the white working class with social ascendancy over racialized others. The racial folk/Nazi state was strong when hierarchies were rigidly maintained and enforced. Nazi's formed a reactionary middle-strata fighting on two fronts: outwardly toward external enemies and downward to suppress internal enemies. Fueled by out-hating and down-hating, this reactionary middle strata never fought "up" against elites, but masochistically embraced their domination while sadistically kicking down against enemies below.

The racial ideology of Trumpism is eerily similar. Racism in many forms, including anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim, anti-Latino, and anti-Black are defined as Schmittian enemies for Trumps' followers. Each of these groups have rotated in turn as internal enemies that are down-hated by Trump supporters to elevate themselves in the social hierarchy. They have also rotated as external enemies out-hated by Trump supporters to purify and defend the racial people (*volk*). Metonyms for racial enemies appear frequently, including "liberal," "terrorist," and "criminal." Trumpism is held together by the perpetual ignition of these Schmittian friend-enemy distinctions and the charismatic power generated by follower's fear, hatred and aggression. The social psychology is more than just authoritarian or sadomasochistic, but destructive or necrophilic in Fromm's specific meaning.[29]

### Death of Civil Society and the Destruction of the Administrative State

Neumann highlights how bourgeois civil society (in a Weberian not a Marxist sense) was a barrier to the rise of National Socialism. The Nazi party sought to evacuate civil society, disrupt spontaneous social life, and overwrite free association with regimented administration. Liberal democratic society (autonomous civil rights, voluntary association, free assembly, free speech) was the enemy of the Nazi state. To weld atomized masses to the Nazi order, civil associations were broken apart and replaced with party-controlled substitutes. The forced atomization of classes into masses was one of the reasons why Neumann viewed German people as largely indifferent to Nazism. They were not fervently bonded to Nazi structures but were prevented from associating outside of them, always subject to party oversight, surveillance and control. Of course, a strong, vibrant civil society might have been a barrier to the rise of Trumpism, but civil society has been in decay in the U.S. for many decades (see the massive literature on community decline associated with Putnam's *Bowling Alone*). In the contemporary U.S., churches remain as almost the sole voluntary association in civil society, a potential resource for left-resistance. However, the largest "fast-growth" churches in the U.S. are firmly aligned with the cultural right and frequently function as right-wing mobilizing structures, herding their flock toward nationalist, neo-liberal and neo-conservative candidates using a variety of hooks and crooks (abortion, gay marriage, gender). Outside of work, most Americans are tied to the wider world through the glowing screens of spectacle, which often places them in streams of data that confirm rather than challenge nationalist, capitalist and conservative views.

National Socialism's hostility to the bureaucratic state was linked by Neumann to its charismatic party structure: the rules, regulations and universal law of the state generated a "Big Other" that mediated conflicts through a stabilized symbolic structure. The bureaucratic state stood between individuals, establishing a normative order. Without the triadic function of the state, parties in conflict must engage in dyadic struggle of a zero-sum variety. The Big Other of the state enables aspirants and contenders to compete without destruction, generating win-win social surpluses. By taking over the state, the Nazi party captured such social surpluses, enriching and empowering its members at the expense of the underlying society. The leadership principle and the massing of workers contributed to this exploitative situation. Leaders throughout the Nazi regime acted by arbitrary decision (decree) not by rational law. The power of the leader was unconstrained and unchecked to such a degree that law itself vanished. At the end of the book, Neumann argues that National Socialism was not a state because law did not exist, only arbitrary decision.[30]

National Socialism's supreme sovereignty attacked all agents of the Big Other that mediated disputes and settled questions of truth: the judiciary, science, disciplined scholarship, investigative journalism. All information that remained was propaganda (which Neumann defined as "violence against the soul") that advanced the interests of the Nazi party. The Trump administration has made similar moves for similar reasons. Bannon's destruction of the administrative state targeted institutional agencies of the Big Other that generated and made "triadic" decisions based upon analysis of data. Science, public schools, environmental

agencies, labor department, health and human services, interior department, state department all have been identified for severe budget and staff cuts. The government departments that have escaped in tact are those associated with "hard power," such as the military, police, and prison administration. Trumpism aims to remove these triadic structures that mediate between differentiated interests, thus reducing all action to dyadic friend-enemy extermination or zero-sum conflict. Under Trumpism, the judiciary is also under siege, in part because it has been a safeguard of universal rights, a place of universal justice. In Trumpism, the judiciary is just another forum for friend-enemy struggle. Rather than providing impartial judgment of the Big Other, courts will be reduced to arenas for humiliation, defeat, and struggle between small others. Courts are not about justice, in this worldview, but "winning."

The Trump administration also seeks to "complete" the neoliberal project pursued by conservatives at least since Reagan, gutting social services, repealing health care, cutting minimum wage and labor protections, removing collective bargaining protections, and forthcoming cuts to social insurance coupled with removal of civil rights protections for those who protest or resist the regime. The Trump administration also refuses to submit to international authority or collective agreements and has already weakened U.S. support for multi-national associations like NATO, the G-20, and even the United Nations. This is, again, an attempt to remove the triadic function of universal law, a Big Other, such that all nations are placed upon a single plane of dyadic struggle for power and "negotiation." In such a system, the military and economic might of the U.S. will be leveraged to cut better "deals" in one-on-one bargains.

Both National Socialism and the Trump administration insisted upon preserving social and economic hierarchies while removing any triadic institution to serve as a "Big Other" that mediates between players in never ending friend-enemy dyadic struggles. Trump himself – a multi-billionaire by his own reckoning — refuses to pay and legally attacks small contractors, small political actors, and even small children as enemies that must be annihilated. This is the mark of a Lacanian psychotic psyche: structure is missing, hence paranoid insecurity lest one be defeated and displaced from the social order.

Trumpism, ultimately, is historically conditioned by the waning of post-Fordism and neoliberalism. Fordism – the relatively egalitarian regime of stabilized mass production and mass production, coupled with social democratic redistribution of income to ensure full employment – was already in full retreat in the early 1970s. Post-Fordism – explosive growth in income and wealth inequality resulting from the globalization of industry, deregulation and destruction of the social democratic state – is now in its fifth decade. Fordism has been in decay longer than it was in construction. There is already little actual memory of what life was like under Fordism. It is no longer a memory, merely a myth, and a pastoral for the 21st century. National Socialism arose contemporaneously with and was economically parallel to Fordism. As Neumann noted: "National socialism is built on full employment. That is its sole gift to the masses … unemployment must be prevented so as to retain this one link that still ties the masses to its ruling class."[31] National Socialism, unlike Trumpism, actually provided employment, social insurance, old age benefits, health and accident insurance to the working

(Aryan) masses. Compared to Nazism, Trumpism provides its supporters equal levels of sadomasochism and racial hatred, but far fewer economic benefits.

## Conclusion

So, is Trump a new Hitler and is Trumpism a new form of Nazism?

Trump is at best a dilettante, an outsider to the political process, who parlayed the display value of celebrity into incessant media attention and votes. Hitler spent decades as a political operative, building the Nazi party and its extensive bureaucratic and paramilitary apparatus. Trump is over seventy years old, a narcissistic libertine used to incredibly soft living and sycophantic adoration from those he pays to be near him. Hitler was in his early forties when the Nazi's seized power in Germany and had already bitten his cyanide pill at fifty-six. It is too late for Trump to personally forge Trumpism into any kind of lasting movement or to completely reform the Republican Party in his ethnic nationalist image. Trump's sophomoric rhetorical skills and political ineptitude stand in marked contrast to almost any political leader. He has no obvious successor to replace him; his followers are hetereogenous and lack institutional stability. Given that charisma is always a vanishing form of domination, Trump will soon fail to prove his charismatic claims and his followers will cease to recognize him. He will appear to them as he does to most of us, a comic buffoon rather than a great political leader.

Trumpism exhibits many features that Neumann found in National Socialism. Both movements unite disparate, even contradictory "machines" into a single system: Nazism united a party apparatus, the military, the bureaucratic state and monopoly capital with a powerful racial ideology and charismatic leadership. Trumpism lacks a party apparatus (though the Republican party is temporarily on loan to Trump), but unites military, administrative state functions and globalized, neoliberal capitalism with a powerful racial ideology and destructive, but inept, charismatic leadership. Nazism was grounded in a much stronger form of Schmittian decisionism than Trumpism, meaning that the "state of exception" providing emergency powers was declared early and sustained throughout the Nazi regime, the friend-enemy distinction was deployed consistently and aggressively to sustain charismatic political power, and the leader/Fuhrer principle was deployed with great aggression. Trumpism, though grounded in a charismatic movement, has not, so far, been able to set aside universal law, rules and regulations by declaring a state of exception. This means that the friend-enemy distinction has not been deployed as violently or aggressively, and the leadership principle remains weak and checked by judiciary, legislative and even bureaucratic power. Despite an obvious desire to subvert norms of political civility central to liberal democracy, Trumpism has not been able to suspend law itself. Executive orders have been negated by judicial review, legislative processes and inquiries have been instituted to constrain and control attempts to increase executive authority. National Socialism developed a strong, bureaucratic and paramilitary party apparatus that was able to override and dominate the state. Trumpism has partially hijacked the Republican Party, but lacks its own party structure and is simply trying to deconstruct the administrative state rather than place the party in control of it. Finally, Nazism was fundamentally tied to the historical moment of Fordism and delivered to its (Aryan) adherents

full employment and a basic array of social insurance and welfare protections. Trumpism is tied to the historical moment of waning post-Fordism and neoliberalism, and despite rhetorically promising to bring manufacturing jobs back to America, is actually completing the neoliberal project of dismantling the social insurance, welfare, regulatory and taxation systems without delivering jobs or prosperity to even its most fervent ethnic nationalist supporters.

## Notes

[1] Franz Neumann. *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-44*. With an Introduction by Peter Hayes, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009[1944].

[2] Ibid, p. 6.

[3] Ibid, p. 14.

[4] Ibid, p. 17.

[5] Ibid, p. 33.

[6] Ibid, p. 37.

[7] Ibid, p. 38.

[8] Ibid, p. 39.

[9] Ibid, p. 42.

[10] Ibid, p. 43.

[11] Ibid, p. 44.

[12] Ibid, p. 45.

[13] Ibid, p. 48.

[14] Ibid, p. 50.

[15] Ibid, p. 84.

[16] Ibid, p. 84.

[17] Ibid, p. 84-5.

[18] Oath of Enlistment, U.S. Army Website, https://www.army.mil/values/oath.html

[19] Neumann, p. 55.

[20] Ibid, p. 65.

[21] Ibid, p. 80.

[22] Ibid, p. 80.

[23] Ibid, p. 69-71.

[24 See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. I want to thank Tony A. Feldmann for our conversation about the missing paramilitary in Trumpism.

[25] Daniel Krier and William J. Swart. *NASCAR, Sturgis and the New Economy of Spectacle.* Leiden: Brill, 2016, p. 150-82.

[26] Neumann, p. 125.

[27] Ibid, p. 125. Neumann here anticipates Slavoj Zizek's argument in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso), 2008.

[28] Ibid, p. 199.

[29] See Doug Kellner, "Donald Trump as Authoritarian Populist: A Frommian Analysis," *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture*, 15: 2,3, 2015.

[30] Neumann, p. 452.

[31] Ibid, p. 431.

# Beyond the Collapse: Clearing the Ground for What is to Come

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Regimes in their death throes, attached to and driven by no longer viable forms of institutional power and psychosocial organization, do not go quietly. To the contrary and to the horror of those who watch, and see, they relentlessly tighten their faltering grip using every dark bit of leverage those forms allow. In the process, ever more blatantly and shamelessly sharpening the contradictions – and their sentence of fatality – awaiting, ever more conspicuously they act out the condemnation of history that they have come fatalistically to expect.

“It shouldn’t be that way.” “Isn’t there something we can do to stop them?,” you say, the wanton cruelty, the gloating callousness to others’ basic humanity, to the fate of the world, and the species, even (especially?) to their own ultimate survival? What accounts for such virulent irrationality beyond Freud’s mere positing of a primal death wish, an explanation refuted by the continuing and expanding presence of life on earth over the vast millennia? Always in a Shakespeare tragedy, all the lead characters’ bodies strewn about, someone must pick up the pieces and carry on.

We have come, for some suddenly, into the dynamic space between Thucydides and Plato at the origins of Political Theory. Perhaps we witness again the collapse of the Athenian dream of release from the circularity of fate into linear progress probingly chronicled by Thucydides, a dream whose very hubris ensured for that writer the same outcome as the early Greek tragedies. Yet it was Plato who pointed us away from such a narrow framing, who insisted on what Hegel following Augustine would inscribe in history, that the destinies of great projects flow not from their geopolitical aggrandizements but from the ideals that are shaped in their ascent (and often furthered by their geopolitical failure and cultural decline).

No one would conclude from this that the lead actors in *this* tawdry tale of implosion have an inkling of their role as the tarmac of history. They have seen a vacuum open at the center of the American world-historical – in the negative and positive sense – project, and have leapt to fill it. “Surely the center will hold,” those once-progressives intent on defending Obama’s quixotic and myopically flawed political geometry assert. “This is just another swing of the pendulum,” we hear, “by which America provides space for political and cultural differences in its big tent.”

One may want to respond that every regime tolerates its internal tensions until it doesn’t, that the present crisis is upon us because most Americans took for granted that the center would hold despite the vast erosion of core political, legal, economic, and psychosocial structures

over several decades, that even as these seismic changes led them to withdraw their faith in the classic American institutions and values they preferred to indulge in a massive feeding frenzy, assuming the old order would carry on without their fealty. Instead of boldly embracing their own shift in values and aspirations from a ruthlessly competitive, hierarchical and consumption based society, they turned away from their own recognitions, their own new imaginings, counting on the elites to keep the ship on course and protect them from having to really identify new ways to live and new institutions and social practices to ensure the advance and consolidation of the transformative post-industrial project.

And now, in shock, Americans want to blame the elites for grabbing the whole thing they were given, we called it euphemistically and enthusiastically marketizing, incentivizing, privatizing, deregulating, the schools and the environment, and the sciences and the universities, and the financial markets and the military cadres projecting global power and force. We say to these elites they have no right, but they show us the warrant we signed – "hold onto the center for us while we bowl alone, and just make sure that we do not get a call in the middle of the night that something has gone horribly wrong, let us sleep the sleep of the well-fed and the complacent, of moralists without morality and pietists without religion and armchair warriors armed with 401K's and a place in Florida."

Well, the wakeup call has come anyway, that we are in the midst of a constitutional coup, that the center – the legislative and judicial and state governmental and electoral and administrative checks – has flown the other coop, that it is now a one-party state, the envy of an earlier Latin America, poised through control of the system and the states to repeal the twentieth century and force through constitutional amendments that would make Pinochet blush. And why the center did not hold, why there was no center there *to hold*, is just the first step in a process of painful – and yet ultimately liberating – realizations.

The collapse of the consensus about the viability – and indeed the ultimately validity – of the American experiment as the cutting edge of modernity dates from the early 1960s. It was *not* conservatives but cultural radicals and political progressives, most eloquently expressed by an emerging generation of youths and young adults in the *Port Huron Statement*, but also by Fromm, Riesman, Galbraith, Marcuse, and a host of others cultural analysts, who recognized that in the unprecedented productivity of post-industrial society opportunities for post-work priorities, creative and innovative ways of living, unprecedented distributional justice and self-realization, community and democracy were more attainable than ever before. They in turn challenged the addictive consumption and routinized work, the atrophied selfhood and lack of authenticity and meaning, of dreams and aspirations, signified in the end of ideology and the installation of the organizational liberal behemoth as the ultimate American dream. Above all, the new measure of a life well lived was now the extent of self-actualization within meaningful lives and communities, no longer the effectiveness of self-repression and self-routinization and self-abandonment in the name of future commodified returns in status, power, and privilege.

Set loose by modern post-industrialism and the consumer society from traditional normative (superego) expectations of moral rectitude and the utilitarian demand for efficient and system

supporting practices of the Protestant-liberal work ethic, the initial dreams fostered by release led many to embrace the immediacy of unconstrained gratification. Inattentive to the long-term complexities and challenges of institutional and psychosocial transformation, they allowed indulgence to become an end in itself, further exacerbated by the consumerist mobilization of hedonism. As a result, the momentum for significant change stalled. Many radicals and progressives began drifting toward mainstream values and certainties, not out of conviction but rather self-doubt, pragmatism, and disillusionment.

And yet, with the cogency of the critical analysis of the increasing emptiness and misdirection of American life and the realization that everything was now permitted, the invisible internalized tie lines holding most Americans to their traditional commitment to its values and institutions dissipated. Suddenly, the message spreading through the culture was that limits and restraints were only for those too compliant to indulge. Even the conservative defenders of traditional psychic and behavioral arrangements from more repressive backgrounds, both elites and populous, heard the call. With little capacity to or interest in forging a new common ethos, this large constituency could not resist acting on the temptation to seek revenge, to lash out against the "destroyers" of their way of life, to reassert their sense of dominance, often patriarchal, against those who were trying finally to improve their life conditions or assert their individuality. At a much deeper, largely inaccessible level, rage also erupted from betrayal by the system that had stunted their lives and sense of possibility, that had fed them the rhetoric of the American dream with only fishhooks inside to grab possession of their souls. The irony was that this reactive and reactionary, destructive and self-destructive, campaign that increasingly fuels American life was equally the product of consuming appetites.

The result was a release of desire through the culture without any impetus toward self or social transformation or even normalizing order. These conservative turned reactionary legions were easily manipulated by elites intent on consolidating power. Mobilizing disaffected constituencies with a serial con game, promising the fulfillment of unrealizable apocalyptic fantasies of return to an imagined sense of unlimited privelege and promise from Reagan to W to Trump, they undertook a concerted effort to disassemble the system and its institutional limits on unrestrained power. Meanwhile progressives and liberals and other cultural experimenters, lacking any alternative vision and fearing the oncoming deluge, became (quixotic and half-hearted) defenders of the system from which they had just pulled the rug of legitimacy. Pursuing meritocratic careers and similarly pushing their young into the system of institutional rewards, they turned to the accumulation of technocratic credentialism and administrative leverage.

To what end? As Thomas Frank has emphasized in *Listen, Liberal*, the meritocratic pursuit was no longer attached as in the past to the rise of administrative cadres who had seen their mission as advancing anti-plutocratic forms of social justice and administrative fairness. The new agenda was rather to institutionalize 'rational' and efficient and cost effective social policies that would legitimate their role as the managers of power. But lacking any broader ends for the society as a whole, the meritocratic center no longer maintained its connection with any electoral base or constituency with and for whom it labored. It thus became its own

form of privilege for itself and its progeny in contest with plutocratic privilege, fighting up the organizational ladder and mobilizing its children with every benefit and form of social capital to commandeer the social capital for competitive advance. Exploiting their advantages over those young who came from the sectors with less social capital they had once sought to help, they now regarded ordinary citizens as less successful or worthy or deserving of help, for they had failed in the meritocratic Hunger Games. In this way, the link to the larger public was further severed.

The problem was that, lacking goals and constituencies, the meritocratic sector has been easily co-opted by the organized and determined plutocratic sector which has carried out a forty year (and longer) campaign for control. For it is this sector which provides jobs, careers, rewards and status, organizational and governmental leverage, cultural and non-profit funding and the many forms of university research and competitive branding that now sustain the careers of talent. And with the merging of government and plutocracy now fully consolidated, its exertion of control over the meritocracy will enter a new phase of overt dominance. This was the reality that Hillary Clinton could not either counter or address, that her predecessors Bill and Barack rendered inevitable by deferring to the corporatization of the nation and the isolation of the meritocracy from the rest of society

Ironically, this shift leaves this once-liberal sector more closely allied to the organizational and corporate elites than to sectors in need of change. They have no independent base in their position of subservience to pursue either an egalitarian institutional agenda to assist descending white and minority constituencies or a cultural, psychosocial agenda of greater post-industrial self-realization and humanized communities. Moreover, as the Reaction gains steam and the effort to repeal the New Deal proceeds, the result is a progressive relapse to a focus on basic living standards reminiscent of the first half of the twentieth century and the utter absence from public discourse of demands so obviously needed to address the structural shifts of post-industrialism with new social priorities.

The present situation would appear to be one of great danger. In a condition in which both internal and systemic restraints have been seriously breached and even undone and appetitive monomania carries its own justification, the elites believe they can mobilize mass affect for a plutocratic consolidation. The notion that mass expectations can be reduced now that appetite is out of containment is hard to imagine, particularly given that it is now in service of unbounded elite appetites and agendas. Given that these elites are themselves out of control – and have been increasingly since Reagan, however, it is hard to imagine them convincing anyone of the need for moderation. With fear of elites (the classic strategy of repression) of limited mobilizing value to commandeer a formal if corrupt popular society, the more likely course will be diverting mass appetite from recognition of mainstream decline toward the fear of others.

The likelihood, in other words, of a traditional authoritarian, neo-feudal solution of popular compliance is substantially lower than of need to appease a mobilized public with at least some faux populist trophies. To appease mass appetites without offering anything of substance that

will even slightly diminish their Midas-like hunger suggests the path of least squares toward war, scapegoating, repression of the marginal, the Thucydidian trajectory of imperial limitlessness, displays of naked power and will, at first costing only speeches but very quickly to the fatal drain on treasure and soul that empires eventually accede to with the inevitable – sooner rather than later – overreach.

Where does that leave us? A window into the underlying dynamic is provided in the 2016 film *Neruda* by Pablo Larrain. This cat-and-mouse chase featuring the Chilean poet and a member of the fascist police explores how fascism is driven by no vision of its own but rather by its resentful inability to imagine and create lives of meaning. The hunt for Neruda represents the effort to expunge the tellers of transformative and humanizing stories because of this moral and spiritual vacancy, their vast cisterns of nihilist self-inadequacy (and really envy) fueling the underlying rage and violence. Once we understand that the Reaction is driven by the elite mobilization of uncontrollable rage and envy, we can get a better sense of how historically outmoded movements mobilize and gain power.

The fact that this movement is immune from questions of real outcomes or even real goals beyond revenge, from the logic of governance or the urgent global issues now accelerating, from the contradictions, hypocricies, and self-aggrandizing irrelevances of its leaders, makes it necessary to address the underlying feelings of envy, of being cut off, starved, ruthlessly deprived, of the possibilities of genuine self-actualization that other sectors seek to realize. This Claggart-like desperation to immobilize and demean others, to beggar all who yearn for well-being and wholeness, an insatiable need to destroy anything that hints of hope, now shorn of its theocratic apocalypticism in naked aggression, reveals what we are up against. Moreover, as we watch this culture that has everything but its own inner compass and feels deprived, hollowed out, betrayed by large dreams that have turned to dust, that indulges in the immediate because it has no time line for the future, pursues a scorched earth campaign because it has nothing to plant, we must know that the system that we have long realized was at the end of its days is preparing its own final acts.

This dynamic of being caught by historical change, unable to adapt, is one that lies behind similar self-destructive movements. Most notably, Wilhelm Reich described the mass psychology of fascism as the reaction of vast groups of Central Europeans raised with traditional authoritarian character structures who were unable to adjust to the collapse of village economies and the rise of individualistic modern society with its meritocratic capitalist industry and fluid and morally unregulated urbanism. We can see here how elite class warriors are playing the cards of race and gender war to mobilize groups unable to adapt to the loss of male and white psychosocial status with the rise of a post-industrial, technocratic society. Humpty-Dumpty, the privileges attaching to traditional American life, cannot be put back together nor its provincial incentives and shelters maintained as its own best and brightest leave for the city and technocratic lives, leaving wastelands of neglect and futility.

This paradoxically makes them the perfect lever for continual mobilization. These are groups that never came to terms with modern liberal individuality, and have fallen continually behind

as they have felt the nation taken away from them. With the further shift to post-industrialism and a yet more developed sense of self-actualization, which in turn propelled people toward greater wishes for social justice and diversity and new forms of individuality, further away from traditional status markers, all the stops have come off the rage and wish for retribution.

As for the elites, there are always such groups with a diminished sense of self lurking to exploit psychosocial vacuums to fill their desperation for power and advantage to feel worthy, and it is not entirely accidental that Trump's favorite (only?) reading is Hitler's speeches. The American constitution was designed to protect elites from factions, but factions per Madison of the poor and urban constituencies. As a result, there were no safeguards against an organized elite faction with a broad reach that could much more easily mobilize on a national level as they had precisely done with the Declaration, the Revolution, and the Constitution itself.

Richard Rorty, in accurately foreseeing a couple of decades ago in *Achieving Our Country* the cosmopolitan, meritocratic turn away from social justice and equality toward caste privilege just as a new hereditary caste elite of the "international super-rich" was seizing power and the left was disappearing, called on and called out progressives to reject the incendiary path of claiming an "America unforgiveable" and more so "unachievable." I believe contrarily from more recent evidence that America as an early modern psychocultural and institutional achievement is not capable of taking the next step to new post-industrial forms of self-development and mutuality. This would require in Erich Fromm's terms the cultivation of motivations of psychological abundance, selfhood, and internal empowerment rather than the incessant, unyielding drives of deficit and deficiency that fueled the liberal age. Too many, even progressives and radicals, have not yet come to terms with inward wholeness and empowerment (we thus, as Deresiewicz's "excellent sheep," have more but *are* less or not enough), to take on the power grab in the short run that seeks with total power to reinscribe absolute authority.

Plato saw as Thucydides that the logic of this system has an endpoint as tyranny consumes itself. The question for Plato and for theory (and all of us), however, is "what do we want instead?" As the contradictions and cleavages intensify, the disparity between the claims of this society that it fulfills appetites and the increasing wish for real gratification and authorship will become apparent. As the progressive and counterculture search for lasting and intrinsic fulfillment, for genuine meaning, self-worth, broke the liberal containment and appropriation of genuine libidinal possibility, a way forward will emerge: a new psychosocial and psycho-historical framework, such as that envisioned by Plato amidst the ruins of Thucydides' Athens, a new ethos not like Plato's proto-Christianity but based in a much different age on Rousseau's distinction between a self-love that is abundant and genuine versus that vanity which arises from felt deficiency and the terrible hunger for (any) compensation to fill the hole at the center of one's being.

The goal will be an authority constituted within oneself, in one's own being, to flourish individually and collectivity while repelling aggrandizers and tempters and appropriators. This is the society gestating, the world that will emerge among the young, of the meritocracy, of the

excluded, perhaps even of the plutocracy, who see in the paths of their parents and adult society lives of self-repression, self-abandonment, empty sorrow, hollow appetite, and power without meaning, who yearn for a world of self-embrace and care for others.

Those who foresee this new world are, then, not simply victims of the present scourge, but the instigators of the present civilizational crisis as a way toward making new dreams viable, who pulled out of a collapsing world view because of a more expansive humanity that could no longer fit, who recognize that this world will not emerge in the interstices and channels of the old (though born there), but in spaces where transformation is both possible and nurtured, where the ground has been cleared and prepared.

We and the generations that follow are thus makers of history, the seekers of a more realized world of possibilities that liberalism gave birth to but in the end could not provide. As I sat recently at an American soul and gospel concert on Christmas eve in Valencia, Spain, a capitol of the Spanish Republic, and saw local residents join hands in the transracial and transethnic dance of a new birth as reimagined by those from across the ocean, it struck me that the spirit released by American envisioning and the American promise, symbolized in the great movements and alternative cultures of the post-war era, will connect with others, republicans, indignados, anarchists, seekers, democrats, poets, who will come together in many places and many ways. Rome must come to an end – even if by the hand of its leader-executioners – that we all may move ahead. It is for us to create that path.

# Women, Class, Gender and the Trump Agenda

By | 2017: vol. 16, nos. 1-2

### Introduction

First I want to explain where I am coming from. I am coming from the theory of class in the household developed by me and Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff in the book *Class Struggle on the Home Front*, (Palgrave 2009) based on their recreation of Marxian theory. I will present the recent revolutionary class and gender transformations in the household and then discuss Trump's class and gender agenda for today's women.

I look at Trump through two lenses: one the lens of gender and the other the lens of class. Here is what I see.

The US is has experienced a radical class-gender transformation in the last 40 years. This radical transformation has remained outside of revolutionary discourse because it is a revolution in the household, family and male-female relationships. Trump is orchestrating a devolution to different class gender transformations.

### Revolutionary Class and Gender Transformations in the Household

For 155 years from 1820 to 1975 American white men received a family wage, a wage sufficient to support a dependent wife and children. For most of that 175 years, reliable birth control was non- existent and abortions were illegal. Sex resulted in pregnancy. As the popular song of the time said "Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. This I tell you brother, you can't have one without the other." Pregnancy outside of marriage was a shame on the family of the pregnant girl coincidentally, not the impregnating boy. Under those circumstances, child birth. child rearing and domestic labor were the expected future for white women. During that long period from 1820 to about 1975, white men received 2 wage supplements: one for being white and another for being male. A tight labor market further restricted by our racist, sexist hiring practices enabled that double benefit for white males. Minority men never made a family wage, leaving minority women doing the two jobs that the overwhelming majority of US women now have. They did a full time job working in the home and a "second shift" outside of it. For most of US history our nation was a significantly white nation.

In the mid 1970s multinational sophisticated communications systems, and computers allowed US corporations to outsource tens of millions of what were well paid family waged jobs. US

capitalists could hire Chinese, Indian, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and other third world workers at bizarrely low wages.[1] They could operate in nations like India, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The nations to which corporate America outsources have weak, unenforced, or non-existent worker protections, labor benefits or ecological standards.[2] US workers cannot compete with low wages like the $38.00 a month paid to Bangladeshis. The costs of multinational communication's systems and pollution inducing transport are nothing in comparison the profits from mechanization, computerization, and outsourcing, since profit is the capitalist goal, outsourcing is a "no brainer" for US capitalists.

The traditional family could not be sustained without the family wage to support it. Thus, the traditional US family wage collapsed. It is at an all-time low (https://fathersworkandfamily.com/2013/06/03/the-pew-research-report-breadwinner-moms-misleading-headlines-and-the-challenges-of-dual-income-households/)

**What Kind of Family Household Is the Traditional US Family Household**

The traditional family is in Marxian terms a classically "feudal" family. Like the feudal serf of medieval Europe who worked in a castle owned by the Lord of the Manor, the traditional wife works in a household owned or rented by her husband.[3] In the home, the wife produces use values, services and goods that are just for use, not for sale. They are produced for the husband and his children. Most wives still provide services. Some of them are cooking, serving, creating order and cleanliness, emotional services, sexual services, social services for the husband, children and their families and friends, caring for the ill or elderly parents or in laws, and child care. One portion of the use values the traditional, feudal wife produces are for herself, they allow her to survive according to the cultural economic standard for survival[4], the rest is for the family. In parallel fashion, the feudal serfs retained a portion of the use values they produced for the Lord. That is the portion on which they survived and produced more serfs. The rest of the goods and services they produced they rendered to the Lord. Those services were all those things from growing food to harvesting, preserving and serving food, for the Lord and his retinue and performing all of the menial labor of maintaining the Lords estate.

The feudal system was reinforced by Catholic ideology that justified the feudal class arrangement as the work of the supreme Lord God. In parallel fashion all current fundamentalist religions reinforce feudal gender ideology whether they are Christian fundamentalist, Jewish Orthodox, or strict Muslim. They justify women's subordination and housewifely labors as God's will. In the words of the Southern Baptist Convention on Men and Women, "The marriage relationship models the way God relates to his people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation."

As I stated, for the overwhelming majority of Americans, the economic basis for this feudal household has disappeared. A look at the statistics brings it "home", so to.speak In 1960, 12 % of women were in the labor force. They were primarily unmarried or minority women. By 2015, 60% of women were in the labor force including 70% of mothers. By now fully 40% of married women are not only working, but at work, they earn more money than their husbands (https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/30/business/economy/women-as-family-breadwinner-on-the-rise-study-says.html).

Women, like serfs, were utterly economically dependent on the Lord of the Manor, and men for a living and sustenance for their children. They adopted gender roles to match their dependency and servitude: graciousness subservience, performance of household and emotional and social labor, sexual subservience, etc. Men, like feudal lords were supposed to protect their wives, (serfs) but wives, like feudal medieval serfs, had no protection from their husbands (Lords).[5] Revolutionary gender changes began when a militant women's movement accompanied women's greater financial freedom. Many African American women already had that freedom as a result of their economically forced labor outside of the home.

**New Class Gender Forms in the Household**

The feudal family is mostly gone along with its primary economic condition of existence, the family wage. Families and households have gone through revolutionary class and gender change. Two new forms have emerged.

One is the independent gender and class household. In the independent gender/class household, a person lives alone or alone with a dependent child. He/She perform s his/her domestic, emotional, and sexual labor. An aspect of the feminist ideology of independence from men provides ideological justification, thus the saying, "A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle" as well as Annie Leonard and Aretha Franklin's hit song "Sisters are Doing it for Themselves." The American cult of the individual, provides additional gender and class ideological reinforcement. Americans increasingly live alone. Single person families are burgeoning as are families of single women and their children (Klinenberg 2012, Livingston 2015 [6]). These are "independent families" in which one adult or an adult with young children meets his/her own domestic emotional and sexual needs.

A second family form to emerge also represents a class transformation of domestic and emotional labor. It is the communal family. In the communal family, all labor is shared communally in the communal or communist class process. That includes the labor inside of the household as well as the proceeds of all labor in the marketplace. Decisions of how to proceed domestically and emotionally are shared. There is no hierarchy. This family class gender form is ideologically reinforced by the Left, couples and family therapies, and the feminist ideology of gender equality. Although the communal family form is far reaching, it has not been formally named. Thus far, statistics of its extent are unknown.

The feudal, independent and the communal households are human forms. No human

phenomenon is rigidly and totally pure in its practice. A woman may live in a feudally arranged household owned by her husband for who she does all of the domestic labor. At the same time, she may have a small business of knitting homemade sweaters, which she controls completely using the proceeds entirely at her own discretion. [7] A woman may perform all the domestic labor in a feudal manner while sharing the emotional labor and sexual labor communally. She may enjoy a household of communal sharing while having a sexual relationship based exclusively on serving her man's sexual needs. These terms are for clarification of what is happening in the class gender transformations of the household. The clear lines they represent are for the purposes of clarification only. Life is never neatly codified.

Each of these class transformations is accompanied by changed gender definitions of what it is to be a woman or a man. The Southern Baptist Convention on Men and Women discussed earlier captured the subservient supportive role the feudal woman plays to her husband the Lord who she serves in her duties of domestic labor, emotional service, and child care. She is to love, honor and serve him. That form is difficult to sustain when the overwhelming number of women work outside of the home and cannot and will not perform a second shift of domestic service without the family wages that supported them at home.[8] Feudal households are disappearing because they are untenable. In addition, the ideology of women's equality and the women's movement's support for women's sense of equality and independence makes it harder for women to accept feudal roles at home while being workers in a capitalist market place making our own wages. Men's salaries have descended while women's salaries have steadily risen[9] making women's economic power in both the market place and at home a force that has resulted in the majority of US women for the first time in history choosing to be single through divorces they initiate or refusing marriage in the first place. Being single has given rise to the rapidly increasing independent class of single women or single women with children doing their own domestic labor and emotional labor.

### The Fascist Feudal Class Gender Household and Family

Donald Trump's agenda for women opens the possibility of another class and gender transformation in the household. It is proselytized and reinforced by forces that blame the collapse of the feudal household on homosexuals, minorities, feminists and the immigrants who somehow stole white men's jobs. It is the family of Trump's allies, the religious right. I call this class and gender family household the fascist feudal family. So, named, because of its similarity to the family of the Third Reich. In the family of the Third Reich, women were to preoccupy themselves with kirche, kuche and kinde, kitchen church and children. They were denied control over their own bodies through laws forbidding the use of birth control and abortion. Der Fuhrer was the leader of the man and the man was the leader of the woman.[10] Women were to remain as subordinate as they are within the Southern Baptist Convention on men and women in which God is the leader of men who ordains males to lead females. Women are in charge of hearth and home as they are in Catholic ideology.[11]

In the Third Reich women worked up to 60 hours a week in munitions factories. However, they earned low wages, ostensibly because factory work was not their "true life's vocation". Taking

care of men and children was their gender vocation practiced regardless of their long hours in paid labor. Labor outside of the home was not their true mission and therefore could be poorly paid. Trump opposes women's labor outside of the home as dangerous to marriage because it interferes with services to the husband.[12] He opposes abortion rights. He, like other Republicans and Evangelicals, celebrates the traditional family while undermining all family assistance, in health care, family leave, maternity leaves, the Pregnant Women's, Infant's, and Children's Nutrition program (WIC) as well as subsidized school lunches.) [13] This leads to difficult pregnancies deformed births due to inadequate nutrition, sick or troubled hungry children and women further hobbled by sick children's care. This, and his promised cuts to battered women's shelters and the Violence Against Women Act[14] are indirect ways of fulfilling a fascist feudal class gender mandate to keep women homebound or require the double shifts that economically hurt women and keep them and their children in economically dependent, sometimes abusive, relationships. It also fulfills a different feudal mandate of creating a hobbled underclass. It is the opposite of the "family values" the Trump Right publically espouses. Denying adequate birth control and abortion rights continues the fascist feudal class and gender agenda. That agenda is once again reinforced by cuts to public education.

Trump's education secretary, Betsy De Vos, endorses private schools especially private Christian schools. She donated millions to both subsidize charter schools and elect politicians who will vote to give public money to private charter schools. Scholarly studies uniformly show that public schools outperform charters. [15] The fascist feudal family presents both a gender and a class transformation because it returns to a different version of the feudal family in which the woman, destined by her birth as female, is a household serf producing domestic, sexual and emotional labor for her man and his children. However, as befitting Trump's, like Hitler's fascist/capitalist mandate, most wives must simultaneously work in the marketplace. This family form's ideology is endorsed by fundamentalist churches and temples as well as Right Wing media, Fox news, Breitbart, etc.

## Conclusion

Donald Trump is endorsing and enabling a new class gender devolution in the family and the household. He is trying to replace the more progressive revolution of the independent gender family household and the progressive communal egalitarian gender family household. He is creating a cultural and legal basis for the fascist feudal family. The mass response of the March for Women's Lives may be a, yet inchoate, mobilization. Americans may well intuit the threat of a class gender devolution to fascist feudalism.

## Notes

[1] In Bangladesh, daily wages are $2.17 a day. In Pakistan they are an average of $3.47 a day, in India an average of $3.33 a day and in China, the highest wages in the region, they are $8.48

a day
https://www.nwpc.dole.gov.ph/pages/statistics/stat_comparative.html,avhttps://www.nwpc.dole.gov.ph/pages/statistics/stat_comparative.html.
https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-average-annual-salary-in-India

[2] In one example, on May 10, 2013 a Bangladeshi factory collapsed. The death toll passed 1,000. 2500 were injured. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22476774.

150 Western clothing brands like Wal mart, H &M, Beneton and Zara produced clothing in that in that factory and others with similar nonexistent safety measures (https://www.ibtimes.com.au/bangladesh-factory-collapse-zara-hm-western-clothing-retailers-awaken-sign-factory-safety-upgrade,
https://www.ibtimes.com.au/bangladesh-factory-collapse-zara-hm-western-clothing-retailers-awaken-sign-factory-safety-upgrade

[3] We need to remember that it is only in recent history, in 1974, that the Equal Credit Opportunity Act became law, and then it took time for that legislation to translate into common practice and for women to obtain credit to buy homes set up businesses etc. (//www.directlendingsolutions.com/women_and_credit.html).

[4] Standards for "survival" differ with income and position. A supported wife of the 1% "needs" brand name clothing, servants and a large household budget from her feudal husband while a wife of a blue-collar worker requires far less. In her book, *Primates of Park Avenue*, (2015. New York: Simon and Schuster), Wednesday Martin describes the life of a feudal wife of Park Ave. In class terms, she is more of a feudal manager of her servants' labor than she is a worker. She has a large allowance for wardrobe and for entertainments, befitting her family's economic and social position. She may even get yearly bonuses for her labor in bed and in the family home. However, her position is, in class terms, feudal. She is a feudal manager of servants.

[5] Until the 1970's, the rape laws in every state in the union included an exception if the rapist and the victim were husband and wife. In 1993, all 50 states had finally eliminated the "marital rape exception." But the effects of these archaic exceptions persist and interfere with spousal rape prosecutions in some states
https://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/criminal-defense/crime-penalties/marital-rape.htm

The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act was passed as late as 1984. It was reauthorized in 2000, again in 2005 and then in 2013. In 2013, it was opposed by Republicans because it extended protection to same sex couples. The Violence Against Women act passed in 1994. It was a militant women's movement that won the passage of these protections against marital rape and battery Trump is threatening both of these laws.

[6] Eric Klinenberg. 2012. Going Solo. New York: Basic Books. Gretchen Livingston.2015. "It's no longer a 'Leave It to Beaver" World for American Families-but It Wasn't Back Then, Either."

Pew Research Center
www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/30/its-no-longer-a-leave-it-to-beaver-world-for-american-families-but-it-wasnt-back-then-either.

[7] This was even true in the US during colonial times when legally the proceeds of any wife's labor belonged to her husband with the exception of the butter and egg money that housewives could keep for themselves (Mary Drake Mcfeely. 2000. Amherst MA. Univ.of Mass press. 2

[8] That is reinforced by the fact that the red states have even more divorces than the blue states in spite of those state's religious insistence on marriage. They have more divorces because women and men are pressured into marriages and then they divorce. (Red Families Blue Families, Naomi Cahn, June Carbone. 2010. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, Jennifer Glass. Jan. 16, 2014. "Red states, blue states, and divorce" Council on Contemporary Families (CCF). https://contemporaryfamilies.org/impact-of-conservative-protestantism-on-regional-divorce-rates/

[9] Valerie Wilson.Oct. 26, 2015. "Black workers' wages have been harmed by both widening racial wage gaps and the widening productivity-pay gap. "Economic Policy Institute (EPI). https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-wages-have-been-harmed-by-both-widening-racial-wage-gaps-and-the-widening-productivity-pay-gap/.

[10] Claudia Koontz. 1987. Mothers in the Fatherland. New York: Saint Martins Press.

[11] Baptist Faith and Message. June 13-14, 2000. "Southern Baptist Convention on Men and Women." Orlando, Florida.

The description of the work of married Catholics in The Catholic Family Magazine, (https://www.keepingitcatholic.org/headhome.html) does not even mention women's work outside of home and children even though 70% of US wives work outside the home.

[12] Jordyn Phelps, June 1, 2016. "Donald Trump in 1994 'Putting a Wife to Work is a Very Dangerous Thing',
https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trump-1994-putting-wife-work-dangerous-thing/story?id=39537935

Cortney Drakeford. Nov.,15, 2016. "What Does Pro Life Rights Mean? Donald Trump Opposes Abortions and Planned Parenthood"
https://www.ibtimes.com/what-does-pro-life-mean-donald-trump-opposes-abortion-rights-planned-parenthood-2445986.

[13] educationopportunitynetwork.org educationopportunitynetwork.org/republicans-in-congress-want-to-cut-free-lunches-for-poor-kids-dont-let-them/, thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/house/166653-republicans-looking-to-gut-wic-food-programs-in-amendment-debate, https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/how-republicans-are-taking-food-out-of-my-mouth-20150715

[14] https://govnews.us/id/17148158009/Womens-Shelters-Are-Terrified-Trump-Will-Cut-Their-Funding, https://www.refinery29.com/2017/01/137406/trump-violence-against-women-grants-cut https://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2017/01/19/trump_s_planned_elimination_of_violence_against_women_grants_is_pure_cruelty.html

[15] The most definitive and thorough study is The Public-School Advantage: Why Public Schools Outperform Private Schools 2014. Christopher and Sarah Lipinski. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Also see https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/01/betsy-devos-christian-schools-vouchers-charter-education-secretary, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/us/politics/betsy-devos-trumps-education-pick-has-steered-money-from-public-schools.html?_r=0d

# Alt-Right: A Primer on the Online Brownshirts

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Alt-Right began as an online phenomenon that mushroomed into a poisonous cloud of misogynist, white nationalist, and anti-Left propaganda. Its basic thrust was aimed at collapsing democracy and human rights in the United States on behalf of economic and political elites.[1]

Its voice is that of macho male gasbags polluting the public sphere with self-aggrandizing masturbatory messages. Alt-Right is neither a social or political movement, but an amorphous online network of primarily-unaffiliated news and messaging outlets using both traditional internet platforms, but especially emphasizing social media such as Twitter and obscure posting sites.[2] The persons who consider themselves activists in the extended Alt-Right cyberspace reality are the new Brownshirts.

This study is a basic primer on Alt-Right reality, with a plethora of references leading to more substantial work available primarily online. For detailed discussions of the origin of the term, ideological foundations, key personalities, and the many separate groups of Alt-Right and the see the online work of Matthew N. Lyons, David Neiwert, and others.[3] In the *pot au feu* ingredients simmering in the Alt-Right stewpot, critics have tasted the influence of Oswald Spengler, Julius Evola, Willis Carto, Alain de Benoist, Richard Spencer and even a deadly nightshade herbal sprig of Hitlerian rhetoric.[4] These influences have been sanitized and served up by a range of right-wing institutions considered mainstream by many in the corporate media.[5] Let's be clear: Alt-Right is an example of neofascism.

One highly concise and accurate definition comes from a mainstream weekly news magazine specializing in digesting the news:

> *It's a weird mix of old-school neo-Nazis, conspiracy theorists, anti-globalists, and young right-wing internet trolls — all united in the belief that white male identity is under attack by multicultural, "politically correct" forces.[6]*

The main figure behind Alt-Right is Steve Bannon who was a pit bull at the rabidly right-wing Breitbart News website.[7] Bannon became a top advisor to Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump.[8] A Bannon-affiliated stealth propaganda-generating media company had been hired by Trump aides to surreptitiously suppress voter turnout for Democratic Presidential

nominee Hillary Clinton as part of a strategy funded by a snake pit of billionaire donors.[9]

While Alt-Right's technology is new, its ideological baggage has been carried by right-wing political and social movements for many decades. The trail we are following eventually traces back to the founding of the new nation by patriarchal Christian men who built White nationalist capitalism over the mass graves of the indigenous peoples and Black African slaves. Homosexuality and gender differences were denied, suppressed, and sanctioned.[10]

A key innovation of Alt-Right is that being a gay White man is acceptable if he is willing to verbally brutalize women—especially feminists, lesbians, and non-binary gender identified persons.[11] Physically harming women is celebrated within Alt-Right, whose followers stoop to issuing threats of violence.[12] Critics of Alt-Right are also threatened. One Alt-Right supporter was arrested for assault after intentionally sending Alt-Right critic Kurt Eichenwald, a man with epilepsy, an online message that, when opened, displayed flashing strobe lights which caused Eichenwald to suffer a seizure.[13]

This callous viciousness was modelled by candidate Trump when he publicly and on-camera made fun of a senior *New York Times* investigative reporter, Serge F. Kovaleski, by making supposedly-funny crippled-hand gestures mimicking the congenital joint condition of the highly-respected journalist who is disabled physically and works from a wheelchair.[14] One 2016 poll of likely voters found Trump's mocking gestures were his worst offense as a potential Republican candidate.[15]

In terms of sociological frames and narratives, Alt-Right gives voice to the rhetoric of right-wing populism fueling Trumpian phenomenon.[16] The core elements of right-wing populism are:

- Producerist White Nationalism
- Demonization & Scapegoating
- Conspiracist Subversion Narratives
- Apocalyptic Narratives and Millennial Visions [17]

To understand how the Alt-Right conglomeration reaches a mass popular audience one needs to understand the elements used to spread reactionary messages and ideas in cyberspace:

*Tropes:* Rhetorical devices used in a figurative manner such as in metaphors or puns or even illustrations to convey a mental image that conveys a meaning—often with considerable baggage—especially within a biased target audience online.

*Memes:* A repeated phrase or image–usually with a clear message such as in a trope—that is shared across cyberspace in a self-replicating manner by online users who distribute the message without encouragement so that it spreads like an atomic reaction.

*Dog Whistles:* Phrases that can be interpreted differently by different audiences, with some people not hearing any content at all. When a person hears a phrase in the form of a trope they

may insert into the message the identity of their favorite loathed enemy target group. For example, when Trump talked about the "international banks," farmers and ranchers in Oregon probably thought "Wall Street," while antisemites heard "Jews," and other conspiracists might have detected a reference to the Freemasons or reptilian aliens. Tropes and memes assist the use of "dog whistles" by political candidates and organizers. Pat Buchanan is a master of the rhetorical form by which he masks his quasi-fascist ideas.

*Astroturf Movement*: A fake grass-roots movement funded by political elites but without an actual mass base. The term is borrowed from the commercial brand of artificial grass. The Tea Party Movement started as an *Astroturf Movement* but eventually emerged as an actual mass-based social and political movement.[18]

*Manosphere:* Websites and other sectors and sections of online media targeting "manly" men who complain about women, often in crude and violent language, that makes the term "misogynist" seem inadequate to capture the viciousness of the tropes and memes.[19]

*Trolling:* Posting text and messages intentionally worded and designed to antagonize opponents in such a way that they will overreact, and then can be further antagonized and mocked for their intemperate response. Based on the fishing term for dragging a hooked line through a school of fish in the hope that at least one will be attracted to "bite" on the live bait or artificial lure.

*Gamergate:* the term used by pro-feminist critics to describe the online *Krystalnacht*, launched by misogynist manospheric men to bully women programmers out of the computer game industry—especially women who developed alternatives to splashing blood and guts across computer screens.

*DiBranco explains that Trump's sexist comments about women in general "*energized members of a secular misogynist Right" including the so-called men's rights movement which rose in the 1990s, as well as the more recent Gamergate and the rise of Alt-Right. She notes there was "no pushback against Trump's rhetoric and policy plans from "a brand of conservative, libertarian" feminist groups which emerged in the 1990s which D*iBranco says "*provides a dangerously legitimizing female face for misogynist ideology centered on overt hostility to women and the promulgation of rape culture."[20]

*According to DiBranco it is through highly provocative cyberspace posts that:*

> *misogynist personalities such as Mike Cernovich, associated with the pick-up artist community, and Milo Yiannopoulos, a Brietbart writer, expanded their online following, to be leveraged in future attacks on feminism and women. Yiannopoulos had over 300,000 Twitter followers at the time the social media platform finally banned him for offensive content in 2016. [21]*

In March of 2017 Yiannopoulos, who identifies as a gay man, had more than “1.9 million Facebook likes and 568,000 subscribers on YouTube.” [22]

Alt-Right is not only a sector of the Trump electoral coalition, but also a new sector within historic right-wing political organizing in the United States. Yet it has clear antecedents in the public and published support for antisemitism by Henry Ford and the early use of radio by Father Coughlin: dubbed “the radio priest.”[23] Surrealist anti-communist conspiracy theories were spread on numerous radio stations in the United States and jumped to television, as the McCarthy hearings demonstrated. The Billy Graham crusades were carried on radio and television and shepherded a flock of Christian Right programming, much of it spreading conspiracy theories of subversion through treason and immorality secretly controlled by a subterranean web of communists undermining the nation.

While it is unclear if Alt-Right will transform into an actual mass-based political or social movement, it draws from deep roots. The claims that Alt-Right is a new phenomenon within Republican Party politics ignore a clear decades-long pattern of flirting with White supremacy and theocratic Christian nationalism with its baggage of patriarchal anti-feminism.

## Conclusions

Alt-Right and the Trump Presidency are the result of right-wing ideologues seeking control of the Republican Party by funding strategic research, a variety of intellectual and mass oriented publications, online and televised outreach, and mass movements independent of but allied with the Republican leadership. Meanwhile the Democratic Party forced most of the mass base of McGovern delegates in 1972 out of the Party and replaced them with shameless neoliberal hacks called without irony “superdelegates.” Some of our potential allies will choose to work to transform the Democratic Part from within. The result will be an Inside/Outside strategy. Condemning these folks is counterproductive and rooted in self-congratulatory infantile disorders. However, only a unified mass movement of progressives and radicals engaging in unceasing confrontations in the streets and suites, including non-violent civil disobedience, will stop Trump’s march toward neofascism.

## Notes

[1] My research on this subject was shaped by conversations with Abby Scher and Spencer Sunshine; as well as my participation in conferences and panels as follows: “Where Do We Go from Here? Racism, Populism, Fascism and the Future of the Hard Right after the 2016 Election: A Panel Discussion with Abby Scher, Sophie Bjork James, Spencer Sunshine, and Chip Berlet,” moderated by Mary N. Taylor, City University of New York Graduate Center, November 30, 2016; “We’ve Been Trumped! Analyzing Trump’s Election and Strategies for Resistance” Borough of Manhattan Community College (especially additional conversations with Frances Fox Piven and Roger S. Foster); and Alex DiBranco and Carol Mason at the conference cited in note 2.

[2]This thumbnail sketch is based the discussion by Carol Mason, Alex DiBranco, and Chip Berlet at a panel at the conference "Take Root: Red State Perspectives on Reproductive Justice," held at the University of Oklahoma at Norman, March 25, 2017.

[3] Matthew N. Lyons Ctrl-Alt-Delete: The Origins and Ideology of the Alternative Right January 20, 2017, accessed March 28, 2017, https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/01/20/ctrl-alt-delete-report-on-the-alternative-right; based on Lyon's forthcoming book, *Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right's Challenge to State and Empire*, PM Press and Kersplebedeb Publishing.

[4] Thumbnail sketches of these figures can be found at this URL, accessed March 28, 2017 https://www.researchforprogress.us/topic/concept/what-is-alt-right/

[5] Chip Berlet, "Into the Mainstream: An Array of Right-Wing Foundations and Think Tanks Support Efforts to Make Bigoted and Discredited Ideas Respectable." *Intelligence Report*, Southern Poverty Law Center, no. 110, Summer 2003) 53-58, accessed March 28, 2017, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/mainstream.

[6] *The Week,* "The Rise of the Alt-right," accessed March 29, 2017, https://theweek.com/articles/651929/rise-altright.

[7] Collections of posts typifying Breitbart News content, accessed March 29, 2017, are online here: https://www.breitbart.com/author/breitbart-news/;
on Big Government, https://www.breitbart.com/big-government/;
on National Security; https://www.breitbart.com/national-security/.

[8] Jason Wilson, "A Sense that White Identity is Under Attack: Making Sense of the Alt-Right," accessed March 29, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/23/alt-right-movement-white-identity-breitbart-donald-trump.

[9] This set of stories were accessed on March 29, 2017:
David Z. Morris, "Trump's Digital Team Orchestrating "Three Major Voter Suppression Operations," https://fortune.com/2016/10/30/trump-voter-supression-operations/.
Matea Gold, "The Mercers and Stephen Bannon: How a Populist Power Base was Funded and Built, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/ct-mercers-bannon-trump-20170318-story.html.
Carole Cadwalladr, "Robert Mercer: The Big Data Billionaire Waging War on Mainstream Media" https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/26/robert-mercer-breitbart-war-on-media-steve-bannon-donald-trump-nigel-farage;
An English translation of a lengthy report originally published in German is here:
Hannes Grassegger And Mikael Krogerus, "The Data That Turned the World Upside Down," https://publicpolicy.stanford.edu/news/data-turned-world-upside-down.

[10] This was true in both predominantly Calvinist Protestant colonial America and predominantly Catholic colonial Latin America. See Thomas A. Foster, *Long Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America*. New York, New York Univ. Press 2007; Peter Herman Sigal. *Infamous Desire: Male Homosexuality in Colonial Latin America*. Chicago: University of Chicago press. 2003

[11] Alex DiBranco, "Mobilizing Misogyny, *The Public Eye*, Winter 2017 https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/03/08/mobilizing-misogyny , accessed March 29, 2017.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Martin Weil, "MD Man Accused of Sending Seizure-Inducing Tweet To *Newsweek* Writer Who Has Epilepsy, *Washington Post*, March 18, 2017., accessed March 28, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/md-man-arrested-in-alleged-cyber-attack-on-trump-critic/2017/03/18/0ebde176-0b8d-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474_story.html.

[14] Daniel Arkin, "Donald Trump Criticized After He Appears to Mock Reporter Serge Kovaleski," NBC News, November 26, 2015, accessed March 28, 2017, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/donald-trump-criticized-after-he-appears-mock-reporter-serge-kovaleski-n470016.

[15] Irin Carmon, "Donald Trump's Worst Offense? Mocking Disabled Reporter, Poll Finds," NBC News, August 11, 2016, accessed March 29, 2017, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/trump-s-worst-offense-mocking-disabled-reporter-poll-finds-n627736.

[16] See the excellent collection of overviews at "Diagnosing Right-Wing Populism, Special Section. *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture*, Summer 2016, vol. 15, nos. 2-3; James E. Freeman and Peter Kolozi: Poisoning the Well: Demagoguery versus Democracy; Douglas Kellner: Donald Trump as Authoritarian Populist: A Frommian Analysis; John Abromeit: Critical Theory and the Persistence of Right-Wing Populism. https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/2016/, accessed March 29, 2017,

[17] Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2000) 6-13; Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 46-51 179-190; Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995).

[18] Abby Scher and Chip Berlet, "The Tea Party Moment," in Nella van Dyke and David S. Meyer, eds., *Understanding the Tea Party Movement* (Farnham and London: Ashgate, 2014), and David Barsamian, "Brewing Up Trouble: Chip Berlet On the Tea Party and The Rise Of Right-Wing Populism," *The Sun*, November 2010, accessed March 28, 2017, https://thesunmagazine.org/issues/419/brewing_up_trouble.

[19] Alex DiBranco and Chip Berlet, "Republican Ideological Shift Election 2016," accessed

March 28, 2017, https://www.progressivemovements.us/now/archives/concept/republican-ideological-shift-election-2016-introduction.

[20] DiBranco, “Mobilizing Misogyny.”

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Donald I. Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin: The Father of Hate Radio* (New York, The Free Press, 1996). Warren’s subsequent book, *The Radical Center: Middle Americans and the Politics of Alienation* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1973) accurately predicted the rise of the mass base that elected Trump; but Warren lacked a progressive critique of the White nationalist roots of his “Middle Americans.” Instead Warren eschewed the now overwhelmingly-accepted scholarly term “right-wing populism” to describe their activism, as do a few other authors.

# The Ends of Reform: Liberalism, Trumpism, and American Politics

By | 2017: vol. 16, nos. 1-2

In 1982, the historian Alan Brinkley wondered how two demagogic figures—the Louisiana politician Huey Long and the radio priest Father Coughlin—built mass followings that terrified and confounded political elites during the Great Depression. For one thing, Brinkley explained, Long and Coughlin both possessed substantial personal charisma and skillfully used the new mass media of the day—especially the radio—to communicate directly with their supporters.

Still, Brinkley argued, their popularity "rested ultimately on a far deeper and broader set of concerns—on the evocation of a distinctive ideology." This ideology was often "muddled and simplistic, at times nearly incoherent," in part because "neither man was a careful or sophisticated thinker, and neither had much patience with complexities or ambiguities." And yet, both men articulated "an affirmation of threatened values and institutions"; named "a set of villains and scapegoats upon whom it was possible to blame contemporary problems"; and offered "a prescription for reform, resting on a carefully restricted expansion of government." Contemporary observers may have "dismissed it all as meaningless and, as such, ominous, a demagogic attempt to delude the public with empty, impractical promises." (And, Brinkley added, those observers "were not entirely incorrect.") And yet, even in their incoherence, Long and Coughlin spoke to some of the "oldest and deepest impulses in American political life," namely the desire to defend personal autonomy and local community against social and economic forces that seemed to be displacing them from the center of the American experience.[1]

"Trumpism," to the degree that it constitutes a coherent ideology, is a volatile mixture of economic privilege and cultural grievance—with a disturbing affinity for xenophobic politics of the European far-right. But it seems to have spoken, at least at the margin where close elections are won or lost, to some of the "deepest impulses" cited by Brinkley. Long and Coughlin appealed to those Americans who felt besieged by the forces of large-scale industrial capitalism *and* by the New Deal's expansion of federal power in an effort to rationalize that new industrial order and soften its sharp edges. Trump spoke to Rust Belt voters who felt powerless before global economic forces that move jobs and people around the world *and* before a federal government that seemed to privilege environmental regulation over jobs. Long and Coughlin emerged from obscurity during the economic crisis of the Great Depression, while the rise of Trump was clearly abetted by the slow and uneven recovery from the Great Recession. But the most important parallel might have simply been the grandeur of the promises. Where other candidates in both political parties offered to manage the consequences of economic and cultural change, the demagogues promised immediate relief. As Trump put it,

only he—and he alone—could end “the carnage” and make American great again. And the electoral success of that message demonstrated a longstanding political weakness of American liberalism—a weakness that liberals cannot afford to ignore.

American liberalism derives its legitimacy from the idea that government action, at least in certain areas of social or economic life, can make people’s lives better. Government can insure people against poverty in old age or against choosing between bankruptcy and cancer treatment. Government can invest in the workers of the future by supporting education today or save the planet of tomorrow by limiting pollution in the present. As a practical matter, though, making people’s lives better through active government requires at least some degree of state-building. You cannot run a social insurance program or protect the environment without hiring people to make specific decisions, enforce rules, or litigate close cases. And so, efforts to make people’s lives better through government action generally require a larger and more intrusive federal government—one that employs bureaucrats, lawyers, investigators, and clerks. Those federal workers are likely to share certain kinds of education and certain skills—perhaps even shared ways of thinking about social or economic problems.[2] And those ways of thinking may—or may not—have much in common with the deep-seated anxieties, fears, hopes, and dreams that got liberals elected or utilize activist government in the first place.

The work of Alan Brinkley is instructive on this issue, as well. In a biographical essay that was eventually incorporated into his book *The End of Reform*, Brinkley described the career of Thurmond Arnold, a Wyoming native and Yale Law School professor who Roosevelt tapped in 1938 to run the anti-trust division at the U.S. Department of Justice. Once ensconced in the justice department, Arnold successfully changed the direction of U.S. antitrust enforcement away from its previous obsession with policing “bigness”—that is, excessive conglomerations of economic power under a single roof—and toward policing anti-competitive behavior, such as price-fixing conspiracies. By doing so, Arnold accommodated antitrust law to the reality that a modern industrial economy needed large-scale enterprises operating in national or international marketplaces; you could not expect to build automobiles or transport produce across the continent using the model of small-proprietor capitalism imagined by, say, Thomas Jefferson. And he focused his energy on actions that harmed a broad cross-section of Americans as consumers, rather than trying to micro-manage the marketplace or individual corporate structure.[3]

In the process, though, Arnold separated antitrust law from the very political energy that had swept Roosevelt into power in the first place. Arnold’s vision of antitrust, Brinkley pointed out, “had no real constituency beyond the small cadre of lawyers and experts he recruited.” Arnold “promoted an antimonopoly ideal stripped of its populist and democratic content; an ideal tied to a vision, not of restoring power to individuals and communities, but of expert management of the economy through centralized state bureaucracies; an ideal perhaps better attuned to the modern form of the economy and the state than the one it replaced, but one less capable of generating and sustaining genuine popular enthusiasm.”[4] Of course, even if mainstream liberalism stopped articulating the notion, plenty of Americans remained quite interested in the

idea of “restoring power to individuals and communities.” If Arnold and his coterie of lawyers decided that such talk nostalgic or unrealistic, their ideological rivals—from authoritarian populists and conspiracy theorists to more conventional conservatives—would be happy to take the ball and run with it.

In many ways, this particular dilemma—social movements generating state institutions that gradually lose interest in some of the issues that made them necessary—predates the New Deal. In her book *The Roots of Reform*, the political scientist Elizabeth Sanders argues persuasively that the decisive votes for most of the national legislation we associate with the “Progressive Era” came not from the Northern reformers who identified as “Progressives” but from Southern and Western members who had originally been swept into office by the populist mobilizations of the 1890s. Of course, the national legislation that took shape by the 1910s—the Federal Reserve, an expanded regulatory state—differed in very substantial ways from the issues that populists had mobilized around—which is one of the reasons that the populist contribution to Progressive reform is often undervalued. Sanders explains the apparent disconnect by pointing out that almost social movements are, as a general rule, “antibureaucratic.” As she puts it: “When has one seen protestors marching through the streets carrying signs that read ‘Give us an Agency!’ or ‘Give us an expert institution to study the situation and figure out what we need!’?”[5] And yet, translating a popular rebellion into highly bureaucratic state-building was a process of coalition-building and compromise that changed the content of reform and empowered certain people—especially credentialed experts who came to run the agencies that emerged from the process—over others. Perhaps the original farmer-labor agenda was practically impossible and perhaps it could never come close to obtaining an electoral majority. But it is hard to imagine farmers in Kansas raising “less corn, and more hell” with the Federal Reserve, as it was ultimately constituted, specifically in mind.[6]

If liberal state institutions merely enervated some of the political energy of American liberalism, it would be one thing. But the regulatory state has also managed to become a chief bogeyman of the American right. This is partially because the Republican Party is the party of small business, which feels the costs and burdens of a regulatory state more often and more directly than the average educated professional. But it has also become a crucial animating idea of the conservative intellectual movement. For a very long time, conservatives have believed that liberalism exercises power by building state institutions that are subsequently insulated from democratic accountability by civil-service rules or by educational requirements that ensure that a certain kind of mind who has been trained to think in a certain way will always hold down the fort. (In essence, when Thurman Arnold eventually moved on to the private sector, the lawyers he recruited stayed behind, and then they self-selected their replacements.) For this reason, a number of social institutions are accessories to the problem. It is not just regulators and lawyers but the college and universities that train them and the liberal social movements that manipulate them who make the administrative state possible.[7]

Trumpism can be an eclectic stew of ideas and impulses, some of them half-baked and others far less so. But, during a recent speech as CPAC, the annual gathering of self-identified

"movement conservatives," Trump apparently received some of his loudest cheers for promising that he would crush "the administrative state." A California-based Straussian who has become one of Trump's few cheerleaders in academia cited the "administrative state" as his primary reason to cheer on the Trump presidency.[8] That sentiment is not exactly new: When I was researching my first book, I came across a memo from a top Reagan administration lawyer—a guy who managed the day-to-day operations of the Department of Justice but daydreamed about asking the Supreme Court to declare all the independent federal agencies—yes, all of them—unconstitutional.[9] But none of that lawyer's colleagues really wanted to make that argument—or thought it was a winner. The situation may be different right now.

I raise all these deep historical continuities, which may seem a little far afield, for a reason. It would be easy enough to read the Trump phenomenon as a reflection of our particular moment in time—as a response a period of growing income inequality or deindustrialization or globalization. If it were, maybe there would be a simple way to co-opt his message or reconnect with enough of his voters—say, through a version of the left-wing economic populism espoused in the most recent primaries by Bernie Sanders. But I am skeptical that this would work, either in terms of short-term electoral messaging or in terms of dealing with the longer term problem. Democratic publics often want complicated, mutually exclusive things—say, to preserve small-proprietor capitalism while benefitting from national markets for agricultural products at the turn of the twentieth century or to protect domestic manufacturing jobs while purchasing cheap imports in the twenty-first. Responsible politicians cannot promise the impossible. And that will always put them as a disadvantage when an irresponsible demagogue rolls into town.

But I do think liberals can be more honest with themselves and each other about the relationship between their social and political goals and the state institutions that they produce in order to make activist government a reality. Odd as this might sound, this might require liberals to spend less time trying to "solve" particular social and political problems—at least in the sense of reducing them to universal truths or mathematical axioms that could ideally be administered by apolitical experts and whose virtues are so self-evident that they no longer need to be defended. It might require us to be a little more open and self-reflective about the ways in which academic research and educational credentialing can have political consequences—and then to defend our contributions to the greater public good.[10] Nobody goes to a protest chanting "give us an agency" because the agency is supposed to be the means of reform, not the end. It would be a shame if, in our efforts to defend those agencies or the people who work in them, we further confused the two.

## Notes

[1] Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 141-42.

[2] See, e.g., Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). From the very beginning of the field, scholars of American Political Development have had a love-hate relationship with the federal bureaucracy, exemplified in part by Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), esp. 285-292.

[3] Alan Brinkley, "The Antimonopoly Ideal and the Liberal State: The Case of Thurman Arnold," *Journal of American History* 80 (September 1991): 557-579.

[4] Ibid., 579.

[5] Elizabeth Sanders, *The Roots of Reform*: *Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 387-88.

[6] The injunction about corn and hell is credited to Mary Elizabeth Lease. See Lawrence Goodwiyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 339. My point is not that monetary policy was unimportant to the populists, who understood how price deflation was crippling U.S. agriculture. But they campaigned for paper money or silver coinage—and not for the creation of a political independent if regionally dispersed monetary authority.

[7] In earlier iterations, especially popular among neoconservatives who had once dabbled in Marxism, the problem was a "new class" of highly educated professionals whose shared class interests, will-to-power helped, and control of knowledge production (through academia and the media) threatened the other, more traditionally classes. The Trump people prefer to talk about a "deep state," a term more popular among certain right-wing websites.

[8] Jon Baskin. "The Academic Home of Trumpism," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 17, 2017, https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Academic-Home-of-Trumpism/239495.

[9] Jefferson Decker, *The Other Rights Revolution: Conservative Lawyers and the Remaking of American Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 183.

[10] See, e.g., Rick Perlstein, "Outsmarted: On the Liberal Cult of the Cognitive Elite" *The Baffler* 34 (2017), https://thebaffler.com/salvos/outsmarted-perlstein.

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# The Twilight of Liberal American Imperialism: Trump, Debt, and War

By | 2017: vol. 16, nos. 1-2

One of the most remarkable predictions in Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) is that, on its current trajectory and without a dramatic political correction, the United States will reach a point of wealth inequality that is historically unprecedented in the modern era and that nation states do not sink to asymmetries of this depth and magnitude without triggering large-scale violent uprisings, revolutions, or civil wars.

I began to discuss the apparent 'inevitability' of this looming catastrophe of civil breakdown with my colleague Dan Krier at Iowa State University, and, though I did not end up participating myself, I initiated the symposium on Piketty's blockbuster text at the journal *Critical Sociology* in 2015 (Vol. 41, No. 2). My feeling a couple of years ago was that one thing you can always count in American politics is the rise of an internal populist demagogue to agitate the rabble in contradictory and self-defeating ways (e.g., the infamous pro-Nazi "Radio Priest" Father Coughlin during the Great Depression) and, externally, you can always count on a war to soak up and dispose of some proportion of the agitated mass (see Worrell 2011, 2013).

The Occupy Movement and the Tea Party signaled the estrangement and anger of millions of Americans over politics as usual across party lines but there was no sign of credible 'charismatic' leader on the horizon to galvanize either the right or the left and, since Vietnam, wars no longer function to dispose of large quantities of surplus young men. While we still dispose of mass quantities of enemy combatants, and 'collateral damage' accounts for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians, the permanent elimination of bodies on 'our side' has been replaced with the temporary removal of personnel by multiple deployments –– a kind of virtual suspended animation.

Like most of us, I assumed that Clinton and *Homo davos* would stay the course for a few more years, driving the nation closer to the edge of the abyss before crafting a new War on Something within the core designed to warehouse a few million would-be troublemakers while injecting more resources and personnel into an ever-expanding military project to control and discipline the globe. But Trump came out of 'nowhere' to capture the executive branch, at least temporarily –– one of the problems of discussing Trump is that one never knows if by the time you finish your thoughts he might be removed from office. But where Trump the man will be temporary, Trumpism will be more durable. Now we have our 'charismatic' leader (a bearer of what we might think of as 'negative charisma' or the impure and vulgar charm of a 'pussy-grabbing' anomie monster who abuses people, lies, and exploits with impunity). In a way, Trump represents what Leo Lowenthal referred to as the fantasized monster that enjoys

unpunished enjoyment (Institute of Social Research 1945). The figure that filled out that space prior to and during the second world war was 'the Jew' of antisemitic propaganda (Worrell 2008). What every antisemite unconsciously wants is to be 'the Jew' that breaks taboos and gets away with it. It should come as no surprise that antisemitism has come roaring back in American political life along with a resurgence in neo-Nazis, the Klan, white supremacists, etc. Trump, like any demagogue, will promise his agitated base everything while delivering very little and holding the current neo-liberal project together a little longer before the 'inevitable' collapse. Despite surface appearances, Trumpism does *not* mark a break with the neoliberal order but an amplification of it: Turbo Liberalism, neoliberalism 2.0, neoliberalism on steroids, etc., and maybe its last gasp before the total breakdown of the American imperial order that has been moving across the planet since the turn of the 20th century. To prevent deception we have to keep in mind that what transpires on the imperial periphery is always reflected back into the domestic core, and vice versa.

### *The Contradictions of Neoliberalism*

In simple terms, the Western neoliberal project has reached a point of near exhaustion. On the one hand, the *domestic core* of the US has been pushed to the breaking point with regards to stagnating wages and even wage reversals for many, outsourcing of jobs, overaccumulation of capital, negative interest rates, automation, degraded social services, decaying infrastructure, debased public education and soaring student debt, crazy religion on every street corner, guns everywhere, rising suicide rates and chemical dependencies, underemployment, deepening consumer debt bondage and the return of debtor prisons, the blooming of slave labor camps (prisons), financial deregulation and monetarism, the bloating of the state security apparatus, the militarization of municipal police forces, lower tax burdens for the wealthy and corporations, the destruction of labor organizations, etc. The list is nearly infinite. And while the Fordist version of the American Dream was going down in flames neoliberals were cultivating the cult of diversity. Where Fordism celebrated the Working Man and the Middle Class, the post-Fordist regime of accumulation and the new American lifeworld shifted the accumulation of cultural capital to what conservatives see as a rogues gallery of freaks and unicorns demanding a rainbow utopia. *Let us not confuse diversity as a mechanism of social control (anti-solidarity and diversion) with actual pluralism.*

The potent mix of economic fatalism for the Average Joe and the deregulation (anomie) of economic institutions is superimposed on the logic of the imperial periphery where the US and its 'partners' have hit a brick wall. The long and the short of it is that the domestic core is spent, hurting and rightfully enraged while the DNC's unicorns of the future project is further eroding the white male Boomer's sense of entitlement. On top of this are the bonfires of 'potlatch capitalism' where we find the literal destruction of constant capital for the few that can profit from temporary fluctuations in equity prices (Worrell 2015; see also Krier 2005, 2008). Trumpism as next-level neoliberalism represents *continuity* with previous administrations, despite the bewildering narcissistic shell, and an intensification of the bonfire of sacrifice and scapegoating. Trumpism represents the sacrifice of everything deemed

secondary to the goal of of reenergizing the engines of the global project that has stalled out during the Bush and Obama administrations. Department of Education? Environment? Worker protections? Health care for poor people? Protections and assistance for unmarried mothers and children? Old people? Everything that costs money and does not contribute to the enrichment of the rich, global military domination, and dollarization is sacrificable. Money and resources have to be liberated from social welfare systems such that they can be transferred to the elite and the Department of Defense and the internal security apparatus. Now, this seems to fly directly in the face of the populist and paleoconservative strains of Trump's appeal to his base. Bear this in mind: the base of angry old white people who support Trump have already been compensated by receiving the recognition they feel they deserve and they might get a wall along with some anti-Other hatred spewing out of right wing hate radio programs. In other words, the domestic program promised by the Trump administration (the return of a great, golden age) is rhetorical and symbolic while actually accelerating the destruction and liquidation of the social infrastructure of the nation. The capitalist elite and their political lap dogs will suck trillions of dollars out of the melting down of America between now and the final plunge into the abyss while serving up racism, misogyny, and Islamophobia to deranged rural and small town Americans.

The anger that rises from the contradictions associated with making America "great again" while shepherding over its further degradation and immiseration will be vented not only on an internal enemy but also the planetary opponents of America. Military intervention in the Middle East has been a colossal and expensive failure –– the only metric we have to suggest anything like 'success' has been achieved is that no nuclear warheads have been detonated. We are bogged down with nothing to show for it except the triggering of more hostilities on multiple fronts, none of which can be won. China has seized the moment and is colonizing Africa, Russia wants to recover its status as a world power, and there is not much more we can expect from Americans in the way of contributions to this expanding folly except to stay in debt, continue consuming, and battling it out in futile wars all across the globe. And if the core lacks the resources to prosecute the war against the world then the world will have to pay for its own punishment. And this is another dimension of Trumpism: making even allies and partners pay more for their submission. We've created quite a mess and if you want protection you'll have to start paying a lot more.

### *Debt and Tribute*

What looks like a pure liability from a personal standpoint appears to another interested party as an asset. Under the Fordist regime of capital accumulation the US was a lending nation but in the post-Fordist, neoliberal epoch, the lender has become a debtor nation and within this new framework asset obligations in the form of Treasury bills, and so forth, are no longer fully contained within the traditional debt-asset framework. In other words, the worry over national debt (US) is the result of an outdated set of assumptions. A large and variable mass of national debt is imperial tribute. The variability of this sum will depend upon military force.

In the case of quantitative easing (QE) it was not simply a case of injecting "hot air" currency

into the market to devalue alien investments. The Chinese response to QE1 and QE2 suggests that their capital investments were being devalued, and they were, but when a carrier battle group conducts training off the shores of Taiwan it signals that US bonds and currency are backed by brute *force* and as long as Uncle Sam can force-feed debt to nations, US currency and bonds are still 'worth' something, they are purchased, exchanged, and they stay in circulation, even as they are continuously devalued. Obviously, however, there is a limit to how much debt, devaluation, and force-feeding we can exact from our associates.

### *War and New Deals*

The constant fear of default is largely irrelevant so long as the US maintains its position as the global superpower. The US Department of Defense is largely a state within the state dedicated to preventing the slide into a symmetrical competition between global hegemons. The full-scale US intervention in Africa is largely a check on China's ambitions in the region; the war in Syria is, largely, a check on Russian access to ports and regional influence; the war in Afghanistan is, largely, a war on our friends in Pakistan; the war in Iraq is, largely, not a war for petroleum but a matter of disobedience and punishment going back to the early 70s when Iraq dared to make rules for itself –– notice Trump's admonishment that next time we're keeping the oil for ourselves; and the war on terror (the bow wave generated by imperial motion) is the perfect war in which to express command and discipline: it can neither be won nor lost, it is simply a new matrix for dollarization, denominating reserves, generating corporate war profits (nothing beats cost-plus contracts) and creating an obedient world system with the US at the helm.

Mainstream conservatives and liberals alike still think in terms of contractual obligations and fear that the US is putting itself in a position of dependency upon other nations and transnational actors, as well as concerns over things like credit rating downgrades, etc., but, as Durkheim noted, while contracts are a form of partial slavery, when you are the global powerhouse, you are a slave to no one which means that contracts are only honored if they are in the interest of the one with all the power. In fact, consider an analogy from the world of organized labor: if your union fails to strike or even threaten a work stoppage, then it is not a union at all. At best your 'union' is a toothless collective bargaining unit that will be coerced by more powerful forces. Likewise, if your imperial master fails to bomb you periodically or threaten you with a deep recession the prospects of another stone age now and then, they are not much of an imperial master to be feared. This is, of course, the function of Trumpism in the US and why we are probably looking at a shooting war with at least one of our main trading partners and consumers of debt.

While my colleague Dan Krier sees a Schmittian logic to Trumpism and the cultivation of internal enemies (illegal aliens, Islam, etc.), and that is undeniably important, I think the big picture is more Treitschke than Schmitt. In *Germany Above All* (1915) Durkheim pointed out that for the powerful state any form of subjugation is intolerable, including contracts and obligations, e.g., debt to some other power. This is one of the essential benefits of war: the breaking of contracts and obligations (for the winner). It seems virtually 'inevitable' to me that the US is headed toward an actual shooting war with China because our ability to service debt

in such a way that we never have to pay it back, and thereby losing our tribute, is impossible to maintain. The inner circle of the Trump braintrust probably has General Curtis 'Strangelove' LeMay on its mind –– the Soviets could have been clobbered at the end of WWII, saving us from the bipolar death struggle that lasted 50 years. We have the advantage now but every day we wait we lose the edge. The way out is simply to declare war soon, engage in a short-term naval, aerial, outer space, and cyberspace shock and awe campaign against China (avoiding ground forces and troop invasions as well as tactical nukes, not to mention embedded journalists that might spoil the narrative) that provides the mechanism for the suspension and breaking of all contracts and obligations and then negotiating new deals and terms. Thinkers infected with mainstream assumptions regarding the undesirable nature of devaluation associated with conflict with China miss the crucial relationship between value and devaluation –– there can be no accumulation of surplus without devaluations as a precondition; the devaluation of one thing is mechanism of surplus value emerging somewhere else and in some transfigured form. Besides, the wealthy are drowning in surplus value at the moment and there has to be a correction.

An actual shooting war with China (perhaps starting with an attack on a proxy like North Korea) might seem like economic suicide considering how integrated Chinese production is with Western finance and consumption. However, keep in mind that other Asian nations are now more attractive when it comes to low-cost labor power. China can beat Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea on the wage front but many manufacturers of low value consumer junk have shifted production to cheaper sources such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and now India. Africa will soon become a major competitor in the labor power market. This is also why the tiff with Mexico is not as consequential as it might seem on the surface for capital. American firms can find cheaper labor power elsewhere.

Kant believed that a national debt was, ultimately, self-defeating (1983) and he is undoubtedly correct. Paying it down will cause pain for someone. Eventually, empire will run out of steam and the world will turn against it. As Durkheim insisted, a lone political entity cannot stand against the rest of the world for long. Even now we see, for example in the Philippines, a 'rebalancing' of dependencies toward China at the end of the Obama Administration. With Trump, a wait and see approach has set in. But, ultimately, the neoliberal order will fail, ultimately, because it violates the structure of reason, it is unreasonable, and violently irrational.

The world system is a symbolic absolute that encompases individual nation-states and their 'speculative' relations with one another. This is a central point and something that we keep running into time and time again: as far as individuals go, the idea of the nation-state and unique cultural identity is still extremely powerful and vastly more important than multi-state conglomerates. Brexit and the rise of AfD in Germany, as well as recent right-wing gains in Austria, Denmark, Sweden, and Switzerland (see Aisch, Pearce, and Rousseau 2016) attest to the continuing power of Nation as a social fact, and not just for stereotypical authoritarians, in the face of mass migrations and what is perceived as cultural dissolution and the paranoia over the imagined fatalistic altruism of Islamic theology. The *one-world* global order appeals to

communists and capitalists. And a *bipolar* world of the kind we had during the Cold War, as an alternative, is one divided against itself with two main blocks serving as countervailing universalities, with some non-aligned leftovers extracting what concessions and deals as they can, playing one power off another. Ultimately, though, a world united under capital or divided along binary, countervailing lines will always disintegrate. The current neoliberal system attempts to sharpen the old Fordist logic whereby the triad of finance, production, and consumption (a fetish conception if there ever was one) is remapped across old geopolitical demarcations. Ultimately, Hegel is right: reason has a structure and it is cunning. When social organization becomes irrational it will destroy itself and a debt-tribute-finance world system is an insult to reason and national sentiments and values.

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# Back to Basics: Trump's Counter-Revolution, Resistance, and Solidarity

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The State of the Union speech by the new president, Donald Trump, has come and gone; so too his address before the joint houses of Congress. The shock of the 2016 election is lessening, it is time to take stock. Trump's triumph evinces the worst of what Richard Hofstadter called "the paranoid streak" in American politics. That has a long tradition reaching back over Joe McCarthy to the heyday of the Ku Klux Klan to the "know nothing movement" of the late 1840s.

In our own time, President Barack Obama was surely correct that a straight line connects Sarah Palin's nomination to Vice President of the United States in the 2008 election to the triumph of Donald Trump eight years later. The overwhelming majority of the GOP had moved to the far right long before he entered the race for the presidency. The establishmentarian opposition to its extremist agenda had already crumbled and Trump's rivals in the presidential primary were equally reactionary. His victory was the product of their internal squabbling and an efficacious strategy predicated on divide and conquer. The right-wing upsurge was therefore not simply due to Trump. He was simply more radical in his rhetoric, less concerned with truth and the explanatory power of blatant bigotry for certain sectors of American society.

2016 witnessed a miserable presidential campaign. Unjust attacks on Hillary Clinton over emails, and baseless rumors of her supposed involvement in conspiracies of one sort or another had a terrible impact. But, still, Trump lost the popular vote by nearly three million votes – almost exactly the same number as that of the fraudulent votes supposedly cast (unanimously for Clinton) by three million illegal immigrants. But he won the electoral college with 306 votes. Undemocratic from its inception, designed to mitigate the power of everyday citizens and subvert the influence of states with larger urban populations, 2016 marks the second time in the 21st century – Governor George W. Bush's victory over Senator Al Gore in 2000 was the first — that a conservative candidate used the electoral college to claim victory without a majority of the vote. In addition, a mushrooming scandal points to Russian interference in the election and collusion between Trump and Putin as well as the inner circles of the two leaders. Trump's presidency is thus seen by many as illegitimate – and he knows it. This helps explain not only his sensitivity to criticism,

obsession with "leaks," and rants about a media conspiracy directed against him, but also the flurry of activity that marked the first 100 days of his administration.

As for the liberal media, such as MSNBC, much of it pandered to supporters and condescended to opponents. They presented themselves as champions of honesty, tolerance, and social

progress. Liberal media attacked Trump vociferously day after day –and always with the smug self-satisfaction of the "insider." Too many jokes and groans greeted Trump's daily disparagements of a "gold-star" military family, the disabled, women, Mexicans, and Muslims. Visions of higher ratings pushed Hillary ever more into the background thereby strengthening already existing feelings that the only justification for her campaign was that she wasn't Trump. In short, other than for their devotees, the liberal media was a turn-off. Indeed, while mocking his supposed inability to raise campaign funds, the liberal media provided him with millions of dollars in free publicity and air-time while forgetting the old publishing adage: "better to be attacked than ignored." They had little to say about Clinton's "mistake" in supporting the Iraq War, her stance on the Libyan debacle (beyond her unfair treatment by Republicans over Benghazi), her calls for a no-fly zone over Syria and Sudan, her support for neo-liberal trade policies, or her anachronistic view of Russia. Liberal media deftly avoided discussing the sleaze associated with the Clinton Foundation, or the collusion between Hillary's and insiders on the Democratic National committee in sabotaging the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders. Unwilling to deal with such issues frankly, the liberal media actually heightened mistrust of Clinton and her candidacy.

But this didn't matter much. Relentless attacks on the press and the media for its "fake news" and dishonesty marked the early days of the Trump presidency. European leaders of the far right followed his lead. That is the way of the "alt-right" and the neo-fascist. They also rely on the "cult of the personality."

Unpredictability becomes a virtue: what the leader says in one venue is contradicted in another. Seeming incoherence enters into the formation of policy. Executive orders by Trump have targeted environmental regulations on coal production, and facilitated building the Keystone Pipeline (thereby inevitably raising carbon emissions), and placed climate change on the back burner as the hottest year on record passed into history. Elite friendly revisions of the tax code complement $1 trillion being devoted to infrastructure; free market policies and deregulation arise amid calls for protectionism; the dismantling of Obamacare is seemingly tempered by commitments to child care; restrictions on abortion are demanded while individual responsibility is privileged; building the "wall" and blocking Muslim and Latino immigration is threatened and then sweetened by a softer rhetoric; civil liberties are constrained, private prisons are praised, oversight of police control is lessened while freedom is proclaimed. Cabinet members are appointed because they condemned the offices they now lead and foreign policy is (purposely) conducted in haphazard manner.

The chaos is purposeful and the frenzied activity of the new administration seeks to throw opponents off balance. Progressives have responded in multiple ways and on multiple fronts. They have called for a special prosecutor over the Russia mess, employed legal actions in the courts, "truth squads," bad publicity and mass demonstrations. All have contributed to keeping pressure on the new administration (with some success) and giving its faint-hearted and more opportunistic supporters cause to ponder their allegiance. Liberal media is focusing on the hypocrisy of one-time conservative critics of Trump like House Speaker Paul Ryan or Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) who have jumped on the president's bandwagon. Republican unity has

proven elusive. Election experts in the Democratic Party will surely investigate those regions of the "Rust Belt" that had previously voted for Obama but turned on Hillary Clinton and switched to Trump. The role of the left in the Democratic Party has grown. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-Ca) has introduced legislation that would abolish the electoral college –even though, to this point, it has gone nowhere. Beyond tactical concerns, however, it is important to recognize the magnitude of the current counter-revolution, the ideological confusions and naïve strategic assumptions prevalent among progressives, and the preconditions necessary for strengthening solidarity in the future. What follows are a few thoughts that might prove sobering.

Unfortunately, it would seem, little was learned from the Al Gore-George W. Bush presidential debacle of 2000 in which the former won the popular vote and the latter the electoral college while Ralph Nader (the consumer advocate) played the spoiler. This hotly contested election was ultimately determined by the pro=Republican Supreme Court. Admittedly, Gore lost his home state of Tennessee but, more importantly, 250,000 Democrats voted for Bush in the crucial state of Florida. Bush won there with 537 votes thereby sealing the election. Yet, it could have gone the other way. Nader pulled over 91,000 votes in that state and the great majority of his supporters, as he admitted in an interview for the *Wall Street Journal* (May 31, 2008) would have voted for Gore. That would have thrown the election to the Democrats—thereby probably sparing us the effects of a neo-conservative foreign policy, two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, deregulation of markets, and wholescale attacks on the welfare state.

Third parties often raise issues and demands that establishmentarian parties ignore. Had Nader told his supporters a week or so before the election to vote Democratic in key and hotly contested states his project would have proven itself useful and legitimate. Unlike Bernie Sanders, however, he didn't – and, whatever other factors might have existed, it cost Democrats the election. The situation was no different with the presidential candidate for the Greens, Jill Stein, in 2016. Others, mostly on the right, voted for Gary Johnson and his Libertarian Party, which received 4.5 million votes. A slim majority would probably have gone to Trump, but that is not our concern. The 1.5 million Stein voters considered themselves people of the left – and it was Democratic votes that they wasted. Numbers don't lie. Trump won Michigan by roughly 11,000 votes—Stein received 51,000; Trump took Pennsylvania by 47,000 votes –Stein received about 50,000; and Trump's margin of victory in Wisconsin was 22,000, where Stein received 31,000 votes.

Losing these three states would have deprived Trump of 46 electoral votes, leaving him with 260, or ten shy of the minimum necessary to become president. Apathy played a role. All in all, along with those who were not hindered from voting, but *chose* not to vote, less than 58% of those eligible to vote cast their ballots. Some believed it unethical to accept the lesser of the two evils; others embraced misguided beliefs in "the worse the better" while thinking that a Trump victory would usher in the revolution. There are still arguments flying around the Internet that question the need to take a position on conflicts between "neo-liberals and

reactionary populists." Their advocates apparently found it better to turn their backs on political reality – and, objectively speaking, apologize for the winner. Unlike old campaigns by communist and socialist parties, moreover, the Greens left nothing resembling a qualitatively more radical agenda on the table. They simply, again, played the spoiler.

All elections rest on choosing between the lesser of the two evils. Legislating an agenda always involves compromise. That would also surely have been the case for Nader or Green had they won. The issue is not what progressive social movement or interest group or even party is joined *before* crucial moments of decision take place. What counts is the decision to engage political reality when that moment of decision comes, when the stakes are high, the future hangs in the balance, and there is a choice between stubbornly standing alone or in solidarity with those who will assuredly bear the brunt of a more reactionary future. That is particularly the case in the context of a single-district winner take-all system that makes it virtually impossible for third parties to grow over time. The huge anti-immigrant demonstrations and women's marches, mostly organized by those who chose to vote Democratic, demonstrate what should be obvious: solidarity with the disenfranchised and exploited is the precondition for opposing the new expressions of fascism.

Anti-fascism rests on the ability to fuse the defense of *liberal* political principles that impact upon all minorities with a *socialist* economic agenda that privileges the general interests of working people. That is true today no less than it was during the heyday of the Popular Front during the 1930s. But the requisite unity is arguably even more difficult to achieve under circumstances where interests are strong, political parties are weak, and so much of the discourse revolves around personal identity whose logic projects an ever-increasing specificity and particularism. Women took the primary role in standing up for women, people of color did the same, and so did gays. As cultural change flourished, however, economic inequality reached record levels. Indeed, whatever the positive cultural benefits it has achieved, identity politics has manifested a fragmenting dynamic that has had a negative impact on economic equity and class power.

Critical self-reflection and institutional analysis are necessary to deal with the problem. It will not vanish simply by chanting "the people united will never be defeated." Fragmentation occurs in a way that is very much in accord with the vision articulated in *The Federalist Papers* (especially Number 10 and 51) written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay in 1787-88. So, for example, women's liberation originally spoke to all women. If a woman is also gay, black, and working class, however, it is questionable whether her specific identity can be determined by the National Organization of Women or any of the more generic original groups. A person can obviously share multiple identities and new forms of hybridity or "intersectionality" will constantly appear. New organizations then become necessary to represent them. Each will thus appear as a (quite traditional) "faction" intent upon privileging the interests of its own clientele. Interest groups can often agree on the need for specific reforms. They can work with established political parties and cooperate in single-issue coalitions – often to great effect. With the multiplication of lobbies and interest groups, however, comes an ever-greater competition for resources and loyalty. Alliances rise, fall apart,

and then rise again so that there is a constant need to reinvent the wheel. Class drops out (or turns into yet another identity) so that it becomes ever more difficult to comprehend the workings of capitalism. In short, the whole becomes less than the sum of its parts.[1] And that defines the current situation.

Identity formations tend to highlight the sufferings of one victim as against those of others. Such an aim is embedded in the structure of interest groups and, of course it facilitates a policy of divide and conquer. That has always been of importance since the bigot rarely targets only one group but, instead, hates in clusters and often employs interchangeable stereotypes. Today, however, the situation is particularly dire since the old rhetoric of prejudice is being supplemented by seemingly respectable justifications: curtailing voting rights is not discriminatory, for example, but a way of preventing (non-existent) electoral fraud; shrinking the welfare state builds character and individual responsibility; making taxation more regressive fosters investment; attacking historical "revisionism," evolution, and abortion rights protects tradition, religion, and the family. Nevertheless, if the rhetoric of bigotry has changed, its traditional targets haven't.

A *coordination problem* exists. Fashionable claims that reliance on unifying categories, universal values, and institutional or "grand narratives" tend to squash "difference" is profoundly misguided. Exercising personal identity actually depends upon the extent to which civil rights are operative and a state is required to sanction their employment. Adherence to the liberal rule of law is not simply an add-on to identity or even social equality—but decisive. Not only does it place protection of the individual above the state but it also serves as the precondition for establishing reciprocity among working people in all social movements and identity groups. "Identity" is organized politically not by social movements and idealistic activists but, instead, through interest groups whose professional leaders are intent upon privileging the material concerns of their members over those with other identities. Solidarity, in short, is usually institutionally short-circuited through the moral economy of the separate deal. That is what the liberal rule of law both legally and ethically rejects: it treats all identities and social movements equally and, at least in formal terms, refuses to privilege any of them.

The same is necessary when it comes to class politics. As things now stand, the working class is identified with older white industrial workers living in regions like the Midwestern "rust belt" (who tended to vote for Donald Trump). This makes things simple: the working class is given a "natural" and empirical identity that lets it be understood in the same terms as women, people of color, gays etc. Class becomes just another identity among a host of (transclass) identities. And, since loss of electoral votes from the rust belt cost the Democrats the presidency the common (if simplistic) wisdom suggests the need for policies that target the (white) working class and bring it back into the fold. But the conceptual and practical mistake is obvious. Privileging that sector of the working class will alienate other sectors. There are black workers, women workers, and gay workers. The working class surely also includes those office workers and others whom one encounters on subways during rush hour. The need exists for coordination among progressive forces and new categories that cut across those cross-cutting cleavages.

Fostering unity among working people calls for understanding the working class not simply in arbitrary empirical terms but as the class that sells its labor power on the market in conditions not of its choosing —- and feels its exploitation in doing so. “Class” should offer a perspective on unity among the disenfranchised and exploited that no other “identity” can provide – if only because it blends (universal liberal political) principles with (universal economic and social) interests. That is the type of unity required to fight the counter-revolution. Its mass base will undoubtedly exist in the cities where resistance will most likely congeal against a counter-revolution that, like its predecessors, is lodged in the less economically developed and non-urban parts of the country. Class solidarity today calls for confronting what Marx termed the “political economy of capital” with the “political economy of labor,” and inventing a class agenda that clarifies the material concerns of working people within each identity-based social movement without privileging any. Such an outlook requires what *in Socialism Unbound* I termed “the class ideal.”

Reducing the working class to the white industrial working class defines the universal in terms of the particular. And it is no accident that the most anachronistic elements should become the symbol of the working class given the backwardness of the American labor movement. Class is a logical derivation of the capitalist accumulation process and it cuts across other (transclass) identity formations thereby creating conflicts of interest within and between them. So, for example, the elitist preoccupation of Hillary Clinton’s supporters with cracking the “glass ceiling” blinded them to the concerns of poor and working class women who were far more worried about avoiding the economic pitfalls of the trap-door. Just as commitment to the generalizable principles underpinning the rule of law makes possible the exercise of diversity, indeed, targeting generalizable interests of the working people makes possible the exercise of class solidarity. There are no guarantees of success. The class ideal is nothing more than an ethical imperative born of political need.

Thousands and thousands of individuals are engaged in the seemingly countless groups that comprise the progressive community. The problem is not apathy as the huge demonstrations that have marked every political ebb and flow since the 1960s will attest. Especially in periods of economic downturn and rigid labor markets, such coalitions are constantly threatened by what might be termed the moral economy of the separate deal. Yet, unity cannot be imposed from the outside by some vanguard organization. Only activists within each of the social movements and engaged in identity politics —– those whom Foucault called “empirical intellectuals” — can effectively articulate the programs necessary to further unity. Such is the dialectical irony of our times.

A new political culture is confronting argument, evidence, and science with dogma, faith, and intuition. Intellectual sloganeers are already speaking about the “post-truth” society. The Other is being held in contempt; Immigrants are in danger of deportation; a useless wall separating the United States from Mexico is being built; Syrians and those coming from crisis torn nations in the Middle East are in danger of being sent back; protectionism is deluding workers and straining relations with other nations. Fear of the Other and the crudest stereotypes are being fueled by paranoia, hysteria, and resentment. Trump seems to view foreign policy as a

smorgasbord; he has taken his admiration for pre-emptive strikes from George W. Bush, his belief in "no-fly zone" in Syria from Hillary Clinton, his super-power fixations from liberal "realists," and his contempt for international organizations such as NATO and the UN from the neo-conservatives. Trump's conspiracy fetishism speaks to provincial feelings of exploitation and ingratitude by the world community. His use of the slogan "America First!" projects the vaguest possible notion of the national interest even as it highlights the chauvinism that marked his presidential campaign.

Trump and his followers have also instigated what might be termed a "post-truth" perspective. Numerous organizational fact checkers report on the far more numerous lies and distortions of empirical reality that have shaped the president's pronouncements and influenced policy from his anti-immigrant stance to denial of global warming to his assault on Obamacare. Experts, intellectuals, scientists, and the general commitment to education are now the "enemy of the people." Trump's use of fabrications and falsifications of fact, his own *conspiracy fetishism*, and the psychological projections of his own actions upon opponents, all contribute to his fundamental aim that is common among both bigots and authoritarians: avoid engagement in a critical discourse and the need to justify arguments and claims. Privileging "street smarts" is the traditional way in which fascists have indulged the elitism of the mob. Milquetoast liberals, who warn against "demonizing" Trump's supporters, misunderstand not merely the direct authoritarian threat they pose but the *style* of their public stance. Of course, it is true that some are simply misinformed and embrace the new authoritarian in good faith. But that doesn't change matters. The belief that they have been somehow carried away and not responsible for the choice that they made is worryingly reminiscent of the way in which it was claimed that the German people were somehow mesmerized by Hitler and that, as Hannah Arendt would have put the matter, they had lost the ability to "think."

But they didn't lose that ability. Such a claim actually deprives fascists both today and yesterday of their culpability as well as, ironically, their free will as individual subjects. Supporters of Trump and the Tea Party made an ethical and political choice. They chose to endorse thugs and "think" accordingly. Authoritarianism, bigotry, and intellectual thuggery, or the elitism of the little man, have always exhibited a certain elective affinity with one another. Progressives today must defend liberal principles from those who hate them—and who have achieved power. Economic programs calling for building infrastructure through "public-private" means have always been easy for fascists to support. It is a small price to pay for the success of an authoritarian politics. Trump is no classical liberal tied to civil liberties, free markets, and a small "watchman" state. He and his friends want a strong state – so long as they are not held accountable for the ways that they exercise power. Principled *political* opposition is required. Progressives must refashion the enlightenment legacy for our time, privilege its liberal and socialist traditions, and promulgate a new *cosmopolitan sensibility*. This constitutes a complex pedagogic and political task. Nevertheless, progressives need to meet the challenge if their more humane outlook is to reclaim its influence and rise like a phoenix from the ashes.

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# “A Hostile World”: Critical Theory in the Time of Trump

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### Introduction

Donald J. Trump’s unexpected victory in the November 2016 American presidential election was met by a wave of shock. After first trying to come to grips with why Trump had won[1], commentators across an array of media outlets then composed “hot takes”[2] as to what Trump’s election signified; did it mark the end of neoliberalism?[3], or its culmination?[4], perhaps it signified the prescience of the 18th Brumaire[5] or the rise of fascism?[6] While the Right were emboldened by Trump’s victory, many on the Left responded to the election with outrage and defiance. Protests broke out in the urban environs of blue states: denouncing Trump’s electoral legitimacy,[7] his personality, and his prospective policies.

More than two months later Trump’s inauguration and his raft of executive orders have been met with another wave of protests. The media continues to offer prognostications, reactions to Trump’s executive orders, and the latest unverified revelations coughed up by private and public intelligence agencies about Russia, Trump and his business dealings. As things currently stand (at the start of his first 100 days in office) Trump looks to be a rare and seemingly paradoxical (not to mention uniquely quaffed infantile and narcissist) character; combining, nativist authoritarian populism and neoliberalism into a form of authoritarian liberalism or post-fascism inline with but exceeding the drift to the Right initiated by Reagan, Bush, and the Tea Party whilst also mirroring political developments in Europe. Having not only bolstered the extreme right, and signed a number of awful regressive and xenophobic executive orders, he also looks set to pass a raft of regressive cultural, social and economic legislation – from the annulment of Obamacare to tax cuts, budget cuts and his vaunted infrastructure plan[8] — that will further enrich the rich, degrade the environment, and hurt the most vulnerable; stigmatizing and degrading the status of women, immigrants and people of color as well as the aggrieved rural white working class voters many point to as his base. In times like these the 24/7 news cycle feels unrelenting: everyday brings more bad news and more reasons for pessimism.

Yet because of the peculiarity of our current social and political constellation there seem to be few resources for understanding the situation we are in, let alone how we got here or how we can get out of it. Are we really experiencing the end of neoliberalism or its culmination? Is Trump a fascist? Is he the modern day Louis Napoleon? Is he an authoritarian in the mould of Orban, Erdogan, and Putin? Does his election signify the rise of right wing populism or is it merely the fluke result of the American electoral system and the hubristic inefficacy of Hillary’s campaign? What is responsible for these developments? Was it the Brexit or the Tea Party?

Perhaps it was the 2008 economic crisis or neoliberalism? Are these contingent events or expressions of an overarching social dynamic? Do we respond to them by supporting Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren? Pulling the Democratic party to the left? Working across the aisle to neutralize Trump? Taking it to the streets? Taking it to the airports? By marshalling progressive and rational ideas to delegitimize Trump and Trumpism in the public sphere?

Frankfurt School Critical Theory would seem to be an invaluable resource for addressing these issues. For all of the thinkers associated with Critical Theory can be said to propound interdisciplinary theories that eschew reductive labels, conceiving of these sorts of events as originating in social dynamics, while pointing to their overcoming. Yet the prevalent forms of contemporary critical theory that developed during, and even in response to neoliberalism, are marked by shibboleths — such as complex societal differentiation, the opposition between the social system and the lifeworld, redistribution, recognition, and normativity – that have "domesticated"[9] the critical theory of society as a normative theory of just democracy. Consequently, despite their differences, at least as it now stands, thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Nancy Fraser understand neoliberalism, the 2008 crisis and even the rise of authoritarianism and the election of Trump as "social pathologies" that have arisen when the relationship between the necessary components of any modern society become askew; resulting in a social disequilibrium wherein the social sub-systems (the market and the state) colonize the lifeworld (the realm of intersubjective reason); subordinating it to non-democratic forms of reason, leading to inequality, misrecognition, and the rise irrational politics. This, in turn, necessitates a critical theory that calls for reorienting society on the bases of the normative rational values of redistribution and recognition, decolonizing the lifeworld and establishing a social equilibrium incumbent on the democratic mediation of the system.

In a recent interview, Jürgen Habermas thus depicts the rise of neoliberalism as characterized by the spread of "untamed markets" and anti-democratic transnational institutional frameworks that have led to the erosion of the post-war global order, a crisis of political legitimacy, and the rise of inequality. The capitulation of left wing parties to the "third way", he further argues, has led to a lack of left wing criticisms of these developments by political parties, which the Right has capitalized on by framing them in nationalist terms, leading to the election of figures such as Erdogan and the rise of the "egomaniac" Trump.

However, as reflective of his social theory, Habermas argues that these developments do not signify the rise of authoritarianism or forms of historical regression. Rather they are part and parcel of the "dynamic of social modernisation" which is "linked to functional imperatives that repeatedly clash" wherein "The trade-off between capitalistic growth and the populace's share – only half-heartedly accepted as socially just – in the growth of highly productive economies could only be brought about by a democratic state deserving of this name." Consequently, "the rug can be pulled from under right-wing populism" through the forthright championing of enlightenment and cosmopolitan values against right-wing nationalism and a policy of the "institutional deepening and embedding of democratically legitimised co-operation across national borders" which will seemingly reign in the gross inequalities of neoliberal financial

capitalism by instituting a relationship of democratic equilibrium between the system and the lifeworld.[10]

Moreover, while Axel Honneth has so far remained silent on Trump, the brand new English translation of his 2015 *Die Idee des Sozialismus, published some seven years after the crisis, comes at what might be seen as an inopportune time. For here Honneth* attempts to rejuvenate socialism; breaking with its "economist" legacy to reinvision it in conjunction with his intersubjective normative social theory of recognition — itself premised on Habermas's social theory.[11] Since Honneth's social theory holds that rather than domains of antagonism, exploitation, domination, repression and ressentiment, the differentiated private, political, and economic spheres of modern society are nascent realms of recognition,[12] he argues that socialism can be updated and revitalized by discarding out-dated ideas like class struggle and the abolition of the market. Rather than a socialist revolution, Honneth proposes this notion of socialism can fully realized on the basis of adhoc pragmatic measures that counteract the effects of pathological types of misrecognition, such a neoliberalism, by re-embedding them within the normative orders of their respective spheres, thus achieving the social democratic rule of recognition.

Finally, even Nancy Fraser, a perceptive critical interlocutor of Habermas and Honneth, who nevertheless utilizes aspects of their work, argues that

"(neo)liberalism and fascism are … two deeply interconnected faces of the capitalist world system. Although they are by no means normatively equivalent, both are products of unrestrained capitalism, which everywhere destabilizes lifeworlds and habitats, bringing in its wake both individual liberation and untold suffering. Liberalism expresses the first, liberatory side of this process, while glossing over the rage and pain associated with the second. Left to fester in the absence of an alternative, those sentiments fuel authoritarianisms of every sort, including those that really deserve the name fascism and those that emphatically do not."[13]

Drawing on Polyani and Gramsci, but also Habermas, Fraser thus argues that Trump's election and Brexit signify a shift in the opposition to neoliberal capitalism; what following the 2008 crisis was expressed in ephemeral protests movement, has now entered the political sphere. According to Fraser, Trump's election then signifies the end of 'progressive' neoliberalism's hegemony to which the Left must respond by constructing a movement that draws on Bernie Sander's legacy.[14]

Thus despite their important differences, for Fraser, like Habermas and Honneth, it then seems that unrestrained neoliberal capitalism's colonization of the lifeworld has eroded democracy, leading to misrecognition and maldistribution, which in turn, is vented in authoritarianism. [15] Moreover, mirroring Habermas and Honneth, it also seems that Fraser holds that advocating the democratic rationality inherent to contemporary society, and its principles of redistribution and recognition, will combat and even cure contemporary society of these pathologies.

Yet if the answer to these social problems is really more democracy, more recognition and a

turn to redistributive policies, then why did neoliberalism and financialization arise in the first place? And if such a democratic impulse resides in the intersubjective realm of the lifeworld, what explains Sander's loss and Brexit and Trump's victory? Would they have been prevented with more democracy? More legitimacy? More redistribution? More recognition? With a better normative exposition of these ideas? Or does neoliberalization, the 2008 crisis, and the rise of right wing authoritarian populism undermine such an refashioning of Critical Theory, calling its underlying social-theoretical assumptions and correlative concepts into question? Can the concept of redistribution grasp or counteract exploitation, antagonism, domination and crises? Can the concept of recognition? Or as Hoschild indicates,[16] does the latter likewise underwrite the rise of the Tea Party and the so-called "alt right" who lodge their antagonistic racist and nativist demands precisely in the language of recognition? More importantly do these pathologies originate from the system's colonization of the lifeworld and would they be solved by subordinating the state and the market to democratic imperatives or do their malaise point to an overarching irrationality inherent in the form of capitalist society as such that is realized in and perpetuated by the dynamics of neoliberalism, crises and the rise of authoritarianism? Is it a *contingent* social pathology we should be concerned with or is contemporary capitalist society *necessarily* pathological as such?

At the very least, as a number of commentators have pointed out,[17] Trump's election and the current wave of right wing populism call to mind the work of the early Frankfurt School. For Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm, Marcuse, Benjamin, Neumann, Lowenthal and Pollock endeavoured to understand the failure of the left and fascism's rise in the context of the Great Depression by posing their approach to the critical theory of society in a markedly different manner: critiquing "the glue that binds society together anew."[18] For, in contrast to the type of contemporary critical theory assayed above, early critical theory conceived of this "glue" in terms of "the economic principle even as it affects both the conscious and the unconscious of the people, the development of which defines the law of movement of society, and drives it towards catastrophe: namely the commodity."[19] Such a Critical Theory, in Horkheimer's seminal formulation, thus rested on unfolding a single existential judgment against the catastrophic dynamics of capitalist society, which in lieu of its internal and external tensions, and its objective and subjective properties, had finally hindered its further development and driven humanity into a new barbarism.[20] Consequently, one could not understand Nazism and anti-Semitism without grasping the connection "between the fetish character of the commodities and the fetishized character of human beings"[21] because one could ultimately not speak of fascism without speaking of capitalism.

Hence even after the defeat of Nazi fascism, the later work of the Institute was still concerned with prospect of the rise of authoritarianism within western democratic countries. This was because in eschewing a model of complex differentiation, the early Frankfurt school held that the intertwined realms of the economy, the state, and the private sphere entailed domination and shaped subjectivity so that individuals lacked autonomy and reason, becoming susceptible to authoritarianism and scapegoating. In Adorno's words, capitalist society was thus a "society based on domination" which "has not simply robbed itself and human beings—its compulsory members—of … dignity, but rather it has never permitted them to become the emancipated

beings who, in Kant's theory, have a right to dignity."[22] Consequently, such a society "as a relationship between human beings" mediated by the social dynamic of capital accumulation … "is just as much founded in them as it comprehends and constitutes them."[23] This conception of society led Adorno, Marcuse, Lowenthal and others, to draw on Marx and Freud to presciently diagnose why and how irrational mass movements lined up behind demagogic figures, enunciating foreshortened critiques of society.[24] It also informed Adorno's famous statement that he considered "the survival of National Socialism within democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies against democracy."[25]

Thus rather than conceiving of authoritarianism as a social pathology arising as a reaction to the irrational disequilibrium between the system and the lifeworld that can be remedied by advocating and instituting a democratic equilibrium on normative grounds, such an understanding of the critical theory of society held that authoritarianism was inherent to the irrational objective and subjective dynamics of capitalist society as such. Consequently, this notion of Critical Theory not only tried to cultivate autonomy as a bulwark against the rise of authoritarianism, but also endeavored to understand, demystify and negate the antagonistic, dominating and regressive society that brought forth authoritarianism.

In our present moment, when so many traditional and critical theoretical models seem at a loss; raising more questions than answers and thus failing to grasp its foreboding light, this early approach to critical theory seems all too pertinent. Towards this end, I have asked some of the foremost contemporary thinkers of this approach to critical theory to use the specter of the Trump presidency to reflect upon neoliberalism, the crisis, the rise of right wing authoritarianism and the task of the critical theory of society today.

In "Authoritarian Liberalism, Class and Rackets," Werner Bonefeld utilizes his Adornian interpretation of the critique of political economy[26] as well as his work on ordoliberalism[27] to offer a critical theoretical account of Trumpism. According to Bonefeld, "Understanding the critique of political economy as a critical social theory includes the critique of so-called neo-liberalism as the theoretical expression of capitalist social relations." Thus, In contrast to "normative critics of neoliberalism, which reject it abstractly as a doctrine of narrow-minded economic interests, especially the interests of financial capital", Bonefeld argues that "neoliberalism did not corrupt capitalism. It is rather a theoretical expression of capitalism." In order to unfold such a constellation, Bonefeld first turns to Adorno's understanding of the class character of bourgeois society. He then expounds the neoliberal conception of class, presents its argument that the free economy amounts to a practice of government, and explores the meaning of authoritarian liberalism. This sets up Bonefeld's discussion of how "Authoritarian liberalism recognizes the state as indispensible for the free economy, a conception that is well understood by Trump." The conclusion "bespeaks the time of Trump" as that of the governance of an authoritarian (neo)liberal racket at the behest of capitalist social relations.

John Abromeit's "Right Wing Populism and the Limits of Normative Critical Theory" assesses the applicability of Habermas's critical theory in our current conjuncture, ultimately arguing that early critical theory can provide a more fruitful approach to the latter. To do so, Abromeit

contextualizes Habermas's work as an attempt to sure up the democratic institutions of the German state in the decades that followed World War II. At the same time he calls into question the suitability of Habermas's normative notion of modernization for criticizing neoliberalism and the rise of right wing populism. From here Abromeit moves to pointing to the relevance of Adorno and Marcuse's work on authoritarianism. To do so, he supplements his argument in "Critical Theory and Right Wing Populism"[28] — which drew on early critical theories' analysis of ideas such as "producers and parasites" and "pseudo conservatism" to show how "Trump has appropriated the communitarian elements of the Tea Party ideology, while at the same time intensifying them, by combining them with his own appeal as an authoritarian leader who allegedly possesses the power to enact them and to punish those "enemies of the people" – both domestic and foreign – who are responsible for America's decline"[29] — by arguing that "early Critical Theorists' greater attention to irrational underpinnings of modern bourgeois society and to the ways in which social domination reproduces itself within the institutions of liberal democracy make their model more appropriate" than normative critical theory 'to grasping the return of crisis tendencies, massive inequality and right-wing populism that have emerged in Europe and the U.S. during the new historical period of neo-liberal globalization.'

Finally, Samir Gandesha suggests that second and third generation Critical Theory lacks a proper theory of crisis as is exemplified by Axel Honneth's interpretation of the conception of "reification" which he understands as the subsumption of persons under the category of "thing" made possible by a failure to ground "knowledge" in "acknowledgement." He then suggests that the first generation is worth revisiting. Of particular value is Adorno's notion of the "identification with the aggressor," which, he suggests, can help us, in part, explain the appeal of President Donald J. Trump.[30]

In so doing, these contributions not only raise questions about appropriateness of the predominant approach to critical theory, but also point the applicability of returning to and further developing early Critical Theory in the hopes of combating barbarism in its newest manifestation.

## Notes

[1] See, for instance, the following examples of these positions: Joseph Stigliz, "The Age of Trump", https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/the-age-of-trump-by-joseph-e-stiglitz-2017-01?barrier=accessyef; German Lopez, "Study: racism and sexism predict support for Trump much more than economic dissatisfaction," https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/1/4/14160956/trump-racism-sexism-economy-study; Juan Cole, "Why the White Working Class Rebelled: Neoliberalism is Killing them (literally) "

https://www.juancole.com/2016/11/rebelled-neoliberalism-literally.html

[2] For my own hot take see Chris O'Kane, intervuju, *Vreme,* 24, novembar 2016

[3] See, for instance, Cornel West, "Goodbye American neoliberalism. A new era is here" https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/17/american-neoliberalism-cornel-west-2016-election; Cornel Ban, "Will Trump Bring Neoliberalism's apocalypse, or Merely a New Iteration?" https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/blog/will-trump-bring-neoliberalisms-apocalypse-or-merely-a-new-iteration; Conor Lynch, "Neoliberalism's Epic Fail," https://www.salon.com/2016/11/19/neoliberalisms-epic-fail-the-reaction-to-hillary-clintons-loss-exposed-the-impotent-elitism-of-liberalism/

[4] Zymunt Bauman, "How Neoliberlism Prepared the Way For Donald Trump", https://www.socialeurope.eu/2016/11/how-neoliberalism-prepared-the-way-for-donald-trump/; Catherine Rottenberg, Trumping it up: Neoliberalism on Steriods, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/12/trumping-neoliberalism-steroids-161215144834626.html; George Monbiot, Neoliberalism: The Deep Story that Lies Beneath Trump's Triumph, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/14/neoliberalsim-donald-trump-george-monbiot

[5] John Quiggan, "the 18th Brumaire Everywhere", https://crookedtimber.org/2016/11/27/18th-brumaire-everywhere/; Matt Ford, "A Thermadorian Reaction", https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/sanders-trump-french-revolution/493349/.

[6] Robert Kagan, "This is How Fascism Comes to America," https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/this-is-how-fascism-comes-to-america/2016/05/17/c4e32c58-1c47-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html?utm_term=.b2bacb0ff185;Gianna Riotta, "I know Fascists; Donald Trump is Not a Fascist," https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/donald-trump-fascist/424449/; Isaac Chotner, "Is Donald Trump a Fascist? Yes and No" https://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/interrogation/2016/02/is_donald_trump_a_fascist_an_expert_on_fascism_weighs_in.html. This particular label became the subject of such debate it also led to the following John Macneil, "How Fascist is Donald Trump? There's actuality a formula for That" https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/10/21/how-fascist-is-donald-trump-theres-actually-a-formula-for-that/?utm_term=.92762d0cf2b9, as well as a Guardian roundtable "Should we even go there? Historians on comparing fascism to Trumpism", https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/01/comparing-fascism-donald-trump-historians-trumpism

[7] Some held out faint hopes that the US constitution, which was responsible for Trump's victory, would also annul it when the Electoral College met. It didn't.

[8] Despite its New Deal style rhetoric at present it seems that the infrastructure plan is a fitting example of Trump's peculiar brand of authoritarian liberalism: consisting in a typically idiosyncratic combination of a raft of privatization and tax cuts coupled with a few token public works projects, most notably the wall and oil pipelines, that at best will only create 240,000 jobs, at the same time as it stigmatizes and harms people of color and propagates the type of corporate welfare typically associated with neoliberalism. See Ronald A Cain, "Trump's Infrastructure Plan? Its a trap" https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trumps-big-infrastructure-plan-its-a-trap/2016/11/18/5b1d109c-adae-11e6-8b45-f8e493f06fcd_story.html?utm_term=.02d4c4a9311a and Holly Warfield, "Three Charts that show the Surprising Scope of Trump's Infrastructure Plan." https://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL=https://www.forbes.com/sites/datadesign/2017/01/31/3-charts-that-show-the-surprising-scope-of-trumps-infrastructure-plan/&refURL=https://www.forbes.com/&referrer=https://www.forbes.com/#

(in addition, it should also be noted that other infrastructure projects, such as the construction of electronic smart grids, promise to create the sort of technologically sophisticated infrastructure that require a smaller and less expensive workforce, a point that seems to be missing in the commentary on the proposed plan)

[9] Michael J. Thompson, *The Domestication of Critical Theory,* New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2016.

[10] Jurgen Habermas, 'How to Pull the Rug from Under Right Wing Populism: https://www.socialeurope.eu/2016/11/democratic-polarisation-pull-ground-right-wing-populism

[11] see Anti Chari, *A Political Economy of the Senses,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Thompson, *Domestication.*

[12] For Honneth's ambivalent treatment of neoliberalism see Anita Chari. For a critique of his conception of the market as a realm of recognition see Timo Juetten, "Is the Market a Sphere of Social Freedom?", *Critical Horizons,* 16:2 (2015): 187–203

[13] Nancy Fraser and Andrew Arato, American Elections: a Dialog on the Left. https://www.publicseminar.org/2016/09/american-elections-a-dialogue-on-the-left/

[14] Nancy Fraser, 'The End of Progressive Neoliberalism" https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/progressive-neoliberalism-reactionary-populism-nancy-fraser.

[15] As I read it, the analysis Fraser presents here rests on her fusion of Polyani, Habermas and Gramsci and her notion of the economic and political crisis of financialized capitalism provided in Nancy Fraser, Legitimation Crisis? On the Political Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism, *Critical Historical Studies*, vol 2 no 2, fall 2015. Here the Fraser provides a more theoretically sophisticated account of neoliberal financialized capitalism, its twin economic and political crises, and the need to redress these crises with public power. However, although she

links these crises to capitalism as such and acknowledges that social democracy and public power will have to be rethought, both of these issues are outside of the purview of her paper. One hopes she will focus on them in the near future.

[16] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in their Own Land,* New York: the New Press, 2016.

[17] Alex Ross, 'The Frankfurt School knew Trump was Coming" https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-frankfurt-school-knew-trump-was-coming and Stuart Jeffries, "If you want to understand the age of Trump, you need to read the Frankfurt School", https://www.vox.com/conversations/2016/12/27/14038406/donald-trump-frankfurt-school-stuart-jeffries-marxism-critical-theory

[18] Theodor W. Adorno, "A Letter from Adorno to Fromm," November 17 1937, https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/adorno_letter.htm

[19] Adorno, "A Letter from Adorno to Fromm."

[20] Marx Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays.* London: Continuum, 1972 available at https://www.heathwoodpress.com/max-horkheimer-traditional-and-critical-theory/

[21] Adorno, Letter to Fromm.

[22] Theodor W. Adorno et al. *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology,* 14

[23] Theodor W. Adorno et al. *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology,* 14

[24] Peter E Gordon, "The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: reading Adorno in the age of Trump, https://www.boundary2.org/2016/06/peter-gordon-the-authoritarian-personality-revisited-reading-adorno-in-the-age-of-trump/ as well as John Abromeit, Douglas Kellner's, and James E. Freeman and Peter Kolozi's contributions Diagnosing Right-Wing Populism in the previous issue of *Logos* were prescient enough to draw on these figures to analysis Trump and right wing populism over the course of the presidential campaign.

[25] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" in *Critical Models,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 90.

[26] Werner Bonefeld, Critical theory and the Critique of Political Economy, London: Bloomsbury, 2014. Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Economic Objectivity, *History of Human Sciences,* April 12, 2016. …https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0952695116637294

[27] Werner Bonefeld, Authoritarian Liberalism: from Schmitt via Ordoliberalism to the Euro

Critical Sociology, August 7, 2016. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0896920516662695 The Strong State and the Free Economy, London: Rowan and Littlefield, forthcoming 2017.

[28] John Abromeit, Critical Theory and Right Wing Populism, Logos, Summer 2016: vol. 15 no. 2-3. https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/2016/abromeit/ Abromeit's piece also draws on "Genealogy and Critical Historicism: Two Concepts of Enlightenment in the Writings of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno," *Critical Historical Studies,* vol. 3, no. 2(Fall, 2016), 283-308 as well as Abromeit's earlier work on Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas.

[29] Abromeit, "Critical Theory and Right Wing Populism"

[30] Samir Gandesha, "The Political Semiosis of Populism" *Semiotic Review of Books* Vol. 13, 3, (2003): 1-7, From the Authoritarian to the Neo-Liberal Personality," paper presented at "Der aufrechte Gang im windscheifen Kapitalismus" conference at the Nietzsche Kollege in Weimar and at the Freud Museum in London in January, 2016. It will be appearing in the journal *Constellations* later this year. Samir Gandesha and Johan Hartle (eds.) , *Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press: forthcoming) and Samir Gandesha and Johan Hartle (eds.) *Aesthetic Marx* (London:Bloomsbury: forthcoming)

# Authoritarian Liberalism, Class and Rackets

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Understanding the critique of political economy as a critical social theory includes the critique of so-called neo-liberalism as the theoretical expression of capitalist social relations. In contrast to normative critics of neoliberalism, which reject it abstractly as a doctrine of narrow-minded economic interests, especially the interests of financial capital, neoliberalism did not corrupt capitalism.[1] It is rather a theoretical expression of capitalism.

Rejection of neo-liberalism as the ideology of market fundamentalism fails to grasp its social validity. It denounces the contemporary mode of capitalist organisation as malign to the interests of workers without asking about the character of capitalist wealth and what it means to be a worker in capitalist society. Why indeed does this content, that is, human social reproduction, take the form of money as more money? Contemporary critical theory asks different questions. It asks about the ways and means of achieving the promises of the Enlightenment and proposes communicative actions to emancipate capitalism from uncivilised forms of profit making, class exploitation, gender oppression, war, and prevent ecological destruction. Honneth's theory of recognition expands on Habermas' ideas of civilising capitalism by communicative actions. According to Axel Honneth society contains within itself the 'promise of freedom' (Honneth 2010, 10). This would suggest that society also contains within itself the 'promise' of a freedom from want and therewith from the daily struggle of a whole class of individuals to make ends meet. For the sake of this freedom, Honneth's argument suggests that the existing form of society has to develop its potential to the full in order to make its promise a reality. In this view, the working class struggle for subsistence is not innate to capitalist society. Rather, it manifests a social pathology. Society ought to be free from it. Who would object to that view? Yet, what really does this mean?[2] Contemporary critical theory is premised on realizing enlightened rule by the rational democratic regulation of contemporary society. It identifies state and economy as distinct forms of social organization and recognizes the state as the predominant power of that relationship. Seemingly, the relations of production manifest either (democratic) reason or (neoliberal) unreason. In contemporary critical theory, the critique of economic categories is a non-topic.

Understanding neoliberalism as a theoretical expression of the capitalistically organised form of social reproduction entails its critique as a critique of capitalist society. Instead of some abstract, purely formal, rejection of neoliberalism as an uncivilised pathology of the capitalist promise of a great society, the critique of neoliberalism is valid only as a critique of the economic object, which by means of invisible principles 'takes care of both the beggar and the

king' (Adorno 1990, 110). For Adorno, 'the abolition of hunger' was not a matter of enlightened government. Rather it required a 'change in the relations of production' (Adorno 1976, 62). Contemporary critical theory shies away from such critique. As a consequence, it really has nothing of note to say about the social conditions of poverty. It proposes various ways of overcoming poverty through the redistribution of wealth and the democratic regulation of the economy without asking about the constitution of the economic object. Humanisation of social relations is the purpose of the critique of political economy. However, the effort of humanising is confronted by the paradox that it presupposes inhuman conditions, which provoke the effort of humanisation in the first place. Inhuman conditions are not just an impediment to humanisation but a premise of its concept.

In the meantime, Trump exploited the socio-economic blow back from the financial crisis of 2008 with populist distrust of those in power and an appeal to nativism. He promises a return to and for business by means of the state. His stance expresses a fundamental neoliberal insight that has largely been ignored by its well-meaning critics. Neoliberalism recognises the free economy and the strong state as interdependent categories (for a thorough account, see Bonefeld 2017). Trump's stance made clear also that the rulers have nothing to fear from the discontentment of the ruled for as long as they express their rage as followers of authoritarian personalities, who make it their business to say what everybody else seems to know already: their misfortune is not their fault at all. Trump names the guilty parties and demands that they are locked up and kept out of the business of American labour. Nativism personalises the cause and effects of freedom as economic compulsion. It gives permission to express rage within the bounds of supreme order thinking. Instead of illusory assurances of a politically correct and better capitalism, authoritarians name the Other as undesirable elements to some illusory national harmony. Trump succeeded because he projected a nation divided by friends and enemies and offered action, for the sake of business and nativist pleasure. Paraphrasing Adorno, nativism, this idea of a people as rooted in nature, is 'bound to become a fetish unto itself; there [is] no other way [capitalism] might have integrated the individuals, whose economic need of that form of organization is as great as its incessant rape of them' (Adorno 1990, 339).

In the order of presentation Adorno's understanding of the class character of bourgeois society comes first. The second section expounds the neoliberal conception of class, presents its argument that the free economy amounts to a practice of government, and explores the meaning of an authoritarian liberalism. The term was coined by Hermann Heller in 1933 with further elaboration by Marcuse in 1934. Authoritarian liberalism recognises the state as indispensible for the free economy, a conception that is well understood by Trump. The final section bespeaks the time of Trump. It argues in summary and offers the term 'racket' that Horkheimer and Adorno employed in the Dialectic of Enlightenment as a category of government.

## Class and Struggle: On Hunger

Adorno's critical theory argued that in capitalist society 'the needs of human beings, the satisfaction of human beings, is never more than a sideshow' (Adorno 2008, 51). What existing society thus promises is not freedom from want. It rather promises that the poor will continue to 'chew words to fill their bellies' (Adorno 1978, 102). That is, capitalist 'society remains class struggle' (Adorno 1989, 272). Indeed, he asserts that the 'total movement of society' is 'antagonistic form the outset'. That is to say, bourgeois 'society stays alive, not despite its antagonism, but by means of it' (Adorno 1990, 304, 320).

'To the vanishing point in death of all', the 'life of all man hangs by' the success of turning her labour power into a profitable means for its buyer (cf. Adorno 1990, 320). The profitability of her labour is the fundamental condition of sustaining access to the means of subsistence. Yesterday's profitable appropriation of some other person's surplus labour buys the labour power of another seller today, the buyer for the sake of making another profit so that he avoids bankruptcy by enriching himself, the seller in order to make a living. The profitable consumption of her labour power is the premise of maintaining access to the means of life. For the seller of labour power, competition is not some abstract economic law. Rather, it is an experienced concept. For the seller of labour power, then, the class relation does not just amount to the wage relation; rather, it subsists through the wage relation. That is, the line of class antagonism falls not merely between but, also and importantly, through the social individuals. For the sellers of labour power, the freedom of contract entails the common class experience of labour market competition. Competition is not a category of social unity. It is a category of disunity. Class society exists in the form of individualised commodity owners, each seeking to maintain themselves in competitive, gendered and racialized, and also nationalised labour markets where the term cutthroat competition is experienced in various forms, from arson attack to class solidarity, and from destitution to collective bargaining, from gangland thuggery to communal forms of organising subsistence-support, from strike-breaking to collective action, etc.

The class struggle really is about access to 'crude and material things' (Benjamin 1999, 246). What then are the dispossessed struggling for? 'In-itself' they struggle for access to the means of subsistence to satisfy their needs. They struggle for wages and conditions, and to defend wage levels and conditions. They struggle for respect, education, and recognition of human significance, and above all for food, shelter, clothing, warmth, love, affection, knowledge, time for enjoyment, and dignity. Their struggle as a class 'in-itself' really is a struggle 'for-itself': for life, human distinction, life-time, and above all, satisfaction of basic human needs. The working class struggles for making ends meet, for subsistence and comfort. It does all of this in conditions, in which the increase in material wealth that it has produced, pushes beyond the limits of its capitalist form. Every so-called trickle-down effect that capitalist accumulation might bring forth presupposes a prior and sustained trickle up in the capitalist accumulation of wealth. And then, at the blink of the eye society 'suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence' (Marx and Engels 1996, 18).

In summary, the struggle of the class tied to work is 'dictated by hunger' (Adorno 1978, 102).

Whether this struggle turns concrete in the changing forms of repression as resistance to repression or whether it turns concrete in forms of repression, is a matter of experienced history. To be a productive labourer is not an ontological privilege. It is a great misfortune. At its best, the wage contract is governed by the rule of law. It treats the buyers of labour power and the producers of surplus value as equal legal subjects. In distinction to contemporary critical theory, the law in society does not contain a promise for general well-being. Rather the 'law in society is a preservative of terror always ready to resort to terror with the aid of quotable statues. […] Law [Recht] is the primal phenomenon of irrational rationality. In law the formal principle of equivalence becomes the norm; everybody is treated alike' (Adorno 1990, 309). Critical theory is critical on the condition that it recognises its entanglement with the irrational rationality of bourgeois society.

## The Free Economy and the Strong State: On the Real People

In the late 1920s / early 1930s Hermann Heller characterised what we now refer to as neoliberalism as an authoritarian liberalism. He applied this concept to Carl Schmitt's political theology and the proponents of the then emerging account of German neoliberalism, which is also known as ordoliberalism. The common feature of these accounts is the acceptance of the state as the essential institution of social peace in capitalist society. In relation to the economy, the state is the predominant power. Schmitt and the ordoliberals conceive of the state as a security state and characterise it as the concentrated power of a continuously prevented civil war. For them, Weimar was a state of lamentable weakness – it allowed the governed to influence the conduct of government. For the sake of the free economy, the state had to be built like a fortress to safeguard it from becoming the prey of mass democratic demands for material security. Schmitt argued his case on the basis of Hobbes – the Leviathan always comes first – and through the tradition of conservative opposition to the egalitarian principles of the French Revolution. He rejected the idea of political equality and identified law making in mass democracy as mob rule. The German neoliberals argued on the basis of Adam Smith's insights that the power of the state is fundamental to the establishment of a civil society. The state is to sustain the law of private property and prevent 'bloodshed and disorder' (Smith 1976a, 340). In the Wealth of Nations Smith (1976b, 428) thus defined political economy as a science of the statesman and legislator. In the founding neoliberal argument, civil society amounts to a political practice of 'market police' (Rüstow 1942; also Friedman 1951, 110-11).[3] Competition is unsocial in character. It is not a category of social cohesion and integration.

Market police are required to secure its orderly conduct on the basis of non-directive, abstract rules of law. Competition entails therefore the power of the state to secure the fundamental sociability of the unsocial interests. The competing individuals are mutually dependent upon each other and express their independence by means of contract. Their private interests are reconcilable on the basis of a common interest in the security and the freedom of contract and the guarantee of the rights of property. In its role as market police, the state civilises the conduct of the 'greedy self-seekers' (Rüstow) on the basis of morally binding and politically enforceable rules of the game. Law is the means of social peace. It is the category of individual freedom. Individuals are free if they only have to comply with the law. Nevertheless, law does

not apply to disorder. The rule of law is premised on social order. Order is a political category. For authoritarian liberalism the rule of law thus entails the power of the state as the concentrated force of order and law. Should a situation arise in which a decision has be made between law and order, law is to be sacrificed for the sake of order.

However, for the founding neoliberal thinkers individualism is not the essential category of the state in its role as the concentrated power of social order. The essential category of social (dis-)order is the proletariat. In their argument the proletariat is a capitalist phenomenon. Capitalism entails a natural tendency towards proletarianisation. They understand that the working class has no direct access to the means of subsistence and that it therefore struggles to make ends meet. In this context proletarianisation characterises politicised market relations that are founded on entrenched class relations. In their argument proletarianised workers demand the satisfaction of their wants by means of welfare state guarantees and a politics of full employment. In this argument proletarianisation is a real menace. It denies the workers the social right and removes from them the moral permission to contribute to society as self-responsible entrepreneurs of labour power, as agents of human capital. They identify the proletarianised mass society as entirely irrational. In this context Schmitt and the German neoliberals reject laissez faire liberalism as a theology of freedom because it neglects the state as the predominant power of social order, of peace and tranquillity. The consequences of neglect are formidable. It abandons the state to social democracy, leading to big government. In the context of the crisis of the early 1930s, the Germans were not alone in identifying the dangers of a proletarianised mass society. In the context of the US, Bernard Baruch, who was a leading Democrat, had protested against Roosevelt's decision to abandon the gold standard in 1933 by stating that 'it can't be defended except as mob rule. Maybe the country does not know it yet, but I think that we've been in a revolution more drastic then the French revolution. The crowd has seized the seat of government and is trying to seize the wealth. Respect for law and order has gone' (quoted in Schlesinger 1958, 202). For Baruch, correctly, the dispossessed traders in labour power are the social majority. For the sake of the freedom of labour, their curtailment within the limits of private property is of vital importance. In fact, it is a condition of liberty.

Hermann Heller and Herbert Marcuse provided telling critiques of the authoritarian turn of liberalism in the early 1930s. According to Marcuse, authoritarian liberalism bemoaned that the unemployed lacked the stamina to cope with the economic downturn in the self-responsible manner of the entrepreneur. Instead they demanded government support to alleviate their plight. As Marcuse (1988, 36) put it tongue-in-cheek, whereas Man used to accept her 'responsibility to the state', now 'the state is responsible to man'. Furthermore, he recognised that authoritarianism entailed the 'existentialization and totalization of the political sphere', that is, the depoliticisation of the social relations entails the politicisation of the state as the power of social depoliticisation. There cannot be any claim for or assertion of political power outside the state. Heller (2015, 296-301) argued in a similar manner. He identified liberalism's turn towards authoritarianism as a demotion of democratic government 'in favour of the dictatorial authority of the state'. Authoritarianisation was the means of drawing a line between society and state, removing what Barauch referred to as the mob out of the state,

reasserting the autonomy of the political will. Indeed, the independence of the state from society is fundamental to both, the ability of government to govern and to the 'initiative and free labour power of all economically active people'. For Heller, the authoritarian liberal scheme could not be maintained in democratic form. Rather, a state 'that is determined to secure "the free labour power of those people active in the economy" will…have to act in an authoritarian way' (citing Schmitt 1998). Authoritarian liberalism thus defends 'work as a duty, as the psychological happiness of the people'. The authoritarian state governs by its own free will to secure and maintain the 'psycho-moral forces' at the disposal of a capitalist society, transforming rebellious proletarians into self-responsible and willing entrepreneurs of labour power (Röpke 1942, 68; Eucken 1932). Neoliberalism recognises the state as the authoritative planner for competition (Hayek 1944, 31).

In summary, for the German neoliberals, capitalism entails proletarianisation, which they associate with the revolt of the masses. Laissez faire is neither an answer to riots nor do socio-economic disorder. Liberty has to be defended by means of state. In fact the revolt of the masses 'must be counteracted by individual leadership' (Röpke 1998, 131) to ensure incorporation of competitiveness into a total life-style, as Müller-Armack put it in 1978. They say the masses dislike to be 'satiated by the state' (Röpke 2002, 245). In fact, like their employers the masses, too, are keen to participate in the free economy as self-responsible and self-reliable entrepreneurs of labour power if only they knew how and whom to follow. For their own sake, the masses need to be led by man of good intensions so that they do not become the prey of anti-capitalist demagogues. In order to lead the masses, the establishment of a plebescitarian leadership democracy is of the essence. The leadership of the masses appears as an accentuated democracy between leader and movement. It articulates real mass grievances through the denunciation of the guilty parties, personalising the causes of misery. In this manner, and following Müller-Armack (1933), the masses are the movement of the *Volk*, that is, the real people. The category Volk presupposes the identity of another kind of Man, that is, the Other who wrongs the real people of their lifelihood.

The category of the real people depends on the identification of the enemy of the people. The enemy is the most important category – the identity of the national friend, the real people, depends on the definition of the enemy of the people. There cannot be a real people, a *Volk*, without the enemy. Nevertheless, identity thinking is pseudo-concrete, at best. That is, the identity of the other is both concrete and intangible. The real people fear the enemy because each one of them might be classified as an enemy of the people, too, at any moment. Rage against the Other is a means of expressing nativist identity. Its essence is impotence. Secretly the enraged know that. It is because of this that their rage is boundless and all pervasive. Race rage makes a people. It is all embracing – because it comprehends nothing. Everybody who wants to be somebody will have to be enraged. Participation is everything. Standing on the side does not offer security. It offers a target. What does not belong to the nature of the nativists has to be returned to nature; or at least locked up for good. The demand for Clinton to be locked up produced the kind of enraged frenzy of incomprehension that holds the idea of a freedom from want in contempt. The declaration of the enemy gives identity and purpose to the real people who are set loose as enraged subjects. The leader of the *Volk* does not govern real

individuals. He governs disciples. For the leader of disciples the very idea of an equality of individual human needs is a provocation. He demands an executive state – *autoritas non legem* – in which political decisions have the force of law.

## Misery and Trump

In Dialectic of Enlightenment Horkheimer and Adorno (1979, 179) write that the 'rulers' are safe for as long as the 'ruled' struggle under the spell of the inverted world, in which, say, the cause of financial crisis, economic downturn and conditions of abject misery are attributed to the greedy behaviour of identifiable individuals. Rather than the capitalistically organised relations of social reproduction, it is, say, the greed of the speculator that is criticized, rejected and condemned. 'We have been robbed of our country'! Let us make America great again! For the sake of employment and industry, something needs to be. Something can be done!

The false critique of capitalist society recognizes the misery of the many and offers nationalist solutions, sometimes in the name of socialism and sometimes in the name of patriotism. Trump condemns the world-market society of capital abstractly as anti-American; and does not pay his taxes for reasons of business. He rages against cosmopolitan peddler of misery and calls them crooks. He says 'lock her up' and keep them out. Walls become freedom-walls. The supply of enemies is inexhaustible.

In the meantime, the majority of the worst-off voted for Clinton. Like Trump she too stood for the continuity of misery. Unlike Clinton, Trump sees unemployment as an opportunity for employment and conceives of misery as an opportunity to do better. In authoritarian liberalism, the state governs for business. However, it rejects the idea of the state as a business as illiberal in its consequences. The appropriate term for the state of Trump is racket. This state does not admit of knowledge, only of acknowledgment.

There really is 'tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one should go hungry any more' (Adorno 1978, 156).

## Notes

[1] As implied by Habermas (2012) and argued by Brown (2015).

[2] It might of course be the case that Honneth's conception 'freedom' does not include the freedom from want. If that were to be the case, his freedom does not promise very much, if anything at all.

[3] On the Smithean origins of and Hegelian insights into this concept, see Bonefeld (2014, chap. 8).

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# Right-Wing Populism and the Limits of Normative Critical Theory

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If one wants to address the question of what Frankfurt School Critical Theory can still teach us about the resurgence of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States in recent times, one must call the very concept of the "Frankfurt School" into question and look more closely at how Jürgen Habermas's efforts to "reconstruct" Critical Theory on normative foundations transformed the intellectual tradition he inherited from Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and the other members of the Institute for Social Research.

In a short essay like this, I can only discuss a few key points. I would like to say a few words about how Habermas's theory of history – which was originally very similar to that of the early Horkheimer – shifted in the 1960s and 1970s and how his move away from the Freudian-Marxist foundations of early Critical Theory, more generally, has attenuated his ability to grasp the regressive social and irrational political developments we have witnessed in Europe and the U.S. in recent times. Subsequently, I would like to discuss briefly how and why the early model of Critical Theory is still more helpful than normative approaches in grasping and combating right-wing populism. This short essay should be read in conjunction with the piece that appeared in the previous issue of *Logos*, in which I provided a more detailed analysis of contemporary right-wing populism and authoritarianism in the United States from the standpoint of early Critical Theory.[1]

In his 1962 study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (STPS), Habermas relied upon an interpretation of modern history as a *dialectic of bourgeois society*.[2] He examined the origins, development and transformation of the public sphere in Western Europe in relation to the uneven development of modern capitalism in England, France and Germany. During the period of the ascendance of bourgeois society, the public sphere was characterized primarily by its critical and – especially in France – even revolutionary function vis-á-vis the absolutist state and the remnants of feudalism. In English coffee houses, French salons and German universities, discussions of current events, literature, theater and philosophy sharpened the critical intelligence of the rising bourgeoisie and contributed to the creation of new forms of civil society which would assert themselves with increasing vigor and success against the arbitrary decrees, restrictive mercantilist economic policies, artistic and intellectual censorship of absolute monarchies.[3] With the triumph of bourgeois society in England and France in the 17$^{th}$ and 18$^{th}$ centuries, and the consolidation of its hegemony throughout Europe in the 19$^{th}$ and 20$^{th}$ centuries, this critical function of the bourgeois public sphere was – according to Habermas – increasingly

undermined, as it was transformed from a forum for active rational debate to a platform for the passive consumption of advertising, political marketing and the "public relations" industry.[4]

If one reads Horkheimer's lectures and essay from the late 1920s and 1930s with an eye to the interpretation of modern history that underlies them, one finds the same basic model of a dialectic of bourgeois society. This model emerges with particular clarity in a series of unpublished lectures on the history of modern philosophy that Horkheimer delivered in the late 1920s, but it also remains present in many of his published essays in the 1930s. In the lectures Horkheimer delivers a materialist interpretation of the history of modern philosophy as the mediated expression of the uneven development and transformation of bourgeois society.[5] He demonstrates, for example, that the Enlightenment attained a more radical form in France than in Britain, because of the later development of bourgeois society in France and the crucial role of Enlightenment ideas in preparing the way for the French Revolution – a role that was no longer necessary in Britain in the 18th century. Conversely, in Germany, where the development of bourgeois society lagged behind that of France, eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy assumed a more abstract rationalist – even metaphysical – form, which Horkheimer viewed as an expression of the relative weakness of bourgeois society there and its inability seriously to challenge feudal and absolutist institutions. In these lectures Horkheimer also seeks to demonstrate how, after the death of Hegel – whose writings he interprets as a belated expression of the critical tendencies of the Enlightenment – philosophy entered into a period of decline. He interprets the dominant tendencies of late 19th and early 20th-century philosophy – such as positivism, neo-Kantianism and vitalism – as falling behind the insights attained by Hegel. He argues that these insights were preserved outside the sphere of philosophy: theoretically, in Marx's critique of political economy and, practically, in the new socialist movements. Similarly, in essays published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in the 1930s, such as "The Latest Attack on Metaphysics," and "Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism," Horkheimer demonstrated how the critical function of early modern philosophical ideas, such as empiricism and skepticism, was transformed into affirmations of the status quo in the nineteenth century with the consolidation of bourgeois hegemony.[6] If one reads *Dialectic of Enlightenment* carefully, attentive to the traces of Horkheimer's early model of Critical Theory that remain there, one can find a similar interpretation of the concept of reason itself, whose critical function is undermined by the dialectic of bourgeois society.[7]

The striking parallel one sees, in other words, between Habermas and Horkheimer's interpretation of modern history lies in their emphasis on the socially regressive and politically irrational tendencies that gain the upper hand with the establishment of bourgeois hegemony in the nineteenth century. It is precisely these tendencies which are largely lost from view when Habermas moves – in later 1960s and 1970s – toward a new interpretation of modern history as the evolutionary and progressive differentiation of value spheres. Without being able to elaborate my argument in detail here, I would like to advance the claim that this crucial shift in Habermas's interpretation of modern history should be understood as a response to particular historical conditions in West Germany after World War II, but also as a particular interpretation of the historical roots of National Socialism.

Habermas's move away from the pronounced Hegelian-Marxist dimensions of his early work, towards a theory of communicative action and an effort to recover the theoretical foundations of modern liberal democracies, parallels the efforts of the Federal Republic of Germany in the postwar decades to achieve a *Westanbindung* – a regrounding of Germany in the liberal-democratic traditions of Western Europe and the U.S.[8] According to this interpretation, Habermas's theory from the mid-1960s onwards can be seen as a *philosophische Westanbindung* – an attempt to carry out a philosophical attachment to the West. The interpretation of German history that lies – implicitly or explicitly – beneath Habermas's "normative" turn in the 1960s and 1970s is that of the *Sonderweg* thesis, namely, that fascism took root in Germany – and not in Britain or France – primarily as a result of a modernization deficit in Germany, that is, the failure of the German middle class completely to destroy anachronistic feudal institutions, which prevented the establishment of stable, modern, liberal-democratic political institutions.[9] From this point of view, then, the main task facing the Federal Republic in the post-war period was a *Nachholbedarf* – a need to make up for this historical deficit in Germany's liberal-democratic political traditions.

From this point of view, the strong Marxist and socialist traditions in Germany – which had never forgotten about the ways in which social domination reproduced itself within liberal democratic institutions – came increasingly to seem like an anachronistic liability, especially in the optimistic years of the post-war *Wirtschaftswunder*, when it seemed to many like the earlier crisis tendencies of capitalism had been overcome. The FRG's rapid economic recovery in the 1950s and 1960s provided the legitimation for the new democratic political institutions, which had been so sorely lacking during the Weimar Republic.

West Germany's ban on the KPD (German Communist Party) in 1955 and the decisions of the SPD (German Social Democratic Party) in 1959 to eliminate any reference to Marxist theory in their party program, were further expressions of the new "militant democracy" in the Federal Republic.[10] Habermas's early work, up to and including STPS, was critical of these tendencies to curtail democracy and suppress Marxist theory in the FRG – so much so, that the now much older and more conservative Max Horkheimer viewed Habermas himself as a dangerous Marxist and forced him to leave the Institute in 1959.[11] But by 1968 at the latest, when Habermas notoriously accused Rudi Dutschke and other members of the German Socialist Students Union – which had formed in response to the SPD's shift to the center in 1959 – of "left fascist" tendencies, it was clear that the center of gravity of Habermas's theory had shifted and that he was now more concerned about recovering and defending the foundations of liberal-democratic political institutions than highlighting the ways in which social domination reproduced itself within such institutions.[12] Habermas's turn during this time to Talcott Parson's whiggish reinterpretation of Max Weber's theory of modernization would play a key role in the reinterpretation of modern history as an evolutionary differentiation of value spheres, which was fully articulated in his 1980 magnum opus, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Although Habermas criticized Parsons (and Luhmann) from the standpoint of communicative rationality and communicative action, his evolutionary model of history ultimately remained closer to their structural functionalism than to Marx or the early Horkheimer's critique of the exploitative, antagonistic and regressive tendencies inherent in

modern bourgeois society.[13]

Habermas's sharp criticisms of postmodern and poststructuralist theory in the 1980s also demonstrated his abiding concern with defending the positive achievements of "modernity."[14] His 1992 magnum opus on political theory, *Between Facts and Norms*, could be seen as the culmination of his earlier efforts to reconceptualize and defend the foundations of modern liberal-democratic political institutions.[15]

Habermas's move away from the historical model of a dialectic of bourgeois society was accompanied by a move away from Freudian psychoanalysis, which had played such a central role in the Critical Theory of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. In the late 1960s Habermas praised Freud as a critic of positivism, who restored an important dimension of cognitive self-reflexivity to the sciences.[16] But his reluctance to move beyond this rather superficial, rationalist interpretation of Freud and to tarry with the full implications psychoanalysis – as Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse had done, with their stubborn insistence upon Freud's drive theory as a materialist corrective to rationalist epistemologies and theories of subjectivity – emerged more clearly in the 1970s, when he began to draw more heavily on Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg's theories of developmental psychology, which theorized subjective cognitive development in much the same linear, evolutionary terms as Habermas's objective model of historical modernization.[17] Freud's focus on the powerful irrational forces at work in human psychic life, and the constant threat of individual and collective regression, were marginalized in Habermas's normative-rationalist model of subjective development.

In his efforts to place Critical Theory on firm normative foundations, his move away from a Marxist theory of modern capitalism, and his replacement of psychoanalysis with developmental psychology, Habermas has forfeited many of the most important theoretical concepts upon which the early Critical Theorists had relied to grasp and combat fascism, right-wing populism and authoritarianism. In his efforts to recover the positive achievements of "modernity," Habermas builds critically upon Talcott Parsons and Max Weber's theory of modernization as the differentiation of value spheres. In his mature work Habermas does criticize the illegitimate incursion of one value sphere into another, and the excessive proliferation of means-ends rationality, which leads to a "colonization of the lifeworld," but he doesn't call into question the rationality of modern capitalist society as a whole, insofar as it is guided at the most fundamental level by what he sees as a progressive, evolutionary logic of social differentiation and a decentering of subjective worldviews. He views our task as the continuation and "completion" of this basically benevolent "project of modernity."

But Habermas's theory is less helpful when it comes to explaining phenomena that fall outside the realm of such a progressive march forward in the unfinished project of modernity, such as the return of capitalist crises, massive increases in inequality and the proliferation of right-wing populist movements we have witnessed in Europe and the United States in the past few decades. To be sure, Habermas has been a keen observer and vigilant critic of such tendencies; and he has a right to be proud of the significant contributions he has made to liberal democracy sinking deep roots in West Germany.[18] Yet, the question remains, how well

equipped is his particular version of Critical Theory to grasp the aforementioned regressive socio-economic and political tendencies, which far transcend the German context?[19] My contention here is that the early model of Critical Theory first developed by Horkheimer, and then continued – in different ways – by Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, is much more helpful in grasping and countering such tendencies. The so-called first-generation of the "Frankfurt School" placed such regressive tendencies at the very center of their theory. In marked contrast to Parsons' and – to a lesser extent – Habermas's largely positive appropriations of Weber's theory of modernization, Horkheimer wrote in 1936, "Max Weber stressed the rationalistic trait of the bourgeois mind, but irrationalism is from the start no less associated with its history."[20]

After dedicating much of their energies in the 1930s to understanding the social, historical and ideological origins of National Socialism and fascism more generally in Europe, the Institute for Social Research turned their attention to empirical studies of right-wing populist and authoritarian political movements in the United States in the 1940s. They carried out not only the well-known *Studies in Prejudice* project, but also a lesser known, but almost equally ambitious study of anti-Semitism among American workers.[21] One of the main questions that guided both the anti-Semitism project and the two volumes of the *Studies in Prejudice* that were shaped most directly by Institute members – Theodor Adorno and Leo Lowenthal's contributions to *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Prophets of Deceit*, respectively – was whether or not fascism, or a similar authoritarian political movement, could succeed in the U.S. In his preface to *Prophets of Deceit*, Horkheimer made clear that the Institute did not think that the objective conditions in the U.S. at that time were favorable to authoritarianism.[22] For Horkheimer and his Institute colleagues the fact that liberal-democratic political traditions were more deeply rooted in the U.S. than in Germany, provided an important bulwark against authoritarianism, which must be defended; but it did not mean that the U.S. was exempt from the powerful subjective and objective tendencies toward authoritarianism that were created and constantly reproduced in all modern capitalist societies. For Horkheimer and his colleagues, the threat of authoritarianism was not unique to countries that modernized late or incompletely, or had relatively weak liberal-democratic political traditions – such as Germany and Italy. As Horkheimer pointed out, it was important to study the methods and rhetorical devices of proto-fascist agitators in the U.S. because objective conditions could change in the future and they could become a greater threat. As I argued in the last issue of *Logos*, the continuing growth of right-wing populist parties in Europe, the emergence of the Tea Party and the election of Donald Trump in the U.S. are a clear indication that decades of neo-liberal policies and the Great Recession of 2008 have created objective conditions much more favorable to authoritarian movements.[23]

In 1972, at the dawn of the current neo-liberal period, Herbert Marcuse wrote an essay in response to the re-election of Richard Nixon, in which he discussed "The Historical Fate of Bourgeois Democracy," and the persistence of "neo-fascist" tendencies in the U.S.[24] Marcuse wrote:

The historically new features of bourgeois democracy in its most advanced form (in the USA)

are (a) the strength of its popular base, and (b) its militantly reactionary character. The popular base is fortified by an instinctual structure which reproduces the capitalist system in the individuals. The base includes the large majority of the working class. Now it is of course not at all a new development that the working class is "bourgeoisified" (verbürgerlicht). New is the remoteness of conditions under which this process could be reversed, the absence of a labor party and labor press, the rejection of socialism even as an end.[25]

Marcuse draws explicitly on the concept of identification, which Freud develops in his *Group Psychology and Ego Analysis*, to explain these regressive tendencies in the world's oldest and "most advanced" democracy: "government of the people and by the people […]now assumes the form of a large-scale identification of the people with their rulers – caricature of popular sovereignty."[26] In the essay, Marcuse also recognizes the crucial role of racism, which has facilitated and lent a different historical dynamic to the *Verbürgerlichung*, or "bourgeoisification" of the (white) working class in the U.S. He writes:

In 1972, considerable sections of labor in the densely industrial states of the USA voted for […] Nixon because of his stand against school busing. […] A "cultural" issue superceding the material economic issues? Is it the quality of education which is the concern of these workers or it is rather the racist morality motivating the political act?[27]

Here and elsewhere in this essay, Marcuse points back directly to the Institute's earlier work on the formation of group-specific character structures within the historical emergence and transformation of bourgeois society as still very much relevant to understanding the persistence of right-wing populism and authoritarianism in contemporary "bourgeois" democracies. According to Horkheimer and Fromm's analyses in the 1930s, such character structures were "relatively autonomous" from the socio-economic "base" of society, and thus persist, as a barrier to progressive historical change, long after the specific social and historical conditions that gave rise to them had disappeared.[28] As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, such analyses can certainly help us understand (and counter) reactionary and irrational attitudes among the white working class– irrational, insofar as they empower a political agenda at odds with their own material interests – which seemed to have played such a decisive role in the election of Donald Trump.[29]

Marcuse was not the only Critical Theorist who insisted that the Institute's analyses of fascism and authoritarianism remained relevant, even after the unconditional surrender of National Socialism in 1945. In the immediate post-war period Adorno developed a concept of pseudo-conservatism, with which he linked the Institute's empirical studies of authoritarianism in the U.S. to their earlier, theoretical analyses of the historical and social-psychological roots of authoritarianism in modern bourgeois society as a whole.[30] Adorno explicitly rejected the naïve belief that once a country had successfully attained a certain level of "modernization" – marked by the establishment of stable liberal-democratic political institutions – it was immune to the threat of authoritarian regression. For Adorno, the inability of normative models of liberal-democracy to adequately grasp the deeper causes of social domination in modern capitalist societies, posed a serious threat to the popular legitimacy of these democracies. He

writes:

It cannot be disputed that formal democracy, under the present economic system, does not suffice to guarantee permanently, to the bulk of the population, satisfaction of the most elementary wants and needs, whereas at the same time the democratic form of government is presented as if […] it were as close to an ideal society as it could be. The resentment caused by this contradiction is turned by those who fail to recognize its economic roots against the form of democracy itself. Because it does not fulfill what it promises, they regard it as a "swindle" and are ready to exchange it for a system which sacrifices all claims to human dignity and justice, but of which they expect vaguely some kind of guarantee of their lives by better planning and organization. [31]

Adorno continued to develop this line of argumentation in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, it stood behind his well-known claim, in 1959, that "I consider the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies against democracy."[32] Having actively participated in the *Group Experiment* – an empirical study of West Germans' attitudes about political and social issues, and their own recent past, which was carried out by the Institute in the early 1950s – Adorno realized that Germans' seeming embrace of democracy often concealed older and deeper authoritarian attitudes, which could easily reemerge if the *Wirtschaftswunder* began to falter. In fact, one could say that the desire to prevent the recurrence of authoritarianism moved to the very center of Adorno's thought in the post-war period. Without much exaggeration one could say that, since the question of socialism or barbarism had been decided in favor of the latter in the first half of the twentieth century, the foremost task of Critical Theory shifted in the second half from the active attempt to realize socialism, to the "more modest" goal of preventing barbarism from recurring.

This shift registered in Adorno's thought not only in his arguments that praxis in the emphatic Marxian sense was not possible in the current historical period,[33] but also in his reformulation of Kant's categorical imperative in a way that reflected the ongoing threat of authoritarianism under the conditions of "late capitalism."[34] In his philosophical magnum opus, *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno wrote: "A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen."[35] To be sure, Adorno's greater appreciation in the post-war period of liberal-democratic institutions – he counted this shift in his thinking as one of the lessons he learned during his exile in the U.S. – as a bulwark again authoritarianism went hand-in-hand with this new categorical imperative.[36] Much of Habermas's mature work can be seen as developing this insight. But in contrast to Habermas, Adorno's trenchant theoretical gaze remained trained on the powerful regressive tendencies that continued to exist in a society that was still best understood, in his eyes, as explicitly capitalist. The ultimate sources of these tendencies must still be sought, according to Adorno, not in the illegitimate incursion of one value sphere into another, or the colonization of the lifeworld, but rather in the antagonistic dynamic of bourgeois society.

The materialist method of the early Critical Theorists was a form of *critical historicism*.[37] Philosophical ideas (and works of art) were not seen as "free-floating," or as providing a transcendent or transhistorical basis for normative critique; instead, they were interpreted as relatively autonomous expressions of historically specific social conditions. They could either passively reinforce – as ideology – existing forms of social domination, or they could – as critique – self-consciously and actively contribute to the abolition of social injustice.[38] To effectively accomplish the latter, the concepts of Critical Theory must always keep pace with changing social conditions in the present – without losing sight of the deeper structures that have remained constant throughout the modern bourgeois epoch. What I have suggested here is that Habermas's "reconstruction" of Critical Theory also needs to be historicized. In the mid-1960s he moved away from a Hegelian-Marxist model of modern history as a dialectic of bourgeois society toward a theory of modernity as the differentiation of value spheres. During this same time he moved from a defense of democratic socialism to a long-term project of recovering and defending the theoretical foundations of modern liberal democracy.

Furthermore, he moved away from political economy, as he has himself stated.[39] All of these shifts can and should be seen as a philosophical attachment to the West, which paralleled the Federal Republic's political attachment to the West in the post-war period. In that context, Habermas's theory undoubtedly played an important progressive role and contributed to a transformation of German political culture, which has made it – despite numerous setbacks and delays – a leading exemplar of liberal (and social) democracy in Europe today.[40] Nonetheless, one should not shy away from posing questions about how Habermas's model of Critical Theory holds up when transported geographically and/or temporally out of the West German context, in which it took shape. Does not Habermas's theory become much more affirmative when transported into an Anglo-American context, in which liberal democracy has been the dominant political (and ideological) tradition for much longer? To what extent can Habermas's theory, which took shape before the consolidation of neo-liberal globalization and the "Washington Consensus," still help us understanding the frightening negative consequences of these neo-liberal forms of "modernization," such as the Great Recession of 2008 and the resurgence of right-wing populism in Europe and the U.S.?

Following up on an argument I made in more detail elsewhere,[41] my contention here has been that the early Critical Theorists' greater attention to irrational underpinnings of modern bourgeois society and to the ways in which social domination reproduces itself within the institutions of liberal democracy make their model more appropriate to grasping return of crisis tendencies, massive inequality and right-wing populism that have emerged in Europe and the U.S. during the new historical period of neo-liberal globalization.

## Notes

[1] John Abromeit, "Critical Theory and the Persistence of Right-Wing Populism," *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture*, vol. 15, no. 2 (September, 2016).

https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/2016/abromeit/.

[2] To be clear, this is my own concept, not Habermas's. For an elaboration of the concept of a dialectic of bourgeois society in relation to Horkheimer's early work, see John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 4, 394-95, 429-32.

[3] Critics of Habermas's study have pointed to the ways in which the structure of the public sphere as a bourgeois institution systematically excluded women and the lower classes even before its critical function was undermined in the nineteenth century. See, for example, the essays by Joan B. Landes and Marie Fleming in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. J. Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995), 57-116; and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. P. Labanyi, J. Owen Daniel and A. Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[4] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 181-221.

[5] For an overview of these fascinating lectures by Horkheimer, see Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, 85-140.

[6] Max Horkheimer, "The Latest Attack on Metaphysics," *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1992), 132-87; and "Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. J. Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 265-312.

[7] See John Abromeit, ""Genealogy and Critical Historicism: Two Concepts of Enlightenment in the Writings of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno," *Critical Historical Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Fall, 2016), 283-308.

[8] In his important study, which provides both a sweeping overview and an insightful contextualization of Habermas' long intellectual trajectory, Matthew Specter provides a substantial defense of this historicizing interpretation of his work. He concludes the study with the following sentence: "Not only his explicit political and legal thought but also his social theory bear the unmistakable imprint of its genesis over four decades in the Bonn Republic." *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 212.

[9] The literature on the *Sonderweg* thesis is immense. For the classic statement of the thesis, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918*, trans. Kim Traynor (Dover, NH: Berg, 1985). For a substantial critique of the thesis, see Geoff Eley and David Blackbourne, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[10] For an insightful discussion of the Federal Republic as a "militant democracy," see Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 147f .

[11] On Horkheimer's critique of – and later reconciliation with – Habermas during this time, see Martin Beck Matuštík, *Jürgen Habermas: A Philosophical-Political Profile* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 23-31, 45-61; and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, "Horkheimer's Habermas-Kritik von 1958," in *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung, von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail, 1946-1995*, vol. 3, ed. Wolfgang Kraushaar (Hamburg: Zweitausendeins, 1998), 267-72.

[12] Habermas did later apologize for his use of the term "left fascism" to describe Dutschke and other students activists. See Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Peter Dews (London and New York: Verson, 1986), 233.

[13] Although Habermas stated as late as 1989, that "I mostly feel that I am the last Marxist," [*Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. C. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 469] many Marx scholars have questioned his reading of Marx, which stresses Marx's indebtedness to an "objectivist," evolutionary philosophy of history and his claim that Marx focused to exclusively on labor – rather than communication – as the potential site of social emancipation. For one penetrating critique of Habermas's interpretation of Marx, see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 226-60.

[14] For a perceptive examination in the shift of Habermas's theory of history away from a Hegelian-Marxist critique of the transformation of bourgeois society *within* the modern period, to a sweeping defense of the achievements of "modern" societies against preceding (and contemporary) "pre-modern" societies, see John P. McCormick, *Weber, Habermas, and the Transformations of the European State: Constitutional, Social and Supranational Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43-49. For Habermas's criticisms of postmodernism and poststructuralism, see his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

[15] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). For a critique of the reformist assumptions underlying this study, see William E. Scheuerman, "Between Radicalism and Resignation: Democratic Theory in Habermas's *Between Facts and Norms*," in *Habermas: A Critical R*eader, ed. P. Dews (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 153-77.

[16] Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1971), 214-45.

[17] For recent, insightful critique of the evolutionary assumptions underlying Habermas's theory, see Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 37-79.

[18] During the so-called "Historians' Debate" in the 1980s, in which Habermas admirably defended liberal-democratic principles against the conservative-nationalist opinions of revisionist historians, such as Ernst Nolte and Michael Stürmer, Habermas gave a clear statement of the new liberal-democratic "constitutional pride" of West Germany. He wrote, "The unconditional opening of the Federal Republic to the political culture of the West is the greatest intellectual achievement of our postwar period; my generation should be especially proud of this." Jürgen Habermas, "A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in Germany History Writing," in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit*, trans. J. Knowlton and T. Cates (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993), 43.

[19] In a recent interview, Habermas presents his views on the causes of and possible remedies for the resurgence of right-wing populism in the wake of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. Tellingly, he admits that he was surprised by these developments, but also insists that they do not "indicate a uniform tendency towards a new authoritarianism." Demonstrating his unbroken allegiance to his evolutionary model of modernization as the differentiation of value spheres, he argues these tendencies should be seen as an outgrowth of powerful neo-liberal tendencies that emerged after 1989, which "inform the dynamic of social modernization, but are linked to functional imperatives that repeatedly clash." He also points out that the political approach he has favored in recent times, "the left-wing pro-globalisation agenda of giving a political shape to a global society growing together economically and digitally can no longer be distinguished from the neoliberal agenda of political abdication to the blackmailing power of the banks and of the unregulated markets." He also points out that, "since Clinton, Blair and Schröder, Social Democrats have swung over to the prevailing neoliberal line in economic policies because that was or seemed to be promising in the political sense." Finally, he suggests that, "the puzzle has to be solved as to how it came about that right-wing populism stole the Left's own themes." These suggestions all makes sense, but one wonders how effectively they can be pursued on the basis of a normative approach to Critical Theory, which submerges the antagonistic tendencies of modern capitalism to larger, evolutionary theory of modernization. See Jürgen Habermas, "For A Democratic Polarisation: How To Pull The Ground From Under Right-wing Populism," in *Social Europe*, November 17, 2016: https://www.socialeurope.eu/2016/11/democratic-polarisation-pull-ground-right-wing-populism/.

[20] Max Horkheimer, "Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Epoch," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G.F. Hunter, M.S. Kramer and J. Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 87.

[21] The most extensive scholarly treatment of the Institute's study of anti-Semitism among American workers is: Mark Worrell, *Dialectic of Solidarity: Labor, Antisemitism, and the Frankfurt School* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2008). For my own review of Worrell's study, see *Journal of Modern History,* vol. 85, no. 1 (March 2013), pp. 161-168.

[22] Max Horkheimer, "Introduction," to Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of*

*Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), xi-xiii.

[23] "Critical Theory and the Persistence of Right-Wing Populism," https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/2016/abromeit/.

[24] Herbert Marcuse, "The Historical Fate of Bourgeois Democracy," in *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse,* vol. 2, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society,* ed. Douglas Kellner (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 163-86.

[25] Ibid., 175.

[26] Ibid., 167.

[27] Ibid., 180.

[28] See, for example, Max Horkheimer, "History and Psychology," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, 111-28.

[29] John Abromeit, "Whiteness as a Form of Bourgeois Anthropology? Historical Materialism and Psychoanalysis in the Work of David Roediger, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse." *Radical Philosophy Review,* vol. 16, no. 1 (2013), pp. 325–343.

[30] Theodor Adorno, et. al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 675f.

[31] Ibid., 678.

[32] Theodor Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia, 1998), 90 (emphasis Adorno's own), 90.

[33] John Abromeit, "The Limits of Praxis: The Social Psychological Foundations of Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno's Interpretations of the 1960s Protest Movements," *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in the 1960s/70s West Germany and U.S.*, eds. B. Davis, W. Mausbach, M. Klimke, and C. MacDougall (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 13-38.

[34] For Adorno's defense, in 1968, of the concept of "late capitalism," see "Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft?" in Theodor W. Adorno, *Soziologische Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 354-70.

[35] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 365.

[36] For his own account of how his estimation of liberal-democratic institutions increased

during his exile in the U.S., see Adorno's essay, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America,"in *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960*, eds. D. Fleming and B. Bailyn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 338-70.

[37] On the concept of critical historicism, see my essay cited in footnote 2, above.

[38] It is precisely this concrete interest, of concrete, suffering individuals in the abolition of social injustice that provides the "normative foundations" of Critical Theory, according to Horkheimer. He writes, "Critical Theory has no specific authority on its side, except concern for the abolition of social injustice. This negative formulation […] is the materialist content of the idealist concept of reason." Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory*, 242 (translation amended).

[39] In 2005 Habermas stated that in the 1960s, "my interest in political economy, in which I have never felt at home, declined." Cited by Specter in *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography*, 209.

[40] From its relatively liberal asylum laws, to its willingness to critically work through its catastrophic past, to changing its antiquated citizenship laws in 1999 to its more recent opening to large numbers of refugees from the Middle East, Germany has undoubtedly demonstrated its willingness to embrace liberal democratic principles. Germany has, until recently, also been one of the few countries in Europe without a large and successful far right party. But the recent success of the right-wing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party, also raises questions of how effective such changes in Germany's political culture will be in immunizing it against deeper and broader tendencies in the global capitalist economy.

[41] "Critical Theory and the Persistence of Right-Wing Populism," op. cit., https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/2016/abromeit/

# “The Neoliberal Personality”

By | 2017: vol. 16, nos. 1-2

Today, Habermas’s action-theoretic reformulation of Critical Theory seems neither capable of understanding the *objective* crisis of Europe, in particular, nor the rise of authoritarianism, more generally, from Ukraine, Hungary and Poland to Turkey and India and Egypt.

The account of the “colonization of the life-world” by the social subsystems of money and power engendering defensive responses by social movements—in defense of contexts of symbolically meaningful interaction possesses—in my opinion, has little explanatory power in explaining the depth of the crisis that has gripped the Eurozone or the ripple effects of the 2007–08 financial crisis in the United States. Moreover, the abandonment of psychoanalysis, since *Knowledge and Human Interests*, renders this drastically refashioned version of Critical theory impotent when it comes to understanding the *subjective* or considerable socio-psychological appeal of the right populism of AfD, Pediga or UKIP. It also seems unable to provide a convincing understanding of the manner in which a significant proportion of the US population identifies at a profoundly affective level with the figure of Donald J. Trump.

The normative political theory of recognition as developed by Axel Honneth seems even less capable of coming to terms with our contemporary situation for reasons that my friend John Abromeit indicates, namely: like so much contemporary normative liberal political theory, it simply does not have a concept of crisis within socio-economic or political institutions. I will come back to this below. Unlike Habermas who has been a public intellectual, *nonpareil*, in the European public sphere since at least his 1953 critique of Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, figures like Honneth do not seem to want to make interventions beyond the seminar room, although Honneth’s confrontation with Peter Sloterdijk over the latter’s advocacy of neoliberal tax policy for example, was certainly important and laudable. And, of course, there is nothing necessarily wrong with this, but the question does then arise as to what makes such a critical theory *critical*, as Nancy Fraser once phrased it. According to his progammatic essay of 1937, Max Horkheimer argues that, unlike traditional theory, Critical Theory emerges and self-consciously *intervenes* in a given social and historical constellation. Critical Theory continues the radical Enlightenment tradition insofar as it evinces an explicit interest in human emancipation from structural forms of heteronomy.

Honneth’s inability to address crisis might have to do with the fact that his conception of the social is more indebted to Durkheim than to Marx, hence there is a displacement of the conception of crisis by “social pathology.” One could say that for Durkheim social pathology is the *exception* while for Marx, in class societies, it is the *rule*; for the former its presence requires explanation, for the latter its absence. Accordingly, Honneth refuses to understand capitalist society as inherently antagonistic but rather sees “modernity as beset by

"paradoxes." The idea here is that moral and legal norms take time to catch up with underlying transformation in social relations. Such an unwillingness to address the social in terms of *constitutive crises* is endemic amongst liberal intellectuals and academics and this confirms the right populist suspicion about their basic detachment from the public life of the citizen as such. Such a lacuna is exemplified by his lectures on the crucial conception of "reification" in 2005.[1] Honneth correctly situates his reading of the concept in relation to the dominant understandings of it in the critical Marxism of Georg Lukács and the phenomenological ontology of Martin Heidegger. According to Lucien Goldmann, the latter constituted a reply to the former. So far so good. However, unlike both of his predecessors, who understand the problem of reification in terms of specific sorts of crises––the socio-economic crisis of capitalism and the on-going "ontological" crisis of the metaphysical tradition, respectively––for Honneth, following Stanley Cavell, reification seems to amount to basically a category mistake or a failure to ground "knowledge" in "acknowledgment" ("Kennen" in "Annerkennen") Such an error can simply be rectified on an individual level but has no real connection to larger social, economic and political forces and structures. This is entirely consistent with a claim he once made in a conference paper that when Starbucks began calling its workers "associates," this amounted to a substantive gain in "recognition." In other words, for Honneth there seems to be little or no awareness of the *structural features* of the social persist in the reification of human beings, not least the way in which, according to Moishe Postone, "abstract labour" is the fundamental form of social mediation in contemporary capitalist societies.[2] Such a form of social mediation would therefore contribute, structurally, to the subsumption of persons under category of "thing."[3] Therefore only transforming social arrangements rather than subjective dispositions can address the problem of reification. To adapt a formulation from Ludwig Wittgenstein, the problem of reification isn't a problem to be *solved* by way of a subjective act of situating "knowledge" within "acknowledgment" of the other, but rather *dissolved* by way of a transformation of institutionally mediated patterns of social action.

As I point out in the forthcoming book that I have edited with Johan Hartle, *Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle*,[4] the concepts of reification and spectacle are important elaborations of Marx's famous analysis of the commodity form in Volume I of *Capital*, published exactly 150 years ago. Indeed, as Anselm Jappe has argued, Debord's reception of Marx anticipates in important ways the "new readings" [*neue Lektüre*] of Marx emphasizing the problem of value form.[5] The Situationist International's conception of spectacle or the idea, as defined by Guy Debord, of "capital accumulated to the point where it becomes an image," in particular, helps us understand, for example, the strategy of organizations such as ISIS in the way they exploit the mainstream media to spread images of mass violence and therefore terror. Moreover, it is simply not possible to understand the success of figures like Trump, and before him, Ronald Reagan and Silvio Berlusconi, without understanding the tremendous objective power of the culture industry. There is also precious little insight into the subjective tendency of individuals to "escape from freedom" to use Erich Fromm's description of the burgeoning support for National Socialism in the 1930s. Surely it would be incorrect to say that the social and historical conditions that we see today are the same as in the 1930s and that these conditions will necessarily give rise to movements identical to those of European fascism. However, there are some deeply troubling parallels.

Honneth's reification book was published in 2008, right in the midst of the most serious financial crisis since the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. Without exaggerating, one could say that the crash and the way it was handled by the Obama administration—bailouts for those firms that were apparently "too big to fail" and bonuses for the very executives responsible for the near total collapse of the global financial system, combined with foreclosures on the houses of hundreds of thousands of Americans—has contributed to the *ressentiment* upon which Trump has capitalized so effectively. One would have expected the heir to the tradition of Critical Theory to have had something incisive to say about this historical moment even if—to be fair– the lectures were delivered a couple of years earlier. Nonetheless, the publication of the book just shows it to be rather out of step with the historical moment that we're in today. In contrast, Honneth insists that the logic of the capitalist market per se has little to do with the phenomenon of reification, which he understands on the analogy of a tennis match. Here one tends to agree with Nancy Fraser that Honneth distorts Critical Theory "beyond all recognition." [6]

Returning to the problem of "culture industry," as both Theodor W. Adorno and Hannah Arendt suggest in different ways[7] one of its effects is to severely undermine genuine experience and the power of (reflective) judgment that lies at the very heart of the capacity to think. Both the capacity for experience and reflective judgment play a key role in dealing with the otherness of the realm of politics in a constructive way. Without this capacity, far from orienting themselves towards "mutual understanding" with the other, citizens look for confirmations of their own biases, inclination, values, etc. While, recently, social media, Face Book in particular, has come under attack for creating so-called "echo-chambers" within which individuals become increasingly surrounded by like-minded opinion, where their world-views are simply reflected back at them, this phenomenon is co-extensive with the culture industry itself. The reason that Adorno emphasizes the encounter with the autonomous work of art to such a high degree is because such an encounter actually destabilizes our subjectivity and causes us to experience the world in a dramatically altered way. Similarly, for Arendt, reflective aesthetic judgment is the most politically potent of Kant's concepts because in such a form of judgment we do not subsume particulars under given universals but must generate universals out of particulars that we are encountering for the first time. The political space is the space of possible new beginnings.[8]

So, contemporary Critical Theory falls well short of the extremely important early contributions of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Pollock, Fromm and Lowenthal. What was so valuable about the first generation of Critical Theory was its dynamic synthesis of social theory and psychoanalysis which enabled it to produce convincing and one can confidently say *enduring* accounts of why the Left failed and why the Right was so successful in mobilizing a mass social base in the 1930's. Despite the best efforts of Habermas and Honneth to marginalize the contributions of the First Generation for its supposedly "metaphysical" assumptions, that it remains trapped in the "paradigm of consciousness philosophy", the work produced by this generation can be of enormous help in coming to terms with the growing rise of authoritarianism globally today, which, in my view, is profoundly connected to the dislocations and upheavals that neo-liberal globalization has produced. Neoliberal globalization has also, as

figures like David Harvey[9] and Thomas Piketty[10] have shown produced has obscene levels of socio-economic inequality. Combined with the neo-conservative agenda of redefining the post-Cold War enemy in terms of what Samuel P. Huntington calls the "clash of civilizations," neoliberalism creates the perfect storm within which authoritarianism can stage an uncanny return. In other words, the collision of a neoliberalism supposedly oriented towards liberating markets from "externalities" and neoconservatism supposedly oriented towards liberating polities from "tyrannies" creates the conditions in which something like the Trump phenomenon becomes possible.

Trump and the European authoritarian populists have been very successful in laying the blame for the growing alienation and inequality produced by the neoliberal order at the feet of migrants and refugees. The existential threat people experience in their everyday lives, a sense of what I have elsewhere called "ontological insecurity,"[11] and attendant anxiety leaves them susceptible to the call to strengthen political borders—to erect Fortress Europa or to Trump's plan to build a wall on the US's southern border with Mexico, engage in the "extreme vetting" of immigrants and to perhaps ban Muslim immigration altogether. Psychologically speaking, the analogue of political border of the state is, of course, a narcissistic identification with the community emphatically *not* defined in terms of what Habermas likes to call a "post-national constellation" but in increasingly particularistic terms, as the "national" or ethnic, religious or linguistic identity. This is precisely how neoliberalism and neoconservatism converge to produce authoritarian populism which has been exceedingly successful in translating an *atmopsheric anxiety* into the *concrete fear* of a determinate enemy—the enemy being defined, to quote Carl Schmitt, as that entity who "threatens our entire way of life."

Here, much more valuable than contemporary "Critical" Theory are the *Studies in Prejudice Series*, produced in the 1940s, especially works such as Löwenthal and Guterman's *Prophet's of Deceit[12]* where the authors show the manner in which the "agitator," unlike the figures of the "reformist" and "revolutionary"—who, each in their own way, identify structural causes of social contradictions and thus adequate forms of amelioration—seeks to magnify them and lay the responsibility for them at the feet of specific groups via a strategy of "personalization." Another important text, which formed the basis for the important research conducted at Berkeley in the forties and published under the title of *The Authoritarian Personality* is, of course, Erich Fromm's vitally important work, *Escape from Freedom*, alluded to above, in which Fromm combines psychoanalytical, sociological, and political theoretical insights. A central line of argumentation in this book, published in 1941, is that the negative freedom—freedom from existing forms of political and ecclesiastical authority–resulting from massive social and economic upheavals that is not ultimately grounded in a positive, democratic conception of freedom geared to autonomy leads to ambivalence towards the idea of freedom as such. It leads to as a tendency to renounce it by subordination to a supreme power (God) or a powerful leader.

But while in many respects the individual has grown, has developed mentally and

> *Emotionally, and participates in cultural achievements in a degree unheard of before, the lag between "freedom from" and "freedom to" has grown too. The result of this disproportion between freedom from any tie and the lack of possibilities for the positive realization of freedom and individuality has led, in Europe, to a panicky flight from freedom into new ties or at least into complete indifference.[13]*

In a sense, what Fromm, and the Frankfurt School as a whole, provide is a social-psychological analysis of the potential power of the political theology of a figure like Carl Schmitt.

In my work I try to understand the phenomenon of support for Trump (think of, for example, the 53% of white women voters who voted for him) in terms of what Adorno, following post-Freudian psychoanalysis, calls "identification with the aggressor."[14] The problem is as follows: Trump clearly projects power, identifies with and defers to the powerful, and hates "losers." This is made clear by his fawning over Putin and his reality-TV persona on the Apprentice. There is something here, however, that does not quite add up. The figure who becomes famous for repeating, ad nauseam, the line "You're Fired" (which he reiterated in his Press Conference the morning after Obama's farewell address) is going to actually create good, middle-class jobs for US citizens? The man who has admitted to sexually abusing and disrespecting (white) women wins a plurality of their support. How do we explain this?

An answer can be located in the work of the Hungarian psychoanalyst and one-time member of Freud's inner-circle, Sandor Ferenczi, who articulated the idea of the "identification with the aggressor." This idea was later taken up by Anna Freud, and she is often referred to as its originator in her 1936 book, *The Ego and Mechanisms of Defense*.[15] Ferenczi is an interesting figure, not least because he is credited for challenging Freud's controversial abandonment of the seduction theory, which, of course, paved the way for his equally contested placement of the Oedipal conflict at the very heart of psychoanalysis, almost as a kind of Procrustean bed into which every explanation must be made to fit. He is also credited with the being one of the originators of relational psychoanalysis or the shift from a view of the individual as essentially monadological––as developing its relations to others as an extension of an originally auto-erotic posture––to dialogical, which is to say, emphasizing the centrality of the early pre-Oedipal relation of infant and mother, stretching all the way back to the infant's uterine existence.

I suggest that Adorno for whom the idea of the 'identification with the aggressor" was a key idea running through all of his thinking and was solidified in his experience as an émigré intellectual in the United States during the war years. I argue that reading Adorno and Ferenczi together might enable us to rescue Adorno's invaluable insights into the nature of the 'authoritarian personality" by loosening its reliance on questionable orthodox Freudian categories and also up-date it such that we can speak of a "neo-liberal personality" that responds not to Keyensian welfare state capitalism—which was Adorno's historical horizon—but rather the present form of neoliberal capitalism. It can help us, in other words, answer the question as to why people are often such willing participants in their own

domination. Indeed, Adorno So, I suggest Adorno can be read in terms of Ferenzci's, not Anna Freud's conception of the "identification of the aggressor."

The idea goes like this. In contrast to Anna Freud's understanding of the term, which suggests a momentary impersonation of the aggressor––in a sense reflecting back to him his own aggression as a way of feeling for that time more secure *in the moment*––Ferenczi's use of the term entails, according to psychoanalyst, Jay Frankel, a "pervasive change in someone's perceptual world…[and] about actually protecting oneself than about simply feeling more secure."[16] Drawing on his clinical experience with adults who had experienced a deeply traumatic encounter with an abusive adult in early childhood, Ferenzci reasoned that "identification with the aggressor" is a typical response to conditions of pervasive social and emotional *insecurity*. Ferenczi's particular understanding of the concept is especially attractive for our purposes, insofar as a central feature of neoliberal capitalism entails the direct destruction of an entire social security network through privatization and commodification, financialization, crisis management, and upward redistribution of wealth. Such processes have created the conditions of the casualization and increasing precariousness of labour. The combined effect of these four processes of neo-liberalization is profoundly *traumatic*, insofar as they deepen and accelerate the struggle for existence that has always constituted the *insecurity* that characterizes capitalism at its core. This is when our world seems on the verge of breaking down, when the basic meaningful structures of the life-world seem fragile and brittle.

It is a response to a situation in which, to quote Frankel again,

> *we have lost our sense that the world will protect us, when we are in danger with no chance of escape. What we do is make ourselves disappear. This response goes beyond dissociation from present experience: like chameleons, we blend into the world around us, into the very thing that threatens us, in order to protect ourselves. We stop being ourselves and transform ourselves into someone else's image of us.[17]*

There are three dimensions of the identification with the aggressor that distinguishes it from Anna Freud's, rather than a displaced aggression, what we find is compliance, accommodation, and submission. And this works in the following way, as explained by Frankel:

> *First, we mentally subordinate ourselves to the attacker. Second, this subordination lets us divine the aggressor's desires—get into the attacker's mind to know just what he is thinking or feeling, so that we can anticipate exactly what he is about to do and know how to maximize our own survival. And, third, we do the thing that we feel will save us: usually we make ourselves vanish through submission and a precisely attuned compliance with the attacker.[18]*

In response, far from repudiating or violently repulsing the malevolent adult, the child acquiesces and reflects back to the adult what the latter requires of her. As in the Stockholm Syndrome, the child identifies with the abusive adult. In addition to the process of identifying with the adult as a threatening external object, as an additional mechanism of defense, the child also *introjects* or transfers from external to internal reality the adult's guilt as a form of mastery of a force that, if it is not controlled, could actually threaten to destroy the integrity of the child's ego. In particular, what the child introjects is the adult's guilt, by, herself, taking the blame for the event. Here, significantly, the logic is deepened and exacerbated by the tendency of a neoliberal capitalism to rely increasingly on debt to finance consumption and higher education, not to mention state expenditures. For the individual, increasing debt means, psychologically, guilt for, as Nietzsche showed so incisively in the *On Genealogy of Morals*, debt (*Schulden)* and guilt (*Schuld*) are intrinsically linked. (Maurizio Lazzarto in his books *The Making of Indebted Man* and *Governing by Debt* has written extensively about this in the context of the European imbroglio.) Moreover, the child undergoes a process, particularly at the moment of assault, of splitting and *dissociation*—a distancing of that part of the child that experienced the violence.

We can understand these three moments in terms of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s presentation of the formation of subjectivity, an account that draws heavily upon Nietzsche in its crucial account of the "introversion of sacrifice." First, faced with a social world marked by a Hobbesian "war of all against all," a state of nature that is in actual fact, the historical reality of contemporary neoliberal capitalism, the individual–understood as *homo economicu*–must strengthen or harden himself up in order to survive. He must subordinate himself to and, therefore, *identify* precisely with the *external* imperatives of the prevailing performance principle of this order by making himself competitive in relation to others. At the same time, for the individuals to do this successfully, such an adaptation to the outside must be *introjected* or internalized. The individual must, therefore, renounce or at least indefinitely defer the claim to a libidinally fulfilled life. The psychic cost of this dialectic of identification with and introjection of the external forces in the interest of self-preservation is a diminishment in the capacity of the self for experience and, ultimately, action. The life that is to be preserved at all costs becomes, paradoxically, turned into "going through the motions." This is the basic paradox identified by Horkheimer and Adorno at the very heart of the "dialectic of enlightenment," the logic of self-preservation destroys the very 'self" it is meant to preserve. In other words, life, as Adorno puts it, "does not live;" neoliberal subjects become, like the popular television show, "the walking dead.".

It seems to me that an account that draws on Ferenczi's notion of the "identification with the aggressor" can help us avoid some of the problems that attend Adorno's account of the transition from liberal to state capitalism, the ensuing decentering of the sources of paternal authority and the emergence of the authoritarian or sado-masochistic personality type, characterized by obsequious obedience to authorities and unrestrained violence towards those with comparatively less socio-economic power . Moreover, in contrast to a state capitalism that was premised upon the idea that capitalism embodied a contradiction inherent in a social form geared to the domination of exchange over use value, a contradiction between over-production

and under-consumption, the doctrine at the heart of neo-liberalism, namely monetarism, asserted an identity of interests between the power of money and society as a whole. That creating a "favourable environment for capital by regulating the money supply would benefit society as a whole. This is, of course, exacerbated by the culture industry and the cult of celebrity that it produces through which citizens increasingly live vicariously through the lives of the rich and famous, often through reality television programs such as *The Apprentice*. In my view, the tripartite structure of *identification*, *introjection*, and *dissociation* can help us, at least in part, to understand the paradox that, with deepening inequality and social insecurity, we see the emergence not of a strong, radical democratic opposition but, rather, authoritarian parties and movements. More specifically, it helps us address the paradox that I mentioned above: that the very person who disparages "losers" is the one who will save them; the very person who has become famous on television for declaring "You're fired" is the one who will put Americans back to work in a revived manufacturing sector; the very person who admits to sexually assaulting and disrespecting (white) women receives a plurality of their votes.

The on-going crisis conditions of the neo-liberal order constitute it as radically more insecure than the one it replaces insofar as it comes into being through a roll back of formal and informal networks of solidarity and social security. It can, therefore, be understood to be experienced as profoundly *traumatic*—since Margaret Thatcher's infamous remark about the "short, sharp, shock," it is often referred to as a kind of "shock therapy" and, of course, six years prior to Thatcher's victory, there was the US coup in Chile that set up the first brutal laboratory for such shock therapy in Chile, overseen by Milton Friedman and the "Chicago boys." As a way of surviving such shock-like conditions, subjects could be said to evince a tendency to *identify* overwhelmingly-–not with those social forces that would constitute a fundamental challenge to that order-–but rather, paradoxically, with the very forces that maintain, and benefit from, those structures. We are going to see in the coming months the misery that results from the fact that millions of US citizens are going to lose their health care coverage with the scrapping of the Affordable Care Act as there does seem to be anything to replace it, contrary to Trump's pronouncements. Citizens could be said to *introject* the aggressor's blame for the very conditions of the crisis, itself. At the very outset, from Chile, in which the coup against Allende, constituted the first neo-liberal laboratory, to Ronald Regan's attack on the Air Traffic Controllers to Thatcher's attack on the Miners, working class organizations—"Big Labour—are blamed for the social and economic crisis of the Keynesian order and, of course, would have to soften if not entire renounce their demands henceforth. And, this entails, the third aspect of "identification with the aggressor," which is to say, a *dissociation* from its own interests. Can there be any doubt that a Trump presidency would entail, in contrast to that of a Bernie Sanders, an exponential deepening of misery for the majority whom globalization has simply left behind. Yet, mimetic identification of the weak with strength appears to be the strategy for survival. In turn, such an identification generates increasing hostility and violence towards those groups and individuals who are identified with weakness, those who are particularly marginalized: the homeless, migrants workers, immigrants and refugees. The socially excluded can take vicarious pleasure in the bullying posture of a United States that expels Muslims and builds a wall on its southern border with Mexico to keep out the "rapists, murderers and drug dealers"; the proverbial "garbage" of

Mexican society. But the key question that arises is whether in "identifying with the aggressor," Trump's supporters are identifying with a figure who directly threatens them or with an ally who protects the ethno-national tribe from the danger posed by its external enemies such as "political Islam." In a way, this is a false opposition insofar as—and Trump in his reality televsion role in *The Apprentice* embodies this—the ultimate form of aggression isn't the individual himself but rather the exploitative and oppressive social order as a whole that Trump seems to personify. Under the guise of confronting the inequities of the neoliberal order, both Trump and the pro-Brexit Tories in the UK will actually deepen the hold of this order on its citizens via an acceleration of further tax cuts, labour market deregulation and redoubled austerity and privatization.

## Notes

[1] Axel Honneth, *Reification*: *A New Look at An Old Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[2] *Time, Labour and Social Domination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[3] See Rüdiger Danneman, "Georg Lukacs' Theory of Reification and the Idea of Socialism", trans. Andreas Kahre and Samir Gandesha, *Contours*, Spring, 2017,

[4] Samir Gandesha and Johan Hartle (eds.) (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press: forthcoming).

[5] Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkeley: university of California Press, 1999).

[6] See Nancy Fraser "Distorted Beyond All Recognition: A Rejoinder to Axel Honneth," in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003).

[7] Adorno in a variety of writings, most significantly the Culture Industry chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1988): 120-167 and Arendt in "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance", in *Between Past and Future*, (London: Penguin, 2006): 194-222.

[8] See Samir Gandesha, "Homeless Philosophy," *Arendt and Adorno: Political and philosophical Investigation*, Lars Rensmann and Samir Gandesha (eds.) (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012): 248-79.

[9] In his book *A Brief History of Neo-liberalism* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2007), Harvey shows the way in which neoliberalism entails a constellation of processes: privatization, de-regulation, "accumulation by dispossession" and an upward re-distribution of wealth.

[10] *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* , trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.:

Belknap Press, 2014)

[11] See Samir Gandesha, “The Political Semiosis of Populism” *Semiotic Review of Books* Vol. 13, 3, (2003): 1-7

[12]Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit: A Study in the Techniques of the American Agitator* (Pacific Book Club, 1970).

[13] Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom.*

[14] “From the Authoritarian to the Neo-Liberal Personality,” paper presented at “Der aufrechte Gang im windscheifen Kapitalismus” conference at the Nietzsche Kollege in Weimar and at the Freud Museum in London in January, 2016. It will be appearing in the journal *Constellations* later this year. An early attempt to get to grips with this was “The Political Semiosis of Populism” in the *Semiotic Review of Books* Vol. 13, 3, (2003): 1-7

[15] (London: Karnac Books, 1992).

[16] Jay Frankel, “Exploring Ferenczi’s Concept of Identification with the Aggressor: Its Role in Trauma, Everyday Life and the Therapeutic Relationship,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, (12): 102.

[17] Jay Frankel, “Exploring Ferenczi’s Concept of Identification with the Aggressor: Its Role in Trauma, Everyday Life and the Therapeutic Relationship,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, (12): 103.

[18] Ibid.

# Explaining ‘Cult45’: What Can WWII-Era Research on Authoritarianism Tell Us about the Political Rise of Trump?

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## Introduction

Since the election, much writing and discussion has been dedicated to making sense of the political rise of Trump and Trumpism. It’s not easy to make sense of his journey from a marginal, garish, Know Nothing, hate-spewing reality TV personality to, well, those things, except he’s no longer marginal and, as of January 20, 2017, he’s the President. It’s important because beneath the jokes about Trump and the perversely entertaining and now overtly grotesque spectacle of American presidential electoral politics there is a deeper significance.

Trump’s rhetoric and the vile ideology which has vastly reverberated across political, public, and media spaces, most observably and belligerently by supporters on social media, at his rallies, and in other venues, encompass profoundly vicious, mean spirited, power adoring, sadistic, violent, homophobic, misogynistic, racist, ethnocentric, and xenophobic sentiment (Parker, et al., 2016). It’s stylistically clumsy, but, grimly, that string of adjectives is necessary to adequately describe the existing circumstances. While such ideology isn’t new in the US, the current situation seems to have inflamed a rancor and angst around straight, white, male racial and class identity which hasn’t been expressed on this broad a scale and so hatefully and openly at the surface of American society in generations.

This is not to crudely present all Trump voters as a monolithic entity, but rather to grasp the urgency and origins of the cruel display of overt prejudice which has become more normalized, open, and broadly expressed. It applies to those dedicated, authoritarian elements of his base, brimming with resentment and hostility and channeling that discontent toward socially marginalized groups both directly and by supporting measures which weaken social protections.

With respect to analogous political phenomena, comparisons have been made to the growing support for Marie Le Pen and Front National in France, the Freedom Party in Austria, and Poland’s now in-power Law and Justice Party (Faiola, 2016; Smale, 2016; Nossiter, 2017). Some have looked back to the Berlusconi years in Italy for a possible glimpse of what things might look like in the US in the next 4-8 years (Foot, 2016; Severgnini, 2016). To understand the psycho-social character which predisposes individuals to such ideology and the corresponding political and economic conditions, a handful of articles have looked toward the

infamous work on authoritarianism by the Institute for Social Research and associated scholars. The institute was founded in Frankfurt, Germany and is commonly known as "The Frankfurt School." Among such articles, of particular note are Richard Wolin's (2016) piece in *The Chronical of Higher Education* and Alex Ross' (2016) *New Yorker* piece. There was also Matthew MacWilliams' January 2016 *Politico* article, which explored the phenomenon in the US statistically and showed that poll data among voters revealed that authoritarianism, far more than any other variable, predicted support for Trump.

The present paper contributes to this current of material as this scholarship by the Frankfurt School is vital for understanding the origins of political authoritarianism and psycho-social predilections to it. However, the hope is to do so with an analysis that is deeper than what can be done on a blog or in a magazine. It will thoroughly examine the concept and framework, as it was developed in relation to the social situation during the World War II-period, and apply it to dynamics of today's conditions as well as Trump's message, his political ascent, and the powerful psychological, emotional, and political commitment of his loyal followers.

## A Contemporary False Prophet: Support for Trump as an Expression of Powerlessness

The social theorist, Max Horkheimer (et al., 1950) noted that it is the particular historically based social situation which determines the sort of demagogue, in terms of personality and techniques, which might come to capture the hearts and minds of segments of the populace. Under Horkheimer's direction, and while operating in exile in the United States from 1933, the Frankfurt School carried out several studies on authoritarianism and prejudice. The overarching goal of these studies was to better understand how racial and ethnic hatred had persisted and intensified beyond the turn of the twentieth century such that there could be broad tolerance and support for incredible yet systemic mass persecution, violence, suffering, and murder, despite the period being an age of "law, order, and reason" (Horkheimer, et al., 1950: v).

The studies sought to explore the psychological dynamics which predisposed members of the population to respond favorably to the techniques of authoritarian agitators or demagogues, i.e. those who foment hostility toward outgroups, activate nationalistic feelings, glorify violence and aggression, and inspire the rejection of reason, education, and intellectualism (Horkheimer, [1948] 1987). (Sound familiar?) The studies also addressed the techniques or "psychological weapons" employed as well as the social, political, and economic factors which tend to create the necessary conditions (Horkheimer, [1948] 1987: 1). Horkheimer explained, "Demagogy makes its appearance whenever a democratic society is threatened with internal destruction. In a general sense, its function has always been the same: to lead the masses toward goals that run counter to their basic interests" (Horkheimer, [1948] 1987: 1).

Of course, the rise of twentieth century European fascism and the horrific atrocities associated with it, along with the fact that key members of the Institute were Jewish and had fled Nazi Germany, were formative aspects for these studies. Rather than merely understand the origins of such ideology, actions, and mass collusion by the public, their work explicitly sought to find

ways to deal with “the cultural atmosphere in which hatred breeds” (Horkheimer, et al. 1950: ix). In other words, the work set out “not merely to describe prejudice but to explain it in order to help in its eradication” (Horkheimer, et al. 1950: ix). A group of studies co-edited by Horkheimer and sponsored by the American Jewish Committee featured the widely influential *The Authoritarian Personality*, by Theodor Adorno, et al. (1950) and *Prophets of Deceit* by Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman ([1948] 1987). Along with other work, especially Erich Fromm’s ([1941] 1965) *Escape from Freedom* and Horkheimer’s ([1936] 1972) “Authority and the Family,” among others, these investigations provided incisive analyses on these trends.

For Horkheimer, Lowenthal, Adorno, and Fromm, authoritarianism originates essentially with feelings of powerlessness, which, in certain circumstances, promote a particular individual and social character susceptible to authoritarian discourse and the potential for escalation to something worse. In the interwar period, that something worse emerged in Europe as fascism. Authoritarianism is characterized by the tendency toward both submission and domination as well as hostility toward the “other.” In the requisite conditions, this disempowerment is processed by repressing hostility toward authority with a magnified and compulsive need to conform to norms and to submit to authority figures while then projecting that hostility onto members of outgroups. Serving almost as a textbook example for today, one merely needs to bear in mind Trump’s calls for “law and order” and the aggression directed toward racially, ethnically, or politically different “others” at Trump’s rallies.

### “Alternative Facts” and “Fake News”: Truth as Conspiracy

In understanding how dimensions of authoritarianism constitute Trumpism as both ideology and experience, we need to look at the characteristic features of Trump’s rhetoric and the basis of its popular appeal. Authoritarianism is a multidimensional phenomenon. First, it must be understood in terms of the content of the message, embodied in the object to which individuals have submitted themselves. This can be in the form of God, a parent, the state, or of a leader to which one can ascribe almost supernatural abilities. Trump’s loyal supporters are deeply invested in his proclaimed ability to “Make America Great Again,” expressed through outlandish policy promises. The most notorious of these he had intermittently withdrawn and redoubled commitment – the cost-free wall across the US-Mexico border, the swift deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants, the banning of Muslims from entering the country, completely repealing the ACA, etc. In an effort to appear “serious” about Trump’s campaign promises, the administration rolled out its initial series of executive orders affecting immigrant and refugee travel, among other things. They have been widely criticized (even by policy hawks) as wrongheaded and hastily and sloppily implemented. Regarding the quasi Muslim-ban, given the countries omitted from the “areas of concern” list, the measure is clearly not meant to address security. Rather, the bearing of the orders is for the administration to appear credible and tough. Members of his base are able to reap from the scenario the “truth” they require to harmonize their self-concept while others look on with utter astonishment and outrage.

Trump lies repeatedly, but it does not matter, as his devout followers hear what they need to

hear. Ironically, their frustration and resentment has been directed toward the alleged lies of others – of "lying Ted" Cruz, "crooked Hillary," "fake news," etc. Whether he wrongly claims that millions of undocumented immigrants voted illegally in the election, (laughably) that he respects women, that President Obama was not born in the US, that data show that racial profiling by police effectively reduces crime, that he doesn't know of David Duke and the KKK, etc., the validity or verifiability of his statements are insignificant. This is why fact-checking and logical argument are ineffective in countering the "alternative facts" expressed by Trump and parroted by his supporters. In response to being challenged by ABC News' David Muir with the fact that no hard evidence has been presented to support the assertion that millions voted fraudulently, Trump countered with, "You know what's important? Millions of people agree with me when I say that" (ABC News 2017). Muir was stunned, but for Trump's loyal base, no more proof is necessary. For authoritarians, falsehood can function as truth so long as the narrative vindicates an inner-psychological necessity.

While authoritarian agitators and demagogues simultaneously draw faith and loyalty from their supporters, Lowenthal reminds us, neither they nor their followers really take what is said seriously or literally. This is why there's no expectation that Trump's positions be valid or consistent. When he would proclaim outlandish things at his rallies, those in attendance cheering exuberantly can be seen smirking, laughing, and even shaking their heads at the surreality of the claims being made, e.g. that he's the least racist person they've ever seen, that he is a "supermodel," that a Mexican plane was going to attack a venue in which he was speaking, that Barack Obama is the founder of ISIS, that there were thousands of cheering Muslims in NJ when the World Trade Center collapsed, that an accusation of sexual assault against him was untrue because his accuser wouldn't be his "first choice," etc., etc. (Politico Magazine 2016). Ominously yet accurately, in their analysis of the discourse of authoritarian agitators, Lowenthal and Guterman ([1948] 1987) found that by rejecting the traditional categories by which "it is possible to distinguish democracy from its opposite," where the population is presented as "eternal dupes and …victims of a perennial conspiracy, …the distinction between truth and lies is accordingly inconsequential." Thus, outlandish conspiracy theories appear (and feel) accurate to the hopeless and disillusioned.

Trump can be shown on audio or video contradicting, falsely denying, or backpedaling from his statements with his credibility intact. It's why he can disparage sacred American categories – like insulting prisoners of war, defending flag burning in a Tweet, boastfully crowing that he was right in relation to tragic acts of terrorism committed on US soil while body counts are still being determined, publicly insulting a Gold Star family – and maintain absolute legitimacy among his ardent followers, even if they identify as patriots and conservatives. As he and his message resolve interior and exterior tensions for them, the narrative does not need to be credible or right, but rather Trump's words and message have to "feel right" and he merely must promise protection from the bad people (Muslims, immigrants, black thugs, etc.). To his staunch proponents, he personifies the archetype of the savior, one who has promised to "Make America 'America' again," to use Scot Baio's words from the Republican National Convention. He's someone they believe will abate their "horrors of lost status" and rollback the "consequences of a collapse of white privilege," as Toni Morrison noted in a post-election *New*

*Yorker* piece.

The Frankfurt School's scholarship on authoritarianism also indicates that such messages can only take hold on a dominant scale if there are preconditions within the psychology of social subjects and if the social conditions are fertile for such ideas to be triggered and to proliferate. MacWilliams (2016) notes in his piece that authoritarianism can be latent and then become activated by fear of real or perceived threat. He describes more recent research which shows that even non-authoritarians act more like authoritarians when there's a perception of threat (MacWilliams, 2016). The frequent violence and sporadic terrorism which has created an atmosphere of perpetual vigilance and alarm has permitted outgroups to be easily constructed and vilified as targets for projected fear, malaise, and hostility. The reduction in real wages over the last four decades, high poverty and inequality compared to similar nations, and the decline in union jobs and corresponding rising workforce precarity in terms of self-determination and job/ income security have enabled this process. These conditions compose what Fromm has described as the "socio-economic factors" which mold the "human basis" for stoking prejudice, chauvinism, and anti-democratic sentiment, especially among disenfranchised whites (Fromm [1941] 1969: 206). Correspondingly, it has been during a time when white resentment and hysteria in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement and over immigration sanctuary cities and incredible fabrications like Muslim no-go zones is palpable.

This pathological dehumanization has created an atmosphere where refrains on social media that dismiss concerns about rampant and unaccountable killings of unarmed people of color by police are common. Often a self-righteous vindication is expressed with comments rationalizing that the victims deserved it because they were "criminals" or were resisting arrest. As threatening "others," their structural oppression and the institutional violence they experience is understood as deserved, exaggerated, or simply nonexistent. Within this milieu, the concepts of "the victim" and of "victimhood" have even been perversely turned on their heads. While a persecution complex is almost a prerequisite for internalizing Trumpism as an ideology, Trump's ardent supporters and other defenders of the dominant culture, desperate to cling on to their privilege, often use these terms as slur words. They're really saying to members of marginalized groups, "Because your story implicates my complicity with repression, and your struggle for justice is a threat to my privilege, you, the bearer of your own experience, must be completely invalidated." Statements by Trump that police are the "most mistreated people" in the country and that the Black Lives Matter Movement is "essentially calling, 'Death to the police'" emboldens such perceptions (Flores, 2016; MSN, 2016). It does so by reinforcing a disposition constituted by the irrational fixation on declining privilege and control, white victimhood, transgressive deviants, and dangerous minorities. It's this dynamic that constructs the unfounded worldview that it's actually whites, and not blacks and other minorities, who experience structural discrimination and racism. Such notions are often triggered when competent experts offer analyses of social inequality or people of color merely describe their own experiences with systemic prejudice and bigotry.

Adorno found that the rapport between demagogues and their loyal following is sustained in several ways. One is "gratification" (Adorno, [1946] 2007: 224). The demagogue's persona and

message offer a sense of vicarious fulfillment. Another is that they engage in theatrical and showy performances, which makes them more relatable. Trump is a clownish huckster whose persona is perfectly suited for reality TV, and, apparently, convincing many in today's America that he can be an effective political figure. Adorno observed that such leaders tend to present themselves as beyond accountability and refuse to be inhibited or censored. Trump says on a big platform what his supporters formerly could only say in isolation, i.e. he says what they "would like to, but either cannot or dare not" (Adorno, [1946] 2007: 224). This contributes to the charade of his honesty, the courage to "tell it like it is," as his message violates "the taboos which middle-class society has put upon any expressive behavior on the part of the normal, matter-of-fact citizen" (Adorno, [1946] 2007: 224). Trump's assault on public decency, solidarities across social groups, and on progressive efforts to preserve the well being of vulnerable populations is waged under the guise of a noble struggle against the liberal PC culture. This, together with his over-the-top showmanship, affirms his loyal supporters' delusions of straight, white, male persecution and, as a form of vulgar spectacle, compels unblinking attention. This is due, again, to the relatability of such leaders, because, as illustrated in the WWII era, such figures "are taken seriously because they risk making fools of themselves." Trump is just like us, normal common folk. …except, he isn't.

**"Treat Them Very, Very Rough": Authority as Fetish and Aggression toward Outgroups**

In *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno, et al. (1950) identified several variables which comprised a tendency toward the submission, domination, and projected hostility which lie at the heart of authoritarianism. You can go down the line and tick them off in regard to common Trumpist refrains and the attributes which make them persuasive to his supporters. Some which are particularly poignant in the current situation are discussed below.

Rigid and absolute conformity to conventional values, which results from external pressure from collective powers recognized by the individual, was identified in the study as "**Conventionalism**" (Adorno, et al., 1950: 230). Trump has been able to generate significant support with continual invocations of "law and order" (Lewis, 2016). He uses this rhetorical method effectively by presenting the society as a dangerous, immoral, and lawless place. Trump's narrative of America returning to greatness is connected to enforcing conformity to white, Christian, middle class values as he interprets them. This has absolutely resonated with his base, as they feel that their troubles are due to America losing its way. This is illustrated by several things, for instance his call for a return to discriminatory stop and frisk measures by police, despite the illegality and ineffectiveness of such measures in reducing crime. It's also illustrated by his tendency to demonize protestors whose alleged lack of respect for the law (and for law enforcement) is contrasted to the "silent majority" of good Americans who fall in line (Lewis, 2016).

He also panders to and incites religious moralism (which from him is more than a little ironic) by promising to appoint SCOTUS judges who would roll back marriage equality and Roe v. Wade and asserting that we'll all be saying "Merry Christmas" again. For Trump and his loyal supporters, "political correctness" has come to represent the unfair prohibition against the

casual racism and prejudice formerly enjoyed, guilt-free, by whites and the sexism formerly enjoyed inculpably by men. Rather than problematize such attitudes, *per se*, the so-called elite, liberal, PC culture is to blame for censoring speech and exaggerating the bad faith and maliciousness behind such sentiment. When questioned by Megyn Kelly at the first GOP primary debate about past comments on women, having referred to them as "dogs" and "disgusting animals"; after asserting that immigrants from Mexico were drug dealers and rapists; and following his remarks that US district judge Gonzalo Curiel was unfit to preside over the Trump University fraud case because of his Mexican ancestry (even though he was born in Indiana); Trump deflected that the real problem was "political correctness."

Next, the compulsion to submit to authority in the form of parents, supernatural powers, leaders, etc. was reflected in *authoritarian submission* (Adorno, et al., 1950: 230-31). As elaborated above, this variable/ tendency resulted from the unresolved antagonism of feeling powerless to such figures. They are therefore given a status of near-infallibility. Trump, knowing he was tapping into such currents of powerlessness and insecurity, and that he had been able to solidify what seems like nearly unconditional devotion, boasted that he "could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and …wouldn't lose voters" (Diamond, 2016a). Chillingly, he's probably right. Imagining that parallel on the foreign or domestic policy level is unsettling, to say the least.

Additionally, in interviews with study subjects, Adorno, et al. (1950: 232) found that in social conditions which normalize strict and repressive restraint, where giving up basic pleasures is rationalized *via* the super-ego, people were prone to seek objects on which they can "take it out" (Adorno, et al., 1950: 232). Also, they found that discontent was expressed by stewing that there are others "getting away with something" (Adorno, et al., 1950: 232). He called this tendency *authoritarian aggression*, which can be thought of as the sadistic aspect of authoritarianism, while authoritarian submission can be thought of as the masochistic aspect of it (Adorno, et al., 1950: 232). In addition to bragging about sexual violence he claimed to have committed against women, boasting that his status entitles him to grope women's genitals without consent, Trump has also actively incited political violence by his supporters. At a rally in Michigan, he shouted as attendees were roughing up demonstrators, "Get him out!" (Howell, 2016). As things escalated, and with a smile, he offered to defend in court any supporters who hurt protesters. Gleefully, he asked, "Are Trump rallies the most fun? We're having a good time" (Howell, 2016). At a North Carolina rally, as protesters were being escorted out of the venue, he lamented to the southern crowd, "In the good old days this doesn't happen because they used to treat them very, very rough" (Butler, 2016).

The considerable rise in hate crimes which corresponded with Trump's nomination also reflects this tendency. After the election, reported hate crimes had surpassed the 1,000 mark (Bacon 2017). Given that authoritarian aggression is caused by repression, Adorno, et al. (1950) observed that sexual and aggressive inclinations are likely to be forceful and violent in authoritarians. He attributed the neurotic fixation by authoritarians to "zootsuiters," "foreigners," and "other nations" as well as to "gays," "sex offenders," and "people with bad manners" to this dynamic. One need not think too hard to find analogous objects of projection

beyond immigrants and racial minorities today, for example, the bizarre public obsession with gender queer folks and which restroom they use, internet predators, “lazy” millennials, parents who don’t discipline or promote the “right” values in their kids, teenagers with sagging pants, etc.

A revelatory finding of the study was that the prevalence and psycho-social function of *superstition and stereotypy* for authoritarians did not merely apply to those with “low intelligence,” but also to “intelligent” and “informed” people (Adorno, et al., 1950: 236). This is not to infer a direct correlation with institutional learning and “intelligence,” or even to take the category of “intelligence” for granted at all, but Adorno and his cohorts’ analysis brings to mind post-election discussions of the education gap among voters. Even though Trump once exclaimed that he loved “the poorly educated,” and while there was a gap between voters in terms of education level, a significant number of college educated voters turned out for Trump – 52% with some college, 45% of college graduates, and even 37% of postgrads (Castillo and Schramm, 2016). Adorno, et al. (1950) identified superstition as the irrational belief in mythic or fantastic external determinants of life, or “fate,” while stereotypy was described as the tendency toward rigid thinking. Applied to the ingoup-outgroup dynamic, this factor presents itself as belief in over-simplified and outlandish narratives and a tendency toward ethnocentrism and racism. While often couched in discussion about the lack of proper morality or personal responsibility within society, in fact, superstition and stereotypy indicate the shifting of responsibility from within the authoritarian toward others or outside forces. Adorno, et al. (1950) noted that, rather than an automatic indicator of low intelligence or being uninformed, it represents an expression of ego-weakness. While a sound intellect can potentially grasp a critical understanding of the world, the weak ego cannot, as certain inconvenient facts are potentially anxiety provoking to the authoritarian, regardless of intelligence. Former presidential candidate and now member of Trump’s administration, Ben Carson is a celebrated neurosurgeon, yet he believes the theory of evolution was inspired by the devil and once noted that the Egyptian pyramids were build by the Old Testament figure, Joseph to store grain (Miller, 2016). Trump, who is well educated and views himself as being “like, a smart person,” only acknowledged that Barack Obama was born in the US in September 2016 despite clear evidence that he was (Tani, 2016). Around that time, an NBC news poll showed that 41% of Republicans continued to believe that Obama was not born in the US (Clinton and Roush, 2016). Nearly half of Trump supporters deny that the planet’s climate is warming because of human activity despite overwhelming scientific evidence that it is (Kennedy, 2016). Additionally, according to American National Election Studies (ANES) data, and with a complete absence of proof, 70% of white Republican Trump supporters believe that President Obama is Muslim, compared to 41% of white non-Trump supporting Republicans (which is still alarmingly high) (McElwee, 2016).

Among white Republicans, and controlling for education, this data show that a fixation on white identity and on discrimination against whites increased the probability of support for Trump (McElwee, 2016). White identity and the irrational preoccupation with white victimhood are significant features of Trumpism, as nearly one-third % of white Trump voters believe that whites experience more discrimination than blacks and 61% express that the government

favors blacks over whites (McElwee, 2016). This same group is much more likely to endorse stereotypes of all groups compared to non-Trump supporting Republicans. About 65% believed that blacks were more violent than whites and nearly 55% reported that blacks were lazier (McElwee, 2016). Among this group, 76% said Muslims were more violent than whites and just over 40% believed that they are lazier, and just over 40% responded that Hispanics were more violent than whites and nearly 30% said that they were lazier (McElwee, 2016). These rates were appreciably higher compared to Democrats more generally, but were also greater when compared to non-Trump supporting Republicans.

Adorno, et al. (1950: 237) classified the authoritarian's exaggerated display of strength, which is generated in part by a fragile ego, into the variable, *power and toughness*. This component of the authoritarian character encompasses constant posturing, threats, and bragging, and tends to view all relationships in terms of domination-submission, strong-weak, leader-follower, etc. Exhibited almost purely in Trump, his thin skin and tendency to obsess on criticism and seemingly always take it personally manifest the personality trait of the "tough-guy" *par excellence*. Trump's justification of cheating or defrauding former associates and clients, his interactions with women, his tendency to constantly insult opponents (ironically, one time making fun of Jeb Bush's comparably quiet demeanor by sarcastically calling him a "tough guy"), his promotion of violence at his rallies for those deemed deserving of his supporters' authoritarian aggression, all illustrate this domination-submission dynamic, illustrating what Fromm ([1941] 1969: 162) described as a "sado-masochistic character."

Finally, *destructiveness and cynicism* was characterized by aggression which is rationalized, normalized, and "ego-accepted" (Adorno, et al., 1950: 239). Like the previous two tendencies, it operates in relation to an underdeveloped, or weak, ego. Such aggression is considered beyond the parameters of moral judgment because it is presented in terms which relativize it (so less justification is needed for "all-out aggression") (Adorno, et al., 1950: 239). Respondents in *The Authoritarian Personality* reported that if the situation was such that "hostility is so generalized, so free of direction against any particular object, that the individual need not feel accountable for it" (Adorno, et al., 1950: 239). Other prominent justifications in the study included the contention that "everybody is doing it" and that such aggression (like exploitation and making war "upon one's neighbors") is just "human nature" (Adorno, et al., 1950: 239). In the context of war and foreign policy, the drone program was largely escalated during the Obama presidency. Both a latent and explicit indifference to the killing those identified as enemies or civilians deemed expendable enough to be collateral damage was already predominant before Trumpism was a thing. US citizens have been inadvertently and deliberately killed by drone strikes as well. There is already an ethical line drawn between those whose lives are deemed to be precious and those which do not matter, both domestically and abroad. The casual, remote, video game-style snuffing out of the lives of enemy combatants and those of the innocent men, women, and children who happen to be around, has largely and implicitly been accepted. Further, while Trump has been anything but consistent with regard to his foreign policy strategy, he nonetheless has comforted his supporters by promising to escalate the current approach (without being too specific) and move beyond the current "politically correct war" on terror and to extend that war beyond the terrorists and "take out

their families" (LoBianco, 2016). In addition, he has beat his chest several times vowing to bring back torture – to "bring back a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding" – in order to "beat the savages" (Diamond, 2016b). He has wavered on this, but the rhetorical method of promising to respond to ISIS' barbarism in-kind has had the predictable consequence of mitigating the alarm produced by the spectacle of their horrific atrocities. While the likelihood of any of his proponents experiencing the wrath of an immigrant terrorist is roughly 400 times less likely than any one of them being struck by lightning twice, as Adorno notes, the rhetoric "attacks bogies rather than real opponents" (Adorno, [1946] 2007: 222; Matthews, 2017). It "builds up an *imagery*" of the enemy and "tears it to pieces, without caring much how this imagery is related to reality" (Adorno, [1946] 2007: 222). The spontaneous violence at Trump's rallies can also be understood in this context. These are spaces where violent and destructive rhetoric and behavior are encouraged, normalized, instigated, and cheered on. When protesters are escorted out, attendees often see it as an opportunity to get in freebies as they yell insults, slurs, and at times, violently attack.

At its core, and in psychoanalytic terms, the authoritarian personality is generated through the failure of the individual to appropriately internalize the super-ego which creates ego-weakness. This is expressed through neuroses, through the development of a sado-masochistic character in response to a repressive, psycho-social power dynamic. A weak ego (i.e. excessive defensiveness or "thin-skin") manifests in response to the over-the-top compulsion to conform, i.e. the inclination to externalize the super-ego. Evident in the authoritarian "tough-guy," "no nonsense" disposition and language of Trump and his faithful advocates is a deep-seated terror of perceived excesses in their own autonomy and the freedom of others. Therefore, power evokes immediate respect, admiration, and deferential submission in authoritarians, and powerlessness provokes their hate, contempt, and desire to dominate, and in some circumstances annihilate and destroy. Conditions which limit autonomy bring great comfort, as experience becomes understood as the product of "fate," "God's will," or what is "meant to be." This may be understood in relation to the supernatural or a social system/ political regime/ leader which administers or determines thought and action. If taking the form of social institutions and norms themselves, authority ascribed to them was identified by Horkheimer ([1936] 1972: 76) as a sort of "deification of authority."

Horkheimer ([1936] 1972: 78) understood that the promise of the Enlightenment to liberate the "common man" from tradition and servitude was a myth. The promise of self-realization through work and productivity was (and still remains) limited only to some. "Liberation" really meant that workers had the privilege to be offered up to the exploitation inherent in industrial labor markets (Horkheimer, [1936] 1972: 78). He explained that while in the Middle Ages reality was connected to God's will and was endowed with meaning, in the epoch of liberal capitalism, "real situations are brute facts which do not embody any meaning but are simply to be accepted" (Horkheimer, [1936] 1972: 78). In such conditions, the bourgeois system and the fetishized authority constituted in it are accepted ideologically as given. This may seem antithetical to Trump's promise of "change" or to "draining the swamp," but as we've seen with his cabinet picks, the Trump Train is firmly stuck in the mire of the establishment. The same process/ dynamic which facilitates the submission of those susceptible to the rhetoric of

demagogues is exacerbated by and applicable to social conditions which promote isolation, despair, and feelings of powerlessness.

More recently, neoliberalism has further naturalized these conditions in which domination and exploitation are normalized, and in the current climate, the authoritarian dimension has brought cruel disparagement and even physical violence against opponents or members of marginalized groups further into the realm of the ordinary. In light of all of this, it's easy to understand how Trump has been able elevate himself politically and within the larger social consciousness. He embodies the capitalist ethos and the garish sensationalism prominent in today's popular entertainment. After all, he's a reality TV star. He also represents the narrative of the "little guy" succeeding through hard work. Consistent with other ideological phenomena, people know the narrative and the man are a fraud, but they believe. They need to. Trump attended a private boarding school and an Ivy League college, is a billionaire, and yet speaks like the "common man," making him relatable, funny, and, well, seemingly "normal."

## Conclusion: Fascism?

Trump's normalizability is what makes his particular brand of authoritarian populism and nationalism so appealing and so dangerous. Currently, there's been much discussion about whether prominent and key supporters of Trump from what has been called "the alt-right" are Nazis or fascists and whether property damage and physical attack are legitimate and effective tactics in opposing these more extreme elements on the right. What of Trump and Trumpism? What about the potential for the emergence of explicit authoritarianism in the form of fascism on a broad scale in the US? The *Authoritarian Personality* explored the prospect of "a fascist triumph in America," noting that the "potential" of either "susceptibility" or "resistance" lies in the "character of the people" (Adorno, et al., 1950: 10). Fromm ([1941] 1969: xiii-xiv), in his 1965 forward to his book written in 1941, warned that humanity in modern times not only remains "anxious" and "tempted to surrender" its "freedom to dictators of all kinds," but these tendencies have only increased, in no small part due to the threat of nuclear annihilation. In reference to the prevailing nuclear superpowers, the US and Russia, he lamented that, "The buttons are there, the men charged with pushing them …are there, anxiety and helplessness are still there" (Fromm, [1941] 1969: xiv). With Trump's assurances that he'd expand the US's nuclear arsenal and empower other nations to do the same, the buttons are surely not going anywhere. Lowenthal and Guterman ([1948] 1987: 149-150) noted that in America, authoritarian agitators have tended to appeal to a small group of committed followers: "disgruntled old people, cranks, toughies, unemployables," and others. However, they speculated that "in an economic crisis," where "the middle class loses its security, and the youth its confidence in the future," the gulf between the "cranks" and others fade, and the potential for large-scale influence of an authoritarian agitator could potentially emerge (Lowenthal and Guterman, [1948] 1987: 150).

The term, "fascism" gets tossed around a lot by people across political camps. However, more serious analysis has recently both opposed and supported that Trump and Trumpism represents a fascist movement. Italian anti-fascist resistor, Gianni Riotta (2016) explains that

the current situation in the US is not akin to fascism. He explains that Trump has not called for the violent overthrow of the system. Fascists, he remembers from the Mussolini regime, had the mission of killing democracy and installing a dictatorship. Fascism is hostile to individual freedom and capitalism, and Trump seems to reflect these values. He assures that Americans will not be goose-stepping down Broadway, and Amazon will not be nationalized as a "state asset" (Riotta, 2016). However, others have argued that Trump and the current situation represent "echoes" of fascism or a kind of proto-fascism or neo-fascism (Bernstein, 2016; Chotiner, 2017). After all, he appeals to and has empowered assorted blatant fascists, white nationalists, ultra-rightists, and neo-Nazis. Preeminent historian of the Third Reich, Richard Evans explains that while bands of thugs aren't killing each other in the streets, they're "killing each other in tweets" (Chotiner, 2017). In Weimar Germany, there was a similar poisoning of public discourse. He noted that, while not on Twitter or Facebook, formal political discussion in 1930s Germany had also descended to the level of lies, distortions, and insults (Chotiner, 2017). Similarly, there was a stigmatization of minorities, blatant attacks on the rule of law and legal system, and the marginalization of the popular press (Chotiner, 2017). Carl Bernstein (2016) speculates that Trump flirts with a new kind of fascism, one which incorporates celebrity and neo-fascism. Like Riotta, he says there won't be jackboots, an economic takeover, or Nazi Salutes. However, he identifies a burgeoning fascism in the nativism, ego-mania, and hostility toward democratic political processes (Bernstein, 2016).

Wolin (2016) correctly remarks that the social causes which sparked Trumpism must be addressed. This means sincerely examining and addressing the circumstances in which people have come to feel so powerless. It must be said that these conditions – endless war, austerity, wage and job insecurity, inadequate healthcare, the police state, Wall Street cronyism etc. – are the consequence of the actions of both Republicans and Democrats in the past, including Hillary Clinton. However, now that the authoritarianism encompassed by Trumpism has been triggered at such a scale, it won't so easily go away. While the nation's dispossessed may feel that their plight has been ignored, their discontent is giving way to a resentment and hate directed toward vulnerable groups. Many of Trump's committed supporters espouse an open bigotry which they no longer feel compelled to hide.

With the ascent of Trumpism, these patterns have been normalized to an extent where bona-fide organized racist and fascist groups came out and openly promoted Trump's candidacy, seeing in him an avenue to emerge from the isolation of the political margins. His selection of Steve Bannon as his chief strategist, who headed up Breitbart News, which Bannon has called "the platform for the alt-right," was a signal to white nationalists, anti-Semites, fascists, etc. that he might just be their guy (Posner and Neiwert, 2016; Roy, 2016). It didn't help that during his presidential run, Trump would retweet memes from these groups and tended not to rebuff such extremists unless pressured. Perhaps, Trump and Trumpism reflect a kind of ideological and social media- and reality TV-mediated fascism, where individuals internalize proto-fascistic precepts but believe they are fighting for "freedom" or "liberty" over and against a straw-man they may themselves recognize as a kind of liberal tyranny. In the same way many on the left offhandedly evoke and apply the term, Trump's committed advocates may even believe they are fighting against a kind of fascism. They are ardently following Trump and

seem to truly identify with his pervasive Tweeting, TV huckster persona, and phony billionaire bourgeois pageantry. Whether or not he and his movement represent an emerging, contemporary fascism is as of yet not clear. However it feels like a new kind of "something worse" maybe be seething below the surface ready to erupt.

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# Black Subjugation in America

By | 2017: vol. 16, nos. 1-2

Books Reviewed in this Essay:

Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race.* London and New York: Verso, 2012.

Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism.* New York: Basic Books, 2014.

Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015.

On a recent visit to Ho Chi Minh City's (Vietnam) War Remnants Museum—focusing on The 'American War'—I was reminded how Americans have never, as a country, come to grips with our invasion and war on Vietnam, neither our war on its people or its very physical being. Yet, while we haven't come to grips with our war on Vietnam, Americans as a whole have never come to grips with our own history, specifically how Europeans stole this land from Native Peoples, and then built this country on the blacks of African slaves, while institutionalizing white supremacy. Accordingly, issues of slavery, race, racism, etc., have been relegated to the margins of American experience, confined overwhelmingly to "The South." And with anything so marginalized, it can be ignored—if not forgotten.

Three recent books, however, when combined, have challenged this marginalization; in fact, together, I argue that they call for the (re) placement of the issues of slavery, racism and white supremacy at the very center of American historiography and popular understanding. They also support African American calls for reparations. The late Theodore W. Allen's two volume work, *The Invention of the White Race*—published originally in 1997, but republished in 2012—takes a "round-about" route to the issue, powerful when completed but a long way to keep readers' attentions. Allen's first volume, "Racial Oppression and Social Control," examines the way the Protestant British controlled Catholic Ireland after colonization, and focuses on the system of "Protestant Supremacy," whereby the lowest, no-account Protestant was deemed superior to the most accomplished Catholic. In other words, Allen focused on how the English—mainly through importing Protestant Scots to rule—maintained control over Catholic Irish in Ireland. Interestingly, he wrote it to understand how social control was developed in the British colonies in North America, and most notably in Virginia.

However, it is Allen's second volume that demands attention. Titled "The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America," Allen—who spent 20 years working in the Colonial Virginia archives—argues that for the first 60 years of Virginia, there were no white people in the colony! He points out that people referred to each other by their national origin—as

Englishmen, Dutchmen, (Protestant) Irishmen, Germans and later Scandinavians—and that references to “whites” did not occur until the 1680s. What was going on…?

Key to understanding this is to recognize that about three-quarters of all Europeans who entered Virginia in the first sixty years were indentured servants, people who had agreed to subordinate themselves to the control of anyone who would pay their passage to the colony for a set period of time (usually seven years). Oftentimes, this has been presented as similar to an apprenticeship, where one works for little in exchange for learning a trade, a bed and clothing, and receiving some tools and/or some land after the term is completed. Allen, however, argues that this indentured servitude was, in fact, much closer to actual slavery, albeit limited to a set period of time. The control was all-but-total. For example, miscreants were not just admonished or even jailed, but many were whipped. (Allen claims that the whipping of white people made it much easier for them to accept whipping of blacks later on.) Allen also points out that it was *illegal* for male and female “servants” to have sex; and if the woman got pregnant, her servitude was legally extended by two years!

Interestingly, however, Allen points out that most Africans entered the colony the same way; not as chattel slaves, but as indentured servants—only about 25 percent came as chattel slaves in the early years. Importantly, what this meant was that the conditions between white and black servants were very similar and relations were generally affable.When the colonial elites used servants to try to extend landholdings by stealing even more land from Native tribes for their precious tobacco—which sucked up nutrients from the land, requiring new acreage about every three years—African and European servants ultimately banded together in 1676-77 in what became known as the civil-war stage of Bacon’s Rebellion, and turned on the elites. They burned Jamestown to the ground, and seriously threatened the existence of the colonial government. Once the rebellion was suppressed and colonial order restored, the elites faced the problem of how to prevent such events from happening again. They consciously decided they had to prevent possible unity between poor whites and poor blacks from ever re-emerging.

Their solution solved their problem. They chose not to elevate poor whites over poor blacks, thus improving the situation for whites, but rather lowered blacks *below* the already poor whites. This they did by passing a series of laws that worsened the situation of most blacks and, most notably, changed black indentured servitude to black chattel slavery for life. They also allowed for the selling of individual slaves to different slave masters, attacking the very existence of black families. Free blacks were not ignored, either, as their rights were systematically taken away from them, and by 1735, they could no longer vote, a right they had enjoyed in Virginia for over 100 years.

At the same time, the elites began a massive propaganda campaign directed toward the poor whites, convincing them that they were in all ways superior to blacks, that whites were human while blacks were “animals” (i.e., sub-human), and that blacks deserved to be enslaved permanently. The changing laws and the propaganda—done often through church Sunday Schools, as this was the only education poor whites in the South received prior to Reconstruction—were joined by material incentives for poor whites serving in the slave patrols

and especially for capturing runaway slaves. And, of course, there was the not-always-implicit threat that if the poor whites did not support the white-based, elite-dominated social order, that they could be enslaved as well. And ultimately, most poor whites accepted the (re) established social order, and incorporated their sense of white supremacy into the very essence of their beings, consciously or unconsciously passing this on to children and other family members, and insisting on its acceptance by later European immigrants.

Allen's work shows the process by which the colonial elites made sure their rule would not again be contested: they lowered blacks into chattel slavery, and inculcated a belief of white supremacy among the poor whites. In effect, they incorporated poor whites into the white ruling elite over the blacks, albeit in a very subordinate position vis-à-vis the economic and political elites. It was this process, argues Allen, that enabled the existence and expansion of black chattel slavery. In other words, slavery and racism were not "normal," based on biological differences, but were socially constructed by the elites to maintain social control over *both* whites and blacks. And with that social control (re) established, the stage was set for the development of a black slave-based, but capitalist, cotton industry that ultimately shaped the development of the modern world. Edward Baptist explicates what happened to black slaves, showing "how slavery changed and moved and grew over time":

> *In the span of a single lifetime after the 1780s, the South grew from a narrow coastal strip of worn-out plantations to a sub-continental empire. Entrepreneurial enslavers moved more than 1 million enslaved people, by force, from the communities that survivors of the slave trade from Africa had built in the South and in the West to vast territories that were seized—also by force—from their Native American inhabitants. From 1783 at the end of the American Revolution to 1861, the number of slaves in the United States increased five times over, and all of this expansion produced a powerful nation. For white enslavers were able to force enslaved African American migrants to pick cotton faster and more efficiently than free people. Their practices rapidly transformed the southern states into the dominant force in the global cotton market, and cotton was the world's most widely traded commodity at the time, as it was the key raw material during the first century of the industrial revolution. The returns from cotton monopoly powered the modernization of the rest of the American economy, and by the time of the Civil War, the United States had become the second nation to undergo large-scale industrialization. In fact, slavery's expansion shaped every crucial aspect of the economy and politics of the new nation—not only increasing its power and size, but also, eventually, dividing US politics, differentiating regional identities and interests, and helping to make civil war possible (p. xxi).*

Where Baptist writes about forcing "African American migrants to pick cotton faster and more efficiently," he details the use of brute torture of individual slaves through the lash; a process so ubiquitous that Baptist refers to it throughout the book as "the whipping machine."

It is this story—how slavery was absolutely central to the development of the United States—based on accounts from the slaves themselves, that Bishop tells so powerfully. Key to this was seeing the development of slavery as a process—"Things happened because of what had been done before them—and what people would do in response" (xxiii)—but that the center point at all times "was the experience of enslaved African Americans themselves" (xxiv). And as he points out, "by the 1840s the North had built a complex, industrialized economy on the backs of enslaved people and their highly profitable cotton labor" (xxvi). Through explicating the process of slavery's expansion, Baptist illuminates the growth of the US economy. He argues that slavery was not a pre-capitalist formation, but a capitalist one that was based on the exploitation and oppression of African Americans and their ability to work. The profits made were plowed back into more land and slaves in the South, while in the North, they were invested in emerging industries.

What Baptist also makes clear is how slavery was not limited to the South, although most of its production was based there. The fact is that, through torture, slaves produced more cotton than could be consumed in the United States—"Many enslaved cotton pickers in the late 1850s had peaked at well over 200 pounds a day" (470)—and thus, this had to be exported and sold to realize profits. That means that boats, trains and wagons had to be located and hired to transport cotton from individual plantations to the (international) ports on the coasts, space on ships had to be procured, insurance had to be paid, and "factors" engaged internationally to solicit buyers for the produced cotton. None of this happened "automatically." And though he doesn't belabor the point, these "service providers" were often located in the far southern cities of New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

Yet even the production of cotton was not limited to just southerners. Investors—not only rich people from across the country, but international banks such as Baring Brothers of England as well as banks in the US North such as Brown Brothers—provided credit for the purchase of slaves, often mortgaging individual slaves; in other words, if a loan could not be repaid, the banks would gain title to the individual slave, which they could then sell for more profit. In all, a tremendously brutal, yet productive and profitable system of oppression and exploitation. Baptist explains:

> *In the hands of cotton entrepreneurs, slavery was a highly efficient way to produce economic growth, both for white southerners and for others outside the region. In the 1850s, southern production of cotton doubled from 2 million to 4 million bales, with no sign of either slowing down or of quenching the industrial West's thirst for raw materials. The world's consumption of raw cotton grew from 1.5 billion to 2.5 billion pounds, and at the end of the decade, the hands of US fields were still picking two-thirds of it, and almost all of that which went to Western Europe's factories. By 1860, the eight wealthiest states in the United States, ranked by wealth per white person, were South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Connecticut, Alabama, Florida, and Texas—seven states created by cotton's march west and south, plus one that, as the most industrialized state in the Union, profited disproportionately from*

*the gearing of northern factory equipment to the southwestern whipping-machine (350).*

Yet, while Baptist argues here and there that US cotton production was part of a global system of production, it remains for Sven Beckert to properly place it in the history of the global cotton industry. He does this by starting in the Global South, where the cotton industry emerged—notably in India—seeing it develop into global networks centered in the northwestern English city of Manchester—dependent though it was on cotton from the US South—and then ultimately returning to the Global South in the late 20th Century. What is especially interesting in Beckert's account is his foregrounding the role of violence in the emergence of capitalism. Permit an extended quotation:

*Such a thorough and rapid re-creation of the world was possible only because of the emergence of new ways of organizing production, trade and consumption. Slavery, the expropriation of indigenous peoples, imperial expansion, armed trade, and the assertion of sovereignty over people and land by entrepreneurs were at its core. I call this system war capitalism.*

*We usually think of capitalism, at least the globalized, mass-production type that we recognize today, as emerging around 1780 with the Industrial Revolution. But war capitalism, which began to develop in the sixteenth century, came long before machines and factories. War capitalism flourished not in the factory but in the field; it was not mechanized but land- and labor-intensive, resting on the violent expropriation of land and labor in Africa and the Americas. From these expropriations came great wealth and new knowledge, and these in turn strengthened European institutions and states—all crucial preconditions for Europe's extraordinary economic development by the nineteenth century and beyond.*

*Many historians have called this the age of 'merchant' or 'mercantile' capitalism, but 'war capitalism' better expresses its rawness and violence as well as its intimate connection to European imperial expansion.*

*When we think of capitalism, we think of wage workers, yet this prior phase of capitalism was based not on free labor but on slavery. We associate industrial capitalism with contracts and markets, but early capitalism was based as often as not on violence and bodily coercion. Modern capitalism privileges property rights, but this earlier moment was characterized just as much by massive expropriations as by secure ownership. Latter-day capitalism rests upon the rule of law and powerful institutions backed by the state, but capitalism's early phase, although ultimately requiring state power to create world-spanning empires, was frequently based on the unrestrained actions of private individuals—the domination of masters over slaves and of frontier capitalists over indigenous inhabitants. The cumulative*

> *result of this highly aggressive, outwardly oriented capitalism was that the Europeans came to dominate the centuries-old worlds of cotton, merge them into a single empire centered in Manchester, and invent the global economy we take for granted today.*
>
> *War capitalism, then, was the foundation from which evolved the more familiar industrial capitalism … (xv-xvi).*

And what makes Beckert's account so powerful is the powerful combination of both historical depth and global sweep. He covers approximately 5,000 years of human history, from the cotton fields in Mexico to those in Egypt, India, China and the United States, all eventually linked together through the imagination and the cotton mills of Manchester's capitalists, and distributed to markets around the world. He differentiated it from other crops, noting that it was based both in slavery and wage labor, and argues, "Cotton provides the key to understanding the modern world, the great inequalities that characterize it, the long history of globalization, and the ever-changing political economy of capitalism" (xvii). Echoing Baptist, Beckert emphases the centrality of violence to slavery and to the overall global network. Beckert writes,

> *This expansion of European trade networks into Asia, Africa and the Americas did not rest primarily on offering superior goods at good prices, but on the military subjugation of competitors and a coercive European mercantile presence in many parts of the world. Once Europeans became involved in production, they fastened their economic fortunes to slavery. These three moves—imperial expansion, expropriation, and slavery—became central to the forging of a new global economic order and eventually the emergence of capitalism (37).*

Beckert asserts that slavery was central to the new system: "The deportation of many millions of Africans to the Americas intensified connections to India because it increased pressure to secure more cotton cloth. It was that trade that established a more significant European mercantile presence in Africa. And it was that trade that made it possible to give economic value to the vast territories captured in the Americas…." Ultimately, this qualitatively changed the world from what it had been previously.

War capitalism depended on the capacity of rich and powerful Europeans to divide the world into an 'inside' and 'outside'. The 'inside' encompassed the laws, institutions and customs of the mother country where state-enforced order ruled. The 'outside', by contrast, was characterized by imperial domination, the expropriations of vast territories, decimation of indigenous peoples, theft of their resources, enslavement and the domination of vast tracts of land by private capitalists with little effective oversight by distant European states. In these imperial dependencies, the rules of the inside did not apply. There, masters trumped states, violence defied the law, and bold physical coercion by private actors remade markets (38).

In a chapter titled “Slavery Takes Command,” Beckert specifically discusses the role of cotton production in the United States to the global empire. He notes the unique situation that prevailed here: “What distinguishes the United States from virtually every other cotton-growing area in the world was planters’ command of nearly unlimited supplies of land, labor and capital, and their unparalleled political power” (104). He notes that the expansion of cotton production was based on the removal of native inhabitants of the land. And he ties things together: “The coercion and violence required to mobilize slave labor was matched only by the demands of an expansionist war against indigenous peoples” (108).

In parallel to Baptist, Beckert emphasizes the role of the large plantation in this production system: “Indeed, 85 percent of all cotton picked in the South in 1860 was grown on units larger than a hundred acres, and the planters who owned these farms owned 91.2 percent of all slaves.” He commented, laconically, “The larger the farm, the better the planter was able to take advantage of the economies of scale inherent in slave-based cotton production” (110). Again, the violence.

Cotton demanded quite literally a hunt for labor and perpetual struggle for its control. Slave traders, slave pens, slave auctions, and the attendant physical and psychological violence of holding millions in bondage were of central importance to the expansion of cotton production to the United States and of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain.

Better than anyone else, slaves understood the violent foundations of cotton’s success. [This is what Baptist detailed so well-KS.]

The expansion of cotton manufacturing in Great Britain depended on violence across the Atlantic.

Beckert discusses the political power of the slave owners, noting the lack of competing elites within the slave states. Of course, the inclusion of the “three-fifths” clause into the US Constitution by slaveholders and their politicians signified their political power nationally. The violence, the expropriation of the land, and the political power to both enable and protect these features had astounding economic consequences. By 1859, in the Mississippi Delta alone, “as many as sixty thousand Delta slaves produced a staggering 66 million pounds of cotton,” which was over ten times as much as that exported by slaves in Saint-Dominique to France at its highpoint in the early 1790s. The Delta was so fertile that Beckert claims it was basically the Saudi Arabia of the early nineteenth century. By 1840, in the Delta’s Washington County, there were more than ten slaves for every white inhabitant. By 1850, in the same county, “each and every white family in the country held on average more than eighty slaves.” He notes

> *The largest Delta planter, Stephen Duncan, owned 1,036 slaves and the value of his property by the late 1850s was estimated at $1.3 million. While not typical cotton farms, plantations in the Delta were highly capitalized businesses, indeed among the very largest in North America, and the investments necessary would have been beyond the reach of nearly every northern industrialist (113).*

This combination of books establishes a reality that can no longer be ignored, avoided or rationalized away. The fact is that slavery was at the heart of the "American" economy prior to the Civil War; this slavery was based on extreme violence—physical and psychological—that was liberally employed; and it was protected (and expanded) by white southern elites who had dominated national political power. The slave-based economy was not confined to the South: it was integral to both the (US) national and global economy. It was a capitalist production system that spanned the globe, although its key workers (slaves in the plantation South before the Civil War) were definitely not free; nonetheless, the clear goal was profit maximization, and the accumulation of political power as a result to ensure the maintenance and expansion of the plantation system.

The slave-based economy generated the profits that allowed the US to industrialize, and also enabled these processes to happen much quicker and much more extensively than could have been done without slavery. The factories and industrial-related employment provided allowed the US to absorb the millions of people immigrating from especially Europe in the late 1800s-early 1900s. Without this capability, emigration from Europe would have been much more limited, and had they been forced to stay on a generally limited land-base; it seems certainly worthwhile to speculate if Russia would have been the only European country to have a successful revolution in the early twentieth century…? To say the industrialization of the US had far-reaching global implications seems terribly inadequate.

While both Baptist's and Beckert's work are both crucially important and straight-forward, the addition of Allen's work adds a level of detail often overlooked. He incorporates "white" people into the discussion, and not just as proponents and perpetrators of slavery. He shows how most poor and working class whites acquiesced if not accepted the lifetime enslavement of African Americans (and some facilitated it), and by so doing, moved into the ruling elite, helping to control people of color, albeit at a terribly subordinate level to the white economic and political elites. By doing this, and by accepting the dominance of the white elites, these whites perpetuated their own subordination by rejecting alliances with people of color. Considering that general social advances for working and poor people in this country have happened only when whites and African Americans have allied—during Reconstruction, during the industrial union movement of the 1930s and '40s, and during the mass mobilizations of the 1960s-early '70s—one can quickly realize the impact of this collective white decision to accept black subjugation, on whites as well as blacks. And why the ruling elites have worked so hard to ensure these alliances rarely ensue, and when they do, to limit them as much as possible.

The Black Lives Matters movement is again putting inter-racial unity on this country's public agenda for the betterment of most Americans. It is telling white Americans that our liberation is incumbent upon black liberation. But with its "in-your-face" style, its message demands whites respond affirmatively, and with much more effort than verbally expressing "support." It is not enough to condemn police killings of young African American men: yes, we have to do this, but we have to also address the use of white supremacy and racism in social control; we have to force our leaders to actively confront the poverty that is devastating both our inner cities and our rural country side; and we have to reject the lies and obfuscation that have been

used to ignore or marginalize the role of slavery in the development of this country. We whites have to make people of color full citizens of this country, both in reality and in our hearts and minds. If we are going to address the economic inequality and resulting by-products that are literally tearing apart our country, only a full understanding of how white supremacy has worked against the large majority of us must be placed at the center of the table, and we cannot avert our eyes.

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# White Like Them

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Books Reviewed in this Essay:

Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right.* New York, NY: The New Press, 2016.

Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America.* New York, NY: Viking Press, 2016.

J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of Family and Culture in Crisis.* New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2016.

These three books all arrived about the same time that pollsters started to realize that the non-college educated white and mostly rural population might exert a strong influence on the 2016 Presidential election. Indeed, they delivered Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin in addition to the usual conservative Southern strongholds to Donald Trump, and in the process decided the election. Although none of the three are about the 2016 election specifically, all three speak to one crucial segment of Trump supporters—low-income and low-status white people. J.D. Vance gives us an insider's perspective, having grown up in low-income Appalachian culture in Kentucky, and later transplanted to Middletown, Ohio, one of the many (now formerly) industrial-town destinations of the Appalachian diasporas of the 20th Century. We see these diasporas and much more in Nancy Isenberg's journey through the historical making of a permanent "white trash" underclass. She frequently and fluently integrates primary sources into the narrative, which capture and convey a feel for the culture over the 400-year span indicated in the title. Isenberg shows us the changes and the remarkable consistencies since the first English settlements in North America. In contrast to both Isenberg and Vance, Arlie Hochschild is the outsider, a professor at (as she reminds us) an elite university (UC-Berkeley) who ventures out to understand the Tea Partiers and others in Louisiana who are seemingly so different and alien to her own experiences in the Berkeley enclave.

Despite her intentions, *Strangers in Their Own Land* is really about Hochschild's personal journey into so-called 'dark Africa'; like her 19th century forefathers from imperial Europe, she is the civilized scholar out to study the allegedly primitive savages. Like a 21st century white man's burden, she nobly (at least in her mind) endeavors over and over to grasp the worldview of the local primitives—she is determined by gum, even if it takes her ten trips over five years. In the opening chapter, "Traveling to the Heart," she compares student groups at UC-Berkeley to those at Louisiana State University. Guess which one is far more liberal (or conservative)

than the other? She notes many contrasts between Berkeley and Louisiana, right down to the ingredients in the complimentary moisturizing lotion at Aunt Ruby's Bed and Breakfast in Lake Charles, Louisiana (p. 22). My goodness, it has artificial ingredients that can also be found in manufactured plastics! I'm sure that's true, but not everyone can afford the high-end organic fair-trade personal care products (like Hochschild and myself). As if that weren't bad enough, one man fails to appreciate Berkeley's proud academic standing or its seventy-two Nobel Laureates (by Jove, I didn't know it was that many, and I'm an academic myself. Wow!). Then she wants to entice us with the example of Madonna Massey, a gospel singer who loves Rush Limbaugh and whom she dubs "kindly Madonna." Reduced to a sweet but dim-witted yokel, this seems no less condescending than Donald Trump's "little Marco" insult (Senator Marco Rubio is not very tall, which for Trump also indicates diminutive manhood), and much like Trump the exceptional billionaire, Hochschild is the exceptional Berkeley Scholar and not some LSU scrub (ironically, LSU is Isenberg's home university). Hochschild tells us less about the people she encounters and more about her own prejudices of status and privilege that inhibit even a rudimentary understanding of the people in rural Louisiana. The central unifying question for Hochschild really is: why don't the small-town people of Louisiana think and act more like my friends and colleagues in Berkeley?

She compiles the politics, attitudes, and cultural tastes in Louisiana into The Great Paradox. We learn that this Paradox has multiple dimensions: Why do poor whites vote for far-right politicians who institute policies that deny them access to education and pollute the environment? Why do poor whites vote against their own economic interest? Why are there no organic vegetarian restaurants in the Louisiana countryside? J.D. Vance in *Hillbilly Elegy* answers these questions quite directly. Speaking about Middletown, Ohio, he says that

> *People didn't leave because our downtown lacked trendy cultural amenities. The trendy cultural amenities left because there weren't enough consumers in Middletown to support them. And why weren't there enough well-paying consumers? Because there weren't enough jobs to employ those consumers (p. 53).*

Plain and simple. Hochschild laments the frequent meals at fast food restaurants, as if poor white people prefer that. Maybe they would try something more sophisticated and nutritious if they could afford some level of culinary adventure, that maybe if someone, anyone, at any point in the past 400 years could have afforded it? Eventually, the very notion of a good life ceases to exist. After Yale Law School, Vance developed tastes beyond The Cracker Barrel, his previous ideal of fine dining, because he could afford better food and to indulge more sophisticated tastes. He never knew, for example, that there was more than one kind of white wine.

Without delivering a literature review here, suffice to say that extensive research and theory looks into the very questions (perhaps not the dearth of vegetarian cuisine) that Hochschild seems to think are brand new—work that includes *The Authoritarian Personality* from 1950—ironically, part of the Berkeley Studies housed at Hochschild's home institution. If she

doesn't like the Critical Theory approach, she could find many others, but that assumes her goal is to understand the people she meets and the culture she experiences.

Instead, she surmises as she goes, wondering if the key to understanding The Great Paradox might be in environmental issues such as exposure to pollution, which she says reveals the "Least Resistant Personality" (p. 80). This alleged personality consists of an eight-point profile, which in essence describe an uneducated, conservative, small-town person. One thing that apparently doesn't matter is class, although she mentioned earlier that the poorer the state, the less regulated it was likely to be. Maybe the explanation is much simpler, that people in the poorest states are more desperate? J.D. Vance thinks so.

Without resolving The Great Paradox, Hochschild moves on to even more profound insight, "The Deep Story." Beginning with chapter 8, she tells us that the locals are given to conspiracies, having noticed for example that President Obama's flag pin was indeed a very small pin (p. 140) although she doesn't attribute this to a real person. Following this sort of imaginative example, she presents a dramaturgical narrative of her own invention that leads us "behind the deep story" (p. 146) where she considers the issues of race, gender, and class, but only for five pages total for all three variables. How remarkably deep! Maybe the Deep Story and the Great Paradox are not so deep or great, or maybe the discussion is gratuitous and she has little to say?

From there, the book concludes with several social-psychological types, or I should say, stereotypes: the team player, the worshipper, the cowboy, and the rebel—stock characters from b-movies or mid-century westerns. Always sensitive to the people she studies, these somewhat more polite terms for the locals replace such terms as "crazy redneck," "white trash," and ignorant Southern Bible-thumper" (p. 144)—designations they resent (should we presume there are people somewhere who wouldn't mind those monikers?). The "Cowboy," for example, embodies stoicism, as she summarizes her archetype Donny McCorquodale: "I'm strong. You're strong. Mother Nature is strong. We can take it" (p. 189). The Cowboy is the survivor who bears any burden and never complains. To find out more about this type, she might begin with Rupert Wilkinson's *American Tough*, or J.A. Mangan's *Manufacturing Masculinity* or something that speaks to the broader culture she witnessed, such as Dean Manders' *The Hegemony of Common Sense: Wisdom and Mystification in Everyday Life*. I don't expect that she would read everything that might be relevant, but she has apparently read almost nothing. Why research a topic when you can freely speculate? Throughout the book, Hochschild establishes categories, changes and reformulates them, adds to them, but in the end, her final text is more like a collection of field notes, or not even that—more like a personal travel journal. Not until Appendix A does she reveal the scholarly angle, what "research sociologists describe as 'exploratory' and 'hypothesis generating'" research (p. 247). The "something" that she wants to hypothesize about is "the emotional draw of right-wing politics." OK then. Why not consult at least some of the mountains of research on this topic? We are several decades past the "exploratory" stage (which started in the 1930s) with people like Erich Fromm, Wilhelm Reich, and Kurt Lewin, and extensive empirical research that culminated with the aforementioned Berkeley Studies. We are past an intermediate middle to

late 20th century stage with the work of people like Richard Hofstadter, Richard Slotkin (who wrote three volumes on the Cowboy type) and well into the advanced stages with scholars such as Bob Altemeyer, Gerda Lederer, Charles Pierce, and Jonathan Haidt (whom in my view she misrepresents on page 15), or journalists and former political staffers such as Chris Hedges and Mike Lofgren. These few happen to be among my favorites, but there are many, many more, including hundreds of relevant empirical studies of all methodological varieties.

Hochschild closes the book with expressions of celebratory gratitude towards her rather extensive staff of graduate students, friends, colleagues and of course the people who opened their lives to her.

As it turns out, Hochschild's equally well-educated but differently experienced counterpart in the form of J.D. Vance relied on no support staff, and feels no particular sense of celebration. Although he worked his way out of the backwoods poverty and culture that so fascinates Hochschild, he presents himself far more humbly than The Berkeley Scholar:

> *…I've accomplished nothing great in my life, certainly nothing that would justify a complete stranger paying money to read about it. The coolest thing I've done, at least on paper, is graduate from Yale Law School…But about two hundred people do the same thing every year…I am not a Senator, a governor, or a former cabinet secretary. I haven't started a billion-dollar company or a world-changing non-profit. I have a nice job, a happy marriage, a comfortable home, and two lively dogs (p. 1).*

Vance realizes the tragic irony—"I write this book because I've achieved something quite ordinary, which doesn't happen to most kids who grew up like me (p. 1). Born into the poverty of Appalachian Kentucky, later transplanted to an Ohio rust-belt town, Vance vaguely fits Hochschild's Cowboy category, stoic in a way, but her limited conceptualizations cannot contain the exuberance that Vance and everyone else we see in his life express.

Among the many exuberant and, in Vance's words, deeply flawed characters that shaped his upbringing, his Mamaw (Bonnie Vance) shaped him the most. She taught young J.D. about his people, their sense of honor, and like any honor code, the need to maintain a personal reputation of toughness. Examples abound, most of which no one regards as abusive or improper. On the contrary, Mamaw emphasized early on that sometimes you need to fight, and not just in self-defense but because it is the right thing to do (p. 68). In elementary school, J.D. decided to stand up to Chris, the school bully, who was tormenting an awkward little kid and making him cry every day. Mamaw taught J.D. to hit him right in the gut, right on the belly button, and remember to turn your hips into it. Chris went down with one shot and spit up blood. J.D. got a good talking to and had to practice writing instead of going out to the playground, but apparently, the school felt, like Mamaw, that Chris the bully got what he deserved.

Violence permeates life in Appalachian culture. Vance recounts numerous cases of drunken

fights, and some particular cases when Mamaw and Papaw (who also fought in WWII) tried to kill someone who insulted the family honor. In one particularly vivid example, a truck driver named Big Red once told J.D.'s Uncle Pet, who owned a lumber mill, to hurry and load the truck, 'you son of a bitch.' Uncle Pet asked the man to speak more kindly about his mother. When Big Red refused, Uncle Pet beat him unconscious and then ran an electric saw over his body (p. 14-15). Big Red nearly bled to death, but he refused to cooperate with police. As a mountain man himself, he also lived by the honor code.

In mountain culture, family means "a chaotic life in big groups of aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins" (p. 69). J.D.'s mom married a guy named Bob, her third husband, who was not a mountain man, and Mamaw disliked him. He saw Mamaw and Papaw as scary hillbillies, and in some ways, they were: they carried a loaded gun always, and both had tried to kill more than one person (apparently true) rather than seek justice through the law. In their domestic fights, Bob often used Mom's background against her, but Mom never became the victim, either. J.D. witnessed most of the fights, and learned that slapping and punching was OK as long as the man didn't hit first. This all seemed typical growing up, because all the households seemed to be this way. Such confrontations took their toll in his family just like in all the others—Mom started to party to escape her ugly marriage, and partying led to constant drinking, which led to a suicide attempt. Later, a guy named Chip replaced Bob, then Steve moved in, and then mom and J.D. moved in with Matt, and then with Ken and his three kids. In J.D.'s view, Mamaw instilled some of the better qualities from the mountains, such as loyalty and self-reliance, while protecting him from substance abuse and bad influences. When he moved in with her (and no one else) in the tenth grade, the sanctuary she provided saved his life. From then on, he could focus on schoolwork and make some decent friends. She forbade him to hang out with any of the pot-smokers, and if she ever caught one of them hanging around the house, she threatened to run him over with her car. "No one would ever find out who did it," she stated menacingly (p. 154). Not surprisingly, J.D. lost interests in drugs, and no longer feared going home at the end of the school day. Yet Mamaw's love superseded her menace; she fiercely protected J.D., encouraged him, comforted him, and unlike many others from places like Jackson, KY, lived up to her values.

Beyond personal anecdotes, Vance places his life in the context of the larger culture and its rife contradictions. No one likes to admit that they don't regularly attend church, but the region has among the lowest church attendance in the nation and among the highest rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, interpersonal violence, and poverty. J.D. says that childhood was often enjoyable, but he makes no attempt to glorify his culture, a world of "truly irrational behavior. …Our children wear nice clothes thanks to high-interest credit cards and payday loans. …Our homes are a chaotic mess. We scream and yell at each other…at least one member of the family uses drugs—sometimes the mother, sometimes the father, sometimes both…At especially stressful times we hit and punch each other, all in front of the rest of the family" (p. 146-147). Most of the time, they express some sort of remorse, "but then we act just as mean a few days later" (p. 147). He further explains that most people preach personal responsibility and the value of hard work, but then don't practice it. If they get fired for tardiness or stealing, it's the supervisor's fault for being an asshole. Obama or some other hated politician closed the mines

(it could never be that coal is no longer economically viable). “These are the lies we tell ourselves to solve the cognitive dissonance” (p. 149) Vance writes, the difference between profession of religious faith and actual practice, the difference between professions of hard work and the personal choices necessary to hold a good job, the willingness to fight for family honor and at the same time break the family apart with drugs and violence. There is no Great Paradox or Deep Story, but instead a very manifest social dysfunction that creates a disempowering and brutal ambivalence towards life.

Whereas Vance recounts the history of the region from time to time as a backdrop for his personal story, Nancy Isenberg focuses directly on the history of the underclass, a history of disempowerment—something more profound than poverty or any one or several social problems. After 400 years, the people of the underclass envision their tough existence as legitimate, even desirable, to the extent that hillbillies attach “a remarkable stigma to people who have left the hills of Kentucky for a better life” (p. 30). The cognitive dissonance that Vance recognized is not really dissonant if contradictions are the normative standard. The culture of disempowerment teaches its victims not only to accept that life is hard, but that life is contradictory, meaningless, and ultimately hopeless. As Isenberg shows, the “white trash” of today descended from a wide assortment of people all looking for a better life in the colonies, and then in the wilderness as the country pushed westward. Forced from the land through enclosure movements of the 1600 and 1700s, then forced to pay for their Atlantic passage through indentured servitude, migrant peasant farmers either remained indentured the rest of their life or fled into the Appalachians, the forests of the Midwest, and later, across the Mississippi, always towards the wilderness beyond the reach of the law. Without legal title, these wilderness people could rely only on themselves to survive against nature, hostile Native-Americans, and wealthy landowners with title in hand and the force of law. Low social status and suspicious hostility toward government started with the first colonies. Called crackers and squatters, landless migrants became synonymous with ignorance and mindless brawn whose “only real gift he received from his country was the liberty to keep moving” (p. 107) and stay one step ahead of the law.

The distance between town and the backwoods became a measure of class, education, and stability. Some notable figures arose from the impoverished backwoods, such as Davey Crockett and Andrew Jackson, men who made their reputations through personal toughness and killing. After election to the House of Representatives, Crockett became an ardent opponent of the land speculators and plantation masters (whose interests Jackson championed) and who routinely drove off the squatters. Despite the class conflict that Crockett exposed, his vernacular speeches in the House and elsewhere became the fodder of satirists and an excuse to intensify prosecution of squatters; Crockett became living proof of the uncultured cracker who could not be trusted to own a homestead. Andrew Jackson embodied many of the same characteristics, but unlike Crockett the hunter and trapper, Jackson preferred to kill people. As President, the Indian Removal Bill forced the relocation of the Cherokee and other ‘civilized’ tribes which produced the Trail of Tears and various other slaughters of Native-Americans and later, of Spanish settlers in Florida. Jackson executed his own men whenever he felt like it (p. 123), and maintained authority through terror. In the political realm, he managed to sell acts of

genocide and terror as virtuous backwoods toughness and patriotism, and at the same time support the speculators and other big money interests which achieved two goals of the landed class—removal of Native-Americans and squatters, and property requirements in order to vote (which lasted until 1857). By the time their hero died in 1845, Andrew Jackson had turned the squatters into settled tenant farmers to generate revenue for the landlords. With the legal right to work the land they rented but with no greater prosperity, the veneer of the tenant farmer quickly wore away in favor of the contemporary term—white trash (p. 135).

In New England and the Midwest, the squatter either morphed into or was replaced by the family farmer who owned the land and the business. 'White trash' tenant farmers lived mostly in the South, but the social role and the term would later spread along the frontier and in the mountains where subsistence farming also continued. For Isenberg, the Civil War was equally about race and class. Would poor Southern whites support the wealthy plantation owners? Isenberg answers that Jefferson Davis and other Southern patricians invoked honor and manhood to rally poor whites to the Southern cause. This created a dilemma, because backcountry types seemed to have more in common with other landless and uneducated people, namely poor Yankees, Native-Americans, and even African slaves. The dilemma became more acute when the backwoods Abraham Lincoln became President, a man born in Kentucky very close to his eventual political rival Jefferson Davis. Southern aristocrats feared that Northern economic opportunity might win over poor whites, so they employed newspapers and orators to depict Lincoln as a poor man born in a slave state, and alluded to his allegedly questionable parentage with epithets such as the "Illinois Ape" and a "mudsill spawned in prairie mud," someone born to serve and inherently unfit to lead. In contrast, Jefferson Davis was high-born, a West Pointer from a patrician family, a man born to rule over people like Lincoln (p. 167). The Civil War united race and class, but in the process race effectively eclipsed class in American culture, and this legacy continues today.

Isenberg thus sees an intersection that both conceals class beneath race but also exalts whiteness as superior and legitimates patrician wealth and power, an intersection that simultaneously condemns blackness and white trash failure, but also dismisses any level of success they manage to achieve as dumb luck or as perversion above their station. If the contemporary American worldview insists that anyone can prosper and become rich if they are willing to work for it, Isenberg sees this as an American adaptation of early British colonialism, that while everyone can allegedly become whatever they want in life, some will naturally be more successful than others because breeding counts. As late Nineteenth and early twentieth century eugenics claimed, everyone has a 'natural' place in the magical meritocracy of the American Promised Land. Mythical science and economics reinvented class distinctions into a new type of American aristocracy—"the Democrats swooned over Kennedy's Camelot, and Republicans ennobled the Hollywood court of Ronald Reagan" (p. 310).

## Closing Thoughts

In her own way, Arlie Hochschild embodies the academic aristocrat, and she writes for others of her class, whether in or out of the academy. In contrast, Nancy Isenberg writes for the

activist scholar and looks to fire up anyone concerned about contemporary politics and culture. When Hochschild concludes that people living on contaminated land become the “least resistant personality,” she pledges her allegiance to the long lineage of aristocrats who condemned “the clay-eaters” with “sunburned necks” for making bad choices and who “are blamed for living on bad land, as if they had other choices” as Isenberg retorts (p. 320). Vance has no pretentions of profound insight and leaves the poignancy of luck and love to speak for itself. Cloaked in the regalia of the elite institution, Hochschild’s book remains a desultory anecdotal treatise. Even if she assigned the relevant literature to her graduate students, she would still need to think about it and engage with the commoners of tier II institutions and lower. Much easier to speculate. Apparently, LSU’s status confers no such right of speculation and instead requires that Nancy Isenberg assemble and critically evaluate factual knowledge about Hochschild’s bayou people and everywhere else the impoverished underclass carries on with fatalistic perseverance.

Beside the exploitation as cheap labor, expendable soldiers in the service of empire, the targets of predatory mortgages and payday loans, and the votes for politicians who legislate against their interests, the people of the hollers and swamps, of the mountains and the woods have survived it all. They have also created some uniquely American music. Folk, country, jazz, blues, bluegrass, gospel, rockabilly and rock’n’roll all hail from the downtrodden and oppressed people of North America. The musical stories of joy, tragedy, and survival may be small recompense, but if nothing else, many of us look to their words and music for comfort and hope. All three of these books are bestsellers, so maybe interest can lead to understanding, maybe to mobilization, and even to unity among everyone who ever has to worry about employment, healthcare, education, and a decent place to call home.

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# Andy Blunden, The Origins of Collective Decision Making. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016.

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There is something way too flat about horizontalism. The political style associated with Occupy Wall Street has its defenders, including writers like Marianne Maeckelbergh and David Graeber, who find something lively and colorful in the horizontalist enthusiasm for long consensus-seeking meetings, rejection of "vertical" structures like representation or formal leadership, and conviction that a group's actions can outline in advance ("prefigure") the future that those actions seek to bring about. Why then does horizontalism strike me, and I think some others, as being dull, unresonant, shallow—that is to say, one-dimensional?

By uncovering their histories, Andy Blunden's *Origins of Collective Decision Making* reveals a great deal about the character and feel of the consensus and majority decision making paradigms. Blunden takes up a question that has received curiously little attention from scholars: how did political organizations in the English-speaking world come to adopt the paradigms of collective decision making that they use today? Blunden rightly points out that it is one thing to know when and where a decision making paradigm was first used, and quite another to reconstruct the lines of influence by which that paradigm was traduced. It is not enough, he argues, to say that an idea is "in the air" (14): people always learn about political practices from specific sources. Somehow, majority rule became central to the "traditional decision-making procedures and structures of the social democratic and labor movements" by the end of the nineteenth century; somehow, consensus process, and the horizontalist style of which it is a component, came to define many late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century anarchist and "alterglobalization" groups (viii).

How? Blunden might have made it easier for his readers to see what the answers to that question are and why they matter. In his own description, his book proceeds by "going back from the present into the past to find origins, and then working forwards again, and on a number of occasions, stepping back again to follow up leads which would later prove to be byways"—and, he adds, doing all of this twice, once for majority decision making and once for consensus (xi). For readers who (like me) prefer Raymond Chandler's detective stories to Agatha Christie's, this style of investigation has a certain appeal, but its price is that the most valuable findings in this book are obscured by the book's structure. Blunden—the secretary of the Marxists Internet Archive, the group responsible for the invaluable website marxists.org—has an archivist's affection for details, and he sometimes gets lost in them. Nevertheless, Blunden's fascination with the mechanics of group decision making is contagious, and, more important, his attention to the transmission of decision making practices

allows him to show the contexts in which majority and consensus practices have each been adopted. That relationship between practices and their contexts turns out to be crucial.

Blunden proposes that the practice of majority decision making within organizations stems from medieval or early modern guilds. There were, to be sure, ancient polities that practiced something like majority rule, the Athenian assembly being the best-known case. Blunden argues, however, that there is no plausible line of transmission from the Athenian assembly through the Middle Ages to modern organizations, since medieval political and ecclesial assemblies operated through consultation or advice-giving, not majority rule (30-36). Blunden uncovers guild records that clearly demonstrate the use of majority decision making in the early sixteenth century (50) and that strongly suggest its use in the fifteenth (47), and he makes a case for the probable use of majority decision making within guilds at much earlier dates (36-38). Since the development of majority decision making within the guilds seems to have predated the use of majority decision rules within the House of Commons, and since the House of Lords in its early centuries seems to have played a merely consultative role in relation to its Speaker, Blunden is able to offer a plausible case for the claim that the modern practice of majority decision making, at least in England, was a product of the guilds and was transmitted from them to early trade unions, and then from unions to other sorts of citizen organizations. Moreover, if this line of reasoning is correct, it would seem that majority democracy within the parliaments and congresses of the English-speaking world was derived from majority democracy within guilds and other citizen organizations, and not the other way around. (There are only a few scholarly studies that examine the history of majority democracy, or collective decision making more broadly. Blunden does not cite them, but so far as I can tell they do not contradict his argument. See, for example, John Gilbert Heinberg, "History of the Majority Principle," *American Political Science Review* 20.1, February, 1926, pp. 52-68; Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, esp. pp. 8-18; Melissa Schwartzberg, *Counting the Many: The Origins and Limits of Supermajority Rule*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.)

Consensus as groups like OWS practice it, in contrast, is of quite recent origin. Blunden argues convincingly that it was invented in the early 1960s by participants in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. SNCC's consensus practices, of course, did not come out of nowhere: they were influenced by "shared decision making" at Myles Horton's Highlander school (180) and by consensus-like practices among some African-American religious groups before the 1960s (161, 170). Blunden notes that the decision making method that the Religious Society of Friends developed in the seventeenth century has often been seen as a precedent for contemporary consensus decision making. However, he argues—conclusively, I think—that the Quakers' pursuit of a Spirit-infused "sense of the meeting," in which members of the group speak as little as possible and aim to "lay aside" their differences, is fundamentally different from the consensus paradigm's pursuit of total agreement through lengthy discussion. Given this difference, it is not surprising that, despite the links between Quakerism and the civil rights movement, decision making practices do not seem to be among the ideas that Quakers transmitted to SNCC (210-214).

Within SNCC, consensus worked because of the unusual relationship among SNCC's members and between those members and the public: this is where the link between practices and their contexts proves crucial. Blunden quotes Casey Hayden's recollections: "I think Consensus in SNCC grew mostly from the idea that if folks were going to risk their lives they had to be able to do it for something they agreed with. And the ethical notion that if one disagreed with a plan, one might have to leave as a matter of conscience" (160). Being guided by conscience rather than by strategic reasoning, taking direct and risky action that expresses one's conscience rather than acting through representatives or making calculations about means and ends, joining and leaving groups with ease: these are the hallmarks of horizontalist groups today as much as of SNCC a half-century ago. Blunden wants to train his readers' attention on what he calls the "germ cell" of politics, the experience of "a group of people in the same room, deciding what to do together" (2), and when he writes about consensus this concreteness is especially important: the vivid sensory bond that exists among people who sit through an exhaustingly long discussion and who emerge with a decision on which all agree is a powerful feeling. Thus a member's commitment to a group like SNCC or OWS will tend to have an intensity and immediacy unlike the experience of membership in other sorts of groups.

Although Blunden does not say so, if we picture the "germ cell" of consensus as he asks us to do, we can easily see the affinity between consensus decision making and the idea of prefiguration (11). In the sensory intensity of a consensus meeting, the world outside the meeting pales in contrast with the people inside, an experience that invites participants to imagine the future they seek as nothing more than an enlarged repetition of their present actions. Supporters of prefigurative politics would probably say "nothing less than," but "nothing more than" seems more apt: prefiguration collapses the distinction between means and ends, trapping the future in the present. Seeing the present as an advance image of the future, a prefigurative group (which is generally also a consensus-based horizontalist group, as Blunden notes [viii, 11]) turns in on itself—not in the sense that its members do not want to change the external world, but in the sense that they experience the face-to-face equality of their group *as* the changed world they are seeking. Prefiguration is a "what you see is what you (will) get" principle; consensus is a "what we decide is who we are" practice: it is no surprise that the two tend to go together.

In majority decision making, however, the decision makers tend to turn their attention to the world outside their meeting room and to the future. Here, again, Blunden's story of origins helps us understand how the decision making paradigms function. He notes that majority decision making arose in groups formed to make decisions about matters like trade rules and craft apprenticeships, funeral expenses and sick relief (44), and were later adopted by trade unions interested in organizing a broad membership for collective action in the face of employers' power. Where membership in horizontalist groups, from SNCC to OWS, has characteristically been limited to volunteer militants who already share a worldview, membership in groups that practice majority democracy characteristically carries with it a feeling of having been, as it were, drafted into the group by one's circumstances. Guilds and trade unions alike deal with issues that their members *must* confront, alone if not together. The members of such groups do not necessarily share a worldview. What they have in

common—what mediates their commitment to one another—is a concern with certain problems that are happening, or will happen, outside their meeting room. One consequence of this mediated commitment is that groups like guilds and unions use majority decision making because it is more conducive to large-scale, inclusive, collective actions. Blunden writes that majority decision making within trade unions has, "over generations, managed the conflict between opposing social and political currents," allowing union members to "act as one despite often deep political and ideological differences within their own ranks." For unions, "nothing is more alien…than the idea that compliance with a strike vote is a matter of individual conscience. Once the question is put to the vote, [the majority] decides. Anything else spells the end for a trade union" (111).

Blunden's point is sound, but I want to emphasize something else here: the observation, which he makes only in passing, that majority decision making tends to go along with strategic, rather than prefigurative, understandings of political action. Groups whose members have been (to borrow John Locke's phrase) "driven into society" with one another have a relationship defined by what happens outside, before, and after their meetings. They are brought together by, and thus tend to keep their minds on, the grievances or worries that compel their membership in the group, and by the problems they want to solve, or at least confront, together. Majority decision making thus does not fit well with the assumption that one's worldview or one's conscience ought simply to determine the actions to which one commits; it fits, instead, with the more ethically complex idea that means and ends—however much one might like to bring them closer together—cannot be collapsed into one another, and thus also with the idea that actions might yield results that do not resemble them.

Horizontalism's proponents like to think that they are engaged in a politics of imagination—"Another world is possible!"—but, reading Blunden's account, I want to argue that horizontalism is better described as a politics barren of imagination, as political literalism. Each part of the horizontalist package—consensus, prefiguration, opposition to formal leadership—rests on literalist thinking. Consensus decision making assumes that the decisions one accedes to and the directives of one's conscience ought to be exactly the same. Prefiguration asks its adherents to imagine more of what their senses already present to them. Perhaps even more explicitly than do consensus and prefiguration, the horizontalists' rejection of representation proclaims a lack of confidence in invisible things: in the links between representatives and constituents, elections now and policy change later, those in the room where a decision is made and those elsewhere. Those bonds are meaningful, the tradition of majority democracy insists, even when they are tenuous and unsatisfying, and even in a country, like the United States, where majority democray is as much an aspiration as an accomplishment.

We are so accustomed to majority democracy that we do not think of it as being imaginative. Nevertheless, it depends on powers of imagination or, more precisely, of metaphorical and analogical thinking. To say that a majority vote stands for the decision of the whole or that the people make decisions through their representatives is to think metaphorically. Horizontalism says of these sorts of claims: they are not literally true, therefore they are not true at all. This

impatience with metaphor is all too common today: religious fundamentalists, New Atheists, readers who prefer memoirs to novels, and horizontalists all, in their own ways, exhibit it. I have no theory to explain this phenomenon. I would like to suggest, however, that, whatever its source or sources, the failure of imagination typical of this moment correlates somehow with a declining sense of the possibility of public life and of politics as such—politics as a sphere distinct from private life, a category of relationships dependent on invisible bonds, an activity through which something other than what our senses already show us can come to be.

Majority democracy has a vertical dimension, that bane of horizontalism, not only in that it grants dignity to the distinct activity of leadership—what the ancients called "rule"—and thus to the distinct needs of the kinds of decision making most appropriately called "political." ("Majority is at home on the scale of the entire community," Blunden writes [241].) That is important enough already, but it seems to me that majority democracy has a vertical dimension in another sense as well. A readiness for imaginative and metaphorical thinking allows for a sense of depth; it allows for attention to the sorts of questions that most unsettle us and are most necessary for us. Taken seriously, majority democracy leaves us acutely aware of the gulf between the world as it is and the world as it should be, between ourselves and those frighteningly different beings who are our neighbors and fellow citizens, between what we want and what we can actually achieve. Some ordinary, prosaic experiences, entered into with thought and receptivity, open up—beneath our feet, so to speak—the immeasurable fathoms of what we cannot know and cannot do. Majority democracy, a politics that depends on imagination, is like that, although we rarely take it seriously enough to notice. Horizontalism—political literalism—is not.

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# Stuart Jeffries. Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School (London: Verso, 2016)

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In *Hail, Caesar!* the Coen Brother's recent paean to 1950s Hollywood, there is a curiously political scene in a later part of the film: Baird Whitlock (George Clooney) a popular cinematic heartthrob is kidnapped by a group of disgruntled (and secretly communist) screenwriters. Having hidden him in a well-appointed beach-front property, the kidnappers add insult to injury when they force the leading-man to attend their interminably boring Marxist discussion group. Initially confused, Baird Whitlock falls under the spell of the circle's philosophical guru, a vaguely *mitteleuropäische* academic named Prof. Marcuse and is soon speaking a leftist lingo, spouting talk of "theories generating their own anti-theories". For those in the know, "Prof. Marcuse" was a recognizable figure, a barely concealed remake of Herbert Marcuse, the radical German-Jewish social theorist. And Marcuse's densely-worded philosophy is accorded a similar status as the sword-and-sandal epics and camp musicals pastiched in *Hail, Caesar!*; all are cultural artifacts from a distant past. For sure they are presented with a fairly gentle nostalgia. But it is a nostalgia that reinforces how old-fashioned this all is for twenty-first-century viewers. Densely Hegelian Marxist philosophy is a lot like technicolor cinema; they don't make them like that any more.

Stuart Jeffries' wonderfully readable group biography of the Frankfurt School (of which Prof. Marcuse was only one of several key theorists) politely disagrees; the critical theory of Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and, more recently, Jürgen Habermas has great relevance for our hyper-mediatized and profoundly unequal world.

The Frankfurt School, officially the *Institut für Sozialforschung* [Institute for Social Research], emerged out of a sense of disillusionment after the collapse of the Spartacist Revolution of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The founding members were gripped by a sense of despair; the question of why proletarians, rather than seeking revolution, instead seem content with their own oppression would continue to animate their philosophical writings. The Institute was initially devoted to a fairly orthodox Marxism, with the work of the economist Henryk Grossman and Carl Grünberg, a historian and Director of the Institute, to the fore. At this early stage, Jeffries points out the odd incongruities that defined the Frankfurt School; heavily Marxist but with an anodyne name that would allow them to escape too much scrutiny from the authorities or from their hosts at the University of Frankfurt; suspicious of the far-right and capitalist modernity in equal measure, but housed in a custom-built modernist building designed by an architect who would later develop Nazi sympathies; anti-capitalist but bankrolled by Hermann Weil, the wealthy father of their official founder, Felix Weil. Indeed, as

Jeffries regularly points out, the majority of the charter members of the School had remarkably similar backgrounds: Jewish sons of wealthy fathers who rejected their bourgeois heritage, but still took their monetary inheritances.

In 1931, Max Horkheimer took over the Institute's directorship and soon signaled a radical change in the Frankfurt School's work. The emphasis on a strictly economistic conception of Marxism was abandoned, in favor of a focus on popular culture and an admixture of Freudianism. The centrality of Labour in Orthodox Marxism was abandoned for a new focus on consumerism. Horkheimer had already been going in this direction in his work, as had the classical musician-turned-philosopher, Theodor Adorno. Under Horkheimer, the Institute went interdisciplinary; "The Frankfurt School… decided to remove the white gloves… and get its hand dirty. It would study horoscopes, movies, jazz, sexual repression, sadomasochism, the disgusting manifestations of unconscious sexual impulses, take critical notes at the trough of mass culture, and explore the shabby metaphysical foundations in the basements of rival philosophies."

The rise of Nazism and the continuing concern of why large fractions of the German working class sought salvation through their own oppression, were obvious impetuses here. For the Frankfurt School, Nazi oppression was of a piece with the general oppressiveness of life under Capitalism. But what would come to be called Critical Theory was not just a response to a specific moment of genuine political crisis; it was an attempt to synthesize a diverse array of influences. As Jeffries points out, the posthumous publication of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* – more humanistic than his later economic writings – also played a part. As did the work of György Lukács – whose *History and Class Consciousness* helped introduce themes of alienation and reification into the Frankfurt School's work – and Walter Benjamin, who had long had informal connections with the School and whose musings on life under capitalism and on a haute-bourgeois German-Jewish childhood resonated with his comrades. Jeffries lingers for quite a while on Benjamin; he becomes almost a central character in this group biography, despite never being an official member of the Institute for Social Research. There is a similar pause to take in Lukács' ideas. The narrative is languorous and meandering, but not tiring or self-indulgent. This is a history that capably takes in many of the Frankfurt School's diverse tributaries.

The other major shift occurring under Horkheimer's direction was the relocation of the School out of Germany. Even before the Nazi seizure of power, a branch of the Institute had been set up in Geneva. After 1933, the entire Frankfurt School left Germany, managing to find an institutional home in Columbia University. In some ways, the arrival in Morningside Heights did little to change the School. Their intellectual combativeness remained intact, as did their view about the essential similarities of capitalism and Nazism, a position that was even less tenable in FDR's America and which the author rightly pinpricks; in general, Jeffries wisely pushes against the polemical flourishes of Adorno *et al* whilst salvaging the many valuable parts of their analyses.

When Adorno moved to Los Angeles in 1941 he became even more dyspeptic about American

culture. He was appalled by Hollywood even as leading figures in the city's arts and entertainment community embraced him. Adorno played piano at parties in Charlie Chaplin's house by night, and excoriated American popular culture by day. In one particular reflection, Adorno compared this new country's commercialized music to "the sound of dropping dog food in a bowl". Such thinking was channeled into the more sober investigations of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a study of modernity and the roots of Nazism co-written with Horkheimer, and one of the most important works of all the School's output. Other members of the School were less detached during their American sojourn. Herbert Marcuse found employment interpreting German society for the Office of Strategic Services, precursor to the CIA, an anti-Fascist action he would later be called on to explain when he became a mentor of the counter-culture.

Toward the end of the War, Adorno completed his study of *The Authoritarian Personality*, a sociological investigation of the political temperaments of 2,099 participants. Unsurprisingly, he saw authoritarian tendencies as ever-present in the USA. It was a grim parting gift for his hosts; in 1949, the year before *The Authoritarian Personality* was published, Adorno left America to take up a position back at the University of Frankfurt. By this time, his hopes for a future socialist revolution were non-existent. Horkheimer, who also returned to Germany, had reached a similar set of conclusions. Their work studied the repressive nature of capitalism whilst foregoing the possibility of escaping capitalism. They were now far removed, Jeffries points out, from Marx's famous view in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." Perhaps most shockingly, Adorno was becoming a respectable academic.

Conversely, Marcuse stayed on in America, eventually teaching at Columbia, Harvard, and Brandeis, and remained less pessimistic about the future and less domesticated. He also attained a certain amount of late-career popular appeal, first with his 1955 work *Eros and Civilization*, later with *One-Dimensional Man*, a favorite among student radicals. The widening gap between Adorno and Marcuse is neatly highlighted by Marcuse's shock when he heard, in 1968, that his old colleague had gone so far as to call the police on students occupying the buildings of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*. For Adorno, the 68ers were dangerously authoritarian, for Marcuse they were potential allies. (Though Marcuse was less conciliatory when students led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit protested one of his own talks during a visit to Rome that year).

The savants of the Frankfurt School ranged across sociology and philosophy, economics and popular culture, sexuality and political science. The complexity and diversity of their writings are intensified by an infamously inaccessible style. When a young Angela Davis went to Frankfurt in the early 1960s as an exchange student, she presumed her difficulties understanding Adorno's lectures were due to a lack of proficiency in German; her German classmates soon told her they found Adorno equally incomprehensible. Stuart Jeffries does a remarkable job condensing and explaining the School's collective output, though some might feel his compression misses out on some of their nuances and complexities. He weaves their works into a compelling narrative that still leaves room for amusing sidebars (two highlights being the bizarre James Bond-esque Soviet spy, Richard Sorge, who ingratiated himself with

the Frankfurt School in the 1920s, and Max Horkheimer's awful teenage novels).

Jeffries ends this book making a strong case for the importance of Adorno, Marcuse and Co. to contemporary discussions of authoritarianism, consumer culture, and the penetration of capitalism down into the deepest crevices of society. Reification, the projecting of autonomy and human characteristics onto commodities and commercial relations, a recurring trope for the Frankfurt School, is certainly a relevant idea for understanding the commodity fetishism of late capitalism, for understanding iPhones, Hipsterdom's veneration of faux-artisanal products, and a social media that encourages us all to become our own consumer brands. Herbert Marcuse's qualified skepticism about the chances of social revolution seem almost tailor-made for a world in which anger is rife and yet supposedly There Is No Alternative. And the recent course of American politics only bears out the importance of Adorno's emphases on authoritarianism (indeed in December *The New Yorker* ran with the headline "The Frankfurt School Knew Trump Was Coming"). *Grand Hotel Abyss* might just be a creepily relevant book for 2017.

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# Martin Jay, Reason After It's Eclipse: On Late Critical Theory Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016.

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Martin Jay begins his reflections on the critique of reason by the first-generation Frankfurt school with the question: What did Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno mean by their notion of an *emphatic* conception of reason? Why was it necessary and what is its role? This is no doubt the right question to ask to begin an inquiry into what he calls late critical theory. While this book is an excellent introduction to the topic in the end I was not fully convinced he provided the best answer. The questions of truth and, as Habermas added, validity are central to problems of emancipatory social theory. Is there some ontological or epistemological baseline that we can ascertain that justifies the critical project? Contemporary radical theories such as those derived from Foucault, are skeptical of such attempts and question notions of emancipatory social theory.

Jay takes a broader historical approach and considers late critical theory via a survey of the concept of reason in western thought. His survey is necessarily selective. Jay emphasizes the way in which western reason constructs and sometime rejects the emphatic conception of reason. This emphatic concept of reason is the idea that there is something real, an ultimate truth or essence that cannot be transcended. Emphatic reason is also close to what Horkheimer came to call objective reason. The idea that truth inheres in the order of the world, the cosmos, the ideas, nature, or god, to name a few alleged sources independent of the knowing subject. Jay also introduces ideas that are relevant, such as the relation of reason and myth, and the notion of "sufficient reason." This latter notion posits that everything must have a reason ground or cause. These notions are necessary background to understanding the Frankfurt School's analyses of reason.

Jay holds that emphatic notions of truth are noetic. Simply put, noetic theories view truth as self-evident and validated through insight. *Noesis* is closely related to *eidos*, or inner vision, what Plato called the mind's eye. Those familiar with contemporary philosophy can see its heritage in Husserl's notion of eidetic intuition. Jay contrasts noetic with what he calls dianoetic, or discursive, reason for which it is not self-evident insight but discussion and reasoning in common that lead to agreement over proposed truth. As in Aristotle's practical philosophy, deliberation is a temporal process focused on the capacities of reasoning subjects and not the supposedly objective order. Thus, it contained a critical measure of contingency. The tension between the two notions of reason continues into the present.

Jay follows the trajectory of emphatic reason from the Greeks, who see reason as inherent in

the cosmos, though the rationalists, who see it as a product of the individual mind, up to its dissolution in Kantian critique. Hegel and Marx attempt, in contrast, to rescue an emphatic reason by recasting the relation of the real and the rational. Where Kant saves reason by making it a formal property of the mind, Hegel and Marx make it a historical process that comes into being and is realized in the practical life of subjects. Both Hegel and Marx begin with a dialogical and quasi-intersubjective view of reason as a democratic community in their early works only to take up a more noetic view in later work. This is especially true of Hegel who sees the development of noetic insight historically but culminating is in a complete and final view of reason.

The noetic view of reason undergoes serious challenge in the 19$^{th}$ and 20$^{th}$ century with the rise of vitalism and positivism, theories of special interest to the Frankfurt School. The former retains noetic insight into the real but it is not accessible through rationalist conceptions of analytic truth while the latter sees only empirically verified observation and logic as sources of knowledge. Positivism is incapable of discussing the proper ends of life. In strictly separating facts and values, it makes reason into a pure instrument of arbitrarily chosen ends.

With these considerations in mind Jay turns his critical gaze on the Frankfurt Schools analysis of the eclipse of reason. Jay lays a lot of the blame for the impasse of critical theory on Horkheimer. According to Jay's interpretation, critical theory or, more precisely, Horkheimer's formulation of it, unnecessarily comes to express deep skepticism and pessimism regarding the future of a self-liquidating reason. In *The Eclipse of Reason* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* critical theory simply comes to a dead end. The link between reason and emancipation is severed.

Jay views Horkheimer's (and Marcuse's) critique of reason as unsuccessful in providing an alternative to emphatic reason. He argues that Adorno and Habermas provide more productive leads. For Adorno, the notion of mimesis provides a viable notion of non-dominating reason, based in a negative dialectics that holds the reconciliation sought by reason can only be grasped negatively. Universal reason is in Adorno's view subsumptive, that is, it absorbs the concrete individual into the whole. Art, in contrast, provided a concrete notion of human suffering. Art worked negatively by attending critically to the gap between an inhuman world and the problem of happiness. Against modern subjectivism Adorno always gave priority to the object over the subject.

Still Horkheimer and Adorno, remain tethered to the noetic version of reason even as they express doubts about it. Jay cites the transcript of a 1956 discussion "Towards a New Manifesto," where Adorno, agreeing with Horkheimer notes that argument is essentially bourgeois. Jay, like others, is not convinced that the attempt to rescue *noesis* by Horkheimer or Adorno is successful He agrees with critics that Adorno's attempt to use aesthetic experience as a placeholder for noetic intuition is latently metaphysical and that it is very hard to draw any connection to emancipatory movements in this formulation.

The last two chapters of Jay's book are devoted to a discussion of Habermas' response to the

*cul-de-sac* of earlier critical theories. Habermas communicative theory stands on the side of the dialogical view. Habermas' post-metaphysical theory sees insight into truth and validity as a matter of discourse and communication rather than self-evident insight. Jay gives a fine overview of the main elements of Habermas' criticism of emphatic reason and Habermas' own program. Habermas, in Jay's view, brings reason down to earth. Reason and truth are detached from their objective, transcendental roots. Reason is a situated social and intersubjective process which is fallible and open to correction. This project to devise an emeanipatory non-emphatic notion of reason is closely linked to Habermas' critical democratic theory. He sought to identify a sphere of free and equal deliberation that existed within modern liberalism (and republicanism) and which is not liquidated in late capitalism. There remain crisis potentials which can be the subject and means of struggles for freedom. Whereas the earlier generation of the Frankfurt school equated liberalism with subjective reason, Habermas sought an intersubjective conception of reason which uncovered possibilities for a fuller democracy that Horkheimer and Adorno did not think possible. He rejected the unity of a reconciled reason that overcomes the separation of value spheres in modern society. The plurality of forms of knowledge is an unavoidable fact. A new science, as Habermas always has argued, that reconciles us with nature is not possible. Thus, communicative reason is emancipatory in a more limited way, as in enabling increases in freedom and autonomy without any final reconciliation.

While Jay provides a good guide to the problem of emphatic reason in the Frankfurt school, I think his reading of Horkheimer is unsatisfactory. Jay rejects readings of Horkheimer's work that find elements of a post-metaphysical outlook. Not only did Horkheimer develop elements of a post-metaphysical notion of truth he also developed a practically oriented social theory. In the essay "On the Concept of truth" Horkheimer rejects the notion that truth is eternal and fixed beyond human modification and the idea that truth is simply subjective or in other cases relative. Denying Kant's solution Horkheimer suggests a dialectical approach in which elements are arranged unto unities that amount to successive approximations of reality. Hegel's notion of a final end or absolute truth is rejected as impossibly idealistic. The central conflict in philosophy for Horkheimer is materialism versus idealism, and he accepts Marx's view that the material takes priority. The material world, which includes the social, is always changing and never capable of a final transtemporal or definitive truth. Jay needed to pay more attention to this dynamic.

Thus I disagree with Jay's claim that Horkheimer (or Adorno) is nostalgic for objective reason. For Horkheimer reason is a practical force rooted in the life processes of a society. It realizes a better society not through the actualization of an ideal but by the transformation of the organization of social and material life. Although Horkheimer saw these along the model of purposive reason and a sometimes productivist view of the social world, nonetheless he did not endorse or revive *emphatic* reason. Horkheimer attempts, if unsuccessfully, to find a way between objective and subjective reason. There is considerable continuity between Horkheimer's earlier critical theory and Habermas' project. Like Horkheimer, Habermas certainly emphasized the practical character of reason

In the final chapter Jay provides a thoughtful overview of debates around Habermas' theory, although he is here more a historian than a critic. This is most evident when he considers the questions of truth in Habermas. He deals with epistemological questions without taking up implicit ontological features contained in Habermas' notion of reconstructive social sciences, Truth and validity are features of social action and practice. Jay's analysis raises a problem concerning Habermas' adoption of a modified version of realism regarding the natural world. He sees that as the basis for an Adorno-like priority of the object world. Yet Habermas argues that in social inquiry there is no independent object world. What we can find is a model of non-identity inherent in intersubjectivity where participants are both identical and non-identical in their interaction with others. Understanding is thus created and renewed in interaction, an open-ended process without final terminus. Jay could have identified some elements of the participants' perspective on knowledge that might have lead his analysis in a very different direction.

# Henry A. Giroux, America at War with Itself. City Lights Books, 2016

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Henry A. Giroux is a prolific scholar and public intellectual best known for his work in the field of "critical pedagogy" and on issues commonly grouped under the hypernym: "social justice." His latest book, *America at War with Itself*, offers readers a way to "see through" the "dark clouds of authoritarianism" gathering over America, Europe, and the world, while "point[ing] to alternative pathways offered by critical pedagogy, insurrectional democracy, and international solidarity." In a brief *Foreword* written by Robin D.G. Kelley, Giroux is described as "the intellectual descendant of Antonio Gramsci," a revolutionary thinker who diagnoses the ills of neoliberalism, militarism, authoritarianism, environmental degradation, racism, nationalism, violence, civic illiteracy, and the collapse of the public sphere. While such claims may be a dash hyperbolic, there is real value to be found in *America at War with Itself*, particularly as a readable summary of some of our most pressing social, economic, and political problems.

Giroux strives not only to recount the most unsettling current events but to contextualize them with reference to the broader ideological landscape of twentieth and twenty-first century America. The book is praiseworthy for bringing together analyses of the rise of Donald Trump, the victimization of Sandra Bland, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, America's gun epidemic, ISIS and global terrorism, the economics of austerity, right-wing political movements, the relationship between police and military organizations, the degradation of journalism, and more. These events and trends are too often presented and perceived as isolated or exceptional incidents. Indeed, one of Giroux's most important theses is that it is crucial "to connect" these issues to the institutional structures that propel them, to the ideological system — what a successor of Gramsci might have called the *superstructure* — that both shapes and is shaped by them, and to the individuals who experience them first-hand.

The book — divided into eight chapters and four parts — begins with "Donald Trump's America," Giroux's signature example of "the menace of authoritarianism." The menace of Trump or Trumpism, however, is "not new," according to Giroux, but has been hiding in plain sight for decades, as militaristic and corporate forces have overrun civic and political spheres, culminating in a fascistic politics of "the unthinkable." Giroux then turns his attention to four deadly political ills: lead-contaminated water in Flint, Michigan (and other areas), America's epidemic of gun violence, the brutal treatment of Sandra Bland at the hands of Texas State Troopers, and the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, France. While these examples — along with the depths of their analyses — are quite varied, Giroux strives to connect them by reiterating in Parts 2 and 3 what has come before: that racialized class warfare, violence, and a culture of fearful ignorance define today's version of what Albert Camus once called an *état de siege* [state of siege]: a political, moral, and psychological state of human degradation. Chapter 7,

“Paris, ISIS, and Disposable Youth,” co-authored with Brad Evans, stands out in its development of a compelling theory of how attitudes and policies that rely on the premise of intractable conflict both recruit and attack young people, robbing them of alternative imaginations or “alternative image[s] of the world.”

In spite of the book’s usefulness in cataloging the challenges before us, however, what really seems “to connect” the tragedies Giroux describes and the “dark clouds” from whence they are distilled is that progressives are *against them*. While there are good reasons to be “against them,” the adversary Giroux sets up in his book is hydra-headed, invested with an almost demiurgic quality, and yet remains so vague as to inspire confusion. For instance, while Giroux is surely correct that the dangers we face are not “new,” they are most often attributed to that preferred whipping boy of contemporary progressives and academics: “neoliberalism.” The concept of “neoliberalism” has been used and abused to the point of meaninglessness, serving now primarily to unite Leftists under a common banner. Giroux, himself, holds “neoliberalism” responsible for plutocracy, militarization, racism, xenophobia, sexism, celebrity worship, entertainment-culture, the degradation of public education, the erasure of historical memory, the elimination of public spaces, the absence of solidarity among citizens, the privatization of time, and more.

And “neoliberalism” is not the only slippery signifier relied upon by Giroux. What is denounced as “fascism” on one page is decried as “authoritarianism” on another, “totalitarianism” on another, “demagoguery” on another, and “tyranny” on another. In Chapter 3, entitled, “The Menace of Authoritarianism,” there is even a subsection entitled, “The Menace of Totalitarianism.” Not only does this relationship of sub- and super-ordinacy seem counter-intuitive, but nowhere in the book can the reader find a description of (Giroux’s understanding of) the relationship between these important concepts. Later, Giroux argues that “totalitarianism throws together authoritarian and anti-democratic forms that represent a new moment in American history.” The claim that we are facing a “new” moment in history not only seems to contradict Giroux’s central thesis that current events are “*not* new,” but is exemplary of the confusion we face if we take seriously ideas like totalitarianism, authoritarianism, and democracy. In calling attention to these discrepancies, it is not my intention to focus excessive attention on semantics, to be petty, or to trivialize the issues treated throughout the book. On the contrary, we learn something vital by attending to Giroux’s language.

While it is well beyond the scope of this brief review to offer definitions and distinctions between concepts such as fascism, authoritarianism, tyranny, and totalitarianism, they may be usefully distinguished by the relative importance of charismatic leadership, the influence of nativist or racist political dogma, the degree of state-intrusion into private lives of citizens, the relative influence (or lack thereof) of the rule of law, and several other identifiable (although not always quantifiable) variables. To use such terms interchangeably suggests that Giroux’s attempt to “connect” issues and problems may not be so much an intellectual endeavor as an *emotional* one. That is, the goal would seem to be to affirm the enemy, in all of its guises, to forge emotional identifications between readers and victims, and to form a sort of loosely-knit group defined by opposition to the overwhelming evil objects named and re-named throughout

the book. Put simply, when terms and concepts like these are muddled in this way, they serve primarily to reassure us that we are in danger, that we are together, and that we are on the right side.

For instance, while it certainly holds rhetorical appeal, Giroux's decision to call the Flint, Michigan water crisis an act of "state violence" and "domestic terrorism" seems intended to rouse us to anger more than to help us understand the (potentially interesting) connections between neoliberalism, the politics of austerity, racism, and terrorism. If we wish the idea of terrorism to be at all meaningful — and almost any reasonable definition involves terrorism's *symbolic* nature: its emphasis not on the infliction of injury but on spectacular violence that engenders widespread fear and psychological distress — then naming the Flint crisis "terrorism" without further explanation teaches us little about the Flint crisis and terrorism. To say it another way, the "connection" Giroux strives to accomplish here is not a connection based on understanding but on outrage and anger. If both terrorism and poisoned water unite us in outrage in anger, then perhaps we need not think about whether it is reasonable to suggest they are the same. Or, if the goal of making this connection is, as I have suggested, an emotional one, then perhaps we would rather not think about it.

Giroux does not reflect on the irony that, in a book dedicated to resisting "the unthinkable," antagonizing forces are made indecipherable and, to that degree, "unthinkable." This unacknowledged internal tension, however, does not necessarily decrease the book's value, at least not if we can read Giroux "against the grain," as Terry Eagleton would say. Indeed, such a reading is illuminating, for it reveals that even a brilliant mind, like Giroux's, engaged in a noble pursuit, such as formulating opposition to totalitarianism, may fall victim to patterns of thinking and emoting that are, themselves, *totalizing*. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is that the very title of the book, "America at War with Itself," turns out to be nothing but a slogan, repeated eight or nine times, but not once examined or explored. It is difficult not to remark the irony in the book's call to judgment when the reader is asked to reflect on "the banality of evil" and on the figure of Adolf Eichmann, whom Hannah Arendt famously condemned as a man who could think only in slogans.

In Part 4, which contains a single chapter, we find Giroux's proposed solution to the overwhelming dangers we face. Giroux exhorts us to implement a "resurgent and insurrectional democracy," although this concept is never defined. If we take "resurgency" and "insurrection" at face value, we are left to wonder whether blending these practices with democratic values would require the destruction of existing civil and political institutions, and even whether the combination of democracy, resurgency, and insurrection could uphold the basic tenets of democracy, such as political equality and the possibility of collective deliberation. But Giroux quickly returns to more familiar ground, the need for a "critical pedagogy," a complex and controversial term popularized by Paolo Friere and Giroux, himself.

By "critical pedagogy," Giroux means, among other things, the renewal of an "ethical imagination," a concept that is puzzling but potentially rich. What is surprising is that the complex but possibly illuminating relationships between the imagination, criticality, and ethics

are not explored here. Instead, the reader finds a description of a pedagogy that seems quite *un*critical. For Giroux, pedagogy must be defined as "a moral and political exercise" in order to "'refresh the idea of justice going dead in us all the time,'" as the poet Robert Hass would have it. Learning to be a "skilled citizen," according to this pedagogy, means adhering to a particular set of moral and political values, which include pluralistic democracy, socio-economic egalitarianism, non-violence, and the importance of "service to a greater collective good." And while many of us would likely applaud these ideals, the imposition of specific moral values upon any pedagogy should prompt serious questions about what we mean by terms like "critical," "ethical," and "imagination."

If a "critical" pedagogy means that students are instructed to identify with the oppressed, to hate oppressors, and to dedicate themselves to particular forms of moral and political activity identified as "good" by their instructors, then it *replicates*, at the most fundamental level, the dynamics of *totalitarian education*. Even the notion that a pedagogy should "provide the conditions for students to be engaged individuals and social agents," predetermines the meaning of "the good" as social "engagement" and "agency," seemingly neglecting other ethical and democratic values, such as autonomy, solitude, and resistance to the imposition of any (group) identity.

Related to the democratic and pedagogical renewal Giroux proposes is a long list of needed intellectual, cultural, and global "changes" which, while laudable, lack definition and explanation. In addition to the renewal of "public spaces," Giroux implores us to create "a new language," a "new discourse," new "global alliances," a "new form of politics," a "new political conversation," and "new forms of agency." We "need to invent a new system from the ashes of one that is terminally broken," we need an entire "rethinking [of] the space of the political," and we need always to "connect issues," for "there has never been a more pressing time to rethink the meaning of politics, justice, struggle, collective action, and the development of new political parties and social movements." So, faced with the specter of "the unthinkable," urged on by indistinct and overwhelming "dark" forces with too many names to count, we must embrace the hope that an all-encompassing personal and political renewal can be accomplished by enforcing a progressive pedagogy focused on emotional identification with oppression, victimization, and injustice. Here, the language of resistance becomes difficult to differentiate from the language of totalitarianism.

The admirable scope, ambition, and intellectual dexterity displayed in Giroux's latest work will not surprise his fans. It may well become an important reference for those seeking "connections" between seemingly disparate instances of social and political injustice in our time. But Giroux's book also seems intended to coax the reader to align his or her judgment with Giroux's, or, rather, to solidify a congruence of judgment already established. But there remains (or there must remain) a difference between the activity of critical thinking and the activity of solidifying moral judgment, for, as much as we may oppose our political adversaries, we can not preserve a space for critical examination and genuine opposition if our moral judgments and group identities are pre-formed and solidified via emotional identification, or, to paraphrase Christopher Bollas, never *thought* but deeply *known*.

Instead, we must recognize that moral judgment, while clearly necessary at times, can also contribute to thoughtlessness and unthinkability, that morally judging ourselves and others can be a means of repressing thought and attacking ethical being and relating. While engaged in the activity of moral judgment, it is tempting to neglect nuanced understandings and self and other and to seek to shore up the hatefulness of the enemy by calling him, her, or it (many) names and by imagining him, her, or it in exaggerated, overwhelming, and even grotesque forms. In totalitarian regimes, the values upheld by the ruling powers pervade all aspects of public and private life, even thought. But in our hurry to critique and combat totalitarianism, we, too, may be drawn into a cycle of short-circuited thought, facile moral condemnation, group-oriented political identities, and a kind of symbolic violence by which we call out all the "dark forces" of the world, only to find that, by taking this stance, the values and principles upon which our condemnations are founded have become more, not less, obscure, and the "dark forces," themselves, have become more, not less, difficult to resist.

In one sense, Giroux's work holds a certain affinity with Paul Potter's famous exhortation at the (1965) March on Washington, D.C. to "name [the] system" that wages war on the Vietnamese people, that disenfranchises and impoverishes its own citizens, that creates "faceless and terrible bureaucracies" in which we work and live, that "consistently puts material values before human values," and more. "We must name it," Potter declared, as the first step in a longer list of imperatives. That is, we must not only "name it," but, then, "describe it, analyze it, understand it, and change it."

If, with concepts like "neoliberalism," we seem to have come closer to "naming" the system responsible for tragedies suffered in contemporary America and around the world, we may have also discovered that "naming" the system is not enough; indeed, that "naming" it may even inhibit our ability to "describe it, analyze it, understand it, and change it." In an irony shared with Giroux, Potter argued that we must "name" the system precisely in order to "to build a democratic and humane society in which Vietnams are *unthinkable*."

While Giroux's latest work shares the urgency and sincerity of Potter's speech, both force us to ask ourselves whether the emphasis placed on "naming" (or, as we like to say: "calling out") intolerable aspects of our political, social, and cultural institutions — as "neoliberal," "fascist," "authoritarian," or the like — offers real help in achieving our greater objectives: developing and sustaining the personal and political capacities needed to understand, critique, resist, challenge, and ultimately change those institutions.

What would make Giroux's book even more valuable would be some "critical" and reflexive attention paid to the possibility that "naming" the ills of the world may reflect not only a desire to combat them, but also a (tragic, ironic, or perhaps even unconsciously self-destructive) effort to make them *unthinkable*. The effort to make something unthinkable reflects an ambivalent intention: It means not only to make something vanish from our memories and imaginations, but *to keep* that thing around in a form so ill-defined that it is capable of containing all that is bad or wrong. This "dark side" of our opposition to the "dark forces" we face makes it likely that we will develop an emotional dependence upon unthinkable evil forces and our endless

struggle against them.

To be able to *think* them, on the other hand, offers greater opportunities to break from the past and to give up on this ultimately unproductive relationship with the evil forces that unite us. Of course, to comprehend our situation and to re-imagine the terms of our struggle may be to give up on powerful emotional identifications and group affiliations that provide comfort, particularly in times of crisis. Thus, in facing down what appears to be an authoritarian revival, we may find that the first struggle is an internal one: to reflect upon and resist the temptation to totalize ourselves and others, a process by which, paradoxically, the enemy is obscured while the legitimacy of our opposition is made crystal clear.

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# Vincent Czyz, Adrift in a Vanishing City, Rain Mountain Press, New York City 2015

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***Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance—nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city—as one loses oneself in a forest—that calls for quite a different schooling.***

**—Walter Benjamin**

"Nothing is careless about this writing at all," declares Samuel R. Delany in the introduction to Vincent Czyz's *Adrift in a Vanishing City*, a robust collection of stories, each as ferociously poetic as they are distinctly structured.

Admittedly, though, "structured" doesn't capture the sensitivity of these compositions. If, for instance, sixty percent of contemporary American short fiction is tract housing, and thirty-five percent brazenly Bauhausian, aimed only at revealing literary performance, Czyz's *Adrift* is working in that same narrow space where we locate, say, the mature spirit of Frank Lloyd Wright. In other words, *Adrift* is organically architectured, its stories sprung not from tired crafting tricks or radically experimental plotting, but from a seasoned yearning for harmonization between language, landscape, and reader.

When Delany says, "Nothing is careless," he does not mean this book is mechanically meticulous, but replete with caring. Character, conflict, dialogue, POV—these elements grow from Czyz's lush and unabashed devotion to imagery, to the sacred act of painting Place.

> *She thinks of him during long winter nights silent and clear as a sky full of constellations (he has shown her the place where her sign rises, how his is framed at certain times of the year by her bedroom window). The ice jackets on tree branches, on overgrown grass, shiver and crinkle with the slightest breeze, tinkle like chimes. During the season of changing colors with its misty-breathed mornings, she wonders who is waking up next to him. One of those free-love girls with big tits and too much mascara he likes so much most likely, shaking her can all over the bar he met her in.*

Annie Proulx said, "If you get the landscape right, the story will come from the landscape." Read her prose as a testimony to this narratival phenomenology, the might of her murals, their absolute authority, how Place demands character conformity. In Proulx's narratives a story is weather roiling lyrically across the hard truth of universal human nature, and Czyz writes with

this same wisdom, though minus, I think, Proulx's cynical grit.

I assert this contrast as caveat, because the cynical reader will struggle with the level of sincerity needed to read the whole of *Adrift*. The book boasts rampant humor and wit, and tremendous moments of graphic action, and strenuous, existentialist discussions of disillusionment, but it requires of its reader an open-hearted, even mystical, earnestness. It demands we remember that *how* we read is of utmost importance, that reading can and must be an act of caring—that reading teaches how to care about relationships, communities, contexts, and the unfathomable power of words (which, in this political climate, with so much populist rhetoric about "common sense" and "straight talk", with a new president who, in a July 2016 *The Washington Post* story, is quoted as saying, "I never have [had time to read]. I'm always busy doing a lot," is a message that can't be overstated).

Of course, humans do a great deal of things with their bodies without doing much with their minds, and, sadly, even less with their hearts. But in the pages of *Adrift*, humans inhabit worlds wherein physicality is born of emotionality—not the other way around—and where metaphor is not a utility of the human, but the human, in all its fragile agency, is realized solely through metaphor.

> *And on those sweaty Kansas evenings her hair just won't stay, a hot orange moon big over the fields, crickets rub against each other's solitude and she misses him most.*

From the opening story, "Zee Gee and the Blue Jean Baby Queen"—the Midwestern evening sweats as a body sweats, as *she* must sweat, which is physiological *and* emotive. We feel the evening's paradoxical density, the dirge of blackening day and the fiery lift of night. Night, however, does not fall, but hovers. Night is cypher, where sun is to eye as moon is to hollow socket, and she, observer, sees but is not seen, her gaze eternally unreturned. While, also, the moon is her hair, red, a monolithic passion, and the fields, in all their plurality, are the strands gone feral, reaching out as thoughts untethered. Evening, when the mind turns from prosaic cares to mythic ones, when metaphor is the only way to navigate desire. The world around her, in every way, detaching, and hers is a loneliness too big for one human body. Her loneliness is something stared at but impossible to confront in all its totality: love—

As chafing crickets magnify this truth. Their rub the orchestra of desire's irony—how it is always there and always not. Czyz reminds us that there is something hyper-ritualistic about crickets serenading a rising moon, but ritualistic only in the way the moon is ritualistic, which is to say as a projection of a certainty that can't be grasped. The crickets absorb this projection, for they, too, are living and dying things. Crickets playing the friction of their own bodies, but all at once, and, as such, much bigger than they will ever be in their singular insignificance.…

Or how, in this same way, the crickets *are* her little city, Pittsburg, Kansas, the dark center of

America, its great silence that isn't a silence. The crickets are a pulse, a yearn, that *is*, yet cannot, be isolated. They are home in the way home is never where we left it. Crickets give you their sound when you don't seek them out, but should you look, you'll never locate, and, in doing so, destroy all that beautiful noise of human ache, how it reaches out but is forever unable to grasp and arrest, to denote some clear division between need and plea, here and there, then and now.

Possibly I took that close reading too far, but one can't help it when tackling *Adrift*. The book not only undertakes, but stimulates, the grandest poetic speculation, each paragraph a million little emotional pilgrimages. In the second story, "Overhead, Like Orion", we encounter the him of her missing.

> *From a few hotel stories up, this town don't look like much, a little cross-hatchin a tar streets an' concrete sidewalks on the plains, could be swept away by one a those summer thunderstorms, angry clouds comin in like a dark billowin herd driven by wind riders, winds up takin up the whole sky, lightning spiderin across a stretch a black big as half the state, but town's still here, the dust a worn out years blown down Broad…*

Unlike her, so close in third-person omniscient, we meet him from the distance of the unreliable first-person, the center of his own language, his own faulty idea of who it is that he tells himself he is. He has returned, yet again, to the heartland, to his hometown, which is her reality, not, he tells himself, his. He is looking down at the lack he sees, the fragility he wants to see. His are the eyes of one who has gone and returned, who has compared and sought and experienced a glut of Other-ness. Now this Kansan town—his past—is just sketch and façade, somehow, to him, less material than the weather.

Or, again, that's how he wants it to be. He affiliates his own perspective with the storms and the wind and the lightning—but, within his own metaphor he's confronted with a veracity much more sweeping than his own nomadic vision: the town, his past, his roots, *her*, these things are resilient, more than he hopes them to be, more than he'll ever be. He thinks,

> *Man's always been hollow, since the day a goddess breathed him alive … just solid enough to build cities. Me, just empty enough for dust storms to kick up. Not something to wait out, but something that wants out.*

Zirque's his name. The perpetual prodigal of savant drawl, only back in body, though, back in Pittsburgh, Kansas, but still dreaming Berlin and New York, Paris and Hollywood. Zirque, the book's protagonist—not always by name, but certainly by archetype—embodies the troubled profundity of what one individual caring for another means. Here is the tethered drifter, the devoted philanderer, the master jack-of-all-trades. Here is erudite redneck, the world-wise

American.

Zirque is our central character who's only central in that he's the greatest hole in the text—haunting each story in the collection either directly or indirectly. He's the archetype *and* its yawning interior. In this way, every story in the collection gestures at the title. To be adrift in a vanishing city is to be a fluid being in a maze of watery projections. But these projections must be treated as concrete, for they are what transforms the flimsy to the collective, to the shared, to the meaningful. Cities represents the human's attempt to turn caring into something tangible. They are built by relationship in order to house and protect relationship. There are numerous cities in this book—large and small, ancient and new, vibrant and destroyed—but they are all the same; they are the human's need to ardently invest and the human's inability to create something that might actually eternalize that need.

With "Cada Edad Tiene Su Encanto", third in the collection, the reader's progress with the two lovers and their small-town hearts seems startlingly aborted. Czyz whisks us to an entropic, Mexico City hotel, and introduces yet another narrator, this in second-person. Here is a voice akin to the controversial journalism of the wildly talented Joseph Mitchell, that of the wizened biographer whose passion for engaging a subject inevitably collapses subject and object, observer and observed. This narratival voice paints for us a portrait of Eduardo, but, like the "editorial you" that, when you read it and occupy it, is not editorial at all, Eduardo is, simultaneously, glorious phantom and plaintive human.

> *Resting his creaky back against a chair in the lobby, Eduardo must have directed a comment at the aging manager who steps from past to present, past to present and loses a frame of motion, the continuity, in between—*

For twelve years Eduardo's haunted the decrepit El National, living out of one of the forgotten room's in this once-regal hotel:

> *You will not be able, even in the pliable realm of imagination, to restore the balding carpets in the hallway, the dulled paint (un-evenly done in the first place) in need of dusting and a fresh coat, the water-stained ceilings, the bare-bulb lighting, the brownish tapwater (The Victorian clock with wrought-iron hands has stopped in the lobby but rust marches on in the pipes). Time is a measureless matter of daylight filtering through the exhaust-fume sky through yellowish shades brittle as old newspaper.*

You, reader, will not be able, but you are compelled by your rationale to try, to construct (like the reporter/narrator) from the way things are the way things were. But this sort of calculus is impossible in the realm of imagination, because imagination has its own principles of measurement—those of the heart, not the mind. In the book's Afterword, Czyz writes,

> *Unlike most works of fiction, which begin with a familiar disclaimer, this one ends with more or less the opposite intent. The fact is, many of the characters closely resemble persons both living and dead … Eduardo Lerma, whom I had met in Mexico City, died well before the collection was even published. I learned of his death via a long-distance phone call I had made to El Congreso (the real name of the hotel where he had lived). I took the loss all the harder, knowing Eduardo would never read about himself or ever realize how much he'd been in my thoughts in the years since I'd met him.*

In other words, if there is a moral—or, no, a revelation—that runs through this collection, it might be: to care is to vanish. Ah, but also to expand. Because with caring, Czyz shows us, there is no middle ground … there is just ground. You can't not think of somebody; they either exist in your consciousness or they don't. You either care or you don't—it's not an intellectual choice; it's visceral, automatic, and transcends petty categories of logical awareness, of acceptance and rejection, or, say, fiction or nonfiction.

Human biology is hard-wired to care about its physical well-being, the pragmatics of survival, but what undermines this intuition is an even greater caring, an absurd, mythological, blind-groping species of caring, the ineffable *tenor* of caring—love, truth, heartache and the search for validation of one's existence in the existence of the Other.

"Nothing … careless … at all." To not be careless is to be attentive. It is to be actively alert to the energy of living things in a living world. Delany wants to convey Czyz's remarkable ability to *hear beyond* what he's writing, to tune into more and different and other tributaries that a given story unearth:

> *Some nights in drizzle more like drifting mist Pap saw her, long read hair shimmery with it, smeared with light from the streetlamps, and up a block a couple arm in arm, and in some other city maybe Zee Gee was thinking of her, the falling mist in her was pain. No shape, it found its way everywhere, seeped through her, rubbed off on you when you took her hand, want and need and sadness that smelled of her.*

In story four, "The Night Crawler", our narrator is both inside and outside of Pap, this town drunk, this sorriest soul in Podunk, Kansas. Our narrator watches Pap watching Rae Anne, watching through other eyes, story eyes, the eyes of another man, Zirque—or Zee Gee, her absent lover. Pap becoming narrator then, through his yearning as universal of all characters' yearning, authority dispersed, slipping about with the sound of the scene, giving renewed focus to the *how*—for who is it that smears the light and smells the sadness? And how, when she or he, or you the reader, is a block or a continent away, or a book, away, yet can still reach out and take a hand?

"…a particular aesthetic consciousness…" Delany calls Czyz technique, but the same by any

other name, for Czyz's writing offers up his reader to the consciousness of each story. The looping trajectory of desire between two people becomes the desire between all people in all places at all times, and, more fundamentally, the irrationality of desire *within* every person.

As Zirque develops as character and, more essentially, as theme, we see his growing discomfort with how comfortable he has become running away from feeling comfortable. This, I believe, is Czyz decisive critique of the postmodern impulse. These love stories—and they are all, clearly, love stories—don't seek to deconstruct the notion of love to some cold, plastic irony, but re-assert love as something that both infuses and transcends the finite logics of literature. For even as these stories sprawl they vanish, even as they roam and carve, as plotlines wheel off on their own orbits, so too do they come clawing back together. Reading deeper and deeper (or over and under), the sequential melds with the synchronic.

In a way, this can make for jarring transitions between each work, at least for readers who don't pause at each formal ending, but who feel a need to—especially if the next tale is an obvious continuance of the same narratival world—scout for some manner of assurance that the voice nurtured in one's skull will survive and grow comfortable. For to grow comfortable even with earnest is to grow careless and destroy that earnestness (you can't go looking for the crickets). It is a merging from relationship (which is synchronized conflict and contained discord) into singularity, into unity. To grow comfortable reading is to vanish into the book as unimaginative lovers vanish into one another, having lost the diverse foci that engaged them in the beginning.

So *Adrift* makes voyeurism impossible. There is no fine point to how this impossibility works; I can only say, again, that the reader's earnestness is demanded, endlessly.

> *Blamin my restlessness on anything that can't get up to argue the point, I take the way of greatest desire, whatever the moment dangles before me. A blue print drawn up by expectation, most often endin in disappointment.*

The point comes later, the argument in the form of memory, contemplation, in the wake of damage done. We subvert logic, we break our bodies, we carouse and suicide, all in order to care and not care. Zirque's body is a living testament—twisted and tooth-broke from rodeo and car-wrecking and dope deals gone south. Attempting to live fully in the present, Zirque is even more pronouncedly cursed by desire's relationship to disappointment. He wants to care about not caring, but to do this he can't pause to contemplate. The minute he does pause, return, hold—that is to say, in the moments his memories, or others' memories of him—turn from action to assessment, all the poetry and the romance, turns the ugly shade of damaged relationship. Zirque's homegrown beloved, Rae Ann, says he's broke her heart a hundred and fifty times at least, that he's does so each time he leaves. Which stirs up the question of whether or not she's the one breaking her own heart—if the human is capable of not breaking its own heart. Zirque tells her,

*The heart ain't a muscle but a place, where you either live, or you don't.*

And then he says,

*But I always come back. I got a chronic case of claustrophobia that'll turn terminal if I don't get away from time to time. You can't call it id or superego, it's an illness a the spirit around since the time a the ziggurat-builders in Sumer.*

While two woman want to breach his city walls, waiting and not waiting in their own ways. Two women, two overlapping landscapes, caring for Zirque. Rae Ann, the high school sweetheart, caring blatantly, and Veronique, the Parisian sophisticate, caring clandestinely, almost coyly. For Zirque's carelessness inspires their caring. Here is the love-triangle trope re-drawn as a circle, until chasing and chased are indistinct, passion because hopelessly timeless, held together by periphery but empty in at its core.

*And what is to be done with those of us who have an aching for a myth to support our lives, a backbone, an Yggdrasil whose roots curl like a fist around our trouble hearts, whose leafy branches disappear in the strange horizon where vision blends with the sky lording over it, the pale moon and occasion lumps of burning rock-iron-copper angels who fall through it, gather at our feet as dust that has traveled light years to be stepped on and forgotten except for that one phosphorescent moment when we knew to make a wish before it was already too late.*

So Veronique muses, which begins as a question, but, in the spirit of Czyz's entire collection, bursts free of its directive, reaching out as leafy branches, in the same way Rae Ann's hair strands were strewn below that implausible moon. For to assume any serious answer actually exists is to deny, in the first place, the ache for myth.

Though then we have Zabere, the writer character, the essayist, or attempter of answers. Zabere is Veronique's best friend, removed from the love triangle by his homosexuality, but immersed in the love circle in the way caring operates (his sexuality a displacement, but, somehow, also a relegation to the status of not-so-impartial commentator), meaning how we will read other lovers, and take our sides, and scribble our interpretations, as if our fleeting analyses have any bearing on the reality we are attempting to document.

Zabere is the reader collapsed into writer, scratching away in his journal, the café poet attempting to catalog the now even as it evaporates into ink:

*How strange what separates us from one another is so easily snapped broken breached and yet so rarely. We prefer to go on with our isolation, like dots on a*

*balloon spreading ever farther apart as the space around us keeps getting bigger, more babies are born, more cities are built, fewer loves form over the distances*

—

From moment to moment, cities vanish and newborn cities sprout in their stead. One can never walk the same street twice, or walk the same street with another person. Same goes for the reader: one can never return to the beginning of a sentence, a story, a book, and find it in the condition one left it. Same goes for reading, one can never read the story the writer has written, we can only tell ourselves we have to protect from that which might, as Zabere points out, snap too easily.

With this review, I have trekked deep into the book. Zabere's story, "Bring on the Night," is number seven in the collection of nine. It marks *Adrift*'s most distinct swing toward formal innovation, interspersing journal entries written in the "now" of the story's "now", which draws attention to the way humans seem most desperate to attempt frames for those things we feel unframeable, and, in so doing—like photographers feverishly snapping photos of the very moments they're missing—try to protect our sublime sense of caring from getting out of hand. And this seventh-story shift to formal metafiction is heightened in the final two stories, as if the reader has earned an earnestness capable of, now, revisiting the postmodern without its comfortable armor of irony.

"Nothing … careless … at all." Delany strings together these hyperbolic absolutes as not mere observation or warning or praising—he's doing all of these things, yes—but mostly he's reminding us how we need writers like Czyz; we need writers who will challenge us to care not reasonably, but with every ounce of our emotional might.