

# Patchwork

A Reader





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## The Coming Anarchy

### Robert D. Caplan

The Minister's eyes were like egg yolks, an aftereffect of some of the many illnesses, malaria especially, endemic in his country. There was also an irrefutable sadness in his eyes. He spoke in a slow and creaking voice, the voice of hope about to expire. Flame trees, coconut palms, and a ballpoint-blue Atlantic composed the background. None of it seemed beautiful, though. "In forty-five years I have never seen things so bad. We did not manage ourselves well after the British departed. But what we have now is something worse — the revenge of the poor, of the social failures, of the people least able to bring up children in a modern society." Then he referred to the recent coup in the West African country Sierra Leone. "The boys who took power in Sierra Leone come from houses like this." The Minister jabbed his finger at a corrugated metal shack teeming with children. "In three months these boys confiscated all the official Mercedes, Volvos, and BMWs and willfully wrecked them on the road." The Minister mentioned one of the coup's leaders, Solomon Anthony Joseph Musa, who shot the people who had paid for his schooling, "in order to erase the humiliation and mitigate the power his middle-class sponsors held over him."

Tyranny is nothing new in Sierra Leone or in the rest of West Africa. But it is now part and parcel of an increasing lawlessness that is far more significant than any coup, rebel incursion, or episodic experiment in democracy. Crime was what my friend — a top-ranking African official whose life would be threatened were I to identify him more precisely — really wanted to talk about. Crime

is what makes West Africa a natural point of departure for my report on what the political character of our planet is likely to be in the twenty-first century.

The cities of West Africa at night are some of the unsafest places in the world. Streets are unlit; the police often lack gasoline for their vehicles; armed burglars, carjackers, and muggers proliferate. "The government in Sierra Leone has no writ after dark," says a foreign resident, shrugging. When I was in the capital, Freetown, last September, eight men armed with AK-47s broke into the house of an American man. They tied him up and stole everything of value. Forget Miami: direct flights between the United States and the Murtala Muhammed Airport, in neighboring Nigeria's largest city, Lagos, have been suspended by order of the U.S. Secretary of Transportation because of ineffective security at the terminal and its environs. A State Department report cited the airport for "extortion by law-enforcement and immigration officials." This is one of the few times that the U.S. government has embargoed a foreign airport for reasons that are linked purely to crime. In Abidjan, effectively the capital of the Cote d'Ivoire, or Ivory Coast, restaurants have stick- and gun-wielding guards who walk you the fifteen feet or so between your car and the entrance, giving you an eerie taste of what American cities might be like in the future. An Italian ambassador was killed by gunfire when robbers invaded an Abidjan restaurant. The family of the Nigerian ambassador was tied up and robbed at gunpoint in the ambassador's residence. After university students in the Ivory Coast caught bandits who had been plaguing their dorms, they executed them by hanging tires around their necks and setting the tires on fire. In one instance Ivorian policemen stood by and watched the "necklacings," afraid to

intervene. Each time I went to the Abidjan bus terminal, groups of young men with restless, scanning eyes surrounded my taxi, putting their hands all over the windows, demanding "tips" for carrying my luggage even though I had only a rucksack. In cities in six West African countries I saw similar young men everywhere — hordes of them. They were like loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting.

"You see," my friend the Minister told me, "in the villages of Africa it is perfectly natural to feed at any table and lodge in any hut. But in the cities this communal existence no longer holds. You must pay for lodging and be invited for food. When young men find out that their relations cannot put them up, they become lost. They join other migrants and slip gradually into the criminal process."

"In the poor quarters of Arab North Africa," he continued, "there is much less crime, because Islam provides a social anchor: of education and indoctrination. Here in West Africa we have a lot of superficial Islam and superficial Christianity. Western religion is undermined by animist beliefs not suitable to a moral society, because they are based on irrational spirit power. Here spirits are used to wreak vengeance by one person against another, or one group against another." Many of the atrocities in the Liberian civil war have been tied to belief in juju spirits, and the BBC has reported, in its magazine *Focus on Africa*, that in the civil fighting in adjacent Sierra Leone, rebels were said to have "a young woman with them who would go to the front naked, always walking backwards and looking in a mirror to see where she was going. This made her invisible, so that she could cross to the army's

positions and there bury charms... to improve the rebels' chances of success."

Finally my friend the Minister mentioned polygamy. Designed for a pastoral way of life, polygamy continues to thrive in sub-Saharan Africa even though it is increasingly uncommon in Arab North Africa. Most youths I met on the road in West Africa told me that they were from "extended" families, with a mother in one place and a father in another. Translated to an urban environment, loose family structures are largely responsible for the world's highest birth rates and the explosion of the HIV virus on the continent. Like the communalism and animism, they provide a weak shield against the corrosive social effects of life in cities. In those cities African culture is being redefined while desertification and deforestation — also tied to overpopulation — drive more and more African peasants out of the countryside.

### **A Premonition of the Future**

West Africa is becoming the symbol of worldwide demographic, environmental, and societal stress, in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real "strategic" danger. Disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-states and international borders, and the empowerment of private armies, security firms, and international drug cartels are now most tellingly demonstrated through a West African prism. West Africa provides an appropriate introduction to the issues, often extremely unpleasant to discuss, that will soon confront our civilization. To remap the political earth the way it

will be a few decades hence — as I intend to do in this article — I find I must begin with West Africa.

There is no other place on the planet where political maps are so deceptive — where, in fact, they tell such lies — as in West Africa. Start with Sierra Leone. According to the map, it is a nation-state of defined borders, with a government in control of its territory. In truth the Sierra Leonian government, run by a twenty-seven-year-old army captain, Valentine Strasser, controls Freetown by day and by day also controls part of the rural interior. In the government's territory the national army is an unruly rabble threatening drivers and passengers at most checkpoints. In the other part of the country units of two separate armies from the war in Liberia have taken up residence, as has an army of Sierra Leonian rebels. The government force fighting the rebels is full of renegade commanders who have aligned themselves with disaffected village chiefs. A pre-modern formlessness governs the battlefield, evoking the wars in medieval Europe prior to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which ushered in the era of organized nation-states.

As a consequence, roughly 400,000 Sierra Leonians are internally displaced, 280,000 more have fled to neighboring Guinea, and another 100,000 have fled to Liberia, even as 400,000 Liberians have fled to Sierra Leone. The third largest city in Sierra Leone, Gondama, is a displaced-persons camp. With an additional 600,000 Liberians in Guinea and 250,000 in the Ivory Coast, the borders dividing these four countries have become largely meaningless. Even in quiet zones none of the governments except the Ivory Coast's maintains the schools, bridges, roads, and police forces in a manner necessary for functional sovereignty. The Koranko ethnic

group in northeastern Sierra Leone does all its trading in Guinea. Sierra Leonian diamonds are more likely to be sold in Liberia than in Freetown. In the eastern provinces of Sierra Leone you can buy Liberian beer but not the local brand.

In Sierra Leone, as in Guinea, as in the Ivory Coast, as in Ghana, most of the primary rain forest and the secondary bush is being destroyed at an alarming rate. I saw convoys of trucks bearing majestic hardwood trunks to coastal ports. When Sierra Leone achieved its independence, in 1961, as much as 60 percent of the country was primary rainforest. Now six percent is. In the Ivory Coast the proportion has fallen from 38 percent to eight percent. The deforestation has led to soil erosion, which has led to more flooding and more mosquitoes. Virtually everyone in the West African interior has some form of malaria.

Sierra Leone is a microcosm of what is occurring, albeit in a more tempered and gradual manner, throughout West Africa and much of the underdeveloped world: the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war. West Africa is reverting to the Africa of the Victorian atlas. It consists now of a series of coastal trading posts, such as Freetown and Conakry, and an interior that, owing to violence, volatility, and disease, is again becoming, as Graham Greene once observed, "blank" and "unexplored." However, whereas Greene's vision implies a certain romance, as in the somnolent and charmingly seedy Freetown of his celebrated novel *The Heart of the Matter*, it is Thomas Malthus, the philosopher of demographic doomsday, who is now the prophet of West Africa's



future. And West Africa's future, eventually, will also be that of most of the rest of the world.

Consider "Chicago." I refer not to Chicago, Illinois, but to a slum district of Abidjan, which the young toughs in the area have named after the American city. ("Washington" is another poor section of Abidjan.) Although Sierra Leone is widely regarded as beyond salvage, the Ivory Coast has been considered an African success story, and Abidjan has been called "the Paris of West Africa." Success, however, was built on two artificial factors: the high price of cocoa, of which the Ivory Coast is the world's leading producer, and the talents of a French expatriate community, whose members have helped run the government and the private sector. The expanding cocoa economy made the Ivory Coast a magnet for migrant workers from all over West Africa: between a third and a half of the country's population is now non-Ivorian, and the figure could be as high as 75 percent in Abidjan. During the 1980s cocoa prices fell and the French began to leave. The skyscrapers of the Paris of West Africa are a facade. Perhaps 15 percent of Abidjan's population of three million people live in shantytowns like Chicago and Washington, and the vast majority live in places that are not much better. Not all of these places appear on any of the readily available maps. This is another indication of how political maps are the products of tired conventional wisdom and, in the Ivory Coast's case, of an elite that will ultimately be forced to relinquish power.

Chicago, like more and more of Abidjan, is a slum in the bush: a checkerwork of corrugated zinc roofs and walls made of cardboard and black plastic wrap. It is located in a gully teeming with coconut palms and oil palms, and is ravaged by flooding. Few residents have easy access to

electricity, a sewage system, or a clean water supply. The crumbly red laterite earth crawls with foot-long lizards both inside and outside the shacks. Children defecate in a stream filled with garbage and pigs, droning with malarial mosquitoes. In this stream women do the washing. Young unemployed men spend their time drinking beer, palm wine, and gin while gambling on pinball games constructed out of rotting wood and rusty nails. These are the same youths who rob houses in more prosperous Ivorian neighborhoods at night. One man I met, Damba Tesele, came to Chicago from Burkina Faso in 1963. A cook by profession, he has four wives and thirty-two children, not one of whom has made it to high school. He has seen his shanty community destroyed by municipal authorities seven times since coming to the area. Each time he and his neighbors rebuild. Chicago is the latest incarnation.

Fifty-five percent of the Ivory Coast's population is urban, and the proportion is expected to reach 62 percent by 2000. The yearly net population growth is 3.6 percent. This means that the Ivory Coast's 13.5 million people will become 39 million by 2025, when much of the population will consist of urbanized peasants like those of Chicago. But don't count on the Ivory Coast's still existing then. Chicago, which is more indicative of Africa's and the Third World's demographic present — and even more of the future — than any idyllic junglescape of women balancing earthen jugs on their heads, illustrates why the Ivory Coast, once a model of Third World success, is becoming a case study in Third World catastrophe.

President Felix Houphouet-Boigny, who died last December at the age of about ninety, left behind a weak cluster of political parties and a leaden bureaucracy that

discourages foreign investment. Because the military is small and the non-Ivorian population large, there is neither an obvious force to maintain order nor a sense of nationhood that would lessen the need for such enforcement. The economy has been shrinking since the mid-1980s. Though the French are working assiduously to preserve stability, the Ivory Coast faces a possibility worse than a coup: an anarchic implosion of criminal violence — an urbanized version of what has already happened in Somalia. Or it may become an African Yugoslavia, but one without mini-states to replace the whole.

Because the demographic reality of West Africa is a countryside draining into dense slums by the coast, ultimately the region's rulers will come to reflect the values of these shanty-towns. There are signs of this already in Sierra Leone — and in Togo, where the dictator Etienne Eyadema, in power since 1967, was nearly toppled in 1991, not by democrats but by thousands of youths whom the London-based magazine *West Africa* described as "Soweto-like stone-throwing adolescents." Their behavior may herald a regime more brutal than Eyadema's repressive one.

The fragility of these West African "countries" impressed itself on me when I took a series of bush taxis along the Gulf of Guinea, from the Togolese capital of Lome, across Ghana, to Abidjan. The 400-mile journey required two full days of driving, because of stops at two border crossings and an additional eleven customs stations, at each of which my fellow passengers had their bags searched. I had to change money twice and repeatedly fill in currency-declaration forms. I had to bribe a Togolese immigration official with the equivalent of eighteen

dollars before he would agree to put an exit stamp on my passport. Nevertheless, smuggling across these borders is rampant. The London Observer has reported that in 1992 the equivalent of \$856 million left West Africa for Europe in the form of "hot cash" assumed to be laundered drug money. International cartels have discovered the utility of weak, financially strapped West African regimes.

The more fictitious the actual sovereignty, the more severe border authorities seem to be in trying to prove otherwise. Getting visas for these states can be as hard as crossing their borders. The Washington embassies of Sierra Leone and Guinea — the two poorest nations on earth, according to a 1993 United Nations report on "human development" — asked for letters from my bank (in lieu of prepaid round-trip tickets) and also personal references, in order to prove that I had sufficient means to sustain myself during my visits. I was reminded of my visa and currency hassles while traveling to the communist states of Eastern Europe, particularly East Germany and Czechoslovakia, before those states collapsed.

Ali A. Mazrui, the director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at the State University of New York at Binghamton, predicts that West Africa — indeed, the whole continent — is on the verge of large-scale border upheaval. Mazrui writes, "In the 21st century France will be withdrawing from West Africa as she gets increasingly involved in the affairs [of Europe]. France's West African sphere of influence will be filled by Nigeria — a more natural hegemonic power.... It will be under those circumstances that Nigeria's own boundaries are likely to expand to incorporate the Republic of Niger (the Hausa

link), the Republic of Benin (the Yoruba link) and conceivably Cameroon."

The future could be more tumultuous, and bloodier, than Mazrui dares to say. France will withdraw from former colonies like Benin, Togo, Niger, and the Ivory Coast, where it has been propping up local currencies. It will do so not only because its attention will be diverted to new challenges in Europe and Russia but also because younger French officials lack the older generation's emotional ties to the ex-colonies. However, even as Nigeria attempts to expand, it, too, is likely to split into several pieces. The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research recently made the following points in an analysis of Nigeria: "Prospects for a transition to civilian rule and democratization are slim.... The repressive apparatus of the state security service... will be difficult for any future civilian government to control.... The country is becoming increasingly ungovernable.... Ethnic and regional splits are deepening, a situation made worse by an increase in the number of states from 19 to 30 and a doubling in the number of local governing authorities; religious cleavages are more serious; Muslim fundamentalism and evangelical Christian militancy are on the rise; and northern Muslim anxiety over southern [Christian] control of the economy is intense... the will to keep Nigeria together is now very weak."

Given that oil-rich Nigeria is a bellwether for the region — its population of roughly 90 million equals the populations of all the other West African states combined — it is apparent that Africa faces cataclysms that could make the Ethiopian and Somalian famines pale in comparison. This is especially so because Nigeria's

population, including that of its largest city, Lagos, whose crime, pollution, and overcrowding make it the cliché par excellence of Third World urban dysfunction, is set to double during the next twenty-five years, while the country continues to deplete its natural resources.

Part of West Africa's quandary is that although its population belts are horizontal, with habitation densities increasing as one travels south away from the Sahara and toward the tropical abundance of the Atlantic littoral, the borders erected by European colonialists are vertical, and therefore at cross-purposes with demography and topography. Satellite photos depict the same reality I experienced in the bush taxi: the Lomé-Abidjan coastal corridor — indeed, the entire stretch of coast from Abidjan eastward to Lagos — is one burgeoning megalopolis that by any rational economic and geographical standard should constitute a single sovereignty, rather than the five (the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria) into which it is currently divided.

As many internal African borders begin to crumble, a more impenetrable boundary is being erected that threatens to isolate the continent as a whole: the wall of disease. Merely to visit West Africa in some degree of safety, I spent about \$500 for a hepatitis B vaccination series and other disease prophylaxis. Africa may today be more dangerous in this regard than it was in 1862, before antibiotics, when the explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton described the health situation on the continent as "deadly, a Golgotha, a Jehannum." Of the approximately 12 million people worldwide whose blood is HIV-positive, 8 million are in Africa. In the capital of the Ivory Coast, whose modern road system only helps to spread the

disease, 10 percent of the population is HIV-positive. And war and refugee movements help the virus break through to more-remote areas of Africa. Alan Greenberg, M.D., a representative of the Centers for Disease Control in Abidjan, explains that in Africa the HIV virus and tuberculosis are now "fast-forwarding each other." Of the approximately 4,000 newly diagnosed tuberculosis patients in Abidjan, 45 percent were also found to be HIV-positive. As African birth rates soar and slums proliferate, some experts worry that viral mutations and hybridizations might, just conceivably, result in a form of the AIDS virus that is easier to catch than the present strain.

It is malaria that is most responsible for the disease wall that threatens to separate Africa and other parts of the Third World from more-developed regions of the planet in the twenty-first century. Carried by mosquitoes, malaria, unlike AIDS, is easy to catch. Most people in sub-Saharan Africa have recurring bouts of the disease throughout their entire lives, and it is mutating into increasingly deadly forms. "The great gift of Malaria is utter apathy," wrote Sir Richard Burton, accurately portraying the situation in much of the Third World today. Visitors to malaria-afflicted parts of the planet are protected by a new drug, mefloquine, a side effect of which is vivid, even violent, dreams. But a strain of cerebral malaria resistant to mefloquine is now on the offensive. Consequently, defending oneself against malaria in Africa is becoming more and more like defending oneself against violent crime. You engage in "behavior modification": not going out at dusk, wearing mosquito repellent all the time.

And the cities keep growing. I got a general sense of the future while driving from the airport to downtown Conakry, the capital of Guinea. The forty-five-minute journey in heavy traffic was through one never-ending shantytown: a nightmarish Dickensian spectacle to which Dickens himself would never have given credence. The corrugated metal shacks and scabrous walls were coated with black slime. Stores were built out of rusted shipping containers, junked cars, and jumbles of wire mesh. The streets were one long puddle of floating garbage. Mosquitoes and flies were everywhere. Children, many of whom had protruding bellies, seemed as numerous as ants. When the tide went out, dead rats and the skeletons of cars were exposed on the mucky beach. In twenty-eight years Guinea's population will double if growth goes on at current rates. Hardwood logging continues at a madcap speed, and people flee the Guinean countryside for Conakry. It seemed to me that here, as elsewhere in Africa and the Third World, man is challenging nature far beyond its limits, and nature is now beginning to take its revenge.

Africa may be as relevant to the future character of world politics as the Balkans were a hundred years ago, prior to the two Balkan wars and the First World War. Then the threat was the collapse of empires and the birth of nations based solely on tribe. Now the threat is more elemental: nature unchecked. Africa's immediate future could be very bad. The coming upheaval, in which foreign embassies are shut down, states collapse, and contact with the outside world takes place through dangerous, disease-ridden coastal trading posts, will loom large in the century we are entering. (Nine of twenty-one U.S. foreign-aid missions to be closed over the next three years are in Africa — a prologue to a consolidation of U.S.



embassies themselves.) Precisely because much of Africa is set to go over the edge at a time when the Cold War has ended, when environmental and demographic stress in other parts of the globe is becoming critical, and when the post-First World War system of nation-states — not just in the Balkans but perhaps also in the Middle East — is about to be toppled, Africa suggests what war, borders, and ethnic politics will be like a few decades hence.

To understand the events of the next fifty years, then, one must understand environmental scarcity, cultural and racial clash, geographic destiny, and the transformation of war. The order in which I have named these is not accidental. Each concept except the first relies partly on the one or ones before it, meaning that the last two — new approaches to mapmaking and to warfare — are the most important. They are also the least understood. I will now look at each idea, drawing upon the work of specialists and also my own travel experiences in various parts of the globe besides Africa, in order to fill in the blanks of a new political atlas.

### **The Environment as a Hostile Power**

For a while the media will continue to ascribe riots and other violent upheavals abroad mainly to ethnic and religious conflict. But as these conflicts multiply, it will become apparent that something else is afoot, making more and more places like Nigeria, India, and Brazil ungovernable.

Mention The Environment or "diminishing natural resources" in foreign-policy circles and you meet a brick wall of skepticism or boredom. To conservatives

especially, the very terms seem flaky. Public-policy foundations have contributed to the lack of interest, by funding narrowly focused environmental studies replete with technical jargon which foreign-affairs experts just let pile up on their desks.

It is time to understand The Environment for what it is: the national-security issue of the early twenty-first century. The political and strategic impact of surging populations, spreading disease, deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, air pollution, and, possibly, rising sea levels in critical, overcrowded regions like the Nile Delta and Bangladesh — developments that will prompt mass migrations and, in turn, incite group conflicts — will be the core foreign-policy challenge from which most others will ultimately emanate, arousing the public and uniting assorted interests left over from the Cold War. In the twenty-first century water will be in dangerously short supply in such diverse locales as Saudi Arabia, Central Asia, and the southwestern United States. A war could erupt between Egypt and Ethiopia over Nile River water. Even in Europe tensions have arisen between Hungary and Slovakia over the damming of the Danube, a classic case of how environmental disputes fuse with ethnic and historical ones. The political scientist and erstwhile Clinton adviser Michael Mandelbaum has said, "We have a foreign policy today in the shape of a doughnut — lots of peripheral interests but nothing at the center." The environment, I will argue, is part of a terrifying array of problems that will define a new threat to our security, filling the hole in Mandelbaum's doughnut and allowing a post- Cold War foreign policy to emerge inexorably by need rather than by design.

Our Cold War foreign policy truly began with George F. Kennan's famous article, signed "X," published in *Foreign Affairs* in July of 1947, in which Kennan argued for a "firm and vigilant containment" of a Soviet Union that was imperially, rather than ideologically, motivated. It may be that our post-Cold War foreign policy will one day be seen to have had its beginnings in an even bolder and more detailed piece of written analysis: one that appeared in the journal *International Security*. The article, published in the fall of 1991 by Thomas Fraser Homer-Dixon, who is the head of the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Toronto, was titled "On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict." Homer-Dixon has, more successfully than other analysts, integrated two hitherto separate fields — military-conflict studies and the study of the physical environment.

In Homer-Dixon's view, future wars and civil violence will often arise from scarcities of resources such as water, cropland, forests, and fish. Just as there will be environmentally driven wars and refugee flows, there will be environmentally induced praetorian regimes — or, as he puts it, "hard regimes." Countries with the highest probability of acquiring hard regimes, according to Homer-Dixon, are those that are threatened by a declining resource base yet also have "a history of state [read 'military'] strength." Candidates include Indonesia, Brazil, and, of course, Nigeria. Though each of these nations has exhibited democratizing tendencies of late, Homer-Dixon argues that such tendencies are likely to be superficial "epiphenomena" having nothing to do with long-term processes that include soaring populations and shrinking raw materials. Democracy is problematic; scarcity is more certain.

Indeed, the Saddam Husseins of the future will have more, not fewer, opportunities. In addition to engendering tribal strife, scarcer resources will place a great strain on many peoples who never had much of a democratic or institutional tradition to begin with. Over the next fifty years the earth's population will soar from 5.5 billion to more than nine billion. Though optimists have hopes for new resource technologies and free-market development in the global village, they fail to note that, as the National Academy of Sciences has pointed out, 95 percent of the population increase will be in the poorest regions of the world, where governments now — just look at Africa — show little ability to function, let alone to implement even marginal improvements. Homer-Dixon writes, ominously, "Neo-Malthusians may underestimate human adaptability in today's environmental-social system, but as time passes their analysis may become ever more compelling."

While a minority of the human population will be, as Francis Fukuyama would put it, sufficiently sheltered so as to enter a "post-historical" realm, living in cities and suburbs in which the environment has been mastered and ethnic animosities have been quelled by bourgeois prosperity, an increasingly large number of people will be stuck in history, living in shantytowns where attempts to rise above poverty, cultural dysfunction, and ethnic strife will be doomed by a lack of water to drink, soil to till, and space to survive in. In the developing world environmental stress will present people with a choice that is increasingly among totalitarianism (as in Iraq), fascist-tending mini-states (as in Serb-held Bosnia), and road-warrior cultures (as in Somalia). Homer-Dixon

concludes that "as environmental degradation proceeds, the size of the potential social disruption will increase."

Tad Homer-Dixon is an unlikely Jeremiah. Today a boyish thirty-seven, he grew up amid the sylvan majesty of Vancouver Island, attending private day schools. His speech is calm, perfectly even, and crisply enunciated. There is nothing in his background or manner that would indicate a bent toward pessimism. A Canadian Anglican who spends his summers canoeing on the lakes of northern Ontario, and who talks about the benign mountains, black bears, and Douglas firs of his youth, he is the opposite of the intellectually severe neoconservative, the kind at home with conflict scenarios. Nor is he an environmentalist who opposes development. "My father was a logger who thought about ecologically safe forestry before others," he says. "He logged, planted, logged, and planted. He got out of the business just as the issue was being polarized by environmentalists. They hate changed ecosystems. But human beings, just by carrying seeds around, change the natural world." As an only child whose playground was a virtually untouched wilderness and seacoast, Homer-Dixon has a familiarity with the natural world that permits him to see a reality that most policy analysts — children of suburbia and city streets — are blind to.

"We need to bring nature back in," he argues. "We have to stop separating politics from the physical world — the climate, public health, and the environment." Quoting Daniel Deudney, another pioneering expert on the security aspects of the environment, Homer-Dixon says that "for too long we've been prisoners of 'social-social' theory, which assumes there are only social causes for social and political changes, rather than natural causes,

too. This social-social mentality emerged with the Industrial Revolution, which separated us from nature. But nature is coming back with a vengeance, tied to population growth. It will have incredible security implications.

"Think of a stretch limo in the potholed streets of New York City, where homeless beggars live. Inside the limo are the air-conditioned post-industrial regions of North America, Europe, the emerging Pacific Rim, and a few other isolated places, with their trade summitry and computer-information highways. Outside is the rest of mankind, going in a completely different direction."

We are entering a bifurcated world. Part of the globe is inhabited by Hegel's and Fukuyama's Last Man, healthy, well fed, and pampered by technology. The other, larger, part is inhabited by Hobbes's First Man, condemned to a life that is "poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Although both parts will be threatened by environmental stress, the Last Man will be able to master it; the First Man will not.

The Last Man will adjust to the loss of underground water tables in the western United States. He will build dikes to save Cape Hatteras and the Chesapeake beaches from rising sea levels, even as the Maldive Islands, off the coast of India, sink into oblivion, and the shorelines of Egypt, Bangladesh, and Southeast Asia recede, driving tens of millions of people inland where there is no room for them, and thus sharpening ethnic divisions.

Homer-Dixon points to a world map of soil degradation in his Toronto office. "The darker the map color, the worse the degradation," he explains. The West African coast, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, China,

and Central America have the darkest shades, signifying all manner of degradation, related to winds, chemicals, and water problems. "The worst degradation is generally where the population is highest. The population is generally highest where the soil is the best. So we're degrading earth's best soil."

China, in Homer-Dixon's view, is the quintessential example of environmental degradation. Its current economic "success" masks deeper problems. "China's fourteen percent growth rate does not mean it's going to be a world power. It means that coastal China, where the economic growth is taking place, is joining the rest of the Pacific Rim. The disparity with inland China is intensifying." Referring to the environmental research of his colleague, the Czech-born ecologist Vaclav Smil, Homer-Dixon explains how the per capita availability of arable land in interior China has rapidly declined at the same time that the quality of that land has been destroyed by deforestation, loss of topsoil, and salinization. He mentions the loss and contamination of water supplies, the exhaustion of wells, the plugging of irrigation systems and reservoirs with eroded silt, and a population of 1.54 billion by the year 2025: it is a misconception that China has gotten its population under control. Large-scale population movements are under way, from inland China to coastal China and from villages to cities, leading to a crime surge like the one in Africa and to growing regional disparities and conflicts in a land with a strong tradition of warlordism and a weak tradition of central government — again as in Africa. "We will probably see the center challenged and fractured, and China will not remain the same on the map," Homer-Dixon says.

Environmental scarcity will inflame existing hatreds and affect power relationships, at which we now look.

### **Skinhead Cossacks, Juju Warriors**

In the summer, 1993, issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Samuel P. Huntington, of Harvard's Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, published a thought-provoking article called "The Clash of Civilizations?" The world, he argues, has been moving during the course of this century from nation-state conflict to ideological conflict to, finally, cultural conflict. I would add that as refugee flows increase and as peasants continue migrating to cities around the world — turning them into sprawling villages — national borders will mean less, even as more power will fall into the hands of less educated, less sophisticated groups. In the eyes of these uneducated but newly empowered millions, the real borders are the most tangible and intractable ones: those of culture and tribe. Huntington writes, "First, differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic," involving, among other things, history, language, and religion. "Second... interactions between peoples of different civilizations are increasing; these increasing interactions intensify civilization consciousness." Economic modernization is not necessarily a panacea, since it fuels individual and group ambitions while weakening traditional loyalties to the state. It is worth noting, for example, that it is precisely the wealthiest and fastest-developing city in India, Bombay, that has seen the worst intercommunal violence between Hindus and Muslims. Consider that Indian cities, like African and Chinese ones, are ecological time bombs — Delhi and Calcutta, and also Beijing, suffer the worst air quality of any cities in the world — and it is



apparent how surging populations, environmental degradation, and ethnic conflict are deeply related.

Huntington points to interlocking conflicts among Hindu, Muslim, Slavic Orthodox, Western, Japanese, Confucian, Latin American, and possibly African civilizations: for instance, Hindus clashing with Muslims in India, Turkic Muslims clashing with Slavic Orthodox Russians in Central Asian cities, the West clashing with Asia. (Even in the United States, African-Americans find themselves besieged by an influx of competing Latinos.) Whatever the laws, refugees find a way to crash official borders, bringing their passions with them, meaning that Europe and the United States will be weakened by cultural disputes.

Because Huntington's brush is broad, his specifics are vulnerable to attack. In a rebuttal of Huntington's argument the Johns Hopkins professor Fouad Ajami, a Lebanese-born Shi'ite who certainly knows the world beyond suburbia, writes in the September-October, 1993, issue of *Foreign Affairs*, "The world of Islam divides and subdivides. The battle lines in the Caucasus... are not coextensive with civilizational fault lines. The lines follow the interests of states. Where Huntington sees a civilizational duel between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Iranian state has cast religious zeal... to the wind... in that battle the Iranians have tilted toward Christian Armenia."

True, Huntington's hypothesized war between Islam and Orthodox Christianity is not borne out by the alliance network in the Caucasus. But that is only because he has misidentified which cultural war is occurring there. A recent visit to Azerbaijan made clear to me that Azeri Turks, the world's most secular Shi'ite Muslims, see their

cultural identity in terms not of religion but of their Turkic race. The Armenians, likewise, fight the Azeris not because the latter are Muslims but because they are Turks, related to the same Turks who massacred Armenians in 1915. Turkic culture (secular and based on languages employing a Latin script) is battling Iranian culture (religiously militant as defined by Tehran, and wedded to an Arabic script) across the whole swath of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The Armenians are, therefore, natural allies of their fellow Indo-Europeans the Iranians.

Huntington is correct that the Caucasus is a flashpoint of cultural and racial war. But, as Ajami observes, Huntington's plate tectonics are too simple. Two months of recent travel throughout Turkey revealed to me that although the Turks are developing a deep distrust, bordering on hatred, of fellow-Muslim Iran, they are also, especially in the shantytowns that are coming to dominate Turkish public opinion, revising their group identity, increasingly seeing themselves as Muslims being deserted by a West that does little to help besieged Muslims in Bosnia and that attacks Turkish Muslims in the streets of Germany.

In other words, the Balkans, a powder keg for nation-state war at the beginning of the twentieth century, could be a powder keg for cultural war at the turn of the twenty-first: between Orthodox Christianity (represented by the Serbs and a classic Byzantine configuration of Greeks, Russians, and Romanians) and the House of Islam. Yet in the Caucasus that House of Islam is falling into a clash between Turkic and Iranian civilizations. Ajami asserts that this very subdivision, not to mention all the divisions within the Arab world,

indicates that the West, including the United States, is not threatened by Huntington's scenario. As the Gulf War demonstrated, the West has proved capable of playing one part of the House of Islam against another.

True. However, whether he is aware of it or not, Ajami is describing a world even more dangerous than the one Huntington envisions, especially when one takes into account Homer-Dixon's research on environmental scarcity. Outside the stretch limo would be a rundown, crowded planet of skinhead Cossacks and juju warriors, influenced by the worst refuse of Western pop culture and ancient tribal hatreds, and battling over scraps of overused earth in guerrilla conflicts that ripple across continents and intersect in no discernible pattern — meaning there's no easy-to-define threat. Kennan's world of one adversary seems as distant as the world of Herodotus.

Most people believe that the political earth since 1989 has undergone immense change. But it is minor compared with what is yet to come. The breaking apart and remaking of the atlas is only now beginning. The crack-up of the Soviet empire and the coming end of Arab-Israeli military confrontation are merely prologues to the really big changes that lie ahead. Michael Vlahos, a long-range thinker for the U.S. Navy, warns, "We are not in charge of the environment and the world is not following us. It is going in many directions. Do not assume that democratic capitalism is the last word in human social evolution."

Before addressing the questions of maps and of warfare, I want to take a closer look at the interaction of religion, culture, demographic shifts, and the distribution of

natural resources in a specific area of the world: the Middle East.

### **The Past is Dead**

Built on steep, muddy hills, the shantytowns of Ankara, the Turkish capital, exude visual drama. Altindag, or "Golden Mountain," is a pyramid of dreams, fashioned from cinder blocks and corrugated iron, rising as though each shack were built on top of another, all reaching awkwardly and painfully toward heaven — the heaven of wealthier Turks who live elsewhere in the city. Nowhere else on the planet have I found such a poignant architectural symbol of man's striving, with gaps in house walls plugged with rusted cans, and leeks and onions growing on verandas assembled from planks of rotting wood. For reasons that I will explain, the Turkish shacktown is a psychological universe away from the African one.

To see the twenty-first century truly, one's eyes must learn a different set of aesthetics. One must reject the overly stylized images of travel magazines, with their inviting photographs of exotic villages and glamorous downtowns. There are far too many millions whose dreams are more vulgar, more real — whose raw energies and desires will overwhelm the visions of the elites, remaking the future into something frighteningly new. But in Turkey I learned that shantytowns are not all bad.

Slum quarters in Abidjan terrify and repel the outsider. In Turkey it is the opposite. The closer I got to Golden Mountain the better it looked, and the safer I felt. I had \$1,500 worth of Turkish lira in one pocket and \$1,000 in

traveler's checks in the other, yet I felt no fear. Golden Mountain was a real neighborhood. The inside of one house told the story: The architectural bedlam of cinder block and sheet metal and cardboard walls was deceiving. Inside was a home — order, that is, bespeaking dignity. I saw a working refrigerator, a television, a wall cabinet with a few books and lots of family pictures, a few plants by a window, and a stove. Though the streets become rivers of mud when it rains, the floors inside this house were spotless.

Other houses were like this too. Schoolchildren ran along with briefcases strapped to their backs, trucks delivered cooking gas, a few men sat inside a cafe sipping tea. One man sipped beer. Alcohol is easy to obtain in Turkey, a secular state where 99 percent of the population is Muslim. Yet there is little problem of alcoholism. Crime against persons is infinitesimal. Poverty and illiteracy are watered-down versions of what obtains in Algeria and Egypt (to say nothing of West Africa), making it that much harder for religious extremists to gain a foothold.

My point in bringing up a rather wholesome, crime-free slum is this: its existence demonstrates how formidable is the fabric of which Turkish Muslim culture is made. A culture this strong has the potential to dominate the Middle East once again. Slums are litmus tests for innate cultural strengths and weaknesses. Those peoples whose cultures can harbor extensive slum life without decomposing will be, relatively speaking, the future's winners. Those whose cultures cannot will be the future's victims. Slums — in the sociological sense — do not exist in Turkish cities. The mortar between people and family groups is stronger here than in Africa. Resurgent Islam and Turkic cultural identity have produced a civilization

with natural muscle tone. Turks, history's perennial nomads, take disruption in stride.

The future of the Middle East is quietly being written inside the heads of Golden Mountain's inhabitants. Think of an Ottoman military encampment on the eve of the destruction of Greek Constantinople in 1453. That is Golden Mountain. "We brought the village here. But in the village we worked harder — in the field, all day. So we couldn't fast during [the holy month of] Ramadan. Here we fast. Here we are more religious." Aishe Tanrikulu, along with half a dozen other women, was stuffing rice into vine leaves from a crude plastic bowl. She asked me to join her under the shade of a piece of sheet metal. Each of these women had her hair covered by a kerchief. In the city they were encountering television for the first time. "We are traditional, religious people. The programs offend us," Aishe said. Another woman complained about the schools. Though her children had educational options unavailable in the village, they had to compete with wealthier, secular Turks. "The kids from rich families with connections — they get all the places." More opportunities, more tensions, in other words.

My guidebook to Golden Mountain was an untypical one: *Tales From the Garbage Hills*, a brutally realistic novel by a Turkish writer, Latife Tekin, about life in the shantytowns, which in Turkey are called gecekondus ("built in a night"). "He listened to the earth and wept unceasingly for water, for work and for the cure of the illnesses spread by the garbage and the factory waste," Tekin writes. In the most revealing passage of *Tales From the Garbage Hills* the squatters are told "about a certain 'Ottoman Empire'... that where they now lived there had once been an empire of this name." This history

"confounded" the squatters. It was the first they had heard of it. Though one of them knew "that his grandfather and his dog died fighting the Greeks," nationalism and an encompassing sense of Turkish history are the province of the Turkish middle and upper classes, and of foreigners like me who feel required to have a notion of "Turkey."

But what did the Golden Mountain squatters know about the armies of Turkish migrants that had come before their own — namely, Seljuks and Ottomans? For these recently urbanized peasants, and their counterparts in Africa, the Arab world, India, and so many other places, the world is new, to adapt V. S. Naipaul's phrase. As Naipaul wrote of urban refugees in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, "They saw themselves at the beginning of things: unaccommodated men making a claim on their land for the first time, and out of chaos evolving their own philosophy of community and self-help. For them the past was dead; they had left it behind in the villages."

Everywhere in the developing world at the turn of the twenty-first century these new men and women, rushing into the cities, are remaking civilizations and redefining their identities in terms of religion and tribal ethnicity which do not coincide with the borders of existing states.

In Turkey several things are happening at once. In 1980, 44 percent of Turks lived in cities; in 1990 it was 61 percent. By the year 2000 the figure is expected to be 67 percent. Villages are emptying out as concentric rings of gecekondü developments grow around Turkish cities. This is the real political and demographic revolution in Turkey and elsewhere, and foreign correspondents usually don't write about it.

Whereas rural poverty is age-old and almost a "normal" part of the social fabric, urban poverty is socially destabilizing. As Iran has shown, Islamic extremism is the psychological defense mechanism of many urbanized peasants threatened with the loss of traditions in pseudo-modern cities where their values are under attack, where basic services like water and electricity are unavailable, and where they are assaulted by a physically unhealthy environment. The American ethnologist and orientalist Carleton Stevens Coon wrote in 1951 that Islam "has made possible the optimum survival and happiness of millions of human beings in an increasingly impoverished environment over a fourteen-hundred-year period." Beyond its stark, clearly articulated message, Islam's very militancy makes it attractive to the downtrodden. It is the one religion that is prepared to fight. A political era driven by environmental stress, increased cultural sensitivity, unregulated urbanization, and refugee migrations is an era divinely created for the spread and intensification of Islam, already the world's fastest-growing religion. (Though Islam is spreading in West Africa, it is being hobbled by syncretization with animism: this makes new converts less apt to become anti-Western extremists, but it also makes for a weakened version of the faith, which is less effective as an antidote to crime.)

In Turkey, however, Islam is painfully and awkwardly forging a consensus with modernization, a trend that is less apparent in the Arab and Persian worlds (and virtually invisible in Africa). In Iran the oil boom — because it put development and urbanization on a fast track, making the culture shock more intense — fueled the 1978 Islamic Revolution. But Turkey, unlike Iran and the Arab world, has little oil. Therefore its development



and urbanization have been more gradual. Islamists have been integrated into the parliamentary system for decades. The tensions I noticed in Golden Mountain are natural, creative ones: the kind immigrants face the world over. While the world has focused on religious perversity in Algeria, a nation rich in natural gas, and in Egypt, parts of whose capital city, Cairo, evince worse crowding than I have seen even in Calcutta, Turkey has been living through the Muslim equivalent of the Protestant Reformation.

Resource distribution is strengthening Turks in another way vis-a-vis Arabs and Persians. Turks may have little oil, but their Anatolian heartland has lots of water — the most important fluid of the twenty-first century. Turkey's Southeast Anatolia Project, involving twenty-two major dams and irrigation systems, is impounding the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Much of the water that Arabs and perhaps Israelis will need to drink in the future is controlled by Turks. The project's centerpiece is the mile-wide, sixteen-story Ataturk Dam, upon which are emblazoned the words of modern Turkey's founder: "Ne Mutlu Turkum Diyene" ("Lucky is the one who is a Turk").

Unlike Egypt's Aswan High Dam, on the Nile, and Syria's Revolution Dam, on the Euphrates, both of which were built largely by Russians, the Ataturk Dam is a predominantly Turkish affair, with Turkish engineers and companies in charge. On a recent visit my eyes took in the immaculate offices and their gardens, the high-voltage electric grids and phone switching stations, the dizzying sweep of giant humming transformers, the poured-concrete spillways, and the prim unfolding

suburbia, complete with schools, for dam employees. The emerging power of the Turks was palpable.

Erduhan Bayindir, the site manager at the dam, told me that "while oil can be shipped abroad to enrich only elites, water has to be spread more evenly within the society.... It is true, we can stop the flow of water into Syria and Iraq for up to eight months without the same water overflowing our dams, in order to regulate their political behavior."

Power is certainly moving north in the Middle East, from the oil fields of Dhahran, on the Persian Gulf, to the water plain of Harran, in southern Anatolia — near the site of the Ataturk Dam. But will the nation-state of Turkey, as presently constituted, be the inheritor of this wealth?

I very much doubt it.

### **The Lies of Mapmakers**

Whereas West Africa represents the least stable part of political reality outside Homer-Dixon's stretch limo, Turkey, an organic outgrowth of two Turkish empires that ruled Anatolia for 850 years, has been among the most stable. Turkey's borders were established not by colonial powers but in a war of independence, in the early 1920s. Kemal Ataturk provided Turkey with a secular nation-building myth that most Arab and African states, burdened by artificially drawn borders, lack. That lack will leave many Arab states defenseless against a wave of Islam that will eat away at their legitimacy and frontiers in coming years. Yet even as regards Turkey, maps deceive.

It is not only African shantytowns that don't appear on urban maps. Many shantytowns in Turkey and elsewhere are also missing — as are the considerable territories controlled by guerrilla armies and urban mafias. Traveling with Eritrean guerrillas in what, according to the map, was northern Ethiopia, traveling in "northern Iraq" with Kurdish guerrillas, and staying in a hotel in the Caucasus controlled by a local mafia — to say nothing of my experiences in West Africa — led me to develop a healthy skepticism toward maps, which, I began to realize, create a conceptual barrier that prevents us from comprehending the political crack-up just beginning to occur worldwide.

Consider the map of the world, with its 190 or so countries, each signified by a bold and uniform color: this map, with which all of us have grown up, is generally an invention of modernism, specifically of European colonialism. Modernism, in the sense of which I speak, began with the rise of nation-states in Europe and was confirmed by the death of feudalism at the end of the Thirty Years' War — an event that was interposed between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which together gave birth to modern science. People were suddenly flush with an enthusiasm to categorize, to define. The map, based on scientific techniques of measurement, offered a way to classify new national organisms, making a jigsaw puzzle of neat pieces without transition zones between them. Frontier is itself a modern concept that didn't exist in the feudal mind. And as European nations carved out far-flung domains at the same time that print technology was making the reproduction of maps cheaper, cartography came into its

own as a way of creating facts by ordering the way we look at the world.

In his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson, of Cornell University, demonstrates that the map enabled colonialists to think about their holdings in terms of a "totalizing classificatory grid.... It was bounded, determinate, and therefore — in principle — countable." To the colonialist, country maps were the equivalent of an accountant's ledger books. Maps, Anderson explains, "shaped the grammar" that would make possible such questionable concepts as Iraq, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria. The state, recall, is a purely Western notion, one that until the twentieth century applied to countries covering only three percent of the earth's land area. Nor is the evidence compelling that the state, as a governing ideal, can be successfully transported to areas outside the industrialized world. Even the United States of America, in the words of one of our best living poets, Gary Snyder, consists of "arbitrary and inaccurate impositions on what is really here."

Yet this inflexible, artificial reality staggers on, not only in the United Nations but in various geographic and travel publications (themselves by-products of an age of elite touring which colonialism made possible) that still report on and photograph the world according to "country." Newspapers, this magazine, and this writer are not innocent of the tendency.

According to the map, the great hydropower complex emblemized by the Ataturk Dam is situated in Turkey. Forget the map. This southeastern region of Turkey is populated almost completely by Kurds. About half of the

world's 20 million Kurds live in "Turkey." The Kurds are predominant in an ellipse of territory that overlaps not only with Turkey but also with Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the former Soviet Union. The Western-enforced Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq, a consequence of the 1991 Gulf War, has already exposed the fictitious nature of that supposed nation-state.

On a recent visit to the Turkish-Iranian border, it occurred to me what a risky idea the nation-state is. Here I was on the legal fault line between two clashing civilizations, Turkic and Iranian. Yet the reality was more subtle: as in West Africa, the border was porous and smuggling abounded, but here the people doing the smuggling, on both sides of the border, were Kurds. In such a moonscape, over which peoples have migrated and settled in patterns that obliterate borders, the end of the Cold War will bring on a cruel process of natural selection among existing states. No longer will these states be so firmly propped up by the West or the Soviet Union. Because the Kurds overlap with nearly everybody in the Middle East, on account of their being cheated out of a state in the post-First World War peace treaties, they are emerging, in effect, as the natural selector — the ultimate reality check. They have destabilized Iraq and may continue to disrupt states that do not offer them adequate breathing space, while strengthening states that do.

Because the Turks, owing to their water resources, their growing economy, and the social cohesion evinced by the most crime-free slums I have encountered, are on the verge of big-power status, and because the 10 million Kurds within Turkey threaten that status, the outcome of the Turkish-Kurdish dispute will be more critical to the

future of the Middle East than the eventual outcome of the recent Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

America's fascination with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, coupled with its lack of interest in the Turkish-Kurdish one, is a function of its own domestic and ethnic obsessions, not of the cartographic reality that is about to transform the Middle East. The diplomatic process involving Israelis and Palestinians will, I believe, have little effect on the early- and mid-twenty-first-century map of the region. Israel, with a 6.6 percent economic growth rate based increasingly on high-tech exports, is about to enter Homer-Dixon's stretch limo, fortified by a well-defined political community that is an organic outgrowth of history and ethnicity. Like prosperous and peaceful Japan on the one hand, and war-torn and poverty-wracked Armenia on the other, Israel is a classic national-ethnic organism. Much of the Arab world, however, will undergo alteration, as Islam spreads across artificial frontiers, fueled by mass migrations into the cities and a soaring birth rate of more than 3.2 percent. Seventy percent of the Arab population has been born since 1970 — youths with little historical memory of anticolonial independence struggles, postcolonial attempts at nation-building, or any of the Arab-Israeli wars. The most distant recollection of these youths will be the West's humiliation of colonially invented Iraq in 1991. Today seventeen out of twenty-two Arab states have a declining gross national product; in the next twenty years, at current growth rates, the population of many Arab countries will double. These states, like most African ones, will be ungovernable through conventional secular ideologies. The Middle East analyst Christine M. Helms explains, "Declaring Arab nationalism "bankrupt," the political "disinherited" are not rationalizing the failure of

Arabism... or reformulating it. Alternative solutions are not contemplated. They have simply opted for the political paradigm at the other end of the political spectrum with which they are familiar — Islam."

Like the borders of West Africa, the colonial borders of Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Algeria, and other Arab states are often contrary to cultural and political reality. As state control mechanisms wither in the face of environmental and demographic stress, "hard" Islamic city-states or shantytown-states are likely to emerge. The fiction that the impoverished city of Algiers, on the Mediterranean, controls Tamanrasset, deep in the Algerian Sahara, cannot obtain forever. Whatever the outcome of the peace process, Israel is destined to be a Jewish ethnic fortress amid a vast and volatile realm of Islam. In that realm, the violent youth culture of the Gaza shantytowns may be indicative of the coming era.

The destiny of Turks and Kurds is far less certain, but far more relevant to the kind of map that will explain our future world. The Kurds suggest a geographic reality that cannot be shown in two-dimensional space. The issue in Turkey is not simply a matter of giving autonomy or even independence to Kurds in the southeast. This isn't the Balkans or the Caucasus, where regions are merely subdividing into smaller units, Abkhazia breaking off from Georgia, and so on. Federalism is not the answer. Kurds are found everywhere in Turkey, including the shanty districts of Istanbul and Ankara. Turkey's problem is that its Anatolian land mass is the home of two cultures and languages, Turkish and Kurdish. Identity in Turkey, as in India, Africa, and elsewhere, is more complex and subtle than conventional cartography can display.

## **A New Kind of War**

To appreciate fully the political and cartographic implications of postmodernism — an epoch of themeless juxtapositions, in which the classificatory grid of nation-states is going to be replaced by a jagged-glass pattern of city-states, shanty-states, nebulous and anarchic regionalisms — it is necessary to consider, finally, the whole question of war.

"Oh, what a relief to fight, to fight enemies who defend themselves, enemies who are awake!" Andre Malraux wrote in *Man's Fate*. I cannot think of a more suitable battle cry for many combatants in the early decades of the twenty-first century. The intense savagery of the fighting in such diverse cultural settings as Liberia, Bosnia, the Caucasus, and Sri Lanka — to say nothing of what obtains in American inner cities — indicates something very troubling that those of us inside the stretch limo, concerned with issues like middle-class entitlements and the future of interactive cable television, lack the stomach to contemplate. It is this: a large number of people on this planet, to whom the comfort and stability of a middle-class life is utterly unknown, find war and a barracks existence a step up rather than a step down.

"Just as it makes no sense to ask 'why people eat' or 'what they sleep for,'" writes Martin van Creveld, a military historian at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in *The Transformation of War*, "so fighting in many ways is not a means but an end. Throughout history, for every person who has expressed his horror of war there is another who found in it the most marvelous of all the experiences that are vouchsafed to man, even to the point that he later spent a lifetime boring his descendants by recounting his



exploits." When I asked Pentagon officials about the nature of war in the twenty-first century, the answer I frequently got was "Read Van Creveld." The top brass are enamored of this historian not because his writings justify their existence but, rather, the opposite: Van Creveld warns them that huge state military machines like the Pentagon's are dinosaurs about to go extinct, and that something far more terrible awaits us.

The degree to which Van Creveld's *Transformation of War* complements Homer-Dixon's work on the environment, Huntington's thoughts on cultural clash, my own realizations in traveling by foot, bus, and bush taxi in more than sixty countries, and America's sobering comeuppances in intractable-culture zones like Haiti and Somalia is startling. The book begins by demolishing the notion that men don't like to fight. "By compelling the senses to focus themselves on the here and now," Van Creveld writes, war "can cause a man to take his leave of them." As anybody who has had experience with Chetniks in Serbia, "technicals" in Somalia, Tontons Macoutes in Haiti, or soldiers in Sierra Leone can tell you, in places where the Western Enlightenment has not penetrated and where there has always been mass poverty, people find liberation in violence. In Afghanistan and elsewhere, I vicariously experienced this phenomenon: worrying about mines and ambushes frees you from worrying about mundane details of daily existence. If my own experience is too subjective, there is a wealth of data showing the sheer frequency of war, especially in the developing world since the Second World War. Physical aggression is a part of being human. Only when people attain a certain economic, educational, and cultural standard is this trait tranquilized. In light of the fact that 95 percent of the earth's population growth will be in the

poorest areas of the globe, the question is not whether there will be war (there will be a lot of it) but what kind of war. And who will fight whom?

Debunking the great military strategist Carl von Clausewitz, Van Creveld, who may be the most original thinker on war since that early-nineteenth-century Prussian, writes, "Clausewitz's ideas... were wholly rooted in the fact that, ever since 1648, war had been waged overwhelmingly by states." But, as Van Creveld explains, the period of nation-states and, therefore, of state conflict is now ending, and with it the clear "threefold division into government, army, and people" which state-directed wars enforce. Thus, to see the future, the first step is to look back to the past immediately prior to the birth of modernism — the wars in medieval Europe which began during the Reformation and reached their culmination in the Thirty Years' War.

Van Creveld writes, "In all these struggles political, social, economic, and religious motives were hopelessly entangled. Since this was an age when armies consisted of mercenaries, all were also attended by swarms of military entrepreneurs.... Many of them paid little but lip service to the organizations for whom they had contracted to fight. Instead, they robbed the countryside on their own behalf...."

"Given such conditions, any fine distinctions... between armies on the one hand and peoples on the other were bound to break down. Engulfed by war, civilians suffered terrible atrocities."

Back then, in other words, there was no Politics as we have come to understand the term, just as there is less

and less Politics today in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, among other places.

Because, as Van Creveld notes, the radius of trust within tribal societies is narrowed to one's immediate family and guerrilla comrades, truces arranged with one Bosnian commander, say, may be broken immediately by another Bosnian commander. The plethora of short-lived ceasefires in the Balkans and the Caucasus constitute proof that we are no longer in a world where the old rules of state warfare apply. More evidence is provided by the destruction of medieval monuments in the Croatian port of Dubrovnik: when cultures, rather than states, fight, then cultural and religious monuments are weapons of war, making them fair game.

Also, war-making entities will no longer be restricted to a specific territory. Loose and shadowy organisms such as Islamic terrorist organizations suggest why borders will mean increasingly little and sedimentary layers of tribalistic identity and control will mean more. "From the vantage point of the present, there appears every prospect that religious... fanaticisms will play a larger role in the motivation of armed conflict" in the West than at any time "for the last 300 years," Van Creveld writes. This is why analysts like Michael Vlahos are closely monitoring religious cults. Vlahos says, "An ideology that challenges us may not take familiar form, like the old Nazis or Commies. It may not even engage us initially in ways that fit old threat markings." Van Creveld concludes, "Armed conflict will be waged by men on earth, not robots in space. It will have more in common with the struggles of primitive tribes than with large-scale conventional war." While another military historian, John Keegan, in his new

book *A History of Warfare*, draws a more benign portrait of primitive man, it is important to point out that what Van Creveld really means is re-primitivized man: warrior societies operating at a time of unprecedented resource scarcity and planetary overcrowding.

Van Creveld's pre-Westphalian vision of worldwide low-intensity conflict is not a superficial "back to the future" scenario. First of all, technology will be used toward primitive ends. In Liberia the guerrilla leader Prince Johnson didn't just cut off the ears of President Samuel Doe before Doe was tortured to death in 1990 — Johnson made a video of it, which has circulated throughout West Africa. In December of 1992, when plotters of a failed coup against the Strasser regime in Sierra Leone had their ears cut off at Freetown's Hamilton Beach prior to being killed, it was seen by many to be a copycat execution. Considering, as I've explained earlier, that the Strasser regime is not really a government and that Sierra Leone is not really a nation-state, listen closely to Van Creveld: "Once the legal monopoly of armed force, long claimed by the state, is wrested out of its hands, existing distinctions between war and crime will break down much as is already the case today in... Lebanon, Sri Lanka, El Salvador, Peru, or Colombia."

If crime and war become indistinguishable, then "national defense" may in the future be viewed as a local concept. As crime continues to grow in our cities and the ability of state governments and criminal-justice systems to protect their citizens diminishes, urban crime may, according to Van Creveld, "develop into low-intensity conflict by coalescing along racial, religious, social, and political lines." As small-scale violence multiplies at home

and abroad, state armies will continue to shrink, being gradually replaced by a booming private security business, as in West Africa, and by urban mafias, especially in the former communist world, who may be better equipped than municipal police forces to grant physical protection to local inhabitants.

Future wars will be those of communal survival, aggravated or, in many cases, caused by environmental scarcity. These wars will be subnational, meaning that it will be hard for states and local governments to protect their own citizens physically. This is how many states will ultimately die. As state power fades — and with it the state's ability to help weaker groups within society, not to mention other states — peoples and cultures around the world will be thrown back upon their own strengths and weaknesses, with fewer equalizing mechanisms to protect them. Whereas the distant future will probably see the emergence of a racially hybrid, globalized man, the coming decades will see us more aware of our differences than of our similarities. To the average person, political values will mean less, personal security more. The belief that we are all equal is liable to be replaced by the overriding obsession of the ancient Greek travelers: Why the differences between peoples?

### **The Last Map**

In *Geography and the Human Spirit*, Anne Buttimer, a professor at University College, Dublin, recalls the work of an early-nineteenth-century German geographer, Carl Ritter, whose work implied "a divine plan for humanity" based on regionalism and a constant, living flow of forms. The map of the future, to the extent that a map is even

possible, will represent a perverse twisting of Ritter's vision. Imagine cartography in three dimensions, as if in a hologram. In this hologram would be the overlapping sediments of group and other identities atop the merely two-dimensional color markings of city-states and the remaining nations, themselves confused in places by shadowy tentacles, hovering overhead, indicating the power of drug cartels, mafias, and private security agencies. Instead of borders, there would be moving "centers" of power, as in the Middle Ages. Many of these layers would be in motion. Replacing fixed and abrupt lines on a flat space would be a shifting pattern of buffer entities, like the Kurdish and Azeri buffer entities between Turkey and Iran, the Turkic Uighur buffer entity between Central Asia and Inner China (itself distinct from coastal China), and the Latino buffer entity replacing a precise U.S.-Mexican border. To this protean cartographic hologram one must add other factors, such as migrations of populations, explosions of birth rates, vectors of disease. Henceforward the map of the world will never be static. This future map — in a sense, the "Last Map" — will be an ever-mutating representation of chaos.

The Indian subcontinent offers examples of what is happening. For different reasons, both India and Pakistan are increasingly dysfunctional. The argument over democracy in these places is less and less relevant to the larger issue of governability. In India's case the question arises, Is one unwieldy bureaucracy in New Delhi the best available mechanism for promoting the lives of 866 million people of diverse languages, religions, and ethnic groups? In 1950, when the Indian population was much less than half as large and nation-building idealism was still strong, the argument for democracy was more

impressive than it is now. Given that in 2025 India's population could be close to 1.5 billion, that much of its economy rests on a shrinking natural-resource base, including dramatically declining water levels, and that communal violence and urbanization are spiraling upward, it is difficult to imagine that the Indian state will survive the next century. India's oft-trumpeted Green Revolution has been achieved by overworking its croplands and depleting its watershed. Norman Myers, a British development consultant, worries that Indians have "been feeding themselves today by borrowing against their children's food sources."

Pakistan's problem is more basic still: like much of Africa, the country makes no geographic or demographic sense. It was founded as a homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent, yet there are more subcontinental Muslims outside Pakistan than within it. Like Yugoslavia, Pakistan is a patchwork of ethnic groups, increasingly in violent conflict with one another. While the Western media gushes over the fact that the country has a woman Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, Karachi is becoming a subcontinental version of Lagos. In eight visits to Pakistan, I have never gotten a sense of a cohesive national identity. With as much as 65 percent of its land dependent on intensive irrigation, with wide-scale deforestation, and with a yearly population growth of 2.7 percent (which ensures that the amount of cultivated land per rural inhabitant will plummet), Pakistan is becoming a more and more desperate place. As irrigation in the Indus River basin intensifies to serve two growing populations, Muslim-Hindu strife over falling water tables may be unavoidable.

"India and Pakistan will probably fall apart," Homer-Dixon predicts. "Their secular governments have less and less legitimacy as well as less management ability over people and resources." Rather than one bold line dividing the subcontinent into two parts, the future will likely see a lot of thinner lines and smaller parts, with the ethnic entities of Pakhtunistan and Punjab gradually replacing Pakistan in the space between the Central Asian plateau and the heart of the subcontinent.

None of this even takes into account climatic change, which, if it occurs in the next century, will further erode the capacity of existing states to cope. India, for instance, receives 70 percent of its precipitation from the monsoon cycle, which planetary warming could disrupt.

Not only will the three-dimensional aspects of the Last Map be in constant motion, but its two-dimensional base may change too. The National Academy of Sciences reports that "as many as one billion people, or 20 per cent of the world's population, live on lands likely to be inundated or dramatically changed by rising waters.... Low-lying countries in the developing world such as Egypt and Bangladesh, where rivers are large and the deltas extensive and densely populated, will be hardest hit.... Where the rivers are dammed, as in the case of the Nile, the effects... will be especially severe."

Egypt could be where climatic upheaval — to say nothing of the more immediate threat of increasing population — will incite religious upheaval in truly biblical fashion. Natural catastrophes, such as the October, 1992, Cairo earthquake, in which the government failed to deliver relief aid and slum residents were in many instances helped by their local mosques, can only strengthen the



position of Islamic factions. In a statement about greenhouse warming which could refer to any of a variety of natural catastrophes, the environmental expert Jessica Tuchman Matthews warns that many of us underestimate the extent to which political systems, in affluent societies as well as in places like Egypt, "depend on the underpinning of natural systems." She adds, "The fact that one can move with ease from Vermont to Miami has nothing to say about the consequences of Vermont acquiring Miami's climate."

Indeed, it is not clear that the United States will survive the next century in exactly its present form. Because America is a multi-ethnic society, the nation-state has always been more fragile here than it is in more homogeneous societies like Germany and Japan. James Kurth, in an article published in *The National Interest* in 1992, explains that whereas nation-state societies tend to be built around a mass-conscription army and a standardized public school system, "multicultural regimes" feature a high-tech, all-volunteer army (and, I would add, private schools that teach competing values), operating in a culture in which the international media and entertainment industry has more influence than the "national political class." In other words, a nation-state is a place where everyone has been educated along similar lines, where people take their cue from national leaders, and where everyone (every male, at least) has gone through the crucible of military service, making patriotism a simpler issue. Writing about his immigrant family in turn-of-the-century Chicago, Saul Bellow states, "The country took us over. It was a country then, not a collection of 'cultures.'"

During the Second World War and the decade following it, the United States reached its apogee as a classic nation-state. During the 1960s, as is now clear, America began a slow but unmistakable process of transformation. The signs hardly need belaboring: racial polarity, educational dysfunction, social fragmentation of many and various kinds. William Irwin Thompson, in *Passages About Earth: An Exploration of the New Planetary Culture*, writes, "The educational system that had worked on the Jews or the Irish could no longer work on the blacks; and when Jewish teachers in New York tried to take black children away from their parents exactly in the way they had been taken from theirs, they were shocked to encounter a violent affirmation of negritude."

Issues like West Africa could yet emerge as a new kind of foreign-policy issue, further eroding America's domestic peace. The spectacle of several West African nations collapsing at once could reinforce the worst racial stereotypes here at home. That is another reason why Africa matters. We must not kid ourselves: the sensitivity factor is higher than ever. The Washington, D.C., public school system is already experimenting with an Afrocentric curriculum. Summits between African leaders and prominent African-Americans are becoming frequent, as are Pollyanna-ish prognostications about multiparty elections in Africa that do not factor in crime, surging birth rates, and resource depletion. The Congressional Black Caucus was among those urging U.S. involvement in Somalia and in Haiti. At the Los Angeles Times minority staffers have protested against, among other things, what they allege to be the racist tone of the newspaper's Africa coverage, allegations that the editor of the "World Report" section, Dan Fisher, denies, saying

essentially that Africa should be viewed through the same rigorous analytical lens as other parts of the world.

Africa may be marginal in terms of conventional late-twentieth-century conceptions of strategy, but in an age of cultural and racial clash, when national defense is increasingly local, Africa's distress will exert a destabilizing influence on the United States.

This and many other factors will make the United States less of a nation than it is today, even as it gains territory following the peaceful dissolution of Canada. Quebec, based on the bedrock of Roman Catholicism and Francophone ethnicity, could yet turn out to be North America's most cohesive and crime-free nation-state. (It may be a smaller Quebec, though, since aboriginal peoples may lop off northern parts of the province.) "Patriotism" will become increasingly regional as people in Alberta and Montana discover that they have far more in common with each other than they do with Ottawa or Washington, and Spanish-speakers in the Southwest discover a greater commonality with Mexico City. (*The Nine Nations of North America*, by Joel Garreau, a book about the continent's regionalization, is more relevant now than when it was published, in 1981.) As Washington's influence wanes, and with it the traditional symbols of American patriotism, North Americans will take psychological refuge in their insulated communities and cultures.

Returning from West Africa last fall was an illuminating ordeal. After leaving Abidjan, my Air Afrique flight landed in Dakar, Senegal, where all passengers had to disembark in order to go through another security check, this one demanded by U.S. authorities before they would permit

the flight to set out for New York. Once we were in New York, despite the midnight hour, immigration officials at Kennedy Airport held up disembarkation by conducting quick interrogations of the aircraft's passengers — this was in addition to all the normal immigration and customs procedures. It was apparent that drug smuggling, disease, and other factors had contributed to the toughest security procedures I have ever encountered when returning from overseas.

Then, for the first time in over a month, I spotted businesspeople with attache cases and laptop computers. When I had left New York for Abidjan, all the businesspeople were boarding planes for Seoul and Tokyo, which departed from gates near Air Afrique's. The only non-Africans off to West Africa had been relief workers in T-shirts and khakis. Although the borders within West Africa are increasingly unreal, those separating West Africa from the outside world are in various ways becoming more impenetrable.

But Afrocentrists are right in one respect: we ignore this dying region at our own risk. When the Berlin Wall was falling, in November of 1989, I happened to be in Kosovo, covering a riot between Serbs and Albanians. The future was in Kosovo, I told myself that night, not in Berlin. The same day that Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat clasped hands on the White House lawn, my Air Afrique plane was approaching Bamako, Mali, revealing corrugated-zinc shacks at the edge of an expanding desert. The real news wasn't at the White House, I realized. It was right below.

# Archipelago and Atomic Communitarianism

## Scott Alexander

### I.

In the old days, you had your Culture, and that was that. Your Culture told you lots of stuff about what you were and weren't allowed to do, and by golly you listened. Your Culture told you to work the job prescribed to you by your caste and gender, to marry who your parents told you to marry or at *least* someone of the opposite sex, to worship at the proper temples and the proper times, and to talk about *proper* things as opposed to the blasphemous things said by the tribe over there.

Then we got Liberalism, which said all of that was mostly bunk. Like Wicca, its motto is "Do as you will, so long as it harms none". Or in more political terms, "Your right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins" or "If you don't like gay sex, don't have any" or "If you don't like this TV program, don't watch it" or "What happens in the bedroom between consenting adults is none of your business" or "It neither breaks my arm nor picks my pocket". Your job isn't to enforce your conception of virtue upon everyone to build the Virtuous Society, it's to live your own life the way you want to live it and let other people live *their* own lives the way *they* want to live them. This is the much-maligned "atomic individualism," or maybe just liberalism boiled down to its pure essence.

But atomic individualism wasn't as great a solution as it sounded. Maybe one of the first cracks was tobacco ads. Even though putting up a billboard saying "SMOKE MARLBORO" neither breaks anyone's arm nor picks their pocket, it shifts social expectations in such a way that bad effects occur. It's hard to dismiss that with "Well, it's people's own choice to smoke and they should live their lives the way they want" if studies show that more people will want to live their lives in a way that gives them cancer in the presence of the billboard than otherwise.

From there we go into policies like Michael Bloomberg's ban on giant sodas. While the soda ban itself was probably as much symbolic as anything, it's hard to argue with the impetus behind it – a culture where everyone gets exposed to the option to buy very very unhealthy food all the time is going to be less healthy than one where there are some regulations in place to make EAT THIS DONUT NOW a less salient option. I mean, I *know* this is true. A few months ago when I was on a diet I *cringed* every time one my coworkers brought in a box of free donuts and placed wide-open in the doctors' lounge; there was *no way* I wasn't going to take one (or two, or three). I could ask people to stop, but they probably wouldn't, and even if they did I'd just encounter the wide-open box of free donuts *somewhere else*. I'm not proposing that it is *ethically wrong* to bring in free donuts or that banning them is the correct policy, but I do want to make it clear that stating "it's your free choice to partake or not" doesn't eliminate the problem, and that this points to an entire class of serious issues where atomic individualism as construed above is at best an imperfect heuristic.

And I would be remiss talking about the modern turn away from individualism without mentioning social justice. The same people who once deployed individualistic arguments against conservatives: “If you don’t like profanity, don’t use it”, “If you don’t like this offensive TV show, don’t watch it”, “If you don’t like pornography, don’t buy it” – are now concerned about people using ethnic slurs, TV shows without enough minority characters, and pornography that encourages the objectification of women. I’ve objected to some of this on purely empirical grounds<sup>1</sup>, but the least convenient possible world<sup>2</sup> is the one where the purely empirical objections fall flat. If they ever discover proof positive that yeah, pornographication makes women hella objectified, is it acceptable to censor or ban misogynist media on a society-wide level?

And if the answer is yes – and if such media like really, *really* increases the incidence of rape I’m not sure how it couldn’t be – then what about all those conservative ideas we’ve been neglecting for so long? What if strong, cohesive, religious, demographically uniform communities make people more trusting, generous, and cooperative in a way that *also* decreases violent crime and other forms of misery? We have lots of evidence<sup>3</sup> that this is true, and although we can doubt each individual study, we owe conservatives the courtesy of imagining the

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<sup>1</sup> Hyperlink to: Scott Alexander, “Social Psychology is a Flamethrower”:  
<http://slatestarcodex.com/2013/06/22/social-psychology-is-a-flamethrower/>

<sup>2</sup> Hyperlink to: Yvain, “The Least Convenient Possible World”:  
[http://lesswrong.com/lw/2k/the\\_least\\_convenient\\_possible\\_world/](http://lesswrong.com/lw/2k/the_least_convenient_possible_world/)

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2013)

possible world in which they are right, the same as anti-misogyny leftists. Maybe media glorifying criminals or lionizing nonconformists above those who quietly follow cultural norms has the same kind of erosive effects on “values” as misogynist media. Or, at the very least, we ought to have a good philosophy in place so that we have some idea what to do if it does.

## II.

A while ago, in Part V of this essay<sup>4</sup>, I praised liberalism as the only peaceful answer to Hobbes’ dilemma of the war of all against all.

Hobbes says that if everyone’s fighting then everyone loses out. Even the winners probably end up worse off than if they had just been able to live in peace. He says that governments are good ways to prevent this kind of conflict. Someone – in his formulation a king – tells everyone else what they’re going to do, and then everyone else does it. No fighting necessary. If someone tries to start a conflict by ignoring the king, the king crushes them like a bug, no prolonged fighting involved.

But this replaces the problem of potential warfare with the problem of potential tyranny. So we’ve mostly shifted from absolute monarchies to other forms of government, which is all nice and well except that governments allow a

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<sup>4</sup> Hyperlink to: Scott Alexander, “In Favour of Niceness, Community and Civilisation”:  
<http://slatestarcodex.com/2014/02/23/in-favor-of-niceness-community-and-civilization/>



*different* kind of war of all against all. Instead of trying to kill their enemies and steal their stuff, people are tempted to ban their enemies and confiscate their stuff. Instead of killing the Protestants, the Catholics simply ban Protestantism. Instead of forming vigilante mobs to stone homosexuals, the straights merely declare homosexuality is punishable by death. It *might* be better than the alternative – at least everyone knows where they stand and things stay peaceful – but the end result is still a lot of pretty miserable people.

Liberalism is a new form of Hobbesian equilibrium where the government enforces not only a ban on killing and stealing from people you don't like, but also a ban on tyrannizing them out of existence. This is the famous "freedom of religion" and "freedom of speech" and so on, as well as the "freedom of what happens in the bedroom between consenting adults". The Catholics don't try to ban Protestantism, the Protestants don't try to ban Catholicism, and everyone is happy.

Liberalism only works when it's clear to everyone on all sides that there's a certain neutral principle everyone has to stick to. The neutral principle can't be the Bible, or Atlas Shrugged, or anything that makes it look like one philosophy is allowed to judge the others. Right now that principle is the Principle of Harm: you can do whatever you like unless it harms other people, in which case stop. We seem to have inelegantly tacked on an "also, we can collect taxes and use them for a social safety net and occasional attempts at social progress", but it seems to be working pretty okay too.

The Strict Principle of Harm says that pretty much the only two things the government can get angry at is literally breaking your leg or picking your pocket – violence or theft. The Loose Principle of Harm says that the government can get angry at complicated indirect harms, things that Weaken The Moral Fabric Of Society. Like putting up tobacco ads. Or having really really big sodas. Or publishing hate speech against minorities. Or eroding trust in the community. Or media that objectifies women.

No one except the most ideologically pure libertarians seems to want to insist on the Strict Principle of Harm. But allowing the Loose Principle Of Harm restores all of the old wars to control other people that liberalism was supposed to prevent. The one person says “Gay marriage will result in homosexuality becoming more accepted, leading to increased rates of STDs! That’s a harm! We must ban gay marriage!” Another says “Allowing people to send their children to non-public schools could lead to kids at religious schools that preach against gay people, causing those children to commit hate crimes when they grow up! That’s a harm! We must ban non-public schools!” And so on, forever.

And I’m talking about non-governmental censorship just as much as government censorship. Even in the most anti-gay communities in the United States, the laws usually allow homosexuality or oppose it only in very weak, easily circumvented ways. The real problem for gays in these communities is the social pressure – whether that means disapproval or risk of violence – that they would likely face for coming out. This too is a

violation of liberalism, and it's one that's as important or more important than the legal sort.

And right now our way of dealing with these problems is to argue them. "Well, gay people don't really increase STDs too much." Or "Home-schooled kids do better than public-schooled kids, so we need to allow them." The problem is that arguments never terminate. Maybe if you're *incredibly* lucky, after years of fighting you can get a couple of people on the other side to admit your side is right, but this is a pretty hard process to trust. The great thing about religious freedom is that it short-circuits the debate of "Which religion is correct, Catholicism or Protestantism?" and allows people to tolerate both Catholics and Protestants even if they are divided about the answer to this object-level question. The great thing about freedom of speech is that it short-circuits the debate of "Which party is correct, the Democrats or Republicans?" and allows people to express both liberal and conservative opinions even if they are divided about the object-level question.

If we force all of our discussions about whether to ban gay marriage or allow homeschooling to depend on resolving the dispute about whether they indirectly harm the Fabric of Society in some way, we're forcing dependence on object-level arguments in a way that historically has been very very bad.

Presumably here the more powerful groups would win out and be able to oppress the less powerful groups. We end up with exactly what liberalism tried to avoid – a society where everyone is the guardian of the virtue of everyone else, and anyone who wants to live their lives in

a way different from the community's consensus is out of luck.

In Part I, I argued that *not allowing* people to worry about culture and community at all was inadequate, because these things really do matter.

Here I'm saying that if we *do allow* people to worry about culture and community, we risk the bad old medieval days where all nonconformity gets ruthlessly quashed.

Right now we're balanced precariously between the two states. There's a lot of liberalism, and people are generally still allowed to be gay or home-school their children or practice their religion or whatever. But there's also quite a bit of Enforced Virtue, where kids are forbidden to watch porn and certain kinds of media are censored and in some communities mentioning that you're an atheist will get you Dirty Looks.

It tends to work okay for most of the population. Better than the alternatives, maybe? But there's still a lot of the population that's not free to do things that are very important to them. And there's also a lot of the population that would like to live in more "virtuous" communities, whether it's to lose weight faster or avoid STDs or not have to worry about being objectified. Dealing with these two competing issues is a pretty big part of political philosophy and one that most people don't have any principled solution for

### III.

Imagine a new frontier suddenly opening. Maybe a wizard appears and gives us a map to a new archipelago that geographers had missed for the past few centuries. He doesn't want to rule the archipelago himself, though he will reluctantly help kickstart the government. He just wants to give directions and a free galleon to anybody who wants one and can muster a group of like-minded friends large enough to start a self-sustaining colony.

And so the equivalent of our paleoconservatives go out and found communities based on virtue, where all sexual deviancy is banned and only wholesome films can be shown and people who burn the flag are thrown out to be eaten by wolves.

And the equivalent of our social justiciars go out and found communities where all movies have to have lots of strong minority characters in them, and all slurs are way beyond the pale, and nobody misgenders anybody.

And the equivalent of our Objectivists go out and found communities based totally on the Strict Principle of Harm where everyone is allowed to do whatever they want and there are no regulations on business and everything is super-capitalist all the time.

And some people who just really want to lose weight go out and found communities where you're not allowed to place open boxes of donuts in the doctors' lounge.

Usually the communities are based on a charter, which expresses some founding ideals and asks only the people who agree with those ideals to enter. The charter also specifies a system of government. It could be an absolute monarch, charged with enforcing those ideals upon a population too stupid to know what's good for them. Or it could be a direct democracy of people who all agree on some basic principles but want to work out for themselves what direction the principles take them.

After a while the wizard decides to formalize and strengthen his system, not to mention work out some of the ethical dilemmas.

First he bans communities from declaring war on each other. That's an *obvious* gain. He could just smite warmongers, but he thinks it's more natural and organic to get all the communities into a united government (UniGov for short). Every community donates a certain amount to a military, and the military's only job is to quash anyone from any community who tries to invade another.

Next he addresses externalities. For example, if some communities emit a lot of carbon, and that causes global warming which threatens to destroy other communities, UniGov puts a stop to that. If the offending communities refuse to stop emitting carbon, then there's that military again.

The third thing he does is prevent memetic contamination. If one community wants to avoid all media that objectifies women, then no other community

is allowed to broadcast women-objectifying media at it. If a community wants to live an anarcho-primitivist lifestyle, nobody else is allowed to import TVs. Every community decides *exactly* how much informational contact it wants to have with the rest of the continent, and no one is allowed to force them to have more than that.

But the wizard and UniGov's most important task is to think of the children.

Imagine you're conservative Christians, and you're tired of this secular godless world, so you go off with your conservative Christian friends to found a conservative Christian community. You all pray together and stuff and are really happy. Then you have a daughter. Turns out she's atheist and lesbian. What now?

Well, it might be that your kid would be much happier at the lesbian separatist community the next island over. The *absolute minimum* the united government can do is enforce freedom of movement. That is, the *second* your daughter decides she doesn't want to be in Christiantopia anymore, she goes to a UniGov embassy nearby and asks for a ticket out, which they give her, free of charge. She gets airlifted to Lesbiantopia the next day. If *anyone* in Christiantopia tries to prevent her from reaching that embassy, or threatens her family if she leaves, or expresses the *slightest* amount of coercion to keep her around, UniGov burns their city and salts their field.

But this is not nearly enough to fully solve the child problem. A child who is abused may be too young to know that escape is an option, or may be brainwashed into

thinking they are evil, or guilted into believing they are betraying their families to opt out. And although there is no perfect, elegant solution here, the practical solution is that UniGov enforces some pretty strict laws on child-rearing, and every child, no matter what other education they receive, also has to receive a class taught by a UniGov representative in which they learn about the other communities in the Archipelago, receive a basic non-brainwashed view of the world, and are given directions to their nearest UniGov representative who they can give their opt-out request to.

The list of communities they are informed about always starts with the capital, ruled by UniGov itself and considered an inoffensive, neutral option for people who don't want anywhere in particular. And it always ends with a reminder that if they can gather enough support, UniGov will provide them with a galleon to go out and found their own community in hitherto uninhabited lands.

There's one more problem UniGov has to deal with: malicious inter-community transfer. Suppose that there is some community which puts extreme effort into educating its children, an education which it supports through heavy taxation. New parents move to this community, reap the benefits, and then when their children grow up they move back to their previous community so they don't have to pay the taxes to educate anyone else. The communities themselves prevent some of this by immigration restrictions – anyone who's clearly taking advantage of them isn't allowed in (except in the capital, which has an official commitment to let in anyone who wants). But that still leaves the example of people



maliciously leaving a high-tax community once they've got theirs. I imagine this is a big deal in Archipelago politics, but that in practice UniGov asks these people, even in their new homes, to pay higher tax rates to subsidize their old community. Or since that could be morally objectionable (imagine the lesbian separatist having to pay taxes to Christiantopia which oppressed her), maybe they pay the excess taxes to UniGov itself, just as a way of disincentivizing malicious movement.

Because there *are* UniGov taxes, and most people are happy to pay them. In my fantasy, UniGov isn't an enemy, where the Christians view it as this evil atheist conglomerate trying to steal their kids away from them and the capitalists view it as this evil socialist conglomerate trying to enforce high taxes. The Christians, the capitalists, and everyone else are extraordinarily *patriotic* about being part of the Archipelago, for its full name is the Archipelago of Civilized Communities, it is the standard-bearer of civilization against the barbaric outside world, and it is precisely the institution that allows them to maintain their distinctiveness in the face of what would otherwise be irresistible pressure to conform. Atheistopia is the enemy of Christiantopia, but only in the same way the Democratic Party is the enemy of the Republican Party – two groups within the same community who may have different ideas but who consider themselves part of the same broader whole, fundamentally allies under a banner of which both are proud.

#### IV.

Robert Nozick once proposed a similar idea as a libertarian utopia, and it's easy to see why. UniGov does very very little. Other than the part with children and the part with evening out taxation regimes, it just sits around preventing communities from using force against each other. That makes it very very easy for anyone who wants freedom to start a community that grants them the kind of freedom they want – or, more likely, to just start a community organized on purely libertarian principles. The United Government of Archipelago is the perfect minarchist night watchman state, and any additions you make over that are chosen by your own free will.

But other people could view the same plan as a conservative utopia. Conservatism, when it's not just Libertarianism Lite, is about building strong cohesive communities of relatively similar people united around common values. Archipelago is obviously built to make this as easy as possible, and it's hard to imagine that there wouldn't pop up a bunch of communities built around the idea of Decent Small-Town God-Fearing People where everyone has white picket fences and goes to the same church and nobody has to lock their doors at night (so basically Utah; I feel like this is one of the rare cases where the US' mostly-in-name-only Archipelagoness really asserts itself). People who didn't fit in could go to a Community Of People Who Don't Fit In and would have no need to nor right to complain, and no one would have to deal with Those Durned Bureaucrats In Washington telling them what to do.

But to me, this seems like a liberal utopia, even a leftist utopia, for three reasons.

The first reason is that it extends the basic principle of liberalism – solve differences of opinion by letting everyone do their own thing according to their own values, then celebrate the diversity this produces. I like homosexuality, you don't, fine, I can be homosexual and you don't have to, and having both gay and straight people living side by side enriches society. This just takes the whole thing one meta-level up – I want to live in a very sexually liberated community, you want to live in a community where sex is treated purely as a sacred act for the purpose of procreation, fine, I can live in the community I want and you can live in the community you want, and having both sexually-liberated and sexually-pure communities living side by side enriches society. It is pretty much saying that the solution to any perceived problems of liberalism is *much more liberalism*.

The second reason is quite similar to the conservative reason. A lot of liberals have some pretty strong demands about the sorts of things they want society to do. I was recently talking to Ozy about a group who believe that society billing thin people is fatphobic, and that everyone needs to admit obese people can be just as attractive and date more of them, and that anyone who preferentially dates thinner people is Problematic. They also want people to stop talking about nutrition and exercise publicly. I sympathize with these people, especially having recently read a study showing that obese people are much happier when surrounded by other obese,

rather than skinny people.<sup>5</sup> But realistically, their movement will fail, and even philosophically, I'm not sure how to determine if they have the right to demand what they are demanding or what that question means. Their best bet is to found a community on these kinds of principles and only invite people who already share their preferences and aesthetics going in.

The third reason is the reason I specifically draw leftism in here. Liberalism, and to a much greater degree leftism, are marked by the emphasis they place on oppression. They're particularly marked by an emphasis on oppression being a really hard problem, and one that is structurally inherent to a certain society. They are marked by a moderate amount of despair that this oppression can ever be rooted out.

And I think a pretty strong response to this is making sure everyone is able to say "Hey, you better not oppress us, because if you do, we can pack up and go somewhere else."

Like if you want to protest that this is unfair, that people shouldn't be forced to leave their homes because of oppression, fine, fair enough. But given that oppression is going on, and you haven't been able to fix it, giving people the *choice* to get away from it seems like a pretty big win. I am reminded of the many Jews who moved from Eastern Europe to America, the many blacks who moved

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<sup>5</sup> Hyperlink to: Katy Waldman, "Skinny People Make Overweight People Unhappy, New Study Finds":  
[http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2014/05/29/obesity\\_does\\_not\\_equal\\_unhappiness\\_study\\_tracks\\_relationship\\_between\\_weight.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/05/29/obesity_does_not_equal_unhappiness_study_tracks_relationship_between_weight.html)

from the southern US to the northern US or Canada, and the many gays who make it out of extremely homophobic areas to friendlier large cities. One could even make a metaphor, I think rightly, to telling battered women that they are allowed to leave their husbands, telling them they're not forced to stay in a relationship that they consider abusive, and making sure that there are shelters available to receive them.

If any person who feels oppressed can leave whenever they like, to the point of being provided a free plane ticket by the government, how long can oppression go on before the oppressors give up and say "Yeah, guess we need someone to work at these factories now that all our workers have gone to the communally-owned factory down the road, we should probably at least let people unionize or something so they will tolerate us"?

A commenter in the latest Asch thread mentioned an interesting quote by Frederick Douglass:

The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us [black people]. I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us!

It sounds like, if Frederick Douglass had the opportunity to go to some other community, or even found a black ex-slave community, no racists allowed, he probably

would have taken it.<sup>6</sup> If the people in slavery during his own time period had had the chance to leave their plantations for that community, I bet they would have taken it too. And if you believe there are still people today whose relationship with society are similar in kind, if not in degree, to that of a plantation slave, you should be pretty enthusiastic about the ability of exit rights and free association to disrupt those oppressive relationships.

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<sup>6</sup> Edit: Or not, or had strict conditions. Hyperlink to a later comment from Daniel Speyer (June 7, 2014):

“[I]t might be well to ascertain the number of free colored people who will be likely to need the assistance of government to help them out of this country to Liberia, or elsewhere, beyond the limits of these United States — since this course might save any embarrassment which would result from an appropriation more than commensurate to the numbers who might be disposed to leave this, our own country, for one we know not of. We are of the opinion that the free colored people generally mean to live in America, and not in Africa. ... We do not mean to go to Liberia. Our minds are made up to live here if we can, or die here if we must”

—Frederick Douglass Rejects an offer of  
Blacktopia in 1849

<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abaro3at.html>

## V.

We lack Archipelago's big advantage – a vast frontier of unsettled land.

Which is not to say that people don't form communes. They do. Some people even have really clever ideas along these lines, like the seasteaders. But the United States isn't going to become Archipelago any time soon.

There's another problem too, which I describe in my Anti-Reactionary FAQ.<sup>7</sup> Discussing 'exit rights', I say:

Exit rights are a great idea and of course having them is better than not having them. But I have yet to hear Reactionaries who cite them as a panacea explain in detail what exit rights we need beyond those we have already.

The United States allows its citizens to leave the country by buying a relatively cheap passport and go anywhere that will take them in, with the exception of a few arch-enemies like Cuba – and those exceptions are laughably easy to evade. It allows them to hold dual citizenship with various foreign powers. It even allows them to renounce their American citizenship entirely and become sole citizens of any foreign power that will accept them.

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<sup>7</sup> Hyperlink to: Scott Alexander, "Anti-Reactionary FAQ": <http://slatestarcodex.com/2013/10/20/the-anti-reactionary-faq/>

Few Americans take advantage of this opportunity in any but the most limited ways. When they do move abroad, it's usually for business or family reasons, rather than a rational decision to move to a different country with policies more to their liking. There are constant threats by dissatisfied Americans to move to Canada, and one in a thousand even carry through with them, but the general situation seems to be that America has a very large neighbor that speaks the same language, and has an equally developed economy, and has policies that many Americans prefer to their own country's, and isn't too hard to move to, and almost no one takes advantage of this opportunity. Nor do I see many people, even among the rich, moving to Singapore or Dubai.

Heck, the US has fifty states. Moving from one to another is as easy as getting in a car, driving there, and renting a room, and although the federal government limits exactly how different their policies can be you better believe that there are very important differences in areas like taxes, business climate, education, crime, gun control, and many more. Yet aside from the fascinating but small-scale Free State Project there's little politically-motivated interstate movement, nor do states seem to have been motivated to converge on their policies or be less ideologically driven.



What if we held an exit rights party, and nobody came?

Even aside from the international problems of gaining citizenship, dealing with a language barrier, and adapting to a new culture, people are just rooted – property, friends, family, jobs. The end result is that the only people who can leave their countries behind are very poor refugees with nothing to lose, and very rich jet-setters. The former aren't very attractive customers, and the latter have all their money in tax shelters anyway.

So although the idea of being able to choose your country like a savvy consumer appeals to me, just saying “exit rights!” isn't going to make it happen, and I haven't heard any more elaborate plans.

I guess I still feel that way. So although Archipelago is an interesting exercise in political science, a sort of pure case we can compare ourselves to, it doesn't look like a practical solution for real problems.

On the other hand, I do think it's worth becoming more Archipelagian on the margin rather than less so, and that there are good ways to do it.

One of the things that started this whole line of thought was an argument on Facebook about a very conservative Christian law school trying to open up in Canada. They had lots of rules like how their students couldn't have sex

before marriage and stuff like that. The Canadian province they were in was trying to deny them accreditation, because conservative Christians are icky. I think the exact arguments being used were that it was homophobic, because the conservative Christians there would probably frown on married gays and therefore gays couldn't have sex at all. Therefore, the law school shouldn't be allowed to exist. There were other arguments of about this caliber, but they all seemed to boil down to "conservative Christians are icky".

This very much annoyed me. Yes, conservative Christians are icky. And they should be allowed to form completely voluntary communities of icky people that enforce icky cultural norms and an insular society promoting ickiness, just like everyone else. If non-conservative-Christians don't like what they're doing, they should *not go to that law school*. Instead they can go to one of the dozens of other law schools that conform to their own philosophies. And if gays want a law school even friendlier to them than the average Canadian law school, they should be allowed to create some law school that only accepts gays and bans homophobes and teaches lots of courses on gay marriage law all the time.

Another person on the Facebook thread complained that this line of arguments leads to being okay with white separatists. And so it does. Fine. I think white separatists have *exactly* the right position about where the sort of white people who want to be white separatists should be relative to everyone else – separate. I am not sure what you think you are gaining by demanding that white separatists live in communities with a lot of black people in them, but I bet the black people in those communities

aren't thanking you. Why would they want a white separatist as a neighbor? Why should they have to have one?

If people want to go do their own thing in a way that harms no one else, you *let* them. That's the Archipelagian way.

(Someone will protest that Archipelagian voluntary freedom of association or disassociation could, in cases of enough racial prejudice, lead to segregation, and that segregation didn't work. Indeed it didn't. But I feel like a version of segregation in which black people actually had the legally mandated right to get away from white people and remain completely unmolested by them – and where a white-controlled government wasn't in charge of divvying up resources between white and black communities – would have worked a lot better than the segregation we actually had. The segregation we actually *had* was one in which white and black communities were separate until white people wanted something from black people, at which case they waltzed in and took it. If communities were actually totally separate, government and everything, by definition it would be impossible for one to oppress the other. The black community might start with less, but that could be solved by some kind of reparations. The Archipelagian way of dealing with this issue would be for white separatists to have separate white communities, black separatists to have separate black communities, integrationists to have integrated communities, redistributive taxation from wealthier communities going into less wealthy ones, and a strong central government ruthlessly enforcing laws against any community trying to hurt another. I don't think there's a

single black person in the segregation-era South who wouldn't have taken that deal, and any black person who thinks the effect of whites on their community today is net negative should be pretty interested as well.)

This is one reason I find people who hate seasteads so distasteful. I mean, here's what Reuters<sup>8</sup> has to say about seasteading:

Fringe movements, of course, rarely cast themselves as obviously fringe. Racist, anti-civil rights forces cloaked themselves in the benign language of "state's rights". Anti-gay religious entities adopted the glossy, positive imagery of "family values". Similarly, though many Libertarians embrace a pseudo-patriotic apple pie nostalgia, behind this façade is a very un-American, sinister vision.

Sure, most libertarians may not want to do away entirely with the idea of government or, for that matter, government-protected rights and civil liberties. But many do — and ironically vie for political power in a nation they ultimately want to destroy. Even the right-wing pundit Ann Coulter mocked the paradox of Libertarian candidates: "Get rid of government — but first, make me president!" Libertarians sowed the seeds of anti-government discontent, which is on the rise, and now want to harvest that discontent

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<sup>8</sup> Hyperlink to: Sally Kohn, "Do libertarians like Peter Thiel really want to live in America?":  
<http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2011/09/01/do-libertarians-like-peter-thiel-really-want-to-live-in-america/>

for a very radical, anti-America agenda. The image of libertarians living off-shore in their lawless private nation-states is just a postcard of the future they hope to build on land.

Strangely, the libertarian agenda has largely escaped scrutiny, at least compared to that of social conservatives. The fact that the political class is locked in debate about whether Michele Bachmann or Rick Perry is more socially conservative only creates a veneer of mainstream legitimacy for the likes of Ron Paul, whose libertarianism may be even more extreme and dangerously un-patriotic. With any luck America will recognize anti-government extremism for what it is — before libertarians throw America overboard and render us all castaways.

Keep in mind this is because *some people want to go off and do their own thing in the middle of the ocean far away from everyone else without bothering anyone*. And the newspapers are trying to whip up a panic about “throwing America overboard”.

So one way we could become more Archipelagian is just *trying not to yell at people who are trying to go off and doing their own thing quietly with a group of voluntarily consenting friends*.

But I think a better candidate for how to build a more Archipelagian world is to encourage the fracture of society into subcultures.

Like, transsexuals may not be able to go to a transsexual island somewhere and build Transtopia where anyone who misgenders anyone else gets thrown into a volcano. But of the transsexuals I know, a lot of them have lots of transsexual friends, their cissexual friends are all up-to-date on trans issues and don't do a lot of misgendering, and they have great social networks where they share information about what businesses and doctors are or aren't trans-friendly. They can take advantage of trigger warnings to make sure they expose themselves to only the sources that fit the values of their community, the information that would get broadcast if it was a normal community that could impose media norms. As Internet interaction starts to replace real-life interaction (and I think for a lot of people the majority of their social life is already on the Internet, and for some the majority of their economic life is as well) it becomes increasingly easy to limit yourself to transsexual-friendly spaces that keep bad people away.

The rationalist community is another good example. If I wanted, I could move to the Bay Area tomorrow and never have more than a tiny amount of contact with non-rationalists again. I could have rationalist roommates, live in a rationalist group house, try to date only other rationalists, try to get a job with a rationalist nonprofit like CFAR or a rationalist company like Quixey, and never have to deal with the benighted and depressing non-rationalist world again. Even without moving to the Bay Area, it's been pretty easy for me to keep a lot of my

social life, both on- and off- line, rationalist-focused, and I don't regret this at all.

I don't know if the future will be virtual reality. I expect the post-singularity future will include something like VR, although that might be like describing teleportation as "basically a sort of pack animal". But how much the immediate pre-singularity world will make use of virtual reality, I don't know.

But I bet if it doesn't, it will be because virtual reality has been circumvented by things like social networks, bitcoin, and Mechanical Turk, which make it possible to do most of your interaction through the Internet even though you're not literally plugged into it.

And that seems to me like a pretty good start in creating an Archipelago. I already hang out with various Finns and Brits and Aussies a lot more closely than I do my next-door neighbors, and if we start using litecoin and someone else starts using dogecoin then I'll be more economically connected to them too. The degree to which I encounter certain objectifying or unvirtuous or triggering media already depends more on the moderation policies of Less Wrong and Slate Star Codex and who I block from my Facebook feed, than it does any laws about censorship of US media.

At what point are national governments rendered mostly irrelevant compared to the norms and rules of the groups of which we are voluntary members?

I don't know, but I kind of look forward to finding out. It seems like a great way to start searching for utopia, or at least getting some people away from their metaphorical abusive-husbands.

And the other thing is that I have pretty strong opinions on which communities are better than others. Some communities were founded by toxic people for ganging up with other toxic people to celebrate and magnify their toxicity, and these (surprise, surprise) tend to be toxic. Others were formed by very careful, easily-harmed people trying to exclude everyone who could harm them, and these tend to be pretty safe albeit sometimes overbearing. Other people hit some kind of sweet spot that makes friendly people want to come in and angry people want to stay out, or just do a really good job choosing friends.

But I think the end result is that the closer you come to true freedom of association, the closer you get to a world where everyone is a member of more or less the community they deserve. That would be a pretty unprecedented bit of progress.



# Patchwork: A Positive Vision

## Mencius Moldbug

### 1

I'm afraid UR has been a bit, well, *grim*, of late.

One can flirt only so long with Confederate racist fascism, before eliciting a few jitters. Is our reader really going to be dragged into this horrible, subterranean universe? Is she even comfortable having it on her computer at work? And then we took this awful, bumpy ride into the eel-infested deeps of Obama Derangement Syndrome, which can't have helped matters.

So this week, I thought it would be nice to be positive. Therefore, let me present *Patchwork*: the Mencist vision of a political system for the 21st century. At the risk of being accused of a sales job, I will paint Patchwork in warm, glowing, Obamatronic pastels. Rather than our usual chilly, Machiavellian cynicism. Yes, I know, this is unfair. But here at UR, we're always closing.

To start the hype machine, let's just say that if anyone can build anything like Patchwork, even a tiny, crude, Third World ripoff of Patchwork, it is all over for the democratic regimes. It'll be like East Germany competing with West Germany. (Funnily enough, the financial relationship between the US and the Gulf/East Asia, the most Patchwork-like part of the world at present, is oddly reminiscent of that between the OECD and the Warsaw Pact: the latter borrow from the former to buy cheap

consumer goods, supplied by the former, for the latter's serfs.)

Children growing up in the Patchwork era will learn a new name and a new history of the democratic past. They will date the period to the Dutch invasion of England (1688)<sup>9</sup>, which ended the span of legitimate continuity in

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<sup>9</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glorious\\_Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glorious_Revolution)

“The Glorious Revolution, also called the Revolution of 1688, was the overthrow of King James II of England (James VII of Scotland) by a union of English Parliamentarians with the Dutch stadtholder William III, Prince of Orange. William's successful invasion of England with a Dutch fleet and army led to his ascension to the throne as William III of England jointly with his wife, Mary II, James's daughter, after the Declaration of Right, leading to the Bill of Rights 1689.

“King James's policies of religious tolerance after 1685 met with increasing opposition from members of leading political circles, who were troubled by the King's Catholicism and his close ties with France. The crisis facing the King came to a head in 1688, with the birth of his son, James Francis Edward Stuart, on 10 June (Julian calendar). This changed the existing line of succession by displacing the heir presumptive (his daughter Mary, a Protestant and the wife of William of Orange) with young James Francis Edward as heir apparent. The establishment of a Roman Catholic dynasty in the kingdoms now seemed likely. Some Tory members of parliament worked with members of the opposition Whigs in an attempt to resolve the crisis by secretly initiating dialogue with William of Orange to come to England, outside the jurisdiction of the English Parliament. Stadtholder William, the de facto head of state of the Dutch United Provinces, feared a Catholic Anglo–French alliance and had already been planning a military intervention in England.

“After consolidating political and financial support, William crossed the North Sea and English Channel with a large invasion fleet in November 1688, landing at Torbay. After only two minor clashes between the two opposing armies in England, and anti-Catholic riots in several towns, James's regime collapsed, largely because of a lack of resolve shown by the king. However, this was followed by the protracted Williamite War in

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Ireland and Dundee's rising in Scotland. In England's distant American colonies, the revolution led to the collapse of the Dominion of New England and the overthrow of the Province of Maryland's government. Following a defeat of his forces at the Battle of Reading on 9 December, James and his wife Mary fled England; James, however, returned to London for a two-week period that culminated in his final departure for France on 23 December. By threatening to withdraw his troops, William in February 1689 (New Style Julian calendar)[a] convinced a newly chosen Convention Parliament to make him and his wife joint monarchs.

"The Revolution permanently ended any chance of Catholicism becoming re-established in England. For British Catholics its effects were disastrous both socially and politically: Catholics were denied the right to vote and sit in the Westminster Parliament for over a century; they were also denied commissions in the army, and the monarch was forbidden to be Catholic or to marry a Catholic, this latter prohibition remaining in force until 2015. The Revolution led to limited tolerance for Nonconformist Protestants, although it would be some time before they had full political rights. It has been argued, mainly by Whig historians, that James's overthrow began modern English parliamentary democracy: the Bill of Rights 1689 has become one of the most important documents in the political history of Britain and never since has the monarch held absolute power.

"Internationally, the Revolution was related to the War of the Grand Alliance on mainland Europe. It has been seen as the last successful invasion of England. It ended all attempts by England in the Anglo-Dutch Wars of the 17th century to subdue the Dutch Republic by military force. However, the resulting economic integration and military co-operation between the English and Dutch navies shifted the dominance in world trade from the Dutch Republic to England and later to Great Britain.

"The expression "Glorious Revolution" was first used by John Hampden in late 1689, and is an expression that is still used by the British Parliament. The Glorious Revolution is also occasionally termed the Bloodless Revolution, albeit inaccurately. The English Civil War (also known as the Great Rebellion) was still within living memory for most of the major English participants in the events of 1688, and for them, in comparison to that war (or even the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685) the deaths in the conflict of 1688 were mercifully few."

English government that began with William the Conqueror, replacing it with eternal, degenerate Whiggery and the quisling, "constitutional" or ceremonial Hanover princes. And they will surely call it something cool, like the *Anglo-American Interregnum*. Insulting it with the name of "democracy" will be coarse and over-the-top.

Said Interregnum, which we are of course still in, has been a period of global monotonic decline in official authority. As in the late Roman period, declining official authority, declining personal morality, and increasing public bureaucracy are observed in synchrony. This is not in any way a coincidence. The combination is an infallible symptom of the great terminal disease of the polity — leftism. Leftism is cancer. At least in its present adult, sclerotic and non-fulminating form, it is extremely slow in its progress, but the end is not in doubt.

On theoretical grounds alone — the feat has never really been achieved, at least never for good — the only cure for leftism is complete and permanent excision. Success implies complete absence of the organism from the body politic. This does not mean there are no leftists in the country; in a well-governed country which is at peace, people can think or say whatever they damned well please. It just means that, if there are for some reason leftists, their views are completely without influence on government policy. So people laugh at them, and call them names.

(Isn't this a lovely vision? A Lennonesque feat of delirious, constructive imagination? A world without leftism? Imagine! It's hard to imagine only if you have trouble imagining a Nazi John Lennon — a feat which

taxes my imagination not at all. But maybe I've been reading too much Hitler. It really is a tough call to say who was more coherent, Lennon or Hitler.)

Acceptance of this goal, which I will not attempt to justify today, but which I think Patchwork can achieve, is the difference between a conservative, ie a fellow who thinks he can beat melanoma with an emery board, and a full-bore reactionary such as myself. If you happen to be wrong, you have leaped the rail of sanity. So it is incumbent on us to argue carefully.

But I'm sorry. I am being intentionally abrasive again. As an extremist, I prefer this harsh, confrontational rhetoric to any kind of honeyed cozening. The basic goal of UR, I don't mind admitting, is to convince people who are now progressives to abandon their delusions. Since progressives equate those who accept the reactionary narrative of recent history with acolytes of the Great Goat-Lord Abaddon<sup>10</sup>, one must tread carefully. And if you must come as an Abaddonite, the only way to set your quarry at ease is to constantly confess your vileness. That way the progressive might even just clasp you to his heart — along with all the satanic murderers he is so keen to embrace.

(Consider, for instance, the case of Jose Luis Dorantes.<sup>11</sup> Masters! Mighty masters! Lord Barack, Lady Michelle, and their new puppy too! *Father who art in heaven*, your Lordships! How have we offended you? When did we sin?

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<sup>10</sup> Hyperlink to: <http://eeweems.com/goya/goat.html> [Dead]

<sup>11</sup> Hyperlink to: David Paulin, "Hit-and-Run: Death in a 'Sanctuary City'": [http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2008/11/hitandrun\\_death\\_in\\_a\\_sanctuary.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2008/11/hitandrun_death_in_a_sanctuary.html)

What penance must we say? Which word of yours did we cross — to have a Jose Luis Dorantes inflicted on us? And how in grievous error may we repent? Another diversity-training session, perhaps, or three?)

Anyway. Obviously I am just trying to get you wound up, dear reader. I'm sorry. I know. It is crass. So let's have a look at Patchwork.

The basic idea of Patchwork is that, as the crappy governments we inherited from history are smashed, they should be replaced by a global spiderweb of tens, even hundreds, of thousands of sovereign and independent mini-countries, each governed by its own joint-stock corporation without regard to the residents' opinions. If residents don't like their government, they can and should move. The design is all "exit," no "voice."

(I'm not aware of any specific writer that has proposed *exactly* this, but it is certainly not an original or interesting idea in and of itself. I've certainly read about six zillion science-fiction books in which this is the general state of the future. The devil, however, is in the details. We will go into the details.)

The essential inspiration for Patchwork is the observation that the periods in which human civilization has flowered are the periods in which it has been most politically divided. Ancient Greece, medieval Italy, Europe until 1914, China in the Spring and Autumn Period<sup>12</sup>, and so

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<sup>12</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spring\\_and\\_Autumn\\_period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spring_and_Autumn_period)

"The Spring and Autumn period (simplified Chinese: 春秋时代; traditional Chinese: 春秋時代; pinyin: Chūnqiū Shídài) was a period in Chinese history from approximately 771 to 476

on. Burckhardt once observed that Europe was safe so long as she was not unified, and now that she is we can see exactly what he meant.<sup>13</sup>

Small is good. Local is good. Different is good. We know these things. These are not controversial assertions — even in the hippest streets of Williamsburg. Heck, President Obama is probably a Slow Food man himself. (Once my daughter, aged four months, was in a bakery in the Castro and met Alice Waters.<sup>14</sup> Alice Waters smiled

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BC (or according to some authorities until 403 BC[a])[2] which corresponds roughly to the first half of the Eastern Zhou Period. The period's name derives from the Spring and Autumn Annals, a chronicle of the state of Lu between 722 and 479 BC, which tradition associates with Confucius.

"During this period, the Zhou royal authority over the various feudal states started to decline, as more and more dukes and marquesses obtained de facto regional autonomy, defying the king's court in Luoyi, and waging wars amongst themselves. The gradual Partition of Jin, one of the most powerful states, marked the end of the Spring and Autumn period, and the beginning of the Warring States period."

<sup>13</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob\\_Burckhardt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Burckhardt)

"Carl Jacob Christoph Burckhardt (May 25, 1818 – August 8, 1897) was a Swiss historian of art and culture and an influential figure in the historiography of both fields. He is known as one of the major progenitors of cultural history. Sigfried Giedion described Burckhardt's achievement in the following terms: "The great discoverer of the age of the Renaissance, he first showed how a period should be treated in its entirety, with regard not only for its painting, sculpture and architecture, but for the social institutions of its daily life as well." Burckhardt's best known work is *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860)."

<sup>14</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice\\_Waters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Waters)

Alice Louise Waters is an American chef, restaurateur, activist and author. She is the owner of Chez Panisse, a Berkeley, California restaurant famous for its organic, locally grown ingredients and for pioneering California cuisine, which she opened in 1971.

In addition to her restaurant, Waters has written several books on food and cooking, including *Chez Panisse*

and told Sibyl she was very cute. Which Sibyl is — she might as well be on the Gerber bottle. And Alice Waters might as well be a duchess. Heck, Alice Waters probably *laughs* at duchesses.)

So how, exactly, did all these Obamaniacs, these whiterpeople<sup>15</sup>, these Burning Man regulars, these young, hip progressives, convince themselves that when it comes to government, bigger is better? That in fact we need a world government, toot sweet? That international public opinion is all that really matters in the world, that America should lead the world, feed the world, and be governed by the world?

But somehow they did. The issues that matter to them — the composition-of-the-atmosphere question, and the like — always tend to be transnational. As big as possible. As Peter Gabriel put it, they think big thoughts. (We reactionaries, when we act locally, would rather think locally as well. Always best to think about what you're actually doing.)

This paradox is just one more stimulus for a complete replacement of the State. We have had enough. We are done with the present system of government. We want a reboot. And, anarchy being both impossible and

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Cooking (with Paul Bertolli), *The Art of Simple Food I and II*, and *40 Years of Chez Panisse*.

She founded the Chez Panisse Foundation in 1996, and created the Edible Schoolyard program at the Martin Luther King Middle School in Berkeley, California. Waters serves as a public policy advocate on the national level for school lunch reform and universal access to healthy, organic foods, and the impact of her work in organic food and nutrition is typified by Michelle Obama's White House organic vegetable garden.

<sup>15</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com>



un-reactionary, we can't even talk about a reboot until we've specified what operating system to boot next.

So we can think of Patchwork as a new operating system for the world. Of course, it does not have to be installed across the entire world, although it is certainly designed to scale. But, it is easier and much more prudent to start small. Innovations in sovereignty are dangerous.

A *patchwork* — please feel free to drop the capital — is any network consisting of a large number of small but independent states. To be precise, each state's real estate is its *patch*; the sovereign corporate owner, ie government, of the patch is its *realm*. At least initially, each realm holds one and only one patch. In practice this may change with time, but the realm-patch structure is at least designed to be stable.

Of course, Italy in the fourteenth century was anything but stable. Anything like a patchwork needs a strong security design to ensure that it does not repeat the constitutional solecisms of feudalism, and nor will it be subject to the same pervasive violence or meet the same demise. In a worst-case scenario, we could end up right back at liberal democracy! But don't worry — we will discuss this issue in considerable detail.

To be a reactionary is not to say we must reinstall the exact political structure of the fourteenth century tomorrow, although that would surely be an improvement on what we have now. To be a reactionary is to borrow freely across time as well as space, incorporating political designs and experience from wherever and whenever. As

Nick Szabo<sup>16</sup> has observed, the most interesting, detailed and elegant European forms are found in the period we call *feudal*, and thus it is only natural that a reactionary design for future government will have a somewhat feudal feel.

But Patchwork is something *new*. It will not feel like the past. It will feel like the future. The past — that is, the democratic past — will feel increasingly gray, weird, and scary. (This is how it would feel to you already, if you didn't have a bag of demotic morphine dripping into each carotid. Don't worry — we will try to get you out of the Matrix before we turn off the anesthetic.)

In the future, the fact that once, you would probably be attacked if you went into Central Park at night, will seem preposterous. The idea that millions of random people who were not even authorized to be in the country were wandering around, driving gigantic SUVs at triple-digit speeds after ten or fifteen drinks, and murdering random musicians on motorcycles, will seem as weird as the idea that a pride of wild lions would march into Carnegie Hall in mid-symphony, close off all exits, and systematically slaughter the audience. Graffiti will be a matter for the museums, as will gangs, of course. The streets will have no cars or very few, they will be safe, at night they will be bright and full of lively, happy people. Wine will be cheap, restaurants will be unregulated, and fine Eskimo marijuana will be sold at Dean & DeLuca. Etc, etc, etc.

These kinds of descriptions apply to the kind of city *I* would like to live in. They may or may not seem intriguing or attractive to anyone *else*. *You* may prefer to

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<sup>16</sup> Hyperlink to: <http://unenumerated.blogspot.co.uk>

live in a gritty, urban city which is corrupt, dirty, dangerous, and generally difficult to live in. If there are enough people like you, there will be a market for this lifestyle. If not — not. I suspect, however, that you are outnumbered. And I imagine the new management of Manhattan would take the distance from Dinkins to Giuliani and multiply it by ten or twenty. There would surely be no such thing as a "bad neighborhood," at least in the sense of an unsafe one. Oh, no. Absolutely impossible.

Why hasn't this happened already? Why isn't Manhattan in 2008 half Disneyland, half Paris, half imperial Sodom? Don't you think one or two people share these tastes? But the problem is that Manhattan is not governed in the interests of Manhattan. Capital, in short, is being squandered. In the Patchwork this is most unlikely to happen.

The historical and political reasons why democratic governments are such a mess are complex. I won't go into them today. But perhaps, for a little intuitive perspective, let's introduce ourselves to Herbert Croly's *Promise of American Life*.

Croly was one of the founders of 20th-century progressivism, and of the New Republic in specific — a magazine never out of favor in the corridors of Washington. Observe the extent to which Croly's optimistic, energetic vision of positive change has decayed into the superficially happy, but contentless and enervating, hippie-Starbucks-Unitarian mien of his 21st-century successors at the same office.<sup>17</sup> I have linked

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<sup>17</sup> Hyperlink to: <http://www.tnr.com>

directly to Croly's conclusion, which is all you really need to read anyway.<sup>18</sup> Here is a typical breathless passage:

Do we lack culture? We will "make it hum" by founding a new university in Chicago. Is American art neglected and impoverished? We will enrich it by organizing art departments in our colleges, and popularize it by lectures with

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<sup>18</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert\\_Croly](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Croly)  
"Herbert David Croly (January 23, 1869 – May 17, 1930) was an intellectual leader of the progressive movement as an editor, political philosopher and a co-founder of the magazine *The New Republic* in early twentieth-century America. His political philosophy influenced many leading progressives including Theodore Roosevelt, as well as his close friends Judge Learned Hand and Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter.

"His book, *The Promise of American Life* (1909), looked to the conservative spirit of effective government as espoused by Alexander Hamilton, combined with the democracy of Thomas Jefferson. The book was one of the most influential books in American political history, shaping the ideas of many intellectuals and political leaders. It also influenced the later New Deal. Calling themselves "The New Nationalists," Croly and Walter Weyl sought to remedy the relatively weak national institutions with a strong federal government. He actively promoted a strong army and navy and attacked pacifists who thought democracy at home and peace abroad was best served by keeping America weak.

"Croly was one of the founders of modern liberalism in the United States, especially through his books, essays, and a highly influential magazine founded in 1914, *The New Republic*. In his 1914 book *Progressive Democracy*, Croly rejected the thesis that the liberal tradition in the United States was inhospitable to anti-capitalist alternatives. He drew from the American past a history of resistance to capitalist wage relations that was fundamentally liberal, and he reclaimed an idea that Progressives had allowed to lapse — that working for wages was a lesser form of liberty. Increasingly skeptical of the capacity of social welfare legislation to remedy social ills, Croly argued that America's liberal promise could be redeemed only by syndicalist reforms involving workplace democracy. His liberal goals were part of his commitment to American republicanism."

lantern slides and associations for the study of its history. Is New York City ugly? Perhaps, but if we could only get the authorities to appropriate a few hundred millions for its beautification, we could make it look like a combination of Athens, Florence, and Paris. Is it desirable for the American citizen to be something of a hero? I will encourage heroes by establishing a fund whereby they shall be rewarded in cash. War is hell, is it? I will work for the abolition of hell by calling a convention and passing a resolution denouncing its iniquities. I will build at the Hague a Palace of Peace which shall be a standing rebuke to the War Lords of Europe. Here, in America, some of us have more money than we need and more good will. We will spend the money in order to establish the reign of the good, the beautiful, and the true.

"Athens, Florence and Paris!" Imagine a progressive today saying he wanted to turn anything, let alone New York of all God's Augean stables, into "Athens, Florence and Paris." Imagine telling Herbert Croly that in 2008, progressivism had triumphed beyond his wildest dreams, that the stick-in-the-mud isolationists of the Midwest were forever defeated and heard of no more, that Tammany was a schoolbook memory, that all agencies of government now operate under the close supervision of the universities and the press.

And then imagine trying to explain that despite all this, NYC looks more like a combination of Paris, East Berlin and Port au Prince. And is in many places extremely dangerous at night. What on earth would the good man tell you? What would he even begin to say? I don't know,

but I'd sure as heck like to find out. "The good, the beautiful and the true."

The patch in Patchwork that is Manhattan, however, would be the good, the beautiful and the true. The Athens, the Florence and the Paris. Because Athens, Florence and Paris sell. Even imperial Sodom sells. East Berlin doesn't sell, and Port au Prince *really* doesn't sell.

The foreign, forgotten lesson we are extracting from Croly is not that progressivism is the cure-all for all ills, but that progressivism, the eternal poisonous chameleon, in its 1911 incarnation espoused the civic values of 1911. All the better to convince its innocent hosts that it was anything but a lethal parasite. But we are very good at reading progressive discourse, and when we read Croly we see the values of 1911, not the malignant expansion of the State that Croly was trying to justify in the names of those values. (BTW, when anyone tries to use the phrase "reality-based community" on you, I recommend pointing him at this.<sup>19</sup>)

Our lesson is just that the civic values of 1911 are the naive, obvious values of good government. (At the very least, they are far less warped than their post-1945 replacements.) Thus they are at least a fair proxy for the values of competitive government.<sup>20</sup> "Athens, Florence, and Paris" sounds pretty good to me, although there has to be some kind of room for industrial death metal and heavy-duty psychedelics. But this does not mean you need

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<sup>19</sup> [Broken link]

<sup>20</sup> Arnold Kling, *Competitive Government*. See also: <https://www.seasteading.org/2008/09/competitive-government-vs-democratic-government/>

to worry about being raped and killed by some barbarian thug on your way home from the club.

Anyway. Enough anecdotes and generalities. Let's take a harder engineering look at the anatomy of Patchwork. The basic engineering problem is: while one can fantasize ad libitum about the way in which this system *should* be governed, how will it *actually* be governed?

This entire problem can be described as one of *security*. We postulate some structure of authority for the Patchwork. It sounds good. If the above propaganda is not appealing to you, all I can say is that we have very different tastes and perspectives. But is the result stable? If we set it up in some state, will it remain in that state? Stability and security are the same thing: if the structure of authority changes in any authorized way, it is not really changing at all.

The designers of the Constitution of 1789 were political engineers, too. They were neither stupid, nor ignorant, nor inexperienced. But the government they designed diverged immediately and irreversibly from the envelope in which they intended it to operate. Surely the risk of divergence is even greater for a multipolar framework — not an architecture with a good historical record of stability.

Anything like a patchwork can merge into a single centralized state. It can degenerate into an asymmetric form in which one state dominates the others. It can split into two factions which fight a civil war for the world. Individual states can turn evil and try to turn others evil. Etc. History tells us that all kinds of awful stuff can happen, and probably will.

Because of these dangers, Patchwork's philosophy of security is simple and draconian. It is built around the following axioms, which strike me as too self-evident to debate.

*First*, security is a monotonic desideratum. There is no such thing as "too secure." An encryption algorithm cannot be too strong, a fence cannot be too high, a bullet cannot be too lethal.

*Second*, security and liberty do not conflict. Security always wins. As Robert Peel put it<sup>21</sup>, the absence of crime and disorder is the test of public safety, and in anything like the modern state the risk of private infringement on private liberties far exceeds the official of public infringement. No cop ever stole my bicycle. And this will be far more true in the Patchwork, in which realms actually compete for business on the basis of customer service.

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<sup>21</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peelian\\_principles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peelian_principles)

"The Peelian principles summarise the ideas that Sir Robert Peel developed to define an ethical police force. The approach expressed in these principles is commonly known as policing by consent in the United Kingdom and other countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

"In this model of policing, police officers are regarded as citizens in uniform. They exercise their powers to police their fellow citizens with the implicit consent of those fellow citizens. "Policing by consent" indicates that the legitimacy of policing in the eyes of the public is based upon a general consensus of support that follows from transparency about their powers, their integrity in exercising those powers and their accountability for doing so."



*Third*, security and complexity are opposites. A secure authority structure is as simple as possible, so that it is as difficult as possible to pervert it to unanticipated ends.

Bearing these principles in mind, let's separate our security overview into two parts: the internal management of realms, and the relationships between realms.

A Patchwork realm is a business — a corporation. Its capital is the patch it is sovereign over. The realm profits by making its real estate as valuable as possible — whether it is Manhattan or some ranch in Oklahoma. Even the oceans can and should be divided into patches; a naval realm is sovereign over, and profits by taxing, all economic activities within a patch of ocean.

But how should realms be administered? The answer is simple: a realm is a corporation. A sovereign corporation, granted, but nonetheless a corporation.

In the 21st century, the art of corporate design is not a mystery. The corporation is owned and controlled by its anonymous shareholders (if you've ever wondered what the letters SA stand for in the name of a French or Spanish company, they mean "anonymous society"), whose interests in maximizing corporate performance are perfectly aligned. The shareholders select a chief executive, to whom all employees report, and whose decisions are final. In no cases do they make management decisions directly.

It is at least probable that this joint-stock design maximizes corporate efficiency. If there existed a more effective structure — if firms were more productive when

managed not by a committee but by an executive, or by the collective decisions of their customers or employees, by separate legislative and judiciary branches, etc, etc — we would know. Someone would have found a way to construct a firm on this design, and it would have outcompeted the rest of the stodgy old world. (In fact, I think one of the most plausible explanations of why the Industrial Revolution happened in England, not in Sung China or the Roman Empire, was that the latter two never evolved anything quite like the joint-stock company.)

Our great difficulty, though, is that history records nothing quite like a sovereign joint-stock company. Perhaps the closest examples were the chartered companies<sup>22</sup> of the classical era. But even a colonial

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<sup>22</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chartered\\_company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chartered_company)

“A chartered company is an association formed by investors or shareholders for the purpose of trade, exploration, and colonization.

“Companies enabled merchants to band together to undertake ventures requiring more capital than was available to any one merchant or family. From the sixteenth century onwards, groups of European investors formed companies to underwrite and profit from the exploration of Africa, India, Asia, the Caribbean and North America, usually under the patronage of one state, which issued the company’s charter. But chartered companies go back into the medieval period. Authorizations of charters enabled even small states to greatly augment their influence by indirect rule, steering private resources into national pursuits of exploration and trade. As they grew wealthier, some companies developed extensive administrations for their ventures, and frequently conducted local affairs with little homeland oversight.

“Chartered companies were usually formed, incorporated and legitimised under a royal or, in republics, an equivalent government charter. This document set out the terms under which the company could trade; defined its boundaries of influence, and described its rights and responsibilities.”

chartered company was chartered by a sovereign, though it operated outside that sovereign's realm.

Rather, I think the best way to think of a realm or sovereign corporation is as a modified version of monarchy. A royal family is to an ordinary family business as a Patchwork realm is to an ordinary, nonsovereign, public corporation. Joint-stock realms thus solve the primary historical problem of monarchical government: the vagaries of the biological process. In other words, they assure that the overall direction of the realm will always be both strong and responsible — at least, responsible in a financial sense.

A joint-stock realm simply cannot have anything comparable to a weak monarch of the classical era. Realms will certainly recruit their executives from the same talent pool large companies now draw from. How many Fortune 500 CEOs today are regularly bullied and led by coalitions of their nominal subordinates, as (for just one example) the French monarchy so often was? Zero is probably too easy an answer, but at least an approximation.

Note, however, that we are not considering anything like the watered-down "constitutional" (ie, again, ceremonial) monarchies of the democratic period. If the joint-stock realm is like a monarchy, it is like a true, "absolute" or (most pejoratively) "divine-right monarchy."

With all due respect, dear reader, the probability that you have a sound understanding of the case for divine-right monarchy is approximately the probability that a large white goat will fall out of my ass. This means you need to

read the great English exponent of absolute government, Sir Robert Filmer<sup>23</sup>, and his masterpiece *Patriarcha*.<sup>24</sup>

Filmer was the baddest-ass reactionary who ever lived. Frankly, he makes Carlyle look like a liberal. Just the title of *Patriarcha* is cooler than Jesus Christ himself, and the contents don't even begin to disappoint: we launch almost immediately into hardcore Anglican theology. If Filmer isn't winter beach reading, I don't know who is.

I mean, seriously, how do you justify divine-right monarchy to an atheist? Is it anything like selling refrigerators to Eskimos? Since I am both an atheist and a believer in divine-right monarchy, I'd better be able to square this circle.

One of the major doctrinal thrusts of European Christianity, in all ages and phases of its career, and certainly even in the thinly-disguised, crypto-Christian Unitarianism that has become the religion of the world's ruling class (eg, if ever you meet a "moderate Muslim," he is really a Unitarian), is the quest to justify the political structure of the world.

What makes a king a king? Why should the king be the king? Why can't I be the king, or at least my cousin Ricky?

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<sup>23</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Filmer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Filmer)

"Sir Robert Filmer (c. 1588 – 26 May 1653) was an English political theorist who defended the divine right of kings. His best known work, *Patriarcha*, published posthumously in 1680, was the target of numerous Whig attempts at rebuttal, including Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government*, James Tyrrell's *Patriarcha Non Monarcha* and John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. Filmer also wrote critiques of Thomas Hobbes, John Milton, Hugo Grotius and Aristotle."

<sup>24</sup> Hyperlink to: <http://www.constitution.org/eng/patriarcha.htm>

Do we even need a king? And so on. People have strong emotional feelings about these questions to this day — at least, they have a strong emotional feeling about the last one. Not answering them is certainly not acceptable.

But Filmer, and the divine-right monarchist in general, comes as close as possible to not answering. Moreover, his reasoning is impeccable for the orthodox:

If it please God, for the correction of the prince or punishment of the people, to suffer princes to be removed and others to be placed in their rooms, either by the factions of the nobility or rebellion of the people, in all such cases the judgment of God, who hath power to give and to take away kingdoms, is most just; yet the ministry of men who execute God's judgments without commission is sinful and damnable. God doth but use and turn men's unrighteous acts to the performance of His righteous decrees.

Note that this is basically a 17th-century way of saying: "shit happens." God being omnipotent etc, if Dickweed over there is king, it is obviously because God wanted Dickweed to be king. And who are you to disagree with God?

But an atheist, such as myself, has a simpler way of getting to the same result. Really, what Filmer is saying, is: if you want stable government, accept the status quo as the verdict of history. There is no reason at all to inquire as to *why* the Bourbons are the Kings of France. The rule is arbitrary. Nonetheless, it is to the benefit of all that this arbitrary rule exists, because obedience to the rightful

king is a Schelling point of nonviolent agreement.<sup>25</sup> And better yet, there is no way for a political force to steer the outcome of succession — at least, nothing comparable to the role of the educational authorities in a democracy.

In other words, to put it in Patchwork terms, the relationship between realm and patch is no more, and no less, than a property right. A patch is a sovereign property, that is, one whose proprietor has no defender but itself. Nonetheless, in moral terms, we may ask: why does this realm hold that patch? And the answer, as it always is with in any system of strong property rights, will be not "because it deserves to," but "because it does." Note that whatever the theology, Filmer's model of government captures the property-right approach perfectly.

(Also, one must admire Filmer's wicked gall in starting out by describing the "right of rebellion" as a *Catholic* heresy. Catholicism being admitted, at least by all fair historians, to be the creed of your average divine-right monarchist, as Protestantism is of vile democracy. So Filmer's move here is wildly misleading, but pure fun —

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<sup>25</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focal\\_point\\_\(game\\_theory\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focal_point_(game_theory))

"In game theory, a focal point (also called Schelling point) is a solution that people will tend to use in the absence of communication, because it seems natural, special, or relevant to them. The concept was introduced by the Nobel Memorial Prize-winning American economist Thomas Schelling in his book *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960). In this book (at p. 57), Schelling describes "focal point[s] for each person's expectation of what the other expects him to expect to be expected to do". This type of focal point later was named after Schelling. He further explains that such points are highly useful in negotiations, because we cannot completely trust our negotiating partners' words."

not unlike comparing liberals to Mussolini.<sup>26</sup> Nothing to do with anything, but it sure gets a rise out of 'em, and moves SKUs like no one's business.)

The invention of this spurious right was perhaps the first tiny crack in the philosophical girders of the classical European monarchies. Filmer deftly points out that this is an engineering error, the ancient political solecism of *imperium in imperio*- which is now, in a typical democratic propaganda maneuver, lauded as that bogus political panacea, "separation of powers":

Thirdly, [Bellarmine] concludes that, if there be a lawful cause, the multitude may change the kingdom. Here I would fain know who shall judge of this lawful cause? If the multitude — for I see nobody else can — then this is a pestilent and dangerous conclusion.<sup>27</sup>

Filmer, writing for an educated audience, does not bother to remind them of the basic premise of Roman law: *nemo iudex in causa sua*. Meaning: "no man can be a judge in his own case." And no multitude, either. Pestilent indeed!

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<sup>26</sup> Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, From Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (2008)

<sup>27</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Bellarmino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Bellarmino)

"Saint Robert Bellarmine, S.J. (Italian: Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino; 4 October 1542 – 17 September 1621) was an Italian Jesuit and a Cardinal of the Catholic Church. He was one of the most important figures in the Counter-Reformation.

"He was a professor of theology and later rector of the Roman College, and in 1602 became archbishop of Capua. Bellarmine supported the reform decrees of the Council of Trent.

"He was canonized in 1930 and named a Doctor of the Church. Bellarmine is also widely remembered for his role in the Giordano Bruno affair and the Galileo affair."

These political three-card monte tricks, in which sovereign authority is in some way divided, "limited" (obviously, no sovereign can limit itself), or otherwise weakened, in all cases for the purported purpose of securing liberty, have no more place in a Patchwork realm than they do at, say, Apple. They are spurious artifacts of the Interregnum. Their effect on both a realm and its residents is purely counterproductive. Begone with them.

In reality, no sovereign can be subject to law. This is a political perpetual motion machine. Law is not law unless it is judged and enforced. And by whom? For example, if you think a supreme court with judicial review can make government subject to law, you are obviously unfamiliar with the sordid history of American constitutional jurisprudence. All your design has achieved is to make your supreme court sovereign. Indeed if the court had only one justice, a proper title for that justice would be "King." Sorry, kid, you haven't violated the conservation of anything.

Indeed, as Filmer points out, the unity of chief executive, chief lawmaker, and chief justice is simple, natural and elegant:

There can be no laws without a supreme power to command or make them. In all aristocracies the nobles are above the laws, and in all democracies the people. By the like reason, in a monarchy the king must of necessity be above the laws; there can be no sovereign majesty in him that is under them; that which giveth the very being to a king is the power to give laws; without this power he is but an equivocal king. It skills not which way kings come by their power,



whether by election, donation, succession, or by any other means; for it is still the manner of the government by supreme power that makes them properly kings, and not the means of obtaining their crowns. Neither doth the diversity of laws nor contrary customs, whereby each kingdom differs from another, make the forms of commonweal different unless the power of making laws be in several subjects.

For the confirmation of this point, Aristotle saith that a perfect kingdom is that wherein the king rules all things according to his own will, for he that is called a king according to the law makes no kind of kingdom at all. This, it seems, also the Romans well understood to be most necessary in a monarchy; for though they were a people most greedy of liberty, yet the senate did free Augustus from all necessity of laws, that he might be free of his own authority and of absolute power over himself and over the laws, to do what he pleased and leave undone what he listed; and this decree was made while Augustus was yet absent. Accordingly we find that Ulpian<sup>28</sup>, the great lawyer, delivers it for a rule of the civil law: *Princeps legibus solutus est* ("The prince is not bound by the laws").

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<sup>28</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulpian>

"Ulpian (/ˈʌlpɪən/; Latin: Gnaeus Domitius Annius Ulpianus; c. 170 – 223) was a prominent Roman jurist of Tyrian ancestry. He was considered one of the great legal authorities of his time and was one of the four jurists upon whom decisions were to be based according to the Law of Citations of Valentinian III."

[...]

Besides, all laws are of themselves dumb, and some or other must be trusted with the application of them to particulars, by examining all circumstances, to pronounce when they are broken, or by whom. This work of right application of laws is not a thing easy or obvious for ordinary capacities, but requires profound abilities of nature for the beating out of the truth — witness the diversity and sometimes the contrariety of opinions of the learned judges in some difficult points. Since this is the common condition of laws, it is also most reasonable that the lawmaker should be trusted with the application or interpretation of the laws, and for this cause anciently the kings of this land have sitten personally in courts of judicature, and are still representatively present in all courts; the judges are but substituted, and called the king's justices, and their power ceaseth when the king is in place.

So much, in other words, for Montesquieu.<sup>29</sup> (And note how the democratic doctrine, now assumed by all, simply twists Ulpian's axiom into its polar opposite. Hey, hippie! Who knows more about law? You, or Ulpian? I'm reminded of Einstein's gem, found on so many a Prius: "One cannot simultaneously prevent and prepare for war." Or as the Romans put it: *sic vis pacem, para bellum*. And we wonder how the world got so screwed. Stick to physics, Al.)

A Patchwork realm, or any modern corporate sovereign, is no more bound by the laws it imposes on its residents than Linden Labs is bound by the terms-of-use policy it enforces in Second Life. (In fact, it is probably less so bound, because a terms-of-use policy creates at least the vague suggestion of liability. Whereas suing a sovereign is yet another of these political solecisms.)

This is not at all to say that a Patchwork realm does not enforce the rule of law. (Except, of course, under conditions of martial law that involve a general security threat. A state of siege is an option anywhere, any time, for any reason.) To enforce a law is not to be bound by a

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<sup>29</sup> Hyperlink to:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_de\\_Secondat,\\_Baron\\_de\\_Montesquieu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_de_Secondat,_Baron_de_Montesquieu)

"Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (/ˈmontɛskjuː/;[1] French: [mɔ̃tɛskjø]; 18 January 1689 – 10 February 1755), generally referred to as simply Montesquieu, was a French lawyer, man of letters, and political philosopher who lived during the Age of Enlightenment.

He is famous for his articulation of the theory of separation of powers, which is implemented in many constitutions throughout the world. He is also known for doing more than any other author to secure the place of the word "despotism" in the political lexicon."

law. These are two completely different things. I don't feel I can repeat this too often.

Patchwork realms can be expected to enforce a fair and consistent code of laws not for moral or theological reasons, not because they are compelled to do so by a superior sovereign or some other force real or imaginary, but for the same economic reasons that compel them to provide excellent customer service in general. Real estate on which the rule of law prevails is much, much more valuable than real estate on which it doesn't, and the value of a realm is the value of its real estate.

(I suspect that in a well-run realm this is almost literally the case, because I suspect that a well-run realm makes its take via the world's fairest, least-intrusive tax: property tax. In fact, while I don't know that this has ever been tried, it is easy to design a perfectly fair and perfectly non-intrusive property tax regime. Require real estate owners to assess their own property, offering it for sale at the assessed price, and set the tax at a percentage of that price. No muss, no fuss, no IRS. Since no one can live or work without real estate, it should be straightforward to tune this self-assessed property tax (SAPT) to extract the Laffer maximum.)

To live on a Patchwork patch, you have to sign a bilateral contract with the realm. You promise to be a good boy and behave yourself. The realm promises to treat you fairly. There is an inherent asymmetry in this agreement, because you have no enforcement mechanism against the realm (just as you have no enforcement mechanism against the United States). However, a realm's compliance with its customer-service agreements is sure to be a matter of rather intense attention among residents

and prospective residents. And thus among shareholders as well.

For example, I suspect that every customer-service agreement will include the right to remove oneself and one's assets from the realm, at any time, no questions asked, to any other realm that will accept the emigrant. Possibly with an exception for those involved in the criminal-justice process — but this may not even be needed. Who wants a criminal? Not another realm, surely.

Suppose a realm unilaterally abrogates this right of emigration? It has just converted its residents into what are, in a sense, slaves. It is no longer Disneyland. It is a plantation. If it's any good with cinderblocks, barbed-wire and minefields, there is no escape. What do you say if you're stuck on this farm? You say: "yes, Massa." A slave you are and a slave you will be forever.

This is terrible, of course. But again, the mechanism we rely on to prevent it is no implausible *deus ex machina*, no Indian rope-trick from the age of Voltaire, but the sound engineering principle of the profit motive. A realm that pulls this kind of crap cannot be trusted by anyone ever again. It is not even safe to visit. Tourism disappears. The potential real-estate bid from immigrants disappears. And, while your residents are indeed stuck, they are also remarkably sullen and display no great interest in slaving for you. Which is a more valuable patch of real estate, today: South Korea, or North Korea? Yet before the war, the North was more industrialized and the South was more rural. Such are the profits of converting an entire country into a giant Gulag.

One of the most common errors in understanding the premodern era is the confusion of monarchy with tyranny. Nothing like Stalinism, for example, is recorded in the history of the European aristocratic era. Why? Because Stalin had to murder to stay in power. Anyone, certainly any of the Old Bolsheviks, could have taken his place.<sup>30</sup> The killing machine took on a life of its own. The

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<sup>30</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old\\_Bolshevik](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Bolshevik)

"Old Bolshevik (Russian: старый большевик, stary bolshevik), also Old Bolshevik Guard or Old Party Guard, became an unofficial designation for those who were members of the Bolshevik party before the Russian Revolution of 1917. Those who joined the party after the February Revolution were considered Old Bolsheviks as their membership predated the Bolsheviks' seizure of power during the October Revolution. Many of the Old Guard were either tried and executed by the NKVD during the Great Purge of 1936–38 or died under suspicious circumstances.

"Vladimir Lenin expressed the opinion that what one could call the "old party guard", a "thinnest layer", had a "huge, unshared prestige".

"According to a 1972 Soviet book by D.A. Chygayev, in 1922 there were 44,148 Old Bolsheviks. [2] Vadim Rogovin cites the statistics published by the 13th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), that in 1924, of 600,000 Party members, 0.6% joined before 1905, 2% joined in 1906–1916 and <9% joined in 1917.

"Joseph Stalin removed many of the Old Bolsheviks from power during the Great Purge of the 1930s. (The most prominent survivors in the Communist Party were Lazar Kaganovich, Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, Anastas Mikoyan, and Stalin himself; Stalin had laid plans to remove Molotov and Mikoyan in another purge in the 1950s but died before he could do so.) Some were executed for treason; some were sent to labor camps (the Gulag); and a few, such as Alexandra Kollontai, went abroad as ambassadors, preventing them from participating in the central government. Many communist opponents of Stalin, most notably the Trotskyists, cite this fact in support of their argument that Stalin betrayed the aims of the revolution; they believed in Permanent Revolution, while Stalin and his supporters believed in Socialism in One Country.

tyrant, the mafia boss, stands at the apex of a pyramid of power, each block in which is a person who hopes to someday kill the boss and take his job. In a tyranny, murder and madness become part of the fabric of the State. In a monarchy, however, the succession is clear, and if by some accident of law and fate there are multiple candidates, they are at least each others' relatives. This rules out neither murder nor madness, but they are the exception and not the rule.

Obviously, a joint-stock realm faces completely different problems in maintaining internal security. Internal security can be defined as the protection of the shareholders' property against all internal threats — including both residents and employees, up to and certainly including the chief executive. If the shareholders cannot dismiss the CEO of the realm by voting according to proper corporate procedures, a total security failure has occurred.

The standard Patchwork remedy for this problem is the *cryptographic chain of command*. Ultimately, power over the realm truly rests with the shareholders, because they use a secret sharing<sup>31</sup> or similar cryptographic

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"Various things in the Soviet Union, such as a publishing house, several steamships, motorboats, kolkhozes and settlements, gained the name Old Bolshevik.

"The first prominent Old Bolshevik to die was Yakov Sverdlov in 1919; the last was Lazar Kaganovich in 1991 who also reached the greatest age."

<sup>31</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret\\_sharing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_sharing)

"Secret sharing (also called secret splitting) refers to methods for distributing a *secret* amongst a group of participants, each of whom is allocated a *share* of the secret. The secret can be reconstructed only when a sufficient number, of possibly different types, of shares are combined together; individual shares are of no use on their own.

algorithm to maintain control over its root keys. Authority is then delegated to the board (if any), the CEO and other officers, and thence down into the military or other security forces. At the leaves of the tree are computerized weapons, which will not fire without cryptographic authorization.

Thus, any fragment of the security force which remains loyal to the shareholders can use its operational weapons to defeat any coalition of disloyal, and hence disarmed, employees and/or residents. Ouch! Taste the pain, traitors. (Needless to say, the dependence of this design on 21st-century technology is ample explanation of why history has not bequeathed us anything like the joint-stock realm. It was simply not implementable — any more than our ancestors could build a suspension bridge out of limestone blocks.)

With this basic background in Filmerist government, and with the (as yet unjustified) assumption that a patch is safe against external aggression, let's start to look at what a 21st-century corporate sovereign might actually want to *do*.

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"In one type of secret sharing scheme there is one *dealer* and  $n$  *players*. The dealer gives a share of the secret to the players, but only when specific conditions are fulfilled will the players be able to reconstruct the secret from their shares. The dealer accomplishes this by giving each player a share in such a way that any group of  $t$  (for *threshold*) or more players can together reconstruct the secret but no group of fewer than  $t$  players can. Such a system is called a  $(t, n)$ -threshold scheme (sometimes it is written as an  $(n, t)$ -threshold scheme).

"Secret sharing was invented independently by Adi Shamir and George Blakley in 1979."



For simplicity and for my own personal amusement, let's call the realm Friscorp, and say its patch is the present city of San Francisco — pop., about 750,000.

Obviously, Friscorp would like to turn SF into the coolest, most hoppin', and definitely most expensive city on the planet. Call it a combination of Paris, Monaco, and Babylon. Destroying ugly postwar buildings, for example, and reconstructing them in appropriate historical styles, will definitely be high on Friscorp's agenda.

The first and touchiest problem, though, is just deciding who gets to live in San Francisco. Friscorp's answer is simple: anyone who isn't dangerous to others, and can afford to live in San Francisco. It is probably also nice if they speak English, but considering the exigencies of the second constraint, they almost certainly will. Friscorp may also import menial laborers, as Dubai does today, but they are not to be confused with the actual residents.

Here we face a slight predicament. There are quite a few people presently in San Francisco who do not meet the second constraint, are pretty iffy on the first as well, and have no labor skills to speak of. What do we do with them? Sell their slums out from under them, obviously; demo everything, spray for roaches, rodents and pit bulls, smooth the rubble out with a bulldozer or two, and possibly a little aerial bombing; erect new residential districts suitable for Russian oligarchs. Next question?

But where do they go? Since their customer-service contract gives them the right of exit, these people — call them bezonians<sup>32</sup> — can of course emigrate to any other

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<sup>32</sup> [Dead link]

realm in the Patchwork. This presumes, however, that said realm is willing to accept them. And why would it be? If our design does not provide for the existence of a large number of human beings whose existence anywhere is not only unprofitable, but in fact a straight-up loss, to that realm, it is simply inconsistent with reality.

The design faces an existential challenge. On next week's episode, we'll present the shocking but ineluctable solution, and figure out the second half of our security problem: the relationships between realms.

## **2: Profit Strategies for Our New Corporate Overlords**

I fear last week's essay, after promising an absence of grim, dumped a can of it down your shirt. I apologize for this, dear readers, and also for the awful, incendiary closing cliffhanger. (But fear not. We will answer the question.) UR has never been an easy ride, but I really don't mean to abuse the customer in this way. If nothing else, it repels the good and attracts the bad.

But unfortunately for those who are bored with these warm, gaseous exhalations, I've come to the conclusion that it is simply not possible to get into the meat of a UR post without a fresh introduction to the anti-democratic, and frankly authoritarian, philosophy of government for which we are so notorious. (You do know that just *reading* this blog makes you a bad person, don't you?) Unless you are a hardened longtime reader, UR is just off your political map, and anyone can click on a blog for the first time. Besides, one can never be too deprogrammed.

Most people, when they take a whack at designing a government (an engineering task at which all God's chilluns just naturally excel), tend to ask themselves: what *should* the government do? Of course this is the wrong question. The right question is: what *will* the government do?

(A great example of asking the right question, but still getting the wrong answer, is Federalist 10.<sup>33</sup> It is almost funny to read Madison's bogus remedies for the well-known ills of democracy, like national size as an

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<sup>33</sup> Hyperlink to: <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>

infallible nostrum against political parties — not unlike perusing some medieval pharmacopoeia which prescribes dried wolf dick for breast cancer.)

For example, most democratic citizens are firm believers in the concept of *limited government*. In the all-curing magic black bag of democracy, limited government is the first-line ointment. Apparently a government can prevent itself and its successors indefinite from doing bad things, just by writing a note to itself that says "don't do bad things."

Swallowing the red pill, departing the Matrix and donning our alien-detecting Ray-Bans, we realize at once that no government can limit itself. Limited government is a perpetual-motion machine: a product axiomatically fraudulent by definition. In any human organization, final authority rests with some person or persons, not with any rule, process or procedure.

This is not to say that there is no distinction between Washington and Pyongyang. What we call the "rule of law" is a good thing. But if you have an efficient engine, there is no point in marketing it as an infinitely efficient engine. The noble ideal of "limited government" or "rule of law" is a piece of political camouflage, behind which lurks a useful and effective, but certainly imperfect and not even slightly divine, corporate design: that of *judicial supremacy*. In a sentence: juridical supremacy is judicial supremacy.

Judicial supremacy is a management design in which ultimate sovereign authority rests with committees of arbitrators who are experts in proper government procedure. The design certainly has its merits. If

implemented well, for example, it can reduce personal graft among employees to negligible levels. Hardly a high standard, but I am happy to be governed by a regime which has achieved it. But ultimately, judicial supremacy can become arbitrarily evil — all it takes is arbitrarily evil judges.

Is judicial supremacy, for example, superior to military supremacy? This is like asking if a rowboat is better than a sailboat. For some purposes it is, for some it isn't. In peacetime you would probably rather have the former. If you want to win a war you probably want the latter.

Neither, however, can be said to be in any sense predictable by design. A judicial kritocracy<sup>34</sup> or a military dictatorship may deliver good government, or bad government. Either can be nice or nasty. In the end, the words "judge" and "general" are just words. It is not at all difficult to imagine a process of political evolution by which they swap meanings.

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<sup>34</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kritarchy>

"Kritarchy, also called kritocracy, is a system of rule by judges (Hebrew: שופטים, *shoftim*) in the tribal confederacy of ancient Israel during the period of time described in the Book of Judges, following Joshua's conquest of Canaan and prior to the united monarchy under Saul.

"Because it is a compound of the Greek words κριτής, *krites* ("judge") and ἄρχω, *árkhō* ("to rule"), its use has expanded to cover rule by judges in the modern sense as well, as in the case of Somalia, ruled by judges with the polycentric legal tradition of xeer, and arguably the Islamic Courts Union[citation needed] and in the fictional regime of Mega-city One, the focus of setting for the Judge Dredd franchise."

(Herr Teufelsdröckh's philosophy of Clothes<sup>35</sup> has never said more. Can a General command, in a Black Robe? or Justice be laid down, in Camo? — most assuredly; and the Devil too, in either! But more of *him* in short. Under the Clothes is a *Man* — who is he? How got he here? What does he at his Desk? None of these having much to do with your Design.)

Is it possible to design a structure of government which will be stable and predictable? Hopefully, of course, stably and predictably benign? History affords no evidence of it. But history affords no evidence of semiconductors, either. There is always room for something new.

The key is that word *should*. When you say your government "*should* do X," or "*should not* do Y," you are speaking in the hieratic language of democracy. You are postulating some ethereal and benign higher sovereign, which can enforce promises made by the mere government to whose whims you would otherwise be subject. In reality, while your government can certainly *promise* to do X or not to do Y, there is no power that can hold it to this promise. Or if there is, it is that power

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<sup>35</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sartor\\_Resartus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sartor_Resartus)  
"Sartor Resartus (meaning 'The tailor re-tailored') is an 1836 novel by Thomas Carlyle, first published as a serial in 1833–34 in *Fraser's Magazine*. The novel purports to be a commentary on the thought and early life of a German philosopher called Diogenes Teufelsdröckh (which translates as 'god-born devil-dung'), author of a tome entitled "Clothes: Their Origin and Influence", but was actually a *poïoumenon* ("product"). Teufelsdröckh's Transcendentalist musings are mullied over by a sceptical English Reviewer (referred to as Editor) who also provides fragmentary biographical material on the philosopher. The work is, in part, a parody of Hegel, and of German Idealism more generally. However, Teufelsdröckh is also a literary device with which Carlyle can express difficult truths."

which is your real government. Your whining should be addressed to it.

The neocameralist structure of Patchwork realms, which are sovereign joint-stock companies, creates a different kind of *should*. This is the profitable *should*. We can say that a realm *should* do X rather than Y, because X is more profitable than Y. Since sovereign means sovereign, nothing can *compel* the realm to do X and not Y. But, with an anonymous capital structure, we can expect administrators to be generally responsible and not make obvious stupid mistakes.

Another way to say this is that a realm is *financially responsible*. The general observation here is that, to paraphrase Tolstoy, financially responsible organizations are all alike. By definition, they do not waste money. By definition, their irresponsible counterparts do, and by definition there are an infinite number of ways to waste money. Think of a rope: a financially responsible organization is a tight rope. It only has one shape. But if there is slack in the rope, it can flap around in all kinds of crazy ways.

It is immediately clear that the neocameralist *should*, the tight rope, is far inferior to the ethereal *should*, the magic leash of God. (Typically these days arriving in the form of *vox populi*, *vox Dei*. Or, as a cynic might put it: *vox populi*, *vox praeceptori*.)

Given the choice between financial responsibility and moral responsibility, I will take the latter every time. If it was possible to write a set of rules on paper and require one's children and one's children's children to comply

with this bible, all sorts of eternal principles for good government and healthy living could be set out.

But we cannot construct a political structure that will enforce moral responsibility. We can construct a political structure that will enforce financial responsibility. Thus neocameralism. We might say that financial responsibility is the raw material of moral responsibility. The two are not by any means identical, but they are surprisingly similar, and the gap seems bridgeable.

When we use the profitable *should*, therefore, we are in the corporate strategy department. We ask: how should a Patchwork realm, or any financially responsible government, be designed to maximize the return on its capital?

For our overall realm design, let's simplify the Anglo-American corporate model slightly. We'll have direct shareholder sovereignty, with no board of directors. The board layer strikes me as a bit of an anachronism, and it is certainly one place stuff can go wrong. Deleted. And I also dislike the term 'CEO,' which seems a bit vainglorious for a sovereign organization. A softer word with a pleasant Quaker feel is *delegate*, although we will compromise on a capital. And we can call the logical holder of each share its *proprietor*.

Therefore: a Patchwork realm is governed by a Delegate, who is the proxy of the proprietors, and can be replaced by a majority of them at any time and for any reason. The Delegate exercises undivided sovereign authority, as in divine-right monarchy. i.e., in English: total power. (The Delegate is always Jewish.)



This fragile-looking design can succeed at the sovereign layer because, and only because, modern encryption technology makes it feasible. The proprietors use a secret-sharing scheme to control a root key that must regularly reauthorize the Delegate, and thus in turn the command hierarchy of the security forces, in a pyramid leading down to cryptographic locks on individual weapons. If the Delegate turns on the proprietors, they may have to wait a day to authorize the replacement, and another day or two before the new Delegate can organize the forces needed to have her predecessor captured and shot. Fiduciary responsibility has its price.

That modern cryptography was not available to the Most Serene Republic of Venice<sup>36</sup> does not mean they wouldn't

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<sup>36</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic\\_of\\_Venice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Venice)  
"The Republic of Venice (Italian: *Repubblica di Venezia* or *Repubblica Veneta*), traditionally known as the Most Serene Republic of Venice (Venetian: *Serenissima Repubblica Vèneta*; Italian: *Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia*), was a sovereign state and maritime republic in northeastern Italy, which existed for a millennium between the 8th century and the 18th century. It was based in the lagoon communities of the historically prosperous city of Venice, and was a leading European economic and trading power during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

"The Venetian city state was founded as a safe haven for the people escaping persecution in mainland Europe after the decline of the Roman Empire. In its early years, it prospered on the salt trade. In subsequent centuries, the city state established a thalassocracy. It dominated trade on the Mediterranean Sea, including commerce between Europe and North Africa, as well as Asia. The Venetian navy was used in the Crusades, most notably in the Fourth Crusade. Venice achieved territorial conquests along the Adriatic Sea. The city became home to an extremely wealthy merchant class, who patronized renowned art and architecture along the city's lagoons. Venetian merchants were influential financiers in Europe. The city was also the birthplace of great European explorers, especially Marco Polo,

have used it if they'd had it. Since we have it, we can use it. Since the algorithms date to the 1970s, it's not surprising that history has no record of cryptographic organizational structures at the sovereign level. Since the neocameralist design for a sovereign corporation depends on them, it's not surprising that history shows us nothing of the kind. While as a reactionary I believe that the legal and political structures of old Europe, so often defamed as "feudal," are a treasure trove of sovereign organization and if restored *in toto* tomorrow would prove on balance a vast human boon, it is a slight overstatement to assume that everything old is beautiful and sweet, and anything new must suck.

For simplicity, our realm will do its books in gold. The spectacle of a sovereign corporation that maintains accounts in its own scrip is a fascinating one, at least from a financial perspective, and we cannot write it off quite so casually as yet another 20th-century monstrosity. It is not

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as well as Baroque composers such as Vivaldi and Benedetto Marcello.

"The republic was ruled by the Doge, who was elected by members of the Great Council of Venice, the city-state's parliament. The ruling class was an oligarchy of merchants and aristocrats. Venice and other Italian maritime republics played a key role in fostering capitalism. Venetian citizens generally supported the system of governance. The city-state enforced strict laws and employed ruthless tactics in its prisons.

"The opening of new trade routes to the Americas and the East Indies via the Atlantic Ocean marked the beginning of Venice's decline as a powerful maritime republic. The city state suffered defeats from the navy of the Ottoman Empire. In 1797, the republic was plundered by retreating Austrian and then French forces, following an invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Republic of Venice was split into the Austrian Venetian Province, the Cisalpine Republic, a French client state, and the Ionian French departments of Greece. Venice then became a part of a unified Italy in the 19th century."

impossible that fiat currency can be made to turn a buck. It is unlikely that the proprietors will want their dividends in it, however.

And who are the proprietors? Anyone. They are anonymous shareholders. It may be desirable, though, for a realm to enjoin its residents from holding its shares. It is not normally necessary for a company to refrain from serving its shareholders as customers, but a sovereign realm is not a normal company. A resident shareholder has a conflict of interest, because he may have an opportunity to use the power of his share to promote policies that reward him directly but are not in the interests of his non-resident fellows. The effect is small, but better to rule it out.

We'll also assume — assumption to be justified below — that realms exist in a competitive market in which residents can easily take their business elsewhere if they don't like the service.

Given this setup, let's say you're the Delegate. Your patch is the city of San Francisco, and your realm is its new corporate overlord — Friscorp. Friscorp is yours. Not that you own it, of course, just that the owners have hired you to run it.

First, let's enumerate the basic principles of sovereign corporate management.

Principle one: the proprietors' sovereignty is absolute. Securing it against all enemies, foreign and domestic, is the primary fiduciary responsibility of the Delegate. Lose the patch and the realm is worthless, and so are the shares. Everything else, even profit, comes after security.

Principle two: a realm is a business, not a charity. Its goal is to maximize its discounted return on investment. If Delegate and proprietors alike somehow manage to forget this, in the long run their realm will deteriorate, develop red-giant syndrome, and become gigantic, corrupt and foul. It may even turn into a democracy.

Principle three: except in cases where it conflicts with the first or second principles, "do no evil" is always good business. Think of your realm as a hotel. As Mark Twain once put it: "all saints can do miracles, but few of them can keep hotel." And while many hotelkeepers can do miracles, few indeed are saints. But all are nice to the customers — at least, the 99.999% of customers who feel no need to start torching the drapery.

While our test case, San Francisco, is hardly representative of the average stitch of Earth's skin, it will probably be harder to manage than most — being both urban, and urbane. So how, as Delegate of Friscorp, would you run your town? Let's start by assuming a steady-state system, ducking as usual the problem of getting from *here* to *there*.

There are two basic tasks of a realm: managing the residents, and surviving in the big bad world. Let's take these one at a time.

Any hominid, hominoid, or other bipedal ape present on Friscorp's patch is a *resident*. The basic idea of a realm is that the proprietors profit by providing the residents with a pleasant place to live, be happy, and of course be productive. Basically, if you're not nice to the hominids,

they'll leave, the proprietors won't have a business, and you won't have a job.

It is difficult for those of us who grew up under democracy to juxtapose this fact, which is an incentive rather than a constraint, with the fact that as Delegate of Friscorp, you exercise undivided sovereignty over San Francisco. You have no constraint. Your residents are as ants in your kitchen. No combination of them can possibly oppose you. Not even if they all come together in one big angry mob, screaming, jumping up and down, waving their little signs and throwing rocks and gravel. All will be massacred by your invincible robot armies. *Pour la canaille, la mitraille!*

And even without any such cause for complaint, if it would be profitable to just spray the whole city down, exterminating the current crop of worthless bipeds and replacing them with a more upscale crowd, you will. And if you don't, your proprietors will fire you and hire a new Delegate with a clue. Terrifying! At least from the San Franciscans' perspective.

But we can nip this grimness right here: it won't be profitable. Why exterminate, when you can enslave? (It won't be profitable to enslave, either. But see further.) Once again, Patchwork residents do not rely on imaginary constraints to feel secure in the icy, lethal jaws of a sovereign state which could slaughter them all. They rely on real incentives. While the incentives may not be 100% reliable, they at least exist.

A realm signs a formal contract, or *covenant*, with all responsible residents. The deal is this: the resident agrees not to misbehave, the realm agrees not to mistreat him.

Definitions of each are set down in great detail. In case of conflict, the realm appoints an arbitrator to hear the case. All cases can be appealed up to the Delegate, who has the power not only to interpret the covenant but also — being sovereign — to suspend it.

This process is called "law." It is not a novelty. A realm may adopt and/or modify any of the old Continental, British or American systems of law. If a common-law system is adopted, precedent should be rolled back to 1900 at the latest, and probably more like 1800. The democratic era has corrupted everything, law being no exception.

The covenant has two sides, but the sides are not equal. The realm, having sovereign power, can compel the resident to comply with all promises. Since San Francisco is not an Islamic state, it does not ask its residents to agree that their hand will be cut off if they steal. But it could. And San Francisco, likewise, can promise not to cut off its residents' hands until it is blue in the face — but, since it is a sovereign state, no one can enforce this promise against it.

For exactly this reason, however, San Francisco must guard its reputation. It does this by living up to its promises, as much as possible. If it is forced by unexpected, understandable circumstances to invoke *force majeure*, people will probably understand. If it breaks its own promises all the time and for no good reason, amputating hands willy-nilly after swearing up and down that life and limb are sacred, it will not be viewed as a safe place to live, and no one will want to live

there. Congratulations on your new burned-out ruin.<sup>37</sup> The views, at least, remain spectacular. Your replacement can probably find a way to salvage some tiny fraction of his employers' capital by turning the place into some kind of eco-park.

To live in or even just visit San Francisco, a hominid must either sign the covenant, or be a dependent of some guardian who has signed the covenant. Ie, your hominid must either be responsible, or have someone who is responsible for it. San Francisco is a city, not a zoo. The signer of the covenant, the responsible party, is the *subject*.

In the covenant, the realm promises to protect the subject's person, property and dependents. It indemnifies the subject against crime, and pays unrecoverable tort claims. There is no such thing as perfect security, and bad things can happen to anyone anywhere, but Friscorp considers all disturbances of the peace to be its problem and its fault.

And most important, Friscorp guarantees your right to depart from the city with person, property and dependents, unless of course you are fleeing legal proceedings. (And maybe even if you are — of course, you would have to find another patch willing to take you.)

In return, the subject promises not to disturb the peace of San Francisco, or permit his or her dependents to do so. (I favor the ancient Roman design, in which the guardian is responsible for the actions of his dependents, and holds

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<sup>37</sup> [Dead link]

the authority of *patria potestas*<sup>38</sup> over them. Authority and responsibility, as usual, being unified. Not quite a fractal or hierarchical sovereignty, but close. Friscorp has no business case for interfering in its subjects' family lives.)

Residents of a Patchwork realm have no security or privacy against the realm. There is no possible conflict in the matter: not being malignant, the government is not a threat to its residents, and since it is sovereign they are not a threat to it. This absence of conflict allows the government to enforce a much higher level of peaceful interaction between residents.

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<sup>38</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pater\\_familias](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pater_familias)

"The *pater familias*, also written as *paterfamilias* (plural *patres familias*), was the head of a Roman family. The *pater familias* was the oldest living male in a household, and exercised autocratic authority over his extended family. The term is Latin for "father of the family" or the "owner of the family estate". The form is archaic in Latin, preserving the old genitive ending in *-ās* (see Latin declension), whereas in classical Latin the normal genitive ending was *-ae*. The *pater familias* always had to be a Roman citizen.

Roman law and tradition (*mos maiorum*) established the power of the *pater familias* within the community of his own extended *familia*. He held legal privilege over the property of the *familia*, and varying levels of authority over his dependents: these included his wife and children, certain other relatives through blood or adoption, clients, freedmen and slaves. The same *mos maiorum* moderated his authority and determined his responsibilities to his own *familia* and to the broader community. He had a duty to father and raise healthy children as future citizens of Rome, to maintain the moral propriety and well-being of his household, to honour his clan and ancestral gods and to dutifully participate — and if possible, serve — in Rome's political, religious and social life. In effect, the *pater familias* was expected to be a good citizen. In theory at least, he held powers of life and death over every member of his extended *familia* through ancient right. In practice, the extreme form of this right was seldom exercised. It was eventually limited by law.



All residents, even temporary visitors, carry an ID card with RFID response. All are genotyped and iris-scanned. Public places and transportation systems track everyone. Security cameras are ubiquitous. Every car knows where it is and who is sitting in it, and tells the authorities both. Residents cannot use this data to snoop into each others' lives, but Friscorp can use it to monitor society at an almost arbitrarily detailed level.

In return, residents experience a complete absence of crime — at least at the level of present-day Japan<sup>39</sup>, and ideally much lower. (San Francisco has no need of Yakuza.) Residents also experience a complete lack of security theater<sup>40</sup> — to board a plane, they walk right on. Friscorp has no reason to tolerate the presence of dangerous or unidentified hominids at large in its city, any more than it would tolerate leopards on the loose.

Strong identification and tracking of residents also mitigates one of the most obvious problems with the Patchwork approach, the inconvenience of constantly crossing borders in a world of small sovereignties. What does a resident do if she lives in San Francisco and wants to drive to Berkeley, which is a different country? Is there a checkpoint on the Bay Bridge?

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<sup>39</sup> Takuan Seiyo, *More Lessons from the East*.  
<https://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/3338/print>

<sup>40</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Security\\_theater](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Security_theater)  
“Security theater is the practice of investing in countermeasures intended to provide the feeling of improved security while doing little or nothing to achieve it. Researchers such as Edward Felten have described the airport security repercussions due to the September 11, 2001 attacks as security theater.”

Not at all. She just drives to Berkeley. Her car knows who is in it, and the authorities of both SF and Berkeley know where it is. If she is for some reason not authorized to enter Berkeley, all sorts of alarms will flash. If she persists, she will be of course detained. Having a scalpel, Patchwork feels no need to whack anyone with a club.

One way to see internal security in a Patchwork realm is as a compromise between two sorts of Orwellianism. In the sense that the realm is (effectively) omniscient and omnipotent, it would fit most people's' definition of "Orwellian."

In return for its Orwellian powers of observation and action, however, Friscorp has no interest at all in the other half of Orwellianism: the psychological manipulation of public opinion as a device for regime stabilization. The realm cares what its residents do. It does not care what they think. It is difficult to express the importance of this freedom to those who have found a way to live without it.

There is one problem, though, which is the problem I mentioned last week: the problem of adults who are not productive members of society. In our little Newspeak we call them *wards of the realm*. A ward is any resident who is not capable of earning a living, is not accepted as a dependent by any guardian, and is not wanted by any other patch.

The initial conversion of our present, democratic, and of course completely dysfunctional San Francisco into the realm of Friscorp will produce quite a few wards. At least relative to the number we would expect to emerge in a

healthy society. But there will always be black sheep, and there will always be wards.

As Delegate of San Francisco, what should you do with these people? I think the answer is clear: alternative energy. Since wards are liabilities, there is no business case for retaining them in their present, ambulatory form. Therefore, the most profitable disposition for this dubious form of capital is to convert them into biodiesel, which can help power the Muni buses.

Okay, just kidding. This is the sort of naive Randian thinking which appeals instantly to a geek like me, but of course has nothing to do with real life. The trouble with the biodiesel solution is that no one would want to live in a city whose public transportation was fueled, even just partly, by the distilled remains of its late underclass.

However, it helps us describe the problem we are trying to solve. Our goal, in short, is a *humane alternative to genocide*. That is: the ideal solution achieves the same result as mass murder (the removal of undesirable elements from society), but without any of the moral stigma. Perfection cannot be achieved on both these counts, but we can get closer than most might think.

The best humane alternative to genocide I can think of is not to liquidate the wards — either metaphorically or literally — but to *virtualize* them. A virtualized human is in permanent solitary confinement, waxed like a bee larva into a cell which is sealed except for emergencies. This would drive him insane, except that the cell contains an immersive virtual-reality interface which allows him to experience a rich, fulfilling life in a completely imaginary world.

The virtual worlds of today are already exciting enough to distract many away from their real lives. They will only get better. Nor is productive employment precluded in this scenario — for example, wards can perform manual labor through telepresence. As members of society, however, they might as well not exist. And because cells are sealed and need no guards, virtualization should be much cheaper than present-day imprisonment.

I like virtualization because it can be made to scale. I don't think there is any scenario under which San Francisco is burdened with more than a few thousand wards. Many other regions of the earth, however, contain large numbers of human beings whose existence may well prove an unequivocal liability to the owners of any ground on which they would reside. If so, they can be virtualized, creating giant human Wachowski honeycombs of former bezonians, whose shantytowns can be cleared and redeveloped as villas for retired oil-company executives.

Of course, virtualization is a drastic alternative and itself unlikely to happen. Charity is just too popular these days. Before anyone becomes a ward of the realm, any person or organization is free to adopt him as a dependent as a matter of mutual agreement. His new guardian is (a) responsible for his actions, and (b) free to tell him what to do: the ideal relationship for any attempt at rehabilitation. (It's basically what the Salvation Army does now, I believe.) If all else fails, there's always the honeycomb.

I think this problem gives a flavor of the kind of thinking we would expect in an entrepreneurial sovereign. The

result is quite foreign to the democratic philosophy of government, obviously, and it takes some imagination to picture. But I seriously doubt that many who had a chance to live in this future would have much interest in restoring the past.

Libertarians in particular may have a great deal of trouble understanding how an authoritarian, omnipotent and omniscient sovereign can be expected to create a free society. The fundamental diagnosis of libertarianism — that today's democratic governments are much larger and much more intrusive than they should be — is obviously correct. The remedy proposed, however, does not have anything like a track record of success.

In fact, I believe the libertarian opposition to sovereignty, dating back to Locke, is a major cause of modern big government. Our present establishments, not to mention our tax rates, dwarf any divine-right monarchy in history. The attempt to limit the state, if it has any result, tends to result in an additional layer of complexity which weakens it and makes it more inefficient. This inefficiency gives it both the need and the excuse to expand.

So we may ask: why does the post office suck? Not because it is sovereign, but because it is not financially responsible. Its freedom to be wasteful and inefficient is what gives it that familiar Aeroflot feel. (The bankrupt airlines, such as United, feel more like Aeroflot every year.) When we postulate a sovereign authority which is financially responsible, like a Patchwork realm, we have no reason to expect it to display these pathologies of government. In particular, we cannot expect it to waste resources in order to pointlessly annoy its residents, a

form of inefficiency in which democratic regimes seem to positively revel.

The sight of a financially responsible sovereign, even the thought-experiment of one, is a good lesson for libertarians, because it reminds us what a healthy government actually is. Today's democratic megastates are to healthy sovereigns as liver cancer is to liver. If you find liver cells invading every other organ and crushing them all into goo, it is only natural to think that the cure might be a drug that was lethal to liver cells. But you actually need a liver. You need to kill the cancer, not the liver.

Next week, we'll finish off the design with a look at external security: Patchwork as a whole. How does this glorious tapestry stay afloat? Why doesn't it just collapse into a single patch? And how can it defend itself from its unreconstructed, 20th-century-style neighbors?

### 3: What We Have & What's So Bad About It

I started this series with the assumption that everyone reading it would already be a hardened veteran of UR's brutal, disorienting assaults on everything that is good and decent and true. This is obviously a counterfactual. And even for many hardened veterans, I fear, the Patchwork series has proved a rough ride.

Here at UR we have a very different approach from most who would like to "change the world." Rather than actually trying to market our designs, presumably by making them sound familiar, appealing and benevolent, we apply anti-spin. We strip off the fairing and present the cold, gritty gears of the naked machine. Our tone is at best neutral, at worst acid and nihilistic.

Why? Well, for one, it's just more fun. Let's be clear about this: UR is a blog. UR is not a cult, it is not a subversive underground organization, it is *certainly* not a political party. It is something I write for fun, and you read for fun. UR is part of the entertainment industry. If you find it offensive, Lord only knows what you'll make of Nigga Know.<sup>41</sup> (I don't even know what to make of Nigga Know. I may just be too old for it.)

But if there is a strategy behind the anti-spin, it is to maximize the quality of UR's audience, by minimizing the quantity. (Long posts help with this, too.) UR will not appeal to your heart. It will only appeal to your head. Which must then often overcome the stomach. To put it simply: if you don't understand UR, you are very unlikely to believe it. And this is better for both of us.

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<sup>41</sup> [Dead link]

On the other hand, there is no need to be mysterious. So, now that I've started to introduce this terrifying alternative, let me go back and explain why it's needed. Call it a prequel.

Let's start with a point of agreement: our goal, as people who live in a civilized modern society, is a system of government which is *responsible*. Good government is responsible government. The equivalence is a tautology. The question is: how shall we secure for ourselves the blessings of responsible government? Or as Pope put it:<sup>42</sup>

For forms of government let fools contest;  
Whate'er is best administer'd is best:

Unless you had quite an unusual education, you grew up believing that the problem is solved: constitutional democracy is the best mechanism for producing responsible government. It certainly produces something. Let's call this something, whatever it is, *moral responsibility*.

Here at UR, we see constitutional democracy as a sort of large hydatid cyst<sup>43</sup>, cuddled gently in the skull alongside one's actual neural tissue. The intrepid reader, with the instruments this blog provides, can extract the creature in the comfort and privacy of her own shower stall. As the neurosurgeon, Dr. Ahmad, notes: "The space was filled with saline at the end of operation."

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<sup>42</sup> Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man* (1733-1734)

<sup>43</sup> Hyperlink to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5uOaJFtmt8>



Which is certainly one option. But it leaves the patient a bit of a nihilist. The obvious drop-in replacement is royalism, of course — royalism is really just reverting the changes, as we say in my line of work. So here at UR we give it up for all royalists. (Fill the cavity with gold. This will be young Jasmeen's college fund, as well as her skull ballast.)

For example, I have no hesitation in calling for the King of Thailand to throw off the reins of the transnationalists, obey the wishes of the people, and return the country to full independence and royal government. I have also previously noted that any corporate descendant of the old Union of England, Scotland and Ireland, including but not limited to West Virginia, is entitled to restore the Stuarts through the Princes of Liechtenstein. If you wonder what this would mean for you, personally, try the simple exercise of reading your quality local fishrag for a month, noting the top headline, and asking: "How would Hereditary Prince Alois handle this?"<sup>44</sup>

But royalism, even if you stick a "neo-" on the front, is just too old-fashioned to appeal to some. So we also offer an extra decorative touch, available for a mere \$19.95, in which the customer can fill her cyst's void with our own synthetic organ of government. We call it *neocameralism*, and it is very fresh.

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<sup>44</sup> Hyperlink to:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alois,\\_Hereditary\\_Prince\\_of\\_Liechtenstein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alois,_Hereditary_Prince_of_Liechtenstein)

"Alois, Hereditary Prince of Liechtenstein, Count Rietberg (born 11 June 1968, full name: Alois Philipp Maria), is the eldest son of Hans Adam II, Prince of Liechtenstein, and Countess Marie Aglaë Kinsky of Wchinitz and Tettau. Alois has been regent of Liechtenstein (*Stellvertreter des Fürsten*) since 15 August 2004. He is married to Duchess Sophie of Bavaria."

Neocameralism informs the surrounding neural tissue that the best mechanism for producing responsibility in government is for governments to be administered as sovereign joint-stock corporations, controlled absolutely by their shareholders, who hold the master encryption keys for the government's invincible robot armies. At some risk of oxymoronism, this could be even be described as *private government*. It creates quite a different form of responsibility — *financial responsibility*.

Of course, it's entirely possible that our so-called "cyst" could be a *healthy, normal lobe of your brain*. That our sinister, unapproved product could in fact *insert* a strange translucent, globelike parasite, which will control your destiny and lead you to an awful end. Ha ha! Yes, young Jedi, we are asking you to choose. Wield the red saber for the first time! Then visit our Sith Library, and learn the truth about this so-called "Council." You already know what they say about us.

In other words, the *financial responsibility* created by joint-stock sovereignty would be much more desirable, in terms of quality of life for most residents, than the *moral responsibility* which we presently enjoy thanks to constitutional democracy. Or so I assert.

But this is a dangerous assertion, because history teaches us very quickly that there are many worse things than constitutional democracy. I claim to be encouraging you to exchange the path of evil for the road of enlightenment, but I could be doing just the opposite. And even if I'm not, the surgery I recommend is traumatic by definition. The procedure has never been attempted, let alone tested, and the implant is something I whipped up in my garage out

of spare helicopter parts. On the other hand, do you really want to go through life with a worm in your head?

So let's get down to details, and compare the *moral responsibility* of constitutional democracy with the *financial responsibility* of the sovereign joint-stock company. I think we can all agree that these are both legitimate forms of responsibility, and that they are very different. After 2008, no one can possibly accuse constitutional democracy of being a financially responsible form of government. Likewise, the neocameralist state is amoral by definition.

I don't think there is much contest on the financial side of the ledger. Let's consider morality.

The constitutional democratic state is an apparently immortal, monotonically expanding, and nontrivially morbid mass of personnel which proclaims itself the instrument of a single purpose: to inflict good upon the world. For traditional countries this affliction was at least limited to specified borders, but in the case of USG since 1945 it knows no bound. Washington operates on the principle of universal benevolence. Its ultimate aim is to benefit all people, anywhere and for all time. Doubtless if aliens were found on Jupiter, concern for their welfare would soon be felt on the Potomac.

A joint-stock sovereign is a clean, lean and mean revenue-extracting machine. Its goal: loot. Any well-run Patchwork realm is congenitally dedicated to the good old Marxist ideal of *exploitation*. It has no intrinsic sympathy for the aged, the crippled, the deformed, the useless. Into the biodiesel vats with them! Gold coins literally wrung

from the hides of the unfortunate will cascade into the piggybanks of our obese, cigar-chomping shareholders.

Obviously, whatever you think of democracy, this is unacceptable. To mollify the conscience of the increasingly appalled reader, let me explain the logic of philanthropy in the financially responsible city-state. We will return to the broader contest of morals in a moment.

Government is like a nuclear reactor or a stem cell: perfect when it works properly, and lethal when it doesn't. Like both, any design for a sovereign institution must depend on multiple independent safety mechanisms. If all safeguards fail, something unacceptable will happen — by definition. If all but one fail, the result may not be desirable, but it will not be unacceptable.

So let's look at the safety mechanisms that prevent the healthy Patchwork city-state from turning into its evil twin, with the biodiesel vats. By my count, there are three.

The outermost mechanism is mere PR. "Do no evil" is the automatic slogan of every private government. At the sovereign level, Google's motto would not even be a winner, because to even mention evil is suspicious — like a sign outside a restaurant, promising an absence of rats.

At least in normal conditions of inter-patch peace and harmony, every Patchwork realm should positively exude rectitude and benevolence. This will of course infect its corporate culture. Perhaps it is possible to imagine Disneyland committing genocide. But it would have to be a very different Disneyland than the one we have right

now. They would certainly have to replace at least half the employees.

At the financial level the realm must remember, however, that its concern is not with actual benevolence, but simply with the *appearance* of benevolence. Fortunately, image is cheap. Not screwing up image is cheaper — it costs you nothing, as long you don't screw up. And, best of all, evil, while it really screws up image, just isn't that profitable.

Once you factor in even a tiny image effect, it is surprisingly difficult to devise any scenario that generates ROI out of pure, balls-to-the-wall, straight-out evil. For example, we'll be lucky if we can squeeze \$25 worth of industrial fats out of Granny's cadaver. They say no publicity is bad publicity — but they lie. So why not just run our buses on dinosaurs, the old-fashioned way, and keep Granny in her pen with the automatic monkey-chow dispenser?

Perhaps you see mere PR as a weak line of defense, and it would be hard to disagree. Fortunately, it is only one of three. But the factor is real: a sovereign is a sovereign, and no government can be entirely without paternal graces. No one in a sane society will be rendered into diesel, or even be allowed to starve to death for lack of productive earning power. Perhaps there are enough Randians on the planet for one city-state, but probably not two. Otherwise, it just won't happen, and keeping it from happening is just one of the realm's many business expenses. Granny's monkey-chow skims off the merest tablespoon of the rich butter which the realm churns metaphorically, rather than literally, from its residents' hard-working flesh.

We arrive at the next safety barrier: mere private philanthropy.

It is interesting to note the way in which one sniffs at mere private philanthropy. This is the thinking of the twentieth century, the century of welfare. This was a word with only positive connotations — until the twentieth century got its hands on it.

Another word for private philanthropy, with different negative connotations, is *charity*. Charity was of course one of the principal obligations of the medieval ecclesiastical establishment, the other two being education and adult instruction. In consonance with the general 20th-century pattern in which State has captured the role of Church, thus effecting the merger of the two by different means, most of us today perceive charity as a sovereign function.

And thus we trivialize any charitable establishment which is fully outside the State, as only the most hard-line of unreconstructed ecclesiasts are today. (Nonprofits in the US today tend to fund themselves via a mix of donations with government grants, contracts, etc.)

However, we can measure the demand for charity (meaning, of course, the demand for the production of philanthropy, not for its services) by the benchmark of government itself. Americans today by and large consider their taxes neither too high nor too low, and certainly the left half of the electorate is inclined to feel that Washington should raise even more revenue to do even more. Since Americans also see their government as a general-purpose agency for the doing of good — a sovereign charity — we can measure their demand for

philanthropy by noting the absence of significant political resistance to their present tax rate. (Moreover, if you are critical of this methodology, note that any assertion that present tax rates are obtained by chicanery, rather than genuine consent, hardly constitutes a defense of modern democracy.)

The traditional contribution for charity was of course the tithe, or ten percent of income.<sup>45</sup> It was over a century into Washington's existence before it figured out how to exact anything like a tithe, but eventually as it morphed into the Church of Everything it mitigated this deficiency. Unfortunately, there is no word which is as cool as "tithe," but means "40%." In any case, even in the brutal, inefficient, and decidedly untechnological Middle Ages, 10% has been considered an ample level of productivity for a civilized society to donate to the needs of the unfortunate.

Furthermore, private charity has enormous advantages over welfare. The voluntary nature of the contact between provider and recipient frees the former to assume authority, informal or formal, over the latter. If you don't want to be ordered around, you are free to starve, or at least go to prison. In prison you will certainly be ordered around. If you are not competent to provide for your own existence, you become by definition a dependent of whomever is willing to provide for you.

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<sup>45</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tithing>

A tithing or tything was a historic English legal, administrative or territorial unit, originally ten hides (and hence, one tenth of a hundred). Tithings later came to be seen as subdivisions of a manor or civil parish. The tithing's leader or spokesman was known as a *tithingman*."

And with dependency comes authority, the *patria potestas*. Since you are not responsible for yourself, whatever charitable agency or other party has taken charge of you is now your legal guardian, putting you essentially in the position of a child. Moreover, your guardian is also responsible for any offenses you may commit. There are no irresponsible or feral humans in a Patchwork realm, unless this is some perverse lifestyle feature it sees fit to provide.

As we can see, the second safety barrier is considerably stronger than the third. Moreover, we are about to arrive at the first safety barrier, which cements the second and can be regarded as a complete refutation of social democracy.

Consider the thinking of the social democrat. To him, as previously mentioned, government is a sovereign and universal charity. Its purpose is to use its resources to do good works. These resources are derived, obviously, from the same source as with all governments — taxation. The wisdom of the people, through the magic of democracy, guides said sovereign and universal charity to use its resources efficiently for good works, not inefficiently for evil works. (Or, worst, efficiently for evil works.) This is our vaunted *moral responsibility*.

Any neocameralist who wanders by can observe that this system is easy to improve, in two ways.

One, the people are not wise and the magic of democracy does not exist. Therefore, we should not rely on the wisdom of the people for anything, and we should eliminate the superfluous electoral component of the design.



Specifically, we should *definitely* not rely on the wisdom of the people to either (a) formulate public policy, or (b) allocate budgets. Fortunately, this point is hardly debatable. If you listen to NPR you already believe that that budget and policy should be held virginal from the awful contamination of politics, and if you don't listen to NPR your opinion is of negligible importance in the budget and policy process.

Once this change is applied, allocations for good works as a percentage of disposable spending are constant. So, for example, the environment gets 10% of USG's disposable spending (ie, spending which is not essential to the production of future revenue), AIDS gets 5%, education of children with Down's syndrome gets 3%, the spiny echidna gets 1%, or whatever.

Note that (a) these figures are relatively constant anyway, due to the natural push and pull of the budgeting process (my mother did budget and policy at DoE, so I do know a thing or two about "zero-based budgeting," that unicorn of the Potomac); and (b) keeping them actually constant eliminates a very, very large number of meetings. If "change" must be provided for, a leftover slice of the budget can be allocated to a miscellaneous fund.

But wait! There is another name for "disposable spending." The name is *profit*. And these "shares" of the budget also seem... familiar.

In fact, we have improved our constitutional democracy so completely that we have turned it into a neocameralist joint-stock company. And we have not harmed the

funding or organization of charity even slightly. To the contrary — we have freed it from bushels of red tape.

The trick is that we've converted an argument about what the government should do, into an argument about who should hold the government's shares. But this decision is way outside my pay grade, because the initial share allocation must be performed by whoever actually creates the government. While this is completely independent of the design, I'm pretty confident that any conversion of a constitutional democracy into a joint-stock corporation will include a high level of continuity from charitable budget allocations in the democracy, to share allocations in the corporation.

Consider an indubitably worthy recipient of philanthropic funding, NIH.<sup>46</sup> NIH's budget is \$30 billion or so. If we

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<sup>46</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Institutes\\_of\\_Health](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Institutes_of_Health)

"The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the primary agency of the United States government responsible for biomedical and public health research, founded in the late 1870s. It is part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services with facilities mainly located in Bethesda, Maryland. It conducts its own scientific research through its Intramural Research Program (IRP) and provides major biomedical research funding to non-NIH research facilities through its Extramural Research Program.

"As of 2013, the IRP had 1,200 principal investigators and more than 4,000 postdoctoral fellows in basic, translational, and clinical research, being the largest biomedical research institution in the world, while, as of 2003, the extramural arm provided 28% of biomedical research funding spent annually in the U.S., or about US\$26.4 billion.

"The NIH comprises 27 separate institutes and centers of different biomedical disciplines and is responsible for many scientific accomplishments, including the discovery of fluoride to prevent tooth decay, the use of lithium to manage bipolar disorder, and the creation of vaccines against hepatitis,

separate NIH completely from the State and convert its budget, for which it must fight every year, into State shares producing dividends or other payments of \$30 billion every year, what has changed?

NIH is happier, because it now has \$30 billion with no strings attached. Certainly the guidance of Congress, or whatever, does not assist NIH in doing its job. Quite the contrary! The less political and bureaucratic interference it receives, the better. We have just reduced this to zero, so NIH is happy. Moreover, it is even happier because this payment stream is presumably produced by shares, bonds, or other negotiable instruments, which NIH can sell and diversify. Thus creating a well-structured endowment for the long-term funding of biomedical research.

As for the payers of the \$30 billion, they pay whatever they pay. So this transformation — which can be applied to any charity or entitlement, at least any which does not depend on the sovereign authority of the state in order to do its good works — is a Pareto optimization.<sup>47</sup> And it

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Haemophilus influenzae (HIB), and human papillomavirus (HPV)."

<sup>47</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pareto\\_efficiency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pareto_efficiency)

"Pareto efficiency or Pareto optimality is a state of allocation of resources from which it is impossible to reallocate so as to make any one individual or preference criterion better off without making at least one individual or preference criterion worse off. The concept is named after Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), Italian engineer and economist, who used the concept in his studies of economic efficiency and income distribution. The concept has been applied in academic fields such as economics, engineering, and the life sciences.

"The Pareto frontier is the set of all Pareto efficient allocations, conventionally shown graphically. It also is variously known as the Pareto front or Pareto set.

eliminates the phenomenon of official charity, the hallmark of social democracy. QED.

Again, it is easy to apply this fix to entitlements, such as Social Security or Medicare. For Social Security, it is Granny rather than NIH which is owed a payment stream. For Medicare, the State can go from providing medical care to purchasing an insurance policy, and from purchasing an insurance policy to providing the payment stream needed to purchase a policy. Both these changes are Pareto optimizations, and they end up back at financial responsibility.

Therefore: if you are setting up something like a Patchwork realm, and you are worried that its residents will not donate sufficient alms to fund good works, assign some percentage of the realm's shares (or bonds, or other securities) to those same good works. Problem solved. So why do we have social democracy? Ah. If only it would tell us.

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"A Pareto improvement is a change to a different allocation that makes at least one individual or preference criterion better off without making any other individual or preference criterion worse off, given a certain initial allocation of goods among a set of individuals. An allocation is defined as "Pareto efficient" or "Pareto optimal" when no further Pareto improvements can be made, in which case we are assumed to have reached Pareto optimality.

"Pareto efficiency" is considered as a minimal notion of efficiency that does not necessarily result in a socially desirable distribution of resources: it makes no statement about equality, or the overall well-being of a society.

"The notion of Pareto efficiency has been applied to the selection of alternatives in engineering and similar fields. Each option is first assessed, under multiple criteria, and then a subset of options is ostensibly identified with the property that no other option can categorically outperform any of its members."

So. Having refuted the hypothesis that democracy is what it says it is, let's have a look at what it actually is.

Being a completely uneducated person, I do not know Latin or Greek. But I do have a favorite Latin word: *imperium*. As in "imperialist," of course, and other such Maoist terms of abuse. As I am already on record as a reactionary, I will cheerfully confess to being an imperialist as well.

*Imperium* is a cognate of the English word *empire*. But the two are not synonyms: *empire* in English has shifted to imply the international relationship also known as *suzerainty*<sup>48</sup>, ie, the relationship between Washington

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<sup>48</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suzerainty>

"Suzerainty (/ˈsjuːzərənti/, /ˈsjuːzərɛnti/ and /ˈsjuːzrənti/) is a back-formation from the late 18th-century word *suzerain*, meaning *upper-sovereign*, derived from the French *sus* (meaning *above*) + *-erain* (from *souverain*, meaning *sovereign*).

"It was first used to refer to the dominant position of the Ottoman Empire in relation to its surrounding regions; the Ottoman Empire being the *suzerain*, and the relationship being *suzerainty*. The terminology gradually became generalised to refer to any relationship in which one region or people controls the foreign policy and international relations of a tributary state, while allowing the tributary nation to have internal autonomy. Modern writers also sometimes use the term *suzerain* to refer to a feudal lord, in regard to their relationship to their vassals.

"Suzerainty differs from true sovereignty, as the tributary state or person is technically independent, and enjoys self-rule (though usually limited in practice). Although the situation has existed in a number of historical empires, it is considered difficult to reconcile with 20th- or 21st-century concepts of international law, in which sovereignty either exists or does not. While a sovereign nation can agree by treaty to become a protectorate of a stronger power, modern international law does not recognise any way of making this relationship compulsory on the weaker power. Suzerainty, therefore, describes a practical, *de facto* situation, rather than a legal, *de jure* one."

and its puppet states. Which is pretty cool, but which is at best a special case of *imperium*, which is better translated as *command* or *authority*. Similarly, the Roman title of *Imperator*<sup>49</sup>, which became our Emperor, is best translated as *Commander*, and originally just meant "general."

To hold *imperium* is to command, to hold sovereignty. Sovereignty, as we saw last week, is not sovereignty unless it is above the law. In any organization we can identify the *summum imperium*, or power of final decision. At least at a civilian level, this is generally held by either an individual or a small committee. For example, in the United States, this committee is called the "Supreme Court." In the Soviet Union it was called the "Politburo." Of course these two institutions had very little else in common, but they both held the *summum imperium*.

If you doubt this analysis, note that only the justices' own consciences, which have oft proved fickle, force them to obey any code of conduct whatsoever. They could order Barack Obama to stand on his head and snap a Polaroid

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<sup>49</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperator>

The Latin word *imperator* was originally a title roughly equivalent to *commander* under the Roman Republic. Later it became a part of the titulature of the Roman Emperors as part of their cognomen. The English word *emperor* derives from *imperator* via Old French *Empereür*. The Roman emperors themselves generally based their authority on multiple titles and positions, rather than preferring any single title. Nevertheless, *imperator* was used relatively consistently as an element of a Roman ruler's title throughout the principate (derived from *princeps*, from which prince in English is derived) and the dominate.

"In Latin, the feminine form of *imperator* is *imperatrix*, denoting a ruling *female*."

of his own rectum in order to be inaugurated. He would have to comply, and I am quite confident that he is capable of doing so.

(I hate to mention politics, but I hope all readers with any interest in finance are familiar with Dealbreaker<sup>50</sup>, whose hostess EP<sup>51</sup> even before the Obama administration begins has discovered the exact level of dissident bitchery it deserves. *"Who could rival the innate obscenity of U.S. star fucking, so ritualized from repetition at this point as to roll off us like mercury off a greased duck's back?"* We'll see more of this tone, I'm confident.)

Despite all protests to the contrary, constitutional democracy has neither squared the circle nor solved the old Roman problem of *ipsos custodes*.<sup>52</sup> Whatever the names and rituals, real power in the state can always be tracked. Let's look in more detail at the power structure of constitutional democracy, using our old friend USG as the example. (Its clones around the world differ little.)

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<sup>50</sup> [Dead link]

<sup>51</sup> Hyperlink to: <http://equityprivate.typepad.com>

<sup>52</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quis\\_custodiet\\_ipsos\\_custodes%3F](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quis_custodiet_ipsos_custodes%3F)

"Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" is a Latin phrase found in the work of the Roman poet Juvenal from his *Satires* (Satire VI, lines 347–348). It is literally translated as "Who will guard the guards themselves?", though it is also known by variant translations.

"The original context deals with the problem of ensuring marital fidelity, though it is now commonly used more generally to refer to the problem of controlling the actions of persons in positions of power, an issue discussed by Plato in the *Republic*. It is not clear whether the phrase was written by Juvenal, or whether the passage in which it appears was interpolated into his works."

Imperium always comes in layers of delegation, in which one power relinquishes decisions to another. At the top level — level zero, as it were — is always the military. The US military is of course a large and diverse entity, but imagine it could find some way to agree unanimously that sovereignty, the *summum imperium*, would revert to some specific office in the Pentagon. SOCOM is a good candidate.

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<sup>53</sup> Hyperlink to:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Special\\_Operations\\_Command](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Special_Operations_Command)

“The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM or SOCOM) is the Unified Combatant Command charged with overseeing the various Special Operations Component Commands of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force of the United States Armed Forces. The command is part of the Department of Defense and is the only Unified Combatant Command legislated into being by the U.S. Congress. USSOCOM is headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida.

“The idea of an American unified special operations command had its origins in the aftermath of Operation Eagle Claw, the disastrous attempted rescue of hostages at the American embassy in Iran in 1980. The ensuing investigation, chaired by Admiral James L. Holloway III, the retired Chief of Naval Operations, cited lack of command and control and inter-service coordination as significant factors in the failure of the mission. Since its activation on 16 April 1987, U.S. Special Operations Command has participated in many operations, from the 1989 invasion of Panama to the ongoing Global War on Terrorism.

“USSOCOM conducts several covert and clandestine missions, such as direct action, special reconnaissance, counter-terrorism, foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, psychological warfare, civil affairs, and counter-narcotics operations. Each branch has a Special Operations Command that is unique and capable of running its own operations, but when the different special operations forces need to work together for an operation, USSOCOM becomes the joint component command of the operation, instead of a SOC of a specific branch.”



What would people do? What could they do? They would say: "duh, okay. We welcome our new green-beret overlords. Sure. Frankly, we were a little elected-out, anyway. And Professor Bernanke no longer enjoys our complete confidence. So, yeah, whatever. Could we resume normal programming now? I was watching VH-1, here."

Ergo, the military in all countries and at all all times enjoys the *summum imperium*. In a state in which normal civil-military relations pertain, the military is completely passive, and delegates its authority completely. In a few less-devolved states such as modern Turkey, it still exercises genuine reserve power<sup>54</sup> and may have some influence on civil decisions. (Sadly, the fabled

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<sup>54</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reserve\\_power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reserve_power)

"In a parliamentary or semi-presidential system of government, a reserve power is a power that may be exercised by the head of state without the approval of another branch of the government. Unlike in a presidential system of government, the head of state is generally constrained by the cabinet or the legislature in a parliamentary system, and most reserve powers are usable only in certain exceptional circumstances. In some countries, reserve powers go by another name; for instance, the reserve powers of the President of Ireland are called discretionary powers."

deep state<sup>55</sup> may be on the decline since the Ergenekon purge<sup>56</sup>.)

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<sup>55</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State\\_within\\_a\\_state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_within_a_state)

State within a state is a political situation in a country when an internal organ ("deep state"), such as the armed forces and civilian authorities (intelligence agencies, police, secret police, administrative agencies and branches of government bureaucracy), does not respond to the civilian political leadership. Although the state within a state can be conspiratorial in nature, the deep state can also take the form of entrenched unelected career civil servants acting in a non-conspiratorial manner, to further their own interests (e.g. continuity of the state as distinct from the administration, job security, enhanced power and authority, pursuit of ideological goals and objectives, and the general growth of their agency) and in opposition to the policies of elected officials, by obstructing, resisting, and subverting the policies and directives of elected officials. The term, like many in politics, derives from the Greek language (κράτος εν κράτει, *kratos en kratei*, later adopted into Latin as *imperium in imperio* or *status in statu*).

Sometimes, the term refers to state companies that, though formally under the command of the government, act *de facto* like private corporations. Sometimes, the term refers to companies that, though formally private, act *de facto* like "states within a state".

Political debate surrounding the separation of church and state previously revolved around the perception that if left unchecked, the Church might turn into a kind of State within a State, an illegitimate outgrowth of the State's natural civil power.

In the field of political science, this pop culture concept is studied within the literature on the state. The modern literature on the state is generally tied back to *Bringing the State Back In* (1985) and remains an active body of scholarly research to this day. Within this literature, the state is understood as both venue (a set of rules under which others act and interact) as well as actor (with its own agenda). Under this dual understanding, the conspiratorial version of the deep state concept would be one version of the 'state as actor' while the non-conspiratorial version would be another version of the 'state as venue.'"

<sup>56</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergenekon\\_\(allegation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergenekon_(allegation))

"Ergenekon (Turkish: [æɾeneˈkon]) was the name given to an alleged clandestine, secularist ultra-nationalist organization in Turkey with possible ties to members of the

I am sorry to report to critics of the American right, such as Naomi Wolf<sup>57</sup>, that the United States does not in fact

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country's military and security forces. The would-be group, named after Ergenekon, a mythical place located in the inaccessible valleys of the Altay Mountains, was accused of terrorism in Turkey.

"Ergenekon was by some believed to be part of the "deep state". The existence of the "deep state" was affirmed in Turkish opinion after the Susurluk scandal in 1996. Alleged members had been indicted on charges of plotting to foment unrest, among other things by assassinating intellectuals, politicians, judges, military staff, and religious leaders, with the ultimate goal of toppling the incumbent government.

"Ergenekon's *modus operandi* had been compared to Operation Gladio's Turkish branch, the Counter-Guerrilla. By April 2011, over 500 people had been taken into custody and nearly 300 formally charged with membership of what prosecutors described as "the Ergenekon terrorist organization", which they claimed had been responsible for virtually every act of political violence — and controlled every militant group — in Turkey over the last 30 years.

"As of 2015 most of the people accused of such crimes has been acquitted, forensic experts concluded the documents for supposed plots were fake and some of the executors of trials proved to be linked to the Gülen Movement and were charged with plotting against Turkish Army."

<sup>57</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naomi\\_Wolf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naomi_Wolf)

"Naomi R. Wolf (born November 12, 1962) is a liberal progressive[4][5] American author, journalist, feminist, and former political advisor to Al Gore and Bill Clinton.

"Wolf first came to prominence in 1991 as the author of *The Beauty Myth*. With the book, she became a leading spokeswoman of what was later described as the third wave of the feminist movement. Such leading feminists as Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan praised the book; others, including bell hooks, Camille Paglia and Christina Hoff Sommers, criticized it. She has since written other books, including the bestselling book *The End of America* in 2007 and her latest *Vagina: A New Biography*.

"Her journalism career began in 1995 and has included topics such as abortion, the Occupy Wall Street movement, Edward Snowden and ISIS. She has written in

have a "deep state." However, if the American right wanted to actually get off its butt and do something, it could find many worse manuals than her latest.<sup>58</sup> Of course it will execute no such coup, at least no time soon. Ever since Defoe wrote the *Shortest Way*, the conspiracy theories of leftists have been the best guide to what the right should do, but won't.

The next layer of imperium in a democratic state — layer one — is, of course, the *electorate*. Ie, the people who vote. My belief that the electorate holds a high degree of imperium is not at all inconsistent with my belief that the influence of elections on public policy is generally small. The same after all can be said of the military, whose vote is final but at present unexercised.

The electorate and the military are layers one and zero, because the military can resist anyone in the contest for sovereignty, and the electorate can resist everyone but the

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venues such as *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The Guardian* and *The Huffington Post*.

"However, Wolf's more recent work has inspired controversy across the political spectrum. Writers in such varied venues as *Salon.com*, *Alternet*, *Mother Jones*, *The Atlantic*, *National Review* and *The American Spectator* have criticized many of her latest journalistic efforts as both conspiratorial and overblown."

<sup>58</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_End\\_of\\_America:\\_Letter\\_of\\_Warning\\_to\\_a\\_Young\\_Patriot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_End_of_America:_Letter_of_Warning_to_a_Young_Patriot)

"*The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot* is a 2007 non-fiction book by author Naomi Wolf, published by Chelsea Green Publishing of White River Junction, Vermont. Wolf argues that events of the early 2000s paralleled steps taken in the early years of the twentieth century's worst dictatorships and called Americans to take action to restore their constitutional values before they suffer the same fate. The book illustrates what Wolf depicts as ten steps in the transition of open societies into closed regimes."

military. For example, control of 51 senators and the Presidency is sufficient to defeat all other institutions in USG, because it is sufficient to pack the Supreme Court. Obviously, the electorate can achieve this.

It may not even need the senators. Consider the case of a Presidential candidate whose platform is plain about her plans: if elected, she will suspend all other institutions and rule as a dictator. Suppose Sarah Palin, for example, ran on this platform in 2012. Suppose she won. Does anyone doubt that Washington would obey her every personal whim — exactly as it obeyed, say, FDR's? I suppose it would depend on whether Governor Palin has the natural knack of *imperium*, and we can't know this unless we actually see her in action. But I actually suspect she might.

We move to the next stage: level two, ultimate civil authority. The *summum imperium* here rests, as mentioned, in the Supreme Court, and more generally the judicial system. Judges try to avoid actually formulating public policy, however, typically delegating this task to executive agencies. Domestic and (rarely) foreign policy is sometimes altered, in broad strokes, by Congress. There are also various differences depending on whether the President is a Democrat or a Republican, but we are down to minutiae at this point.

When we look at the remarkable stability of Washington, even in pursuing paths which to the outside eye are plainly, even comically, counterproductive, we have to focus our attention first on level one: the electorate. The opinion of the electorate is exactly what it is supposed to be: the hinge of power in the United States today. Level zero is passive. Level two cannot resist level one.

Therefore, to understand the forces directing the actions of Washington today, we have to understand one thing: the relationship between levels one and two, the electorate and the (mostly) permanent government.

Who are these voters, anyway? There are innumerable ways to classify the American voter, at least half of which UR has already indulged in. But I hate to repeat myself, so let's try to come up with something new.

One way to ask how American voters will vote is to consider what they are trying to accomplish when they go to the ballot box. Obviously, they are making an altruistic attempt to affect the direction of government policy. (The attempt is altruistic because no voter seriously expects his or her vote to affect his or her life.) Obviously, few of them has anything near an understanding of what Washington actually is — most have only a dim grasp of even the official story.<sup>59</sup> But still, they are thinking something when they fill in the box for the R or the D. What is it?

There are basically three ways in which American voters — or voters anywhere in the world, for that matter — conceptualize their participation in democracy. From the bottom up, we can label these modes *tribal*, *populist*, and *institutionalist*.

*Tribal* voters vote on the basis of ethnic and familial identity. In one very legitimate sense, they are the most rational voters around. A tribal voter is acting collectively

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<sup>59</sup> Hyperlink to:  
[http://www.americancivilliteracy.org/2008/summary\\_introduction.html](http://www.americancivilliteracy.org/2008/summary_introduction.html)

to benefit his or her tribe. This group can be hereditary, adoptive, occupational, etc, as long as it feels some sort of collective cohesion or *asabiya*.<sup>60</sup>

In a civilized, stable democracy, only a minority of voters can be tribal. If you want to see a democracy with a tribal majority, I give you South Africa.<sup>61</sup> As a minority, tribal voting blocs generally serve as vote banks<sup>62</sup> for more dominant players. The tribal bloc or blocs become clients

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<sup>60</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asabiyyah>

“*Asabiyya* or *asabiyyah* (Arabic: عصبية) refers to social solidarity with an emphasis on unity, group consciousness and sense of shared purpose, and social cohesion, originally in a context of “tribalism” and “clanism”. It was a familiar term in the pre-Islamic era, but became popularized in Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* where it is described as the fundamental bond of human society and the basic motive force of history. ‘*Asabiyya* is neither necessarily nomadic nor based on blood relations; rather, it resembles philosophy of classical republicanism. In the modern period, the term is generally analogous to solidarity. However, it is often negatively associated because it can sometimes suggest loyalty to one’s group regardless of circumstances, or partisanship. Ibn Khaldun also argued that ‘*asabiyya* is cyclical and directly related to the rise and fall of civilizations: it is most strong at the start of a civilization, declines as the civilization advances, and then another more compelling ‘*asabiyyah* eventually takes its place to help establish a different civilization.”

<sup>61</sup> Barry Bearak, “Post-Apartheid South Africa Enters an Anxious Period”, *The New York Times*:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/06/world/africa/06safrica.html>

<sup>62</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Votebank>

“A votebank (also spelled vote-bank or vote bank) is a loyal bloc of voters from a single community, who consistently back a certain candidate or political formation in democratic elections. Such behaviour is often the result of an expectation of real or imagined benefits from the political formations, often at the cost of other communities. Votebank politics is the practice of creating and maintaining votebanks through divisive policies. As it encourages voters to vote on the basis of narrow communal considerations, often against their better judgement, it is considered harmful to the principles of representative democracy.”

of whichever party is strong enough to buy their votes. This can be done as straight-out, lawless graft, or by steering various benefits — payments, loans, jobs, etc — to members and/or leaders of the tribe.

Our second group of voters is the *populist* group. When populists vote, they are trying to compel the government to act in accordance with their own beliefs, generally derived from a mixture of common sense, tradition and personal experience, of what is right for a government to do.

Populists voters are people who genuinely believe in democracy. They believe that the way Washington works is that the people elect a President, who "runs the country." I once had an email exchange with a very successful, and quite erudite, populist political blogger who did not understand that President Bush cannot fire a State Department employee, just because that employee is openly trying to sabotage White House initiatives.

This is an excellent example of the level of complete structural misconception that a populist voter can entertain when attempting to vote. If populists had any idea at all of how Washington actually works, they would not continue to participate in the increasingly farcical elections by which they repeatedly endorse it.

The fact of the matter is that Washington as it exists today, 21st-century Washington, is designed to resist populist politics in roughly the same way that a lighthouse is designed to resist waves. The entire thrust of 20th-century American government has been to separate public policy from politics, ie, to eliminate the menace of democracy. If you read about what American politics was



a century ago<sup>63</sup>, this program — originally the program of the Mugwumps<sup>64</sup>, and then of various flavors of liberal and progressive, including of course the New Deal — is perfectly understandable.

The problem is basically solved. Populist resistance, a la Poujadisme<sup>65</sup>, no longer exists in Washington's test

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<sup>63</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Croker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Croker)

"Richard Welstead Croker, Sr. (November 24, 1843 – April 29, 1922), known as "Boss Croker," was an Irish-American politician, a leader of New York City's Tammany Hall."

<sup>64</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mugwumps>

"The Mugwumps were Republican political activists who bolted from the United States Republican Party by supporting Democratic candidate Grover Cleveland in the United States presidential election of 1884. They switched parties because they rejected the financial corruption associated with Republican candidate James G. Blaine. In a close election, the Mugwumps supposedly made the difference in New York state and swung the election to Cleveland. The jocular word *mugwump*, noted as early as 1832, is from Algonquian (Natick) *mugquomp*, "important person, kingpin" (from *mugumquomp*, "war leader"), implying that they were "sanctimonious" or "holier-than-thou," in holding themselves aloof from party politics.

"After the election, *mugwump* survived for more than a decade as an epithet for a party bolter in American politics. Many Mugwumps became Democrats or remained independents; most continued to support reform well into the 20th century. During the Third Party System, party loyalty was in high regard and independents were rare. Theodore Roosevelt stunned his upper class New York City friends by supporting Blaine in 1884; by rejecting the Mugwumps he kept alive his Republican party leadership, clearing the way for his own political aspirations.

"New England and the Northeastern United States had been a stronghold of the Republican Party since the Civil War era, but the Mugwumps considered Blaine to be an untrustworthy and fraudulent candidate. Their idealism and reform sensibilities led them to oppose the political corruption in the politics of the Gilded Age."

<sup>65</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_Poujade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Poujade)

facilities in Western Europe, now governed largely by a central administration<sup>66</sup> which has no discernible ties to

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"Pierre Poujade (French: [pjɛʁ puʒad]; 1 December 1920 – 27 August 2003) was a French populist politician after whom the Poujadist movement was named.

"After the war, Poujade was the owner of a book and stationery store.

"On 23 July 1953, with a group of about 20 persons, Poujade prevented inspectors of the tax board from verifying the income of another shopkeeper. This was the start of a tax protest movement by shopkeepers, first in the Lot department, then in the Aveyron department, and finally the whole south of the Massif Central.

"On 29 November 1953, Pierre Poujade created the *Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans* (UDCA; Defense Union of Shopkeepers and Craftsmen), to organize the tax protesters. This movement would soon be called "Poujadism" (French: *Poujadisme*). Poujadism flourished most vigorously in the last years of the Fourth Republic, and articulated the economic interests and grievances of shopkeepers and other proprietor-managers of small businesses facing economic and social change. The main themes of Poujadism concerned the defense of the common man against the elites.

"In addition to the protest against the income tax and the price control imposed by finance minister Antoine Pinay to limit inflation, Poujadism was opposed to industrialization, urbanization, and American-style modernization, which were perceived as a threat to the identity of rural France. Poujadism denounced the French state as "rapetout et inhumain" ("thieving and inhuman").

"The movement's "common man" populism led to antiparlamentarism (Poujade called the National Assembly "the biggest brothel in Paris" and the deputies a "pile of rubbish" and "pederasts"), a strong anti-intellectualism (Poujade denounced the graduates from the École Polytechnique as the main culprits for the woes of 1950s France and boasted that he had no book learning), xenophobia, and antisemitism especially aimed against Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France (claiming "Mendès is French only as the word added to his name"), who was perceived as responsible for the loss of Indochina. Poujadism also supported the cause of French Algeria."

<sup>66</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Commission)

any democratic election. At present, the primary distinction between the EU and the late Soviet Union is that the latter was much more Russian, thus exhibiting a mixture of incompetence and brutality that is hard to duplicate west of the Elbe. But give it a few years.

Populism still has a solid position in the American political system, but it is fading rapidly, as is the importance of politics. The Obama administration seems set to be an almost entirely ceremonial one — at least, the President-elect has displayed no strong evidence of any fixed opinions on any subject. Even the populism of the Bush administration is greatly overstated; a significant

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“The European Commission (EC) is an institution of the European Union, responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions, upholding the EU treaties and managing the day-to-day business of the EU. Commissioners swear an oath at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, pledging to respect the treaties and to be completely independent in carrying out their duties during their mandate.

“The Commission operates as a cabinet government, with 28 members of the Commission (informally known as “commissioners”). There is one member per member state, but members are bound by their oath of office to represent the general interest of the EU as a whole rather than their home state. One of the 28 is the Commission President (currently Jean-Claude Juncker) proposed by the European Council and elected by the European Parliament. The Council of the European Union then nominates the other 27 members of the Commission in agreement with the nominated President, and the 28 members as a single body are then subject to a vote of approval by the European Parliament. The current Commission is the Juncker Commission, which took office in late 2014.

“The term *Commission* is used either in the narrow sense of the 28-member *College of Commissioners* (or *College*) or to also include the administrative body of about 32,000 European civil servants who are split into departments called directorates-general and services. The procedural languages of the Commission are English, French and German. The Members of the Commission and their “cabinets” (immediate teams) are based in the Berlaymont building in Brussels.

minority of the American foreign-policy establishment supported the invasion of Iraq, which was neither an explosion of jingoist fervor, nor the President's personal whim, nor the conspiracy of some Texan "deep state."

The basic advantage of populism is that, if the claimed virtues of democracy are anywhere, they are here. Common sense and plain thinking, in a reasonably intelligent brain, are remarkably immune to the ethereal delusions that so easily infect the brilliant and educated. However, common sense cannot exist without tradition. The best traditions of the American populist voter are steadily being eroded by an educational system that populists do not control, and his worst traditions are steadily being exacerbated by churches and talk-radio networks that populists do control.

The entire political structure of the American populist tradition is set up to select for ignorance and stupidity, and select against organization and cohesion. Thus it is simultaneously undesirable and ineffective, and even those of us who like myself sympathize with it to a considerable degree are often slightly relieved to see it lose, as it always does.

Even when populists win Presidential elections, they simply have no way to control Washington. Even with Congress and the Presidency, the White House has no real authority over the civil service, who outside the military are institutionalist by definition. The "Reagan Revolution" started out as a populist tsunami designed to smash the New Deal, and turned into nothing at all. Nixon's "silent majority" met an even more inglorious fate. At most a few token populist policies can be advanced. Populists can of course disrupt the institutional

bowels of the state, leading to a sort of policy constipation, but like the old House of Lords, their only real power is to delay.

Since populists have no idea of any of this, they participate enthusiastically in the sham. Sometimes they win a little, but in the end they always lose. And they are such gentlemen about it, too. Somehow no one has ever explained to Middle America that if you don't know who the sucker at the table is, the sucker is you.

And finally we come to our ruling class, the institutionalists. Institutionalism, as previously mentioned, is an essentially aristocratic belief system. The institutionalist voter votes not because she believes government policies should be decided at the ballot box, but because she believes they shouldn't.

Rather, she believes that government policies should be determined by a set of official and quasiofficial agencies which have earned her trust permanently and completely, the way a good Catholic trusts the Vatican. Following the analogy, here at UR we refer to this meta-institution as the Cathedral. The Cathedral consists of the universities and the press. Its spire is the Ivy League and the New York Times, whose faculty and news desk respectively are endowed with an almost pure connection to the inner light — lesser institutions, of course, following their lead.

It is not that the institutionalist voter does not believe in democracy. She does believe in democracy. She believes passionately in democracy. But her democracy is very different from the democracy of her mortal enemy, the populist.

To the institutionalist, the way democracy works is that democracy depends on the educated voter. The voter is to be educated by institutionalists, of course, because institutionalists are right. Some level of ignorance and recalcitrance can be expected, and there will always be dissent, but through this cycle of education and election we are always advancing into the future. The reason we have elected officials is not so that they can manage the government, a task which must of course be left to the experts (who are institutionalists, of course). Rather, officials such as the President are essentially educational figures, participating in a public discourse in which the "bully pulpit"<sup>67</sup> — an oddly revealing term — delivers further education. In turn, by electing a good President, the voters demonstrate the depth of their educated wisdom. Und so weiter.

Note the function of populist and tribal voters in the institutionalist's mind. The populist electorate supplies the bogeyman. The fear of a populist takeover, which is theoretically always a possibility and has even happened once or twice in history (eg, Nazi Germany), can keep even the most jaded of institutionalist voters coming back to the polls. Even though it never seems to actually happen. Moreover, the populists are barraged by a flood of institutionalist messages more or less from birth to death. They are naturally resistant, but the programming wears them down over time.

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<sup>67</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bully\\_pulpit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bully_pulpit)

"A bully pulpit is a conspicuous position that provides an opportunity to speak out and be listened to. This term was coined by United States President Theodore Roosevelt, who referred to his office as a "bully pulpit", by which he meant a terrific platform from which to advocate an agenda. Roosevelt used the word bully as an adjective meaning "superb" or "wonderful", a more common usage at that time."

Meanwhile, the tribals, who are votes for rent, will always support the institutionalist bloc (and may even make up a majority of their support, though at a certain level this becomes dangerous.) Their votes are guaranteed in exchange for permanent government programs, administered by institutionalists, that render them dependent on the Cathedral's rule for their lives and livelihoods.

As for the institution itself — the Cathedral — it is, except in its majestic extent and intricacy, not unusual by any historical standard. The Cathedral is a selective aristocracy, which is more or less the way China was run for about 2500 years. It is also the way the Soviet Union was run, the way the Catholic Church was run, the way China today is run, and the way Nazi Germany probably would have been run if we still had a Nazi Germany to kick around. As in all these institutions, rank and place in it is in high demand, and those who rise to the top are men and women of no mean capacity.

However, there is just one little problem: the Cathedral is not responsible. At least, if it is responsible, we cannot detect any mechanism by which it is responsible.

What compels the Cathedral to devise and promulgate good and effective policies, rather than evil or counterproductive ones? If there is an answer to this question, I cannot discern it. If there is an external or internal mechanism which can correct any errors which may occur in the Cathedral — for example, a completely corrupt and meretricious field of learning, a discipline of institutionalized crackpottery, as Lysenko created in Russia — I cannot find it.

I cannot even identify some reserved power which can remove the Cathedral if it goes completely off the rails. Certainly nothing short of a titanic populist explosion or a military coup can dislodge institutionalism for good. The first cure may be worse than the disease, and the second is a complete unknown and shows no signs of being a real possibility. And while the Cathedral's energumens, levels one and two in concert, hold their lock on power, it is free to go as far off the rails as it wants.

There is no responsibility. The chain of guardians stretches up to Harvard, where it is tied to nothing and guarded by itself. Consider the possibility, for example, that the people we call "economists" in fact know nothing at all about economics.<sup>68</sup> Is this farfetched? After October 2008, can we call this farfetched? And if it isn't, what other worms<sup>69</sup> are in your brain?

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<sup>68</sup> Hyperlink to:  
[http://econlog.econlib.org/archives/2008/11/emperor\\_clothes.htm](http://econlog.econlib.org/archives/2008/11/emperor_clothes.htm)  
!

"Richard Dale writes,  
"thousands of finance research papers are published each year, and yet there have been few if any warnings from the academic community of the incendiary potential of global financial markets. Is it too harsh to conclude that despite the considerable academic resources that go into finance research our understanding of the behaviour of financial markets is no greater than it was in 1929/33 or indeed 1720?"

<sup>69</sup> [Dead Link]



#### 4: A Reactionary Theory of World Peace

UR is hardly the first to propose a theory of world peace. So why bother? What could possibly be new?

History records quite a few previous attempts at world peace, some of which even worked pretty well in practice. For example, one was called the "Roman Empire," another was called the "Qing Dynasty," a third was called the "British Empire." All three being extinct, and therefore not *entirely* successful. But there's no denying that in their day they turned out quite a bit of peace.

But the world of 2008 has its own theory of world peace. Which everyone believes, as usual. This theory, which needless to say I think is utter crap, owes most of its theory to Kant's essay on *Perpetual Peace*. In practice it more deserves its most parochial name: *Pax Americana*. (For an amusing personal history of the mapping from Kant to Turtle Bay, try my fellow Brown alumnus Michael Soussan<sup>70</sup>.)

We will go into this whole strange theory of the *Pax Americana*, in just a bit. But our first question has to be: does this *Pax Americana* work? Well, in some ways, yes. The 2008 that history sent us to contains less carnage, surely, than many other 2008s which chance might have produced. On the other hand, when I open my friendly local newspaper, I am seldom greeted with pictures of smiling, happy children. I feel, dear reader, that we could do better.

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Soussan, *Backstabbing for Beginners: My Crash Course in International Diplomacy* (2008)

And, more importantly, my general impression is not that this system, this *Pax Americana*, is getting better over time. I am not an old man but I was not born yesterday, and I was listening to the BBC and reading the IHT and Economist well before I had hair in my pits, and my general feeling is that across history as I have seen it, basically since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world order that was created in 1945 has not been becoming a more and more cohesive, harmonious, efficient and effective operation. I think it is quite incontestable that the entire planet, in 2008, is safe for democracy. Indeed it is clearly safe for nothing but. Yet I notice no particular absence of conflict, armed or otherwise, nor anything like a decrease. Rather the contrary, actually.

This, to me, spells entropy. What peace we have is mostly stable. But it is not perfectly stable. Whatever disorder it has seems good at escalating itself.

Since, as a good citizen, you are familiar with the theory of global warming, you are familiar with what is needed to take slowly rising curves and project them into the late 21st century. Citizen, if I share your concern for the gaseous composition of the atmosphere, can you please share my concern for the breakdown of the thin membrane that distinguishes our world from Jimmy Cliff's?<sup>71</sup> "Mango season bad this year."

So our theory of peace is a little different. It is reactionary rather than progressive, which means that it is designed to work with hominids not as they should be, angels without wings, but as they are: bipedal land apes.

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<sup>71</sup> *The Harder They Come*, directed by Perry Henzell (1972)

Progressive thinkers throughout history differ widely on the means by which said land apes can be converted into angels, philosophers, or (ideally) angelic philosophers — much as no two alchemists agree on how to synthesize gold. For instance, Kant, taking the popular "null-hypothesis" or sugar-pill strategy, roots his claim for the inherent peaceability of republican government in the following logic:

Now the republican constitution apart from the soundness of its origin, since it arose from the pure source of the concept of right, has also the prospect of attaining the desired result, namely, perpetual peace. And the reason is this. If, as must be so under this constitution, the consent of the subjects is required to determine whether there shall be war or not, nothing is more natural than that they should weigh the matter well, before undertaking such a bad business. For in decreeing war, they would of necessity be resolving to bring down the miseries of war upon their country. This implies: they must fight themselves; they must hand over the costs of the war out of their own property; they must do their poor best to make good the devastation which it leaves behind; and finally, as a crowning ill, they have to accept a burden of debt which will embitter even peace itself, and which they can never pay off on account of the new wars which are always impending. On the other hand, in a government where the subject is not a citizen holding a vote (i.e., in a constitution which is not republican), the plunging into war is the least serious thing in the world. For the ruler is not a citizen, but the owner of the state,

and does not lose a whit by the war, while he goes on enjoying the delights of his table or sport, or of his pleasure palaces and gala days. He can therefore decide on war for the most trifling reasons, as if it were a kind of pleasure party.

In other words, Kant is assuming that since voters are generally reasonable people, they will vote for reasonable governments that will act reasonably, and only undertake reasonable wars.

The modern reader, reading this, must quickly remind herself that Immanuel Kant was not a fool. In 1795 the world's experience with democracy (a word Kant, like almost everyone at the time, considered a slur; in *Perpetual Peace* he goes to great, hilariously spurious lengths to distinguish "democracy" from his beloved republicanism) was minimal. The French Revolution could be dismissed as an aberration, and the follies of the late colonies in the Articles of Confederation period was no doubt no better known in Königsberg in 1795 than to us today.

So it was easy for Kant to make the fatal assumption that the People, in their new capacity as rulers, would display the same common sense in considering problems of government as they had when no one cared what they thought. (Kant was biased in this matter by the success of England, whose glory at that time was attributed on the Continent to its constitution's new democratic elements — rather than its corrupt medieval survivals, which turned out to actually be the glue that held the Whig aristocracy together. If Kant could see the results of the

Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867, he might well sing a different tune.)

Kant reasons: people are generally reasonable. As they are — except when unreasonable. If you entrust them with the power of government, you create an easy exploitation target for an oligarchy that controls the State by directing the opinions of the people. Such oligarchies come in two categories: conscious cults and conspiracies, in which at least some top echelons of believers is insincere and consciously malicious, and true religions, in which everyone can be sincere. The former are bad, and the latter are worse.

And the most effective. (Ours is the modern iteration of mainline<sup>72</sup> or ecumenical<sup>73</sup> Protestantism; I call it

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<sup>72</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mainline\\_Protestant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mainline_Protestant)

"The mainline Protestant churches (also called mainstream Protestant and sometimes oldline Protestant) are a group of Protestant denominations in the United States that contrast in history and practice with evangelical, fundamentalist, and charismatic Protestant denominations. Some make a distinction between "mainline" and "oldline", with the former referring only to denominational ties and the latter referring to church lineage, prestige and influence. However, this distinction has largely been lost to history and the terms are now nearly synonymous. These terms are also increasingly used in other countries for the same purpose (to distinguish).

"Mainline Protestants were a majority of all Christians in the United States until the mid-20th century, but they now constitute a minority among Protestants. [...]

"Mainline churches share a liberal approach to social issues that often leads to collaboration in organizations such as the National Council of Churches. Because of their involvement with the ecumenical movement, mainline churches are sometimes (especially outside the United States) given the alternative label of ecumenical Protestantism. These churches played a leading role in the Social Gospel movement and were active in social causes such as the civil rights movement and women's movement. As a group, the mainline churches have

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maintained religious doctrine that stresses social justice and personal salvation. Politically and theologically, mainline Protestants are more liberal than non-mainline Protestants. Members of mainline denominations have played leadership roles in many aspects of life, including politics, business, science, the arts, and education. They founded most of the country's leading institutes of higher education. Marsden argues that in the 1950s, "Mainline Protestant leaders were part of the liberal-moderate cultural mainstream, and their leading spokespersons were respected participants in the national conversation." [...]

From 1854 until at least 1964, Mainline Protestants and their descendants were heavily Republican. In recent decades, Republicans slightly outnumber Democrats. Many also identify as independent.

Since the 1960s, however, mainline groups have shrunk as a percentage of the population as the descendants of Mainline Protestants increasingly identify as atheists or secular humanists, and because their standards for investment in children and their smaller family size (average fertility rate below 3.0 for the entire 20th Century) means religious groups who have larger family size have come to dominate U.S. religion."

<sup>73</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenism>

"Ecumenism refers to efforts by Christians of different Church traditions to develop closer relationships and better understandings. The term is also often used to refer to efforts towards the visible and organic unity of different Christian denominations in some form.

"The adjective ecumenical can also be applied to any interdenominational initiative that encourages greater cooperation among Christians and their churches, whether or not the specific aim of that effort is full, visible unity.

"The terms ecumenism and ecumenical come from the Greek οἰκουμένη (oikoumene), which means "the whole inhabited world", and was historically used with specific reference to the Roman Empire. The ecumenical vision comprises both the search for the visible unity of the Church (Ephesians 4:3) and the "whole inhabited earth" (Matthew 24:14) as the concern of all Christians.

"In Christianity the qualification ecumenical is originally (and still) used in terms such as "ecumenical council" and "Ecumenical Patriarch" in the meaning of pertaining to the totality of the larger Church (such as the Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church) rather than being restricted to one of its constituent local churches or dioceses. Used in this original

*Universalism.* Head here for a brutal, syrupy dose<sup>74</sup>.) And such religions, which may be polytheistic, monotheistic or atheistic, have no reason at all to maintain the reasonableness of the minds they control — at least on the subject of government.

In fact, the parasite must be able to profit at the expense of the host: it must at least convince the host to fund the parasite and ban or discredit its competitors. Thus Kant's whole argument about self-interest is void and can be discarded, destroying his theory of republican virtue and thus his entire preposterous edifice of peace.

An edifice that has worked, basically, like ass. Again, experience confirms logic. Empirically, the expected outcome of a Kantian republican federation is that either (a) the federation becomes a mega-state of its own (which is, of course, ideal, because bigger is always better), (b) the federation breaks in half and creates a massive civil war (in which the good guys always win), or (c) the federation never has any real existence and quickly becomes at best a joke, at worst a festering glob of pompous, corrupt sinecures (but still a symbol of human progress and unity).

Thankfully, the result of the last two attempts has been (c1) and (c2). Do we need to pull the lever again? No, I think not.

But the basic armature of Kant's argument is solid, and we will reuse it. The argument is that warfare is not a

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sense, the term carries no connotation of re-uniting the historically separated Christian denominations, but presumes a unity of local congregations in a worldwide communion.”

<sup>74</sup> [Dead link]

policy to which a responsible sovereign will resort without good reason. Kant's fallacy is in equating "republican" with "responsible," and lacking the imagination to see that popular government has the power to produce far more irresponsible leadership than the classical monarchies he knew, with their little family spats and mild, fancy-dress wars.

The world of Frederick the Great and Louis XV, while Kant was no doubt a keen judge of its imperfections, exhibited a quality of order which we of the *Pax Americana* can only imagine. What would Paris be, if the regime that created Versailles had the technology of 2008? A kind of supernova. A place as far above Paris today, as Paris today above Kinshasa. Certainly, the center of the world, even if you plopped it down in Siberia.

Why don't we have this now? How did things come to such a pass? Before we get into reactionary world peace, let's try and figure out this *Pax Americana*.

Kant had no trouble in describing the obvious principle its name suggests:

Nevertheless it is the desire of every state, or of its ruler, to attain to a permanent condition of peace in this very way; that is to say, by subjecting the whole world as far as possible to its sway.

Amen. The great fraud of our current "international community" is its preposterous disguise as a Kantian federation of equals. In reality, the "international community" is Washington and her clients — at least,



when it is in proper working order. It sometimes approaches such order, but never seems to quite reach it.

The agencies in foreign capitals which we call "governments" are fascinating entities in many ways. Each is different, but in general what they are is clear. There is no accepted English term for the relationship, although "client" or even "puppet" state is close.

We do see something like sovereignty in the post-Communist world: Russia, China, plus the Iran-Syria-Venezuela axis. Russia and China treat each other as sovereigns, and they are clearly intent on preserving some of their sovereign independence, although the imbalanced financial relationships with the Western world that they find themselves in are clear no-nos. Nonetheless, they are generally quite submissive toward the US, an approach which is probably prudent. Iran, Syria and Venezuela are in the position of perpetual hostility that Russia occupied in the heyday of the Cold War, one which is arguably inconsistent with true sovereignty (since the hostile regimes are so dependent on the continuation of the conflict), but one which certainly separates them from the rest of America's sheep.

As for the rest of these "governments"? In many ways, these agencies really do resemble actual sovereign authorities. This is certainly their *formal* status. However, if you were to describe them as locally-staffed branches of the State Department, you would be also be grasping at a truth.

The official role of State is not supervisory, but advisory, a distinction we discuss in some detail below. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the function of a US mission to a

non-US country is not comparable to the function of a non-US mission to the US. I am quite confident that the French Embassy<sup>75</sup>, for example, expends very little effort on telling the US how to reform its financial system.

This is all very confusing. What, exactly, is the difference between supervising and advising? Is Washington supposed to be running the world, or isn't it? Please allow me to explain.

Perhaps you've wondered how a perspective that considers "imperialism" and "American exceptionalism"<sup>76</sup> taboos reminiscent of the Big H<sup>77</sup> himself can produce phrases such as:

The possible decline in America's power does not mean that the United States would not remain powerful. This country can and must continue to lead.<sup>78</sup>

or, more gloriously (Chauncey Depew<sup>79</sup> would be proud),

And to all those watching tonight from beyond our shores, from parliaments and palaces to those who are huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of our world: our stories are

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<sup>75</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://franceintheus.org/spip.php?rubrique2>

<sup>76</sup> Andrew Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (2008)

<sup>77</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf\\_Hitler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler)

<sup>78</sup> "Gloom, but Not Doom", *The New York Times*:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/04/opinion/04thu1.html>

<sup>79</sup> Chauncey Mitchell Depew, *Orations, addresses and speeches of Chauncey M. Depew*

singular, but our destiny is shared, and a new dawn of American leadership is at hand.<sup>80</sup>

Is Washington supposed to be ruling the world? Is Washington supposed to be leading the world? Is there a difference between "leading" and "ruling?" If you replace "lead" with "rule" above — *a new dawn of American rule is at hand* — you definitely don't have a line that either the President or the Times could be imagined uttering.

So there must be some difference. But what is it?

Clearly, if America "leads," its relationship with those it is leading must be anything but equal. Neither the Times nor President Obama will tell us that, while America should "lead" Europe, Europe should also "lead" America. Not even such scoundrels can torture English so.

Any unequal relationship between any two parties, be they sovereigns, colleagues or family members, must involve some combination of two models of control. Call them *authority* and *dependence*.

A holds *authority* over B if B must obey A's instructions. Authority is executive control, as practiced in the workplace, in the (traditional) family, and of course in the military chain of command. Readers who have read the previous essays will remember the Latin translation: *imperium*.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "Transcript: Obama's Victory Speech", *ABC News*:  
<http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=6181477>

<sup>81</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperium>  
"Imperium is a Latin word which, in a broad sense, translates roughly as 'power to command'. In ancient Rome, different kinds of power or authority were distinguished by different terms. *Imperium* referred to the ability of an individual to

B is *dependent* on A if A is gratuitously assisting B. And why would A do that? The relationship is the ancient one of *patronage*<sup>82</sup>, of course. A is the patron, B is the client. This is one of the oldest forms of alliance in the book — I'm pretty sure chimpanzees practice it.

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command the military. It is not to be confused with *auctoritas* or *potestas*, different and generally inferior types of power in the Roman Republic and Empire. Primarily used to refer to the power that is wielded, in greater or lesser degree, by an individual to whom it is delegated, the term could also be used with a geographical connotation, designating the territorial limits of that *imperium*. Individuals given such power were referred to as curule magistrates or promagistrates. These included the curule aedile, the praetor, the consul, the magister equitum, and the dictator.

<sup>82</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patronage\\_in\\_ancient\\_Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patronage_in_ancient_Rome)

"Patronage (clientela) was the distinctive relationship in ancient Roman society between the *patronus* (plural *patroni*, "patron") and their *cliens* (plural *clientes*, "client"). The relationship was hierarchical, but obligations were mutual. The *patronus* was the protector, sponsor, and benefactor of the client; the technical term for this protection was *patrocinium*. Although typically the client was of inferior social class, a patron and client might even hold the same social rank, but the former would possess greater wealth, power, or prestige that enabled them to help or do favors for the client. From the emperor at the top to the local municipal person at the bottom, the bonds between these groups found formal expression in legal definition of patrons' responsibilities to clients.

"Benefits a patron might confer include legal representation in court, loans of money, influencing business deals or marriages, and supporting a client's candidacy for political office or a priesthood. In return, the clients were expected to offer their services to their patron as needed. A freedman became the client of his former master. A patronage relationship might also exist between a general and his soldiers, a founder and colonists, and a conqueror and a dependent foreign community."

Note that, in most cases, the two go together. For example, your relationship with your thirteen-year-old includes both A and B, authority and dependence. She eats; you tell her what to do.

The analogy suggests the unusual nature of dependence without authority. Ordinarily, if A is rational, A will insist on authority along with the dependence. No authority, no gratuities. Can this break down with the thirteen-year-old? Absolutely, but a complete breakdown requires fairly bad parenting as well as, of course, a bad child.

But what we see in the *Pax Americana* — at least, its mainstream or Barackian form, not its renegade, crypto-imperialist Bushitler morph — is exactly that. For example, Pakistan is dependent on Washington, and yet Washington cannot say: get rid of Lakshar-e-Taiba and the like. Washington can certainly not say: clean up your streets, get rid of the madrassas, seal the border, etc, etc, etc, and in general start behaving as if the Raj was back on.

Because Pakistan is sovereign. At least, it is *supposed* to be sovereign. Yet if the US cut off the flow of dollars, Lord only knows what the country would turn into. Whatever that is, it surely has nothing to do with what Pakistan is now. (The other day, I was talking to a friend of mine, thoroughly Westernized but with parents in the Pakistani middle class, and he was describing how in the cities of Pakistan there are many attractive colonial-era neighborhoods that, in the lives of those now living, have fallen into complete disrepair and become slums. Funnily enough, very similar phenomena can be observed in, say, Ohio.)

So why doesn't Washington simply tell it: obey, or no more dollars? Well, the answer is not simple. The answer has to do with the internals of Washington, the structural conflict between Pentagon and State, the history of Pakistan and of the British Empire, etc, etc, etc. We could be at this for some time. But note, again, the analogy to the thirteen-year-old. Why won't your daughter obey? Why don't you make her? Well, it's complicated. It is always complicated.

Suffice it to say that American citizens gain nothing at all from this bizarre pseudo-empire. It might be useful to have all these "allies," perhaps, if we were in a war against somebody. And also if they would fight, and stuff. Neither of these things seems to be true. We do trade with them, but this does not require us to manage their governments, or in fact care at all how they are managed internally.

Conclusion: American foreign policy for the last sixty years has produced neither security nor anything else for Americans. Nor, I believe, has it been particularly good for the rest of the world, which would otherwise have to defend itself and behave responsibly as an independent sovereign. For Foggy Bottom, however, it has been a windfall. Every year it is paid more and more to supervise a giant squalling world of thirteen-year-olds who dress like ho's and bring guns to school, and the next four years promise to be especially rich.<sup>83</sup>

Washington cannot actually *administer* its conquered territories, much less derive revenue from them. And

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<sup>83</sup> David E. Sanger, "A Handpicked Team for a Sweeping Shift in Foreign Policy", *The New York Times*: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/01/us/politics/01policy.html?hp>

their governments degrade, because they are neither sovereign nor supervised. Their job is to implement policies designed in Harvard and approved in Washington. Except in countries with strong traditions of historical probity in state service, the civil servants steal. They have nothing else to do, and there is no prospect of the state becoming a genuine, independent authority.

What does Washington get out of this? Two things. One, the privilege of feeling like a big stud. Of course this applies only to a few people who work inside the Beltway, or who are influential enough in policy studies that their policies actually get adopted. But contributing to actual policies that are actually adopted, even just in some ridiculous forgery of a country in Nowhere, Africa, is an unmistakable feeling. Not only does it provide employment, it makes one's gonads grow by at least a millimeter or two. Many will fight hard for this sensation.

The relationship of dependency and advice is particularly pernicious. Dependency allows American universities to populate the top layers of all foreign institutions with their graduates, largely because those graduates have American connections and thus links to the baskets of dollars which fall out of the sky.

But advice is not supervision, it does not want to be supervision, and it never will be supervision. If the American Embassy tells a foreign "government" what to do, it can usually expect quite a bit of balking and recalcitrance. Absolute orders will generally be complied with, but will greatly increase the general recalcitrance level. Foreigners are people too, like to have their own power, and don't like to be ordered around.

Moreover, the United States is not the British Empire. It is in the business of having clients, whom it pretends to be responsible for and provides large quantities of often unwanted advice to. Ideally, when the advice is good it is listened to and when it is bad it is ignored, but this can go the other way around as well. The State Department is not in the business of providing supervision, and must constantly work hard to prevent the dysfunctional model of advice and dependency from actually turning into responsible, authoritative supervision.

(This is especially problematic because the latter runs the risk of involving the Pentagon, that ancient enemy, which happens to be full of people who just *love* giving orders. The threat that the international community will turn into the Arlington Redneck Empire, perhaps with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace replaced by the Erik Prince Foundation for World Domination, may not actually be a real one — but if you are the sort of person who needs to be kept up at night, it can probably keep you up.)

Two, Americans *care* about foreign public opinion. I used to ask people why they were for Obama all the time, and what I heard — often from people who didn't care at all about politics, normally — was that he would improve America's image in the "eyes of the world." It is generally a waste of time to engage anyone on why the "eyes of the world" should matter, or how exactly they got to pointing in the direction that they generally point in.

Here we must be thankful to the Wikipedians, for the term *meat puppet*.<sup>84</sup> To be quite frank: invading Elbonia,

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<sup>84</sup> [Dead link]



replacing its government with Elbonian dignitaries of a perspective congenial to oneself, and announcing that Elbonia has joined the family of free nations, is not a way to convert one's opinion, plus Elbonia's opinion, into two opinions.

At least, rationally. But the democratic voter is always responsible to consensus. And the absurd concept of "international public opinion," which since 1945 always of course just tracks the public opinion of the most fashionable people in the United States, persuades a fair number of voters. Thus, by shaping the opinions of people outside the US, one can influence votes inside it. The people who do this work do not, of course, think in such Machiavellian terms, but their results benefit from the Machiavellian logic just the same.

This is the purpose of America's pseudo-empire of patronage, in which the money always flows outward and the Mohammed Attas flow only inward: to provide a large number of unnecessary jobs to America's ruling class, the smartest and most sophisticated people in the country, and those most able to obtain alternative employment. And also to gain the set of votes that are needed to keep the policy running, as well as to sustain other policies aligned with it. In short, like most of what Washington is today: a self-licking ice-cream cone.

But because of the multiple frauds essential to this forgery, Washington's "sway" is peculiarly insidious as compared to its Roman, Chinese or British predecessors, who when they ruled a conquered land ruled it honestly, making no attempt to disguise the nature of the relationship.

America's client states, especially outside the core European and Asian dominions (ie, in the "Third World," a term whose inventors did not predict its present connotations), deliver quality-of-government metrics that would have shocked any Roman procurator, Chinese mandarin or British district commissioner. Even when these possessions are at "peace," graft, banditry, and sheer incompetence are the rule rather than the exception. And "peace" is not always the rule.

(For example, were you surprised when, seeing the pictures on TV, you noticed that even in the old downtown of Bombay, a place chock-full of beautiful Raj-era buildings like the Taj Hotel, the streets were full of garbage? Or do you think that this is because the local authorities are so thrifty and impoverished, that they prefer to invest their few rupees on educating the poor?)

This is the current system of the world: a disaster. Absurd in every detail. It lives, it works in a sense, it even is mostly peaceful, but it is held together by chewing-gum and I don't trust it to last another decade. Look — I said this about our financial system. Was I wrong?

But anyway. As usual, I have spent most of the essay berating what we have now, because what we have now is so gigantic and fascinating. By comparison, my preferred approach — the reactionary theory of world peace, if you will — is simple to the point of stupidity.

The reactionary theory of world peace states that *peace* is best defined as *security*. That's all. We are just equating two words. And we can add a third: *order*. Peace, security, and order are all the same thing. That's the

theory. It even sounds cool — if not as cool as Brazil's *ordem e progresso*.<sup>85</sup>

What use is this creepy-sounding triangle — *peace, security, and order*? (Doesn't this just sound like the motto of a 21st-century secret-police force? And it may well yet be.)

Here is one: note that if you believe in peace, you believe that peace is an *absolute good*. It is not a Goldilocks good. No one believes that you can have not enough peace, just right peace, and too much peace. No one says, with St. Augustine: give me world peace, but not just yet. The more peace you have, the better. Concepts such as *freedom* are in the same class.

But if peace, security, and order are all the same thing, there must be equivalents of absolute peace: absolute security, and absolute order. Strangely enough, whatever word you exchange "absolute" for in these phrases either means nothing, or still sounds creepy — *total security*, for example, is not in any way an improvement. Suppose, for example, that John McCain had run for President on a platform of *absolute order*? "As President, I will impose *absolute order*." No, I just can't see it happening.

(This is due to your democratic programming, which first and foremost defends democracy — the strategy of symbiont and parasite alike. The democrat is not willing to equate peace with security and order. He does not like security and order, because either total security or absolute order in the end conflicts with democracy.)

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<sup>85</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag\\_of\\_Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Brazil)

The peaceful, reactionary world of Patchwork is a world populated entirely by rational absolute sovereigns: states which are managed competently and coherently for financial benefit alone. This world can be created on a subset of the entire planet, of course, though then it needs plans for defending itself against the rest of said planet.

Within Patchwork, peace, security and order are most definitely the same thing. As discussed in previous essays, of course, a realm is designed to maintain absolute or near-absolute levels of internal security and order. Society within a Patchwork realm has none of the running sores of the democratic era: there are no slums or dirty streets, no gangs, and no politics. Japan or Singapore would be the closest analogies today, though both of course are quite imperfect.

We can define a rational absolute sovereign, such as a Patchwork realm, as *orderly*. Such a sovereign is controlled centrally from a single point, by competent administration acting for a purely financial purpose. All its motivations come from its desire to produce return on equity. If predation is more profitable than cooperation, it will predate. If cooperation is more profitable, it will cooperate. (Obviously, the goal is to design a framework in which cooperation is always more profitable.)

(Note that all these criteria remain absolute. The administration cannot be too competent, its purposes cannot be too neutral, its responsiveness to the proprietors too complete, etc, etc.)

Patchwork is at peace if every realm in it is *secure*: ie, it is orderly, and it maintains absolute control over its patch. Once again, no realm can ever be too secure, just as peace

is always better than war and no society can be too peaceful.

Between realms, our goal is to achieve the same or nearly the same level of stability, without building anything like a centralized authority that would impose it. A centralized or federalized authority with the power of judgment or enforcement is itself the government — and if you try to split judgment and enforcement into competing agencies, you are just asking for trouble.

Patchwork has no central authority or community of realms. It has conventions, such as rules protecting shared resources (the atmosphere, the oceans and the fish in them, orbital space, etc) from any abuse that would be collectively uneconomic. Sometimes people need to get together and update these rules, as with any system of rules, but they are only occasional delegates and do not constitute any sort of permanent organization. Sometimes realms must vote on these changes, but this is a rare event indeed. Turning the entire system into One Big State is a failure mode, not a goal.

So, for example, let's say a coalition of demented realms are taken over by administrations which, for some reason, are affrighted with the perils of global warming. (Stipulating that global warming is a pile of nonsense<sup>86</sup> — if not, substitute something else which is.) They round up a majority and manage to change the rules for the atmosphere, imposing carbon credits or some such absurdity.

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<sup>86</sup> Hyperlink to: <https://climateaudit.org>

Is that something that could happen in an Patchwork world? Sure. What should the realms in the minority do? Go along with it, I'm afraid. This is the level of imperfection I think is acceptable in a design that remains basically peaceful — it is aggression in a sense, but of an inherently unprofitable form.

What we don't want to see is a situation in which we get civil war, we get predation by some patches on other patches, we get standing internal alliances, we get patron-client relationships, etc, etc, and all the nasty structures that arose under the old international order. A bit of overzealous pollution control is a strain the system can handle.

Our goal is thus to get, at the level of Patchwork as a whole, as close to *total security* as we can. This is also *complete stability*. Ideally, politics is at a complete end, and war as a means of political endeavor. Except through free and peaceful transfers of shares, there should be no further changes in power. Each realm in each patch should last forever. Frankly, if this isn't world peace, I don't know what is. I hope it's not too much peace for anyone.

(Transfers of shares that constitute a merger into bigger and bigger patches, eventually ending in a one-patch world, should be blocked in some way. Since realms do not control their shares, this cannot be done by restricting share transfers. However, it can be done by including a promise of independent ownership in the realm's resident covenant. Like any other item in the covenant, it can be violated, but usually not profitably.)

The basic secret of inter-realm relations in Patchwork is that it is much, much easier to construct rules for a community of rational or orderly sovereigns than for a community of irrational ones. Therefore, even in a world which contains both rational and irrational sovereigns, it is rational for rational sovereigns to have different rules for other rational sovereigns. This set, whether or not it covers the planet or is even geographically contiguous, constitutes Patchwork. At least if it is working as designed, there should be only one.

Orderly sovereigns deal with each other in a very different way, because orderly sovereigns are sovereigns for whom *deterrence always works*. Therefore, it is extremely easy to discourage predation: it can be deterred either (a) through collective disapproval — which might become quite costly, especially if the disapproval of other realms leads to the disapproval of one's present residents, as it almost certainly would; or (b), all else failing, military retaliation.

Military retaliation is important because, in real life, it is rather hard to make war profitable, and rather easy to make it unprofitable. While there is no supply of rational sovereigns in history, history's profitable wars are often best explained in terms of irrationality. For example, while Hitler's conquests of Czechoslovakia, Poland and France may have been in themselves profitable, each of these three countries was more or less a client state of Great Britain, and counted irrationally on British assistance against Germany. As a result, not only did they not defend themselves, they were not prepared to even try to defend themselves.

Among rational sovereigns, that the theoretical military confrontations which would otherwise occur between Patchwork realms, and which there is no authority to prevent, will just not happen. Armaments will be gradually de-escalated, each side of each border prepared to inflict an adequate level of pain on the other in the event of any attempt at aggression. At the end of the process, cross-border security cooperation between any two sovereigns will be at the same level as that between any two "countries" in the democratic world today, and security forces will revert to police forces.

Of course, this process of complete de-escalation can only happen in an all-Patchwork world. Irrational sovereigns can be aggressive in arbitrary ways for arbitrary crazy reasons, and they are not necessarily deterrable. Against the rest of the world, Patchwork is at least expected to stick together, possibly even forming joint security institutions — which are temporary, of course, based on the specific threat.

The general attitude of Patchwork toward the world outside is *neutrality*. This of course was the staple of American foreign policy for a century, which might well be described as one of the only things Washington has ever done right. No more need be said about this well-known approach, due of course to George Washington.<sup>87</sup> The rules of neutrality are well-understood under classical (19th-century) international law, a considerable improvement on its 20th-century successor.

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<sup>87</sup> Washington's Farewell Address 1796:  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp)



Patchwork will defend itself from the rest of the world, but never attack. It will trade if allowed, not if otherwise. Basically, it will keep its head down and try its best to avoid surrendering sovereignty in any way. It will try to keep its trade balanced, avoid accepting loans in currencies it cannot print, maintain resource, food and energy independence to whatever extent possible, etc, etc, etc. Its advantage is in its vitality and economic efficiency, and it will maintain this.

Especially, each realm and Patchwork as a whole will do their best to avoid any compromise of sovereignty. A slice of sovereignty is what each shareholder in each realm holds, and it is not to be surrendered for any reason. And while there may be a theoretical incentive for individual realms to free-ride in defending the whole, surely the loss of reputation capital exceeds any potential profit to ride freely.

I'm sure that, to many democrats, Patchwork seems like a design for permanent global tyranny. This is just something we'll have to work through. However, it is indisputable that, at least if it works as planned, Patchwork will produce world peace. And it is certainly reactionary! Just think of it as a cross between the Holy Alliance, the Hanseatic League, and the National Basketball Association — with all the advantages of each, and the downsides of none.

# Beyond Folk Activism

## Patri Friedman

### Introduction

I deeply yearn to live in an actual free society, not just to imagine a theoretical future utopia or achieve small incremental gains in freedom. For many years, I enthusiastically advocated for liberty under the vague assumption that advocacy would help our cause. However, I recently began trying to create free societies as my full-time job, and this has given me a dramatic perspective shift from my days of armchair philosophizing.<sup>88</sup> My new perspective is that the advocacy approach which many libertarian individuals, groups, and think tanks follow (including me sometimes, sadly) is an utter waste of time.

Argument has refined our principles, and academic research has enlarged our understanding, but they have gotten us no closer to an actual libertarian state. Our debating springs not from calculated strategy, but from an intuitive “folk activism”: an instinct to seek political change through personal interaction, born in our

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<sup>88</sup> Essentially this was a movement from a far view to a near view, see Robin Hanson’s discussion of the difference in “A Tale Of Two Tradeoffs” [<http://www.overcomingbias.com/2009/01/a-tale-of-two-tradeoffs.html>] and “Abstract/Distant Future Bias” [<http://www.overcomingbias.com/2008/11/abstractdistant.html>]. The difference is also covered in Daniel Gilbert’s *Stumbling On Happiness* (Knopf, 2006)

hunter-gatherer days when all politics was personal. In the modern world, however, bad policies are the result of human action, not human design.<sup>89</sup> To change them we must understand how they emerge from human interaction, and then alter the web of incentives that drives behavior. Attempts to directly influence people or ideas without changing incentives, such as the U.S. Libertarian Party, the Ron Paul campaign, and academic research, are thus useless for achieving real-world liberty.

In this essay, I will describe our misguided instinct, present some principles for the incentive-level approach, and then describe some of the paths to reform it suggests. My hope is to persuade those brave souls who labor for liberty so diligently to work more wisely as well.

Also, I want to clearly avow that while I criticize folk activism, it often still drives my actions. It is a deep bias, and hard to correct — I strive to overcome it, and I see it in the world because I see it in myself.

### **What Is Folk Activism?**

Our brains have many specific adaptations<sup>90</sup> tuned for the hunter-gatherer environment in which we evolved, which in some ways differs wildly from the modern world. Consider the prevalence of obesity: we eat according to outdated instincts, feasting before a famine that never comes, rather than adapting to our new world of caloric abundance.

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<sup>89</sup> [Dead link]

<sup>90</sup> Jeromy H. Barlow, Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1995)

Similarly, many people have an intuitive “folk economics” which includes a number of biases such as the anti-foreign and make-work biases.<sup>91</sup> These beliefs are demonstrably wrong, ubiquitous, stubbornly resistant to argument and can be tied to aspects of the pre-agricultural economy, strongly suggesting they are an evolved adaptation. While economically literate libertarians delightedly skewer those who argue mistakenly from folk economics, we constantly engage in what I shall call folk activism.

In early human tribes, there were few enough people in each social structure such that anyone could change policy. If you didn’t like how the buffalo meat got divvied up, you could propose an alternative, build a coalition around it, and actually make it happen. Success required the agreement of tens of allies — yet those same instincts now drive our actions when success requires the agreement of tens of millions. When we read in the evening paper that we’re footing the bill for another bailout, we react by complaining to our friends, suggesting alternatives, and trying to build coalitions for reform. This primal behavior is as good a guide for how to effectively reform modern political systems as our instinctive taste for sugar and fat is for how to eat nutritiously.

Folk activism broadly corrupts political movements. It leads activists to do too much talking, debating, and proselytizing, and not enough real-world action. We build coalitions of voters to attempt to influence or replace

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<sup>91</sup> Paul H Rubin, *Folk Economics*:  
[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=320940](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=320940)

tribal political and intellectual leaders rather than changing system-wide incentives.

This is not a cause for despair. Quite the opposite: it is cause for great hope. It suggests that the failure of libertarian activists to produce libertarian countries may stem more from misdirected efforts than from the impossibility of the task. Using analysis instead of instincts, perhaps we can find a better lever, fulcrum, and place to stand from which to attempt our Archimedean effort.

### **Principles For Realistic Activism**

The world is complex and there are many principles that can be used to guide reform, so here I will discuss only the most vital.

#### *Power Has Inertia*

As a libertarian, I find it easy to see the empirical evidence that incentives matter. More difficult, but very important, is to look at the vast gap between libertarian principles and the size and scope of current governments as empirical evidence that power matters too. Politicians are demonstrably, consistently, and ubiquitously expert at entrenching the power of the political class. To most libertarians this is morally illegitimate, but morality has sadly little influence over the realities of power.

If we are ever going to move beyond philosophizing on barstool and blogs to change the power structures of the world, we must accept that power equilibria have considerable inertia. We cannot shift them with hope and outrage alone — we need carefully calculated action.

## *Democracy Is Not The Answer*

Democracy is the current industry standard political system, but unfortunately it is ill-suited for a libertarian state. It has substantial systemic flaws, which are well-covered elsewhere,<sup>92</sup> and it poses major problems specifically for libertarians:

1) Most people are not by nature libertarians. David Nolan reports that surveys show at most 16% of people have libertarian beliefs. Nolan, the man who *founded the Libertarian Party* back in 1971, now calls for libertarians to give up on the strategy of electing candidates! Even Ron Paul, who was enormously popular by libertarian standards and ran during a time of enormous backlash against the establishment, never had the slightest chance of winning the nomination. His “strong” showing got him 1.6% of the delegates to the Republican Party’s national convention. There are simply not enough of us to win elections unless we somehow concentrate our efforts.

2) Democracy is rigged against libertarians. Candidates bid for electoral victory partly by selling future political favors to raise funds and votes for their campaigns. Libertarians (and other honest candidates) who will not abuse their office can’t sell favors, thus have fewer resources to campaign with, and so have a huge intrinsic disadvantage<sup>93</sup> in an election.

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<sup>92</sup> Mancur Olson’s *The Rise and Decline of Nations* is one source. The most recent work on this I know of is Bryan Caplan’s *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, although it covers only one area of democratic failure.

<sup>93</sup> Jonathan Wilde, “Hypothetical Answer on Party Politics”: <http://www.distributedrepublic.net/archives/2004/11/05/hypothetical-answer-on-political-parties/>

Libertarians are a minority, and we underperform in elections, so winning electoral victories is a hopeless endeavor.

### *Emergent Behavior*

Consider these three levels of political abstraction:

1. Policies: Specific sets of laws.
2. Institutions: An entire country and its legal and political systems.
3. Ecosystem: All nations and the environment in which they compete and evolve.

Folk activism treats policies and institutions as the result of specific human intent. But policies are in large part an emergent behavior of institutions, and institutions are an emergent behavior of the global political ecosystem.

### *Institutions, Not Policies*

I believe that libertarians (including myself) waste enormous effort exploring solutions which will never be implemented or even influence policy. These are not necessarily libertarian solutions — often they attempt to achieve the goals of the majority in an effective way. We're following the intuitive, folk-activism approach of proposing plans to our tribe. Unfortunately, the problem is not that our legislators lack for good ideas, but that democracy is a flawed method for choosing among them,

because politicians respond to incentives too.<sup>94</sup> So while we could argue for weeks about the most effective way to stimulate the economy, effectiveness is not the primary criterion by which lawmakers evaluate policies.

Libertarians pour much of our resources into dissecting policy and proposing alternatives. But agitating for a specific policy is like complaining about a price — and forgetting that it's set by supply and demand. While policy analysis is certainly an interesting field, as a method for improving political performance it is about as useful as price-fixing is for improving economic performance. And while not without benefit,<sup>95</sup> policy debates *feel* far more important than they actually are. Our cognitive bias is to assume that we have a voice equivalent to an individual in a Dunbarian hunter-gatherer tribe,<sup>96</sup> and so we comment on nationwide events with a passion to match — even when no one is listening. (Now you understand blogs and bar conversations!) These debates function as a mirage which distracts us from the more fundamental structural

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<sup>94</sup> Russell Roberts, "Pigs Don't Fly: The Economic Way of Thinking About Politics":  
<http://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2007/Robertspolitics.html>

<sup>95</sup> Policy analysis is not without benefit. It helps people realize how flawed existing policies are, which is the foundation for seeing that institutions are flawed. Understanding the flaws in institutions helps us understand the market which breeds them. The process helps our economic understanding, and the tradeoffs which any society must make. Policy analysis is an important base for our understanding, but we have plenty of base — now we need some boom.

<sup>96</sup> Eliezer\_Yudkowsky, "Dunbar's Function":  
[http://lesswrong.com/lw/x9/dunbars\\_function/](http://lesswrong.com/lw/x9/dunbars_function/)



reforms that would actually achieve liberty in our lifetimes.<sup>97</sup>

### *Ecosystem, Not Institutions*

Government is just another industry, where countries offer services to citizens, but it has some unfortunate features. It is a geographically segmented monopoly, and since all land is taken, the industry has an enormous barrier to entry. To start a new government you have to beat an old one, which means winning a war, an election, or a revolution. And it has very high customer lock-in: there are barriers to emigration and immigration, and switching countries involves both high financial and emotional costs. These characteristics result in a horribly uncompetitive industry, so it is no surprise that existing firms tend to exploit customers instead of innovating to attract them.

This analysis neatly avoids moral debates and has clear practical implications: if the problem is an uncompetitive market, the solution is to make it more competitive. It also exposes the futility of strategies that don't address this issue, like trying to win the war of ideas. While appealing and noble, this is ineffective. Without competitive pressure, our institutions generate flawed policies which benefit the political class, not those that reflect the consensus of academic economists. We need more competition in government, not more academic papers or mindshare.

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<sup>97</sup> This is the motto of the Free State Project, and a wonderful rallying cry.

### *An Experimental Ecosystem*

Before I was introduced to the field of law and economics, I assumed that the main problem in achieving a good society was coming up with shared morals and values.<sup>98</sup> Then you just write them down as laws, and you are done. It turns out that even if we agree on a definition of rights, there is no straightforward way to derive laws and enforcement mechanisms. Implementation is not a trivial detail, it's the hard part! To make things worse, *designing* policies is the easy case. When we view them as the emergent behavior of institutions, things go from difficult to impossible (so they'll take us a little longer).

Because we have no *a priori* knowledge of the best form of government, the search for good societies requires experimentation as well as theory — trying many new institutions to see how they work in practice. This requires institutions to be embedded within a system which allows for their easy creation, testing, and comparison. A governing industry with a lower barrier to entry and easier switching of providers would allow for this constant small-scale experimentation.

This system would offer a host of benefits:

- It creates specific, real-world examples to point to when debating the merits of various systems. How many millions of words of academic papers about the benefits of free-markets does it take to add up to the two words “Hong Kong”?

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<sup>98</sup> David D. Friedman, “Law’s Order: What Economics Has To Do With Law and Why It Matters”: [http://www.daviddfriedman.com/laws\\_order/index.shtml](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/laws_order/index.shtml)

- Prospective customers of the new system could actually experience it physically and emotionally, rather than as a mental abstraction, which is far more powerful for changing minds. For citizens of the USSR, a single visit to the West could outweigh years of Soviet propaganda.
- It enables proponents of an alternative system (like libertarianism) to live their dream much sooner, because they only need to get a small group together to experiment with their new society, rather than convince an entire existing nation (which may never happen).
- It supports an ongoing, evolutionary process where societies learn over time, and change with the world.
- It doesn't assume there is one best society for everyone. People can attempt to live their ideals without having to impose them on others. Not only does it embrace multiple variants of libertarianism, but other goals and methods for creating a good society.

### *The Role Of The Frontier*

As Bryan Caplan says,<sup>99</sup> when working within existing institutions, structural change and policy change are the

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<sup>99</sup> See: "Policy All The Way Down":  
[http://econlog.econlib.org/archives/2009/01/policy\\_all\\_the.html](http://econlog.econlib.org/archives/2009/01/policy_all_the.html);  
 "Except Seasteading":  
[http://econlog.econlib.org/archives/2009/01/except\\_seastead.html](http://econlog.econlib.org/archives/2009/01/except_seastead.html)

same, because you can only change structure by implementing a policy. Only by starting with a blank slate can you make a better structure without having to overcome entrenched interests, which tend to resist innovation because it reduces their power. Historically, the frontier has functioned as this canvas for experimentation.

There are positive aspects to this need for a frontier, because there is a subset of people (currently quite frustrated) for whom the urge to pioneer is a primal drive. For all that I rail against bad instincts, it is far easier to work with instincts than against them, so it's good to have one on our side!

Also, the first steps toward settling a frontier are to come up with a new idea, spread it, and build a coalition of people ready to live it — the same procedure and instinct as folk activism. The difference is the strategy of actually implementing the vision with the number of people one can reasonably enroll, rather than one which requires millions to agree before it can be put into practice. The problem is not instincts, it is following them without re-evaluating whether they are appropriate for the modern world.

### *Technology Is Much More Important Than Rhetoric*

Consider the relative effects of Zero Population Growth<sup>100</sup> rhetoric vs. birth control technology at changing the population growth curve of the world. It's monumental. Technology alters incentives, which is a far more effective way to achieve widespread change than to attempt to fight

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<sup>100</sup> <http://www.populationconnection.org>

human biases or change minds. Unfortunately, technology is also much newer in human history than persuasion, and so is a much less intuitive strategy.

### **Alternatives To Folk Activism**

#### *Free State Project*

The FSP aims to bring 20,000 liberty activists to the state of New Hampshire.<sup>101</sup> So far, 9,000 have signed up and 700 have moved. Even these few have been able to elect 4 of 400 state representatives, which makes it plausible that the full 20,000 could have a substantial impact on state politics.

I have doubts about the amount of freedom the FSP will be able to secure, because most restrictions and taxation are at the federal level, and the issue of states' rights was pretty solidly settled in 1865.<sup>102</sup> Instead of opening a new frontier, it is on land claimed and controlled by the most powerful military force in the world. It also operates within traditional democracy and its flaws.

Still, the FSP was consciously designed as a reaction to the failure of libertarian reform to date, and is a vast improvement over folk activism. It concentrates our strength rather than depending on a mass libertarian movement which will never come. It is based on immediate action: practicing our principles today to demonstrate that freedom works, rather than just endlessly preaching.

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<sup>101</sup> See: <https://freestateproject.org>

<sup>102</sup> See: "American Civil War":  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Civil\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War)

Being inside the United States may limit the freedom achievable, but it also limits the difficulties, so this is a good low-risk, low-reward option.

### *Crypto-Anarchy*

Proposed in Tim May's Crypto Anarchist Manifesto<sup>103</sup> way back in 1988, the idea is that anonymous digital cash could greatly limit government power. While computer and networking technology has developed enormously since it was written, digital cash has not taken off, and the main impact of digital transactions seems to have been on record industry sales, not on *"the ability to tax and control economic interactions"* as May predicted.

Despite the mathematical elegance of digital crypto, our analog world is the site for most spending and income, which can thus be taxed and regulated. Also, physical reality provides a nexus for control — no matter how sophisticated the avatar, a knife between its master's shoulderblades will seriously cramp its style.

While the Internet has been a big step towards a more virtual lifestyle, we aren't all going to be jacked in full-time anytime soon. Over time more of May's predictions will come true, but only slowly and for a limited subset of human affairs. Still, cyberspace is an inherently more competitive, more anonymous, harder to tax and regulate environment, and so advancing it is a way to accelerate freedom through technology.

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<sup>103</sup> See:  
<https://www.activism.net/cypherpunk/crypto-anarchy.html>

### *Market Anarchism*

As described in books like *Machinery of Freedom*,<sup>104</sup> this is a system where competing private agencies define, judge, and enforce the law. It is a strange and beautiful idea which is impossible to do justice in a short space, in part because it is so much a system of human action, not human design. Its brilliant logic neatly solves the problem of how to create an institution that will generate efficient policies.<sup>105</sup> And it is an ecosystem, not just an institution: it generates many legal systems through competition, innovation, and imitation.

Unfortunately, there is no clear incremental path to such a society. Proponents offer the vague hope that governments will somehow fade away, but as observed earlier, power is demonstrably good at perpetuating itself. Anarchism is worth revisiting only if we can get a political tabula rasa some other way. For example...

### *Seasteading*

Seasteading is my proposal to open the oceans as a new frontier,<sup>106</sup> where we can build new city-states to experiment with new institutions. This dramatically lowers the barrier to entry for forming a new government, because expensive though ocean platforms are, they are

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<sup>104</sup> David D. Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom: Guide to a Radical Capitalism* (Open Court, 1989)

<sup>105</sup> See:

[http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Academic/Anarchy\\_and\\_Eff\\_Law/Anarchy\\_and\\_Eff\\_Law.html](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Academic/Anarchy_and_Eff_Law/Anarchy_and_Eff_Law.html)

<sup>106</sup> Also note that space has even more mobility than the ocean, and far more resources, plus it diversifies humanity off rock #3, which is extremely important. Thus the oceans are merely the penultimate frontier.

still cheap compared to winning a war, an election, or a revolution. A lower barrier to entry means more small-scale experimentation. Also, the unique nature of the fluid ocean surface means that cities can be built in a modular fashion where entire buildings can be detached and floated away. This unprecedented physical mobility will give us the ability to leave a country without leaving our home, increasing competition between governments.

This plan is one of immediate action, not hope or debate. It makes use of the people we have now rather than trying to convert the masses, and avoids entrenched interests by moving to the frontier. Most importantly, it increases jurisdictional competition. It will not just create one new country, but rather an entire ecosystem of countries competing and innovating to attract citizens. Like any market, the process of trial and error will generate solutions we can't even imagine — but that we know will be better for customers.

Seasteading is far from certain to succeed, but this is a hard problem, and there will be no easy answer. Two of the greatest risks are the expense and danger of the marine environment, and the chance that states will interfere. The latter is a systemic risk for any reform (if they'll interfere with a new city in the ocean, then no place is safe<sup>107</sup>), but the former is an idiosyncratic risk

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<sup>107</sup> Some people argue that strong defense against existing states is another answer, such as WMDs. This solution has some issues: 1) Pioneering can be done incrementally, while big trouble happens to those who *almost* have nukes. 2) Self-defense doesn't address any of the systemic problems that hamper current governments. 3) Being able to successfully defend against the strongest existing nations is a huge barrier to entry. For these reasons, the experimentalist world we are



that could be diversified away if seasteading was part of a portfolio of freedom projects.

I founded *The Seasteading Institute* to advance this path, so if you're interested in learning more, check out our website, FAQ, and book.

### **Conclusions**

If a fraction of the passion, thought, and capital that are wasted in libertarian folk activism were instead directed into more realistic paths, we would have a far better chance at achieving liberty in our lifetime. We must override our instinct to proselytize, and instead consciously analyze routes to reform. Whether or not you agree with my analysis of specific strategies, my time will not have been wasted if I can get more libertarians to stop bashing their heads against the incentives of democracy, to stop complaining about how people are blind to the abuse of power while themselves being blind to the stability of power, and to think about how we can make systemic changes, outside entrenched power structures, that could realistically lead to a freer world.

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looking for will be unlikely if states commonly interfere with small experimental societies.

## Seasteading and its Critics

### **Patri Friedman**

Cato Unbound Managing Editor Jason Kuznicki writes in *Cato @ Liberty*<sup>108</sup>:

What's needed, Friedman claims, is not more study or advocacy, but a change in the deeper institutional structures that give rise to government policies...

Is this just a young person's impatience? Or has Friedman found a serious weakness in libertarian activism? One reply I might make is that Cato scholars have researched quite a few topics that Friedman would probably find worthwhile... Consider the many Cato scholars who have heralded the rise of tax competition... Or consider Bryan Caplan's *The Myth of the Rational Voter*...

It is certainly true that academic research is useful for understanding what types of structural reform may help realistically transform society, and it definitely informs my strategy. In other words, even if one buys into my worldview, the optimal quantity of academic research is not zero. It is even true that the optimal *rate* of academic research is not zero — new phenomena such as tax competition may be worthy of study, even if you share my goals (liberty in our lifetimes), and my skepticism of folk activist methods.

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<sup>108</sup> See: <https://www.cato.org/blog/new-cato-unbound>

However, as we anti-government types know quite well, defending something as having some virtue does not mean it is better than alternatives, or even of net positive value. Academic research is not useless, but I believe that we are over-invested in talk relative to action and in politics relative to technology, for all the reasons stated in my piece. Describing the benefits of liberty may sell some — but showing it will convince more. Telling people not to have babies may slightly reduce the birth rate — but inventing the pill reduces it drastically.

Ilya Somin has a good piece at the Volokh Conspiracy.<sup>109</sup> Among other things, he says:

Ironically, Patri Friedman's grandfather Milton Friedman was one of the best examples of the impact of libertarian advocacy on policy. Among other things, Milton Friedman's efforts, combined with those of other libertarians, played a key role in ending the draft, one of the greatest infringements on individual liberty in modern American history. Friedman also helped influence many governments around the world in the direction of adopting relatively more free market economic policies.

I think I would like to believe that this is true, and certainly there is a strong case to be made that individual advocacy can have some occasional, limited, and temporary positive effects on liberty. I went too far in characterizing these efforts as useless. The fact remains that they will not get us "liberty in our lifetimes," that

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<sup>109</sup> See:  
[http://volokh.com/archives/archive\\_2009\\_04\\_05-2009\\_04\\_11.shtm/#1239074395](http://volokh.com/archives/archive_2009_04_05-2009_04_11.shtm/#1239074395)

structural reforms (such as the fall of communism and spread of democracy) have had far more positive impact on liberty than minor policy changes, and that technology is a much more realistic path to changing the world than rhetoric.

Furthermore, I question to what degree advocates such as my grandfather could influence policy without successful examples. The United States used to be such an example — but those days are long past, and the current administration seems hell bent on moving even further from them, all the while calling it “progress.” Thus even if one believes in fighting the war of ideas, examples make for powerful ammunition. Surely some of our advocacy budget (perhaps a substantial portion) should go to creating such examples. As Michael Strong writes in his new book *Be The Solution* (reviewed here by Max Borders<sup>110</sup>), we should “Criticize By Creating.”

Both Ilya and Cato Fellow Doug Bandow<sup>111</sup> mention that existing countries may not allow libertarian seasteads to exist. Bandow suggests that political advocacy in existing societies is thus an essential part of even a separatist movement like seasteading. Again, let us not confuse positive value with an efficient action. It is certainly true that a culture of liberty is conducive to tolerance of libertarian startup societies. It does not follow that the budget of a libertarian startup state (or libertarianism in general) should be spent on advertising the joys of libertarianism rather than developing a good product. A good product is, after all, the best form of advertising.

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<sup>110</sup> [Dead Link]

<sup>111</sup> See: “Seasteading: Homesteading the High Seas of Liberty”: <https://www.cato.org/events/seasteading-homesteading-high-seas-liberty>

States may not tolerate freedom on the high seas — but if they don't, then nowhere is safe. In other words, for a given cultural climate, the most freedom will always be had at the frontier, furthest from current power structures. We know that the current political, cultural, and intellectual climate means we are very far from a libertarian state inside the borders of every existing nation. The open question is: in that same environment, how much freedom can be had on the frontier? It is more, but is it substantially more — enough to be worth the extra cost and other disadvantages?

This is where the question of state intervention comes in. It is certainly a major threat, but I do not think that the case that existing governments will not allow any significant freedom on the frontier is overwhelming. Yes, the United States will intervene anywhere in the world — but only for a *tiny* list of offenses. WMD research, harboring terrorists, anonymous banking, and exporting drugs all come to mind as things that will provoke state intervention. But that is a very short list, and it covers most of the territory! In other words, one only needs to ban a very few things in order to be on a friendly basis with the United States.

Whether this will be sufficient to maintain autonomy remains to be seen, and even if seasteading succeeds wildly I expect complex compromises to be necessary. But I think we have a fighting chance at a huge increase in freedom. And a far better chance on the frontier than anywhere else. It's there or nothing — let's give freedom one last try.

## The Education of a Libertarian

### Peter Thiel

I remain committed to the faith of my teenage years: to authentic human freedom as a precondition for the highest good. I stand against confiscatory taxes, totalitarian collectives, and the ideology of the inevitability of the death of every individual. For all these reasons, I still call myself “libertarian.”

But I must confess that over the last two decades, I have changed radically on the question of how to achieve these goals. Most importantly, I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible. By tracing out the development of my thinking, I hope to frame some of the challenges faced by all classical liberals today.

As a Stanford undergraduate studying philosophy in the late 1980s, I naturally was drawn to the give-and-take of debate and the desire to bring about freedom through political means. I started a student newspaper to challenge the prevailing campus orthodoxies; we scored some limited victories, most notably in undoing speech codes instituted by the university. But in a broader sense we did not achieve all that much for all the effort expended. Much of it felt like trench warfare on the Western Front in World War I; there was a lot of carnage, but we did not move the center of the debate. In hindsight, we were preaching mainly to the choir — even if this had the important side benefit of convincing the choir’s members to continue singing for the rest of their lives.

As a young lawyer and trader in Manhattan in the 1990s, I began to understand why so many become disillusioned after college. The world appears too big a place. Rather than fight the relentless indifference of the universe, many of my saner peers retreated to tending their small gardens. The higher one's IQ, the more pessimistic one became about free-market politics — capitalism simply is not that popular with the crowd. Among the smartest conservatives, this pessimism often manifested in heroic drinking; the smartest libertarians, by contrast, had fewer hang-ups about positive law and escaped not only to alcohol but beyond it.

As one fast-forwards to 2009, the prospects for a libertarian politics appear grim indeed. Exhibit A is a financial crisis caused by too much debt and leverage, facilitated by a government that insured against all sorts of moral hazards — and we know that the response to this crisis involves way more debt and leverage, and way more government. Those who have argued for free markets have been screaming into a hurricane. The events of recent months shatter any remaining hopes of politically minded libertarians. For those of us who are libertarian in 2009, our education culminates with the knowledge that the broader education of the body politic has become a fool's errand.

Indeed, even more pessimistically, the trend has been going the wrong way for a long time. To return to finance, the last economic depression in the United States that did *not* result in massive government intervention was the collapse of 1920–21. It was sharp but short, and entailed the sort of Schumpeterian “creative destruction” that could lead to a real boom. The decade that followed — the roaring 1920s — was so strong that historians have

forgotten the depression that started it. The 1920s were the last decade in American history during which one could be genuinely optimistic about politics. Since 1920, the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women — two constituencies that are notoriously tough for libertarians — have rendered the notion of “capitalist democracy” into an oxymoron.

In the face of these realities, one would despair if one limited one’s horizon to the world of politics. I do not despair because I no longer believe that politics encompasses all possible futures of our world. In our time, the great task for libertarians is to find an escape from politics in all its forms — from the totalitarian and fundamentalist catastrophes to the unthinking demos that guides so-called “social democracy.”

The critical question then becomes one of means, of how to escape not via politics but beyond it. Because there are no truly free places left in our world, I suspect that the mode for escape must involve some sort of new and hitherto untried process that leads us to some undiscovered country; and for this reason I have focused my efforts on new technologies that may create a new space for freedom. Let me briefly speak to three such technological frontiers:

(1) **Cyberspace.** As an entrepreneur and investor, I have focused my efforts on the Internet. In the late 1990s, the founding vision of PayPal centered on the creation of a new world currency, free from all government control and dilution — the end of monetary sovereignty, as it were. In the 2000s, companies like Facebook create the space for new modes of dissent and new ways to form communities



not bounded by historical nation-states. By starting a new Internet business, an entrepreneur may create a new world. The hope of the Internet is that these new worlds will impact and force change on the existing social and political order. The limitation of the Internet is that these new worlds are virtual and that any escape may be more imaginary than real. The open question, which will not be resolved for many years, centers on which of these accounts of the Internet proves true.

(2) **Outer space.** Because the vast reaches of outer space represent a limitless frontier, they also represent a limitless possibility for escape from world politics. But the final frontier still has a barrier to entry: Rocket technologies have seen only modest advances since the 1960s, so that outer space still remains almost impossibly far away. We must redouble the efforts to commercialize space, but we also must be realistic about the time horizons involved. The libertarian future of classic science fiction, à la Heinlein, will not happen before the second half of the 21st century.

(3) **Seasteading.** Between cyberspace and outer space lies the possibility of settling the oceans. To my mind, the questions about whether people will live there (answer: enough will) are secondary to the questions about whether seasteading technology is imminent. From my vantage point, the technology involved is more tentative than the Internet, but much more realistic than space travel. We may have reached the stage at which it is economically feasible, or where it soon will be feasible. It is a realistic risk, and for this reason I eagerly support this initiative.

The future of technology is not pre-determined, and we must resist the temptation of technological utopianism — the notion that technology has a momentum or will of its own, that it will guarantee a more free future, and therefore that we can ignore the terrible arc of the political in our world.

A better metaphor is that we are in a deadly race between politics and technology. The future will be much better or much worse, but the question of the future remains very open indeed. We do not know exactly how close this race is, but I suspect that it may be very close, even down to the wire. Unlike the world of politics, in the world of technology the choices of individuals may still be paramount. The fate of our world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism.

For this reason, all of us must wish Patri Friedman the very best in his extraordinary experiment.

**Editor's Note:** Mr. Thiel has further elaborated on the question of suffrage here. We copy these remarks below as well:

I had hoped my essay on the limits of politics would provoke reactions, and I was not disappointed. But the most intense response has been aimed not at cyberspace, seasteading, or libertarian politics, but at a commonplace statistical observation about voting patterns that is often called the gender gap.

It would be absurd to suggest that women's votes will be taken away or that this would solve the political problems that vex us. While I don't think any class of people should be disenfranchised, I have little hope that voting will make things better.

Voting is not under siege in America, but many other rights are. In America, people are imprisoned for using even very mild drugs, tortured by our own government, and forced to bail out reckless financial companies.

I believe that politics is way too intense. That's why I'm a libertarian. Politics gets people angry, destroys relationships, and polarizes peoples' vision: the world is us versus them; good people versus the other. Politics is about interfering with other people's lives without their consent. That's probably why, in the past, libertarians have made little progress in the political sphere. Thus, I advocate focusing energy elsewhere, onto peaceful projects that some consider utopian.

# Lure of the Void

## Nick Land

### 1

#### The Frontier of Disillusionment

...the idea that we are no longer able to accomplish feats we once could do (like travel to the Moon) clashes with the *prevailing narrative* that we march forever forward. Not only can't we get to the Moon at present, but the U.S. no longer has a space shuttle program — originally envisioned to make space travel as routine as air travel. And for that matter, I no longer have the option to purchase a ticket to fly trans-Atlantic at supersonic speeds on the Concorde. Narratives can break.

— Tom Murphy<sup>112</sup>

Shanghai's 2010 World Expo included an entire pavilion dedicated to urban futures. Among the exhibits was a looping video on a large screen, depicting varieties of futuristic city-types as speculative animations, light-heartedly, and with obvious orientation to youngsters. Since children are the denizens of the future, it makes sense to treat them as the target audience for a vision of tomorrow's world, but the effect was also disconcerting, as if parenthesizing what was shown in a form of deniable, non-abrasive irony. *This is what the*

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<sup>112</sup> Tom Murphy, "Why Not Space?" *Do the Math*:  
<https://dothemath.ucsd.edu/2011/10/why-not-space/>

*future used to look like.* Does it still? On this point, a subtle reserve concealed itself as a concession to childish credibility, or even inconsequential fantasy.

One of the four future cities on display had been constructed off-planet, in earth-orbit. It was populated by happy humans (or, at least, humanoids). No date was predicted. Untethered from firm futuristic commitment, it intersected adult perception as a fragment of cross-cultural memory.

*Imagine a city in space, as a child might.* Given the strategic obscurity of this statement, when encountered at a carefully-crafted international event, in a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, global, Chinese city, in 2010, it is tempting to approach it through analogy. Half a century ago, when Western children were encouraged to imagine such things, during the twilight decades of modernity (1.0), was a sincere promise being made to them that they would inherit the solar system? If so, is such a promise now being humorously referenced, or is it being re-directed, and re-made?

The 2010 Expo had a Space Pavilion, too, which only deepened the perplexity. Given the opportunity to re-activate Expo traditions of techno-industrial grandiosity, it was a spectacular miss-launch, containing almost nothing in the way of monumental hardware. The content fell into two broad categories: video-based immersive special effects (highly-appreciated by kids), and vanilla-domestic applications of space technology, on the approximate model of NASA's lamentable "we're the guys who brought you the non-stick frying-pan" PR campaign. Anybody hoping for soul-crushing cyclopean military-analog launch vehicles and the acrid stink of

rocket fuel had clearly wandered into the wrong century. Contemporary international etiquette prevailed, and according to that, the business of blazing into orbit is far too crude – even *primitive* – to be vigorously publicized.

So even in China, at least in its 2010 window to the world, off-planet aspirations were stirred together indissolubly with childhood fantasy. The unmistakable insinuation, harmonized with the commanding heights of world opinion, was that such hard SF dreams had been outgrown. Rather than staring through a window into the spark-torched clangorous workshop of China's emerging national space program, Western visitors found their gazes bounced from mirrored glass, into a 'postmodern' vacuum of collapsed expectations, amongst the eroded ruins of Apollo. Four decades of Occidental space failure smiled politely back. *You lost it, didn't you?* (A quick trip across the Huangpu to the drearily mundane USA Pavilion sufficed for unambiguous confirmation.)

The dismissal of a human off-planet future as a childish dream has plenty to build upon. The world's publishers and book shops have long accommodated their classification systems to the sleazy ambiguity of the 'science fiction / fantasy genre', in which futurism smears into oneirism, and the vestiges of hard SF *programs* (telecommunication satellites, moon bases, space elevators...) are scattered amongst fantastic elves-in-space mythologies (from *Star Wars* to *Avatar*). Competitive prophecies decay into polemical allegories, making statements about anything and everything except the shape of the future.

Of all the cultural ripples from the truncation of the Apollo-era space trajectory, none is more telling than the

rising popularity of ‘Moon Hoax’ conspiracy theorizing. Not satisfied with the *prospective* evacuation of the heavens, the moon hoaxers began systematically editing space-travelers out of the past, beginning with the lunar landings. Whilst clearly maddening to space technologists, American patriots, NASA supporters, and sensible types in general, this form of ‘denialism’ is not only historically comprehensible, but even inevitable. If nobody seriously contests the fact that Columbus reached the New World, it is at least in part because what was then started kept happening. Something began, and continued. Nothing comparable can be said about the process of lunar colonization, and that, in itself, is a provocative oddity. When forecasts are remembered, abandoned outcomes can be expected to mess up memories.

Old-school space enthusiast Sylvia Engdahl finds the whole situation pathological, and subjects it to a kind of jerry-built psychoanalysis. With defiant optimism, she attributes “the present hiatus in space travel” to xenophobic trauma:

Much is said about the positive effect of the photos of Earth obtained by Apollo 8, which for the first time showed our planet as a globe, a fragile refuge amid barren surroundings, and thereby launched the environmental movement. The concomitant negative impact — the spread of gut-level knowledge that space is an actual place containing little that’s familiar to us and perhaps much that we’d rather not meet — is not spoken of. But it may be no less significant. Could this be one of the reasons why interest in space died so soon after the first Moon landing,

resulting in the cancellation of the last few planned Apollo missions?<sup>113</sup>

She elaborates:

Most people do not want to contemplate the significance of an open universe. They do not let uneasiness about it into their minds, but underneath, as the collective unconscious of humankind absorbs the knowledge, they grasp it, and react with dismay disguised as apathy. It does not occur to them that they might be disturbed by the prospect of space exploration. Rather, they believe that although in theory they want humankind to reach new worlds, it's of low priority compared to the problems of here and now. ... [T]he widespread conviction that the public no longer cares about space may also be a rationalization.<sup>114</sup>

Engdahl hints at a modern variant of the Orpheus myth, and captures something of arresting significance. We were told not to look back from orbit, but of course, we did, and what we saw pulled us back down. The damnation of our extraterrestrial out-leap gave birth to a lucid environmentalist vision — the earth seen from space. That is why Tom Murphy turns to the Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America, John Michael Greer, to transmute elegiac disillusionment into acceptance:

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<sup>113</sup> Sylvia Engdahl, "Confronting the Universe in the 21st Century", *The Space Review*:

<http://www.thespacereview.com/article/2125/1>

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.



The orbiters are silent now, waiting for the last awkward journey that will take them to the museums that will warehouse the grandest of our civilization's failed dreams. There will be no countdown, no pillar of flame to punch them through the atmosphere and send them whipping around the planet at orbital speeds. All of that is over. ...In the final analysis, space travel was simply the furthest and most characteristic offshoot of industrial civilization, and depended — as all of industrial civilization depends — on vast quantities of cheap, highly concentrated, readily accessible energy. That basic condition is coming to an end around us right now.<sup>115</sup>

Disillusionment is simply awakening from childish things, the druids tell us. This is a point Murphy is keen to endorse: “space fantasies can prevent us from tackling mundane problems.” Intriguingly, his initial step towards acceptance involves a rectification of false memory, through a (sane) analog of ‘Moon Hoax’ denial. Surveying his students on their understanding of recent space history (“since 1980 or so”), he discovered that no less than 52% thought humans had departed the earth as far as the moon in that time (385,000 km distant). Only 11% correctly understood that no manned expedition had escaped Low Earth Orbit (LEO) since the end of the Apollo program (600 km out). Recent human space activity, at least in the way it was imagined, had not taken place. It was predominantly a collective hallucination.

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<sup>115</sup> John Michael Greer, “An Elegy for the Age of Space”, *The Archdruid Report*. [Dead link; available here: <https://www.countercurrents.org/greer250811.htm>]

Murphy's highly-developed style of numerate druidism represents the null hypothesis in the space settlement debate: perhaps we're not out there because there's no convincing reason to expect anything else. Extraterrestrial space isn't a frontier, even a tough one, but rather an implacably hostile desolation that promises nothing except grief and waste. There's some scientific data to be gleaned, and also (although Murphy doesn't emphasize this) opportunities for political theatrics. Other than that, however, there's nothing beyond LEO worth reaching for.

The neo-druidic starting point is unapologetically down to earth. It begins with energy physics, and the remorseless fact that doing just about anything heats things up.<sup>116</sup> According to Murphy's calculations, a modest 2.3% global economic growth rate suffices to bring the planetary surface to the boiling point of water within four centuries, even in the complete absence of (positive) greenhouse effects. Economic growth is essentially exponential, and that guarantees that we're cooked, due to elementary thermodynamic principles, efficiency limits, and the geophysics of heat dissipation. Within this big picture, conventional 'energy crisis' concerns are no more than complicating details, although Murphy engages them thoroughly. (He provides a neat summary of his argument, with internal links, here.)<sup>117</sup>

From the neo-druidic perspective, the space 'frontier' is a horizon of sheer escapism, attracting those who

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<sup>116</sup> Tom Murphy, "Can Economic Growth Last?", *Do the Math*: <https://dothemath.ucsd.edu/2011/07/can-economic-growth-last/>

<sup>117</sup> Tom Murphy, "My Great Hope for the Future", *Do the Math*: <https://dothemath.ucsd.edu/2012/02/my-great-hope-for-the-future/>

stubbornly deny the necessity of limitation (pestilential growth-addicts):

...relying on space to provide an infinite resource base into which we grow/expand forever is misguided. Not only is it much harder than many people appreciate, but it represents a distraction to the message that growth cannot continue on Earth and we should get busy planning a transition to a non-growth-based, truly sustainable existence.<sup>118</sup>

Since plenty of irrepressible growth-mongers seriously want to get out there,<sup>119</sup> Murphy trowels on the discouragement in thick, viscous layers. Most of the deterrent factors are relatively familiar, but none of them are frivolous, or easily dismissed. The principal problem is the most qualitative (and druidic): human adaptation to terrestrial conditions. This is strikingly illuminated by a consideration of terrestrial ‘frontier’ environments that remain almost entirely unexploited, despite environmental features that are overwhelmingly more benign than anything to be found off-planet. When compared to any conceivable space station, asteroid mining camp, lunar base, or Mars colony, even the most ‘difficult’ places on earth — the seabed, for instance, or the Antarctic — are characterized by extreme hospitability, with ready access to breathable air, nutrients, fuels, and other essential resources, a moderate temperature range, protection from cosmic radiation, and proximity to existing human settlements. This is to be contrasted with typical extraterrestrial conditions of hard

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<sup>118</sup> Tom Murphy, “Stranded Resources”, *Do the Math*:  
<https://dothemath.ucsd.edu/2011/10/stranded-resources/>

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.transterrestrial.com>

vacuum, utter exposure, complete absence of bio-compatible chemistry, and mind-jarring distances.

Murphy touched upon these distances in his survey of student space ignorance. If earth is represented by a “standard” 30-centimeter globe, LEO is 1.5 centimeters from the surface, and the moon a full 9 meters further out. For intuitive purchase upon more expansive space visions, however, a re-calibration is required.

It makes sense to model the earth as a small apple (8.5 cm in diameter), because then an astronomical unit (AU, the mean earth-sun distance of roughly 150 million kilometers, 93 million miles, or 500 light seconds) shrinks to a kilometer, with the sun represented by a sphere a little over 10 meters in diameter. The moon now lies less than 2.7 meters out from our toy earth, but Mars is never less than 400 meters away, the nearest asteroids a kilometer away. The distance to the edge of the planetary solar system (Neptune) is at least 29 kilometers, and within this spatial volume (a sphere of roughly  $113,400 \text{ AU}^3$ ), less than one part in 27 billion is anything other than desolate vacuum, with almost all the rest being solar furnace. On the toy scale, the outer edge of the solar system, and the Oort cloud, lies 50,000 kilometers from the earth. The distance from our shriveled apple to the nearest star, Proxima Centauri, is 277,600 toy kilometers (or 41.5 trillion real ones).

If space colonization is being construed as an escape from terrestrial resource constraints, then a pattern of activity needs to be knitted across these distances, producing — at a minimum — an energy surplus. In a non-frictional kinetic system, governed almost purely by (macroscopic) conservation of momentum, the basic currency of space

activity is ‘delta-v’, or the transformation of velocity. Delta-v is broadly proportional to energy expenditure on “small burns”, when fuel consumption makes a negligible difference to total propelled mass, but when complete flights or “large burns” are calculated, the math becomes nonlinear, since the reduction of fuel payload becomes a critical factor in the equation (subtracting inertial resistance as it adds motive force). In practical terms, the prospective off-planet (‘space-faring’) energy economy consists of the consumption of propellant to move propellant about, with non-fuel vehicle mass contributing little more than a rounding error in the calculations.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, it is possible to get the rocket moving faster than the exhaust velocity once the fuel mass exceeds 63% of the total initial mass. In order to get delta-v values in the 20 km/s range when the exhaust velocity is less than 5 km/s requires almost nothing but fuel. ...[T]he large delta-v’s required to get around the solar system require a lot of fuel...<sup>120</sup>

This double-registry of fuel within the nonlinear equations of “rocket math” – as payload and propellant – is the key to Murphy’s deep skepticism about the viability of off-planet energy economics. The fuel resources strewn within the inner solar system – even assuming their absolute abundance – cannot be moved around usefully for less energy than they provide. Jupiter offers the most tantalizing example. This methane-rich gas giant might be superficially apprehended as an immense cosmic fuel depot, but even the most generous calculations of delta-v

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<sup>120</sup> Tom Murphy, “Stranded Resources”, *Do the Math*: <https://dothemath.ucsd.edu/2011/10/stranded-resources/>

requirements for a Jupiter ‘tanker-run’ imply energy expenditures at least an order of magnitude higher than energy obtained – from the ‘scooping’ operation alone. The inner solar-system is abundant in “stranded resources” that cannot conceivably be extracted at a cost lower than their value. That, at least, is the coherent neo-druidic perspective.

...and yet, in the yawning void, where the space settlements were meant to have been, the stirrings have not ceased. There even seems to be, unmistakably, a quickening of pace. Chinese ‘Taikonauts’,<sup>121</sup> private (American) ‘NewSpace’ businesses,<sup>122</sup> and ever more advanced robots are venturing out beyond the wreckage of dead dreams.<sup>123</sup> Are they heading anywhere that works, or that even makes sense?

## 2

### The right stuff in the rough

... it’s important to understand what Apollo was, and wasn’t. It was a victory in the Cold War over the Soviets, but because we were at war, we waged it with a state socialist enterprise. What it was not was the first step of opening up the frontier to humanity, and it was in fact a false start that has created a template for NASA and a

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<sup>121</sup> Craig Covault, “First Look: China’s Big New Rockets”, *AmericaSpace*:  
<http://www.americaspace.com/2012/07/18/first-look-chinas-big-new-rockets/>

<sup>122</sup> [Dead link]

<sup>123</sup> Jeff Foust, “From Terror to Triumph”, *The Space Review*:  
<http://www.thespacereview.com/article/2133/1>

groove in which we've been stuck for over four decades now, with many billions spent and little useful progress.

— Rand Simberg<sup>124</sup>

The opening of the American west in the first decades of the 19th century and the opening of the space frontier in these first decades of the 21st century are very similar.

— Mike Snead<sup>125</sup>

Fascism makes our heads spin, which is unfortunate, because an inability to gaze unwaveringly into the dominant 'third way' model of political economy (corporate nationalism) makes the history of the last century unintelligible. For amateur space historians, dropping in briefly on the Moon Nazis is simply unavoidable.<sup>126</sup>

SS Sturmbannführer Wernher von Braun, Deputy Associate Administrator for Planning at NASA Headquarters, Washington DC (1970-2), helps with the introduction. Technical director of the Nazi rocket program at Peenemünde, which culminated in the creation of the A-4 (V-2) ballistic missile, von Braun was brought to America in 1945 as the top prize of Operation Paperclip. His contribution to US rocket development, through Redstone to Apollo (and the moon), was central and indispensable. NASA Socialism was born on the Dark

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<sup>124</sup> [Dead Link]

<sup>125</sup> [Dead Link]

<sup>126</sup> Dave Trumbore, "IRON SKY Moon Nazis to Invade the US", *Collider*: <http://collider.com/iron-sky-us-distribution/>

Side of the Moon.<sup>127</sup> (This probably isn't the right time to wander too deeply into Pynchon territory, but, roughly speaking, that's where we are.)<sup>128</sup>

If fascism sounds unduly harsh, more comfortable terminology lies within easy reach. 'Technocracy' will do fine. The name is less important than the essentials, which were already clearly formulated in the work of a previous German immigrant to the United States, Friedrich List,<sup>129</sup> who devoted an influential book to outlining *The National System of Political Economy* (1841). According to List, the 'cosmopolitanism' of mainstream (Smithean) political economy was insufficiently attentive to the collective national interest. Industrial development was too important to be surrendered to the interplay of private economic agents, and should instead be considered a strategic imperative, within the context of international competition. Only by leveraging the power of the state to regulate trade, foster modern industries, and drive the development of critical infrastructure, could a country hope to advance its interests in the international arena. Development was war by other means, and sometimes the same ones.

When eagerly embraced by Henry Clay, who connected List's ideas with the founding tradition from Alexander Hamilton, these ideas became the basis of the American System. Economic nationalism was to be pursued along the threefold path of managed trade (tariffs),

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<sup>127</sup> [Dead Link]

<sup>128</sup> See: Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*:

[https://gravitys-rainbow.pynchonwiki.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](https://gravitys-rainbow.pynchonwiki.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page)

<sup>129</sup> James Fallows, "How the World Works", *The Atlantic*:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/12/how-the-world-works/305854/>



state-controlled finance (central banking), and state-directed infrastructure development (especially transportation systems). Such policies were already ‘progressive’ or ~~fascist~~ technocratic in that they subordinated private-cosmopolitan economic interests to national purposes, but this took place flexibly, without the more recent encrustations of anti-business class warfare, large-scale entitlement spending, or Cathedralist cultural policing. Capitalism was to be steered, and even promoted, rather than milked, deliberately ruined, or replaced. Due to its patriotic direction, elitism, and affinity with militarization, this technocratic progressivism could easily be understood as a phenomenon of ‘the right’, or at least (in Walter Russell Mead’s words) the “Bipartisan Establishment.”<sup>130</sup>

Apollo perfectly exemplified American technocratic progressivism in the teutonized, neo-Hamiltonian tradition. A small step for a man, and a substantial leap for mankind, it was a colossal high-jump for the US Leviathan, marking an unambiguous triumph in the structured competition with its principal geo-strategic and ideological rival. The Apollo program wasn’t *exactly* part of the ballistic missile arms race with the Soviet Union, but it was close enough to contribute to its symbolic, mass-psychological, and deterrent purpose. Landing a man on the moon was a type of overkill, relative to landing a nuke on Moscow, and it expressed a super-abundant payload-delivery capability that had won a war of messages.

In an article originally published in *The American Spectator* (November 10, 2010), Iain Murray and Rand

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<sup>130</sup> [Dead link]

Simberg describe the moon race as Big Government's Final Frontier, remarking that:

There's something about space policy that makes conservatives forget their principles. Just one mention of NASA, and conservatives are quite happy to check their small-government instincts at the door and vote in favor of massive government programs and harsh regulations that stifle private enterprise.<sup>131</sup>

They conclude:

It is time for conservatives to recognize that Apollo is over. We must recognize that Apollo was a centrally planned monopolistic government program for a few government employees, in the service of Cold War propaganda and was therefore itself an affront to American values. If we want to seriously explore, and potentially exploit space, we need to harness private enterprise, and push the technologies really needed to do so.<sup>132</sup>

Whilst it would be pointlessly upsetting to translate this into a call for the *denazification* of outer space, it would be equally misleading to read it as nothing of the kind. Progressive technocracy, in a range of national flavors, is the only effective space politics the world has ever seen, and it is still far more likely — in the near-term — to be modernized than radically supplanted. Space

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<sup>131</sup> Iain Murry and Rand Simberg, "Big Government's Final Frontier", *Competitive Enterprise Institute*:

<https://cei.org/content/big-governments-final-frontier>

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

development poses such an immense collective challenge that it sucks even liberty-oriented conservatives such as Simberg towards accommodation with the activist, catalytic, neo-Hamiltonian state. At least initially, there's simply no other place where the clanking machinery of Leviathan is more at home.

Popular culture has picked up on this well. Among the many reasons for the ecstatic reception to Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) was appreciation for its 'realistic' tonal portrait of practical space activity. Science and commerce played their parts, but the leading edge was dominated by quasi-military heavy metal, funded by massive budgets based on gravely obscure strategic objectives, directed and crewed by hard, obedient, buzz-cut types who did whatever it took to get things done. Weapons research trumped all other considerations. Breaking out into the deep frontier required a rigid, armored-bulkhead seriousness that civilians would never quite understand.

When suddenly stripped of its Cold War context, the proxy warfaring of the rocket-state lost coherent motivation, and immediately veered off course into increasingly ludicrous pseudo-objectives. By the closing years of the 20th century, all pretense of a big push outwards had been dissipated amongst commoditized LEO satellite maintenance, unconvincing zero-gravity science projects, ritualistic space-station diplomacy, multicultural astronaut PR, and even cynical make-work schemes for dangerously competent ex-Soviet technicians. Clever science continued, based on robot probes and space telescopes, but none of that even hinted at an impetus towards space settlement, or even manned spacecraft, and typically advised explicitly against it.

Despite all the very real 'right stuff'<sup>133</sup> heroism, putting people in space was a circus act, and perhaps it always had been.

Whatever else outer space may be, it's a place where the right goes schizoid, and the more that it's thought about, the more jagged the split. The seemingly straightforward, dynamic-traditional, and extremely stimulating 'image' of the *frontier* illuminates the point. The frontier is a space of attenuated formal authority, where entrepreneurial, 'bottom-up' processes of social formation and economic endeavor are cultivated amongst archetypal 'rugged individualists', its affinity with libertarian impulses so tight that it establishes the ('homesteading') model of natural property rights, and yet, equally undeniably, it is a zone of savage, informal warfare, broken open as a policy decision, pacified through the unremitting application of force, and developed as a strategic imperative, in the interest of territorial-political integration. By fleeing the state, in the direction of the frontier, the settler or colonist extends the reach of the state towards the frontier, drawing it outwards, and enhancing its ferocity, or *roughening* it. The path of anti-governmental flight confuses itself with a corresponding expansion, hardening, and re-feralization of the state, as the cavalry learn from the Indians, in a place without rules. Then the railroad comes. *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* meets *Starship Troopers*.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (London: Picador, 2008)

<sup>134</sup> David Wright, *Rational Anarchy: An Analysis of the theme given by Professor Bernard De La Paz In Robert A. Heinlein's 'The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress'*:  
<http://dwrightsr.tripod.com/heinlein/RatAnarch/>

“A strategy for achieving economic benefit from space must involve both government and industry, as did the development of the American West,” argues Martin Elvis, and no one seriously disagrees.<sup>135</sup> Whenever realism is prioritized on the extraterrestrial horizon, some variant of rough-and-dirty technocratic progressivism always waits on the launch-pad, ready to piggy-back business off-planet on patriotic, Leviathan-funded, first-stage boosters. ~~Over-hasty denazification is strictly for earth-bound softies~~ The neo-Hamiltonian jump-leads work too well to drop. As usual, Simberg expresses this best:

The United States should become a spacefaring nation, and the leader of a spacefaring civilization.

That means that access to space should be almost as routine (if not quite as affordable) as access to the oceans, and with similar laws and regulations. It means thousands, or millions, of people in space — and not just handpicked government employees, but private citizens spending their own money for their own purposes. It means that we should have the capability to detect an asteroid or comet heading for Earth and to deflect it in a timely manner. Similarly it means we should be able to mine asteroids or comets for their resources, for use in space or on Earth, potentially opening up new wealth for the planet. It means that we should explore the solar system the way we did the

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<sup>135</sup> Martis Elvis, “After Apollo”, *Harvard International Review*: <http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=2925>

West: not by sending off small teams of government explorers — Lewis and Clark were the extreme exception, not the rule — but by having lots of people wandering around and peering over the next rill in search of adventure or profit.

We should have massively parallel exploration — and not just exploration, but development, as it has worked on every previous frontier.<sup>136</sup>

Which brings us to ‘NewSpace’...

### 3a

There are two related questions posed by human exploration. First, is there anything economically useful to do out there, that pays your way? And second, can you live off the land, and use local resources to survive, or will we always be tied to support from earth? If the answer to both is yes, then you get space colonies, self-sustainable life off-planet. If the answer to both is no, then space is like Mt. Everest. Tourists might go to Mt. Everest, sherpas might make a living off of it, but no one really lives there.

If the answer is that you can live off the land, but it’s not economically useful, it’s like Antarctica. It was 40 years between the last time we were

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<sup>136</sup> Rand Simberg, “A Space Program for the Rest of Us”, *The Space Review*:  
<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/a-space-program-for-the-rest-of-us>

there, when Shackleton reached Antarctica, and when the U.S. Navy went back in 1912. There's a similar lapse between going to the Moon the first time and, hopefully, when we'll return. In that case, you can form an outpost and live there, but you're sustained by constant funding, since engineering doesn't pay for itself. If the answer is that there are economically useful things to do, such as mining Helium-3 on the Moon, but we're always reliant on Earth for basic necessities, then space becomes a North Sea oil platform. You can make money there, but it will always be a hostile environment.

These are four very radically different human futures. And they're all part of a larger question: Is there a human future beyond Earth? It's a question ranks up there with whether there's intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. We can search for life with probes and telescopes, but to determine the living range of humanity, we're going to have to send humans into space.

— Scott Pace<sup>137</sup>

What should the payload be? It does not matter. That is the point. This is not about getting a useful payload into space: That is almost irrelevant. It is about guaranteeing a market for companies offering launch services to get things going. I mean this totally. If we could think of nothing better to launch, concrete blocks would be fine. My philosophy is:

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<sup>137</sup> [Dead link]

*Launching **anything** is good.*

— Paul Almond<sup>138</sup>

The material base for a space-faring future is not only stranded in space, but also stranded in time. Not only are the gravitationally-unlocked resources from which it would assemble itself strewn across intimidating immensities of vacant distance, but the threshold where it all begins to come together – in an autocatalytic extraterrestrial economy – is separated from the world of present, practical incentives by dread gulfs of incalculable loss. In a variant of the old joke, if getting off-planet is the goal, a planet is the absolutely worst place to set out from. “I can tell you how to get there,” the local helpfully remarked. “But you shouldn’t start from here.”

Being out there could quickly start to make sense, as long as we were already there. Experimenting with this perspective-switch makes the animating impulse clearer. Most tellingly, it exposes how deeply planets suck, so that merely not being on one is worth almost anything. That’s the end game, the final strategy, ultimately arranging everything, with anti-gravity as the key.

Once gravity is perceived as the natural archetype of imprisonment, keeping you somewhere, whether you want to be there or not, the terrestrial-economic motivations for off-planet expansion are revealed in their fundamental spuriousness. The reason to be in space is to be in space, freed from planetary suckitude, and any benefits to Earth-dwellers that accrue on the way are

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<sup>138</sup> [Dead link]



mere stepping stones. Off-planet resources diverted to the surface of the Earth are, in the ultimate spacer scheme, wasted, or at least strategically sacrificed (since such wastage is almost certainly required in the interim). In the final analysis, the value of anything whatsoever is degraded in direct proportion to the gravitational influences brought to bear upon it, and descent from the heavens is a fall.

A wider cosmo-developmental view sharpens resolution (although this requires that Smart's invaluable insights<sup>139</sup> are strictly set aside, and black holes avoided with maximum prejudice). Smear into fast-forward until the process of extraterrestrial escape has been substantially accomplished, then freeze the screens. Fleeing gravity can now be seen as no more than the first step in a more thorough, antagonistic contestation with gravity and its works. Asteroids and comets are being pulverized, quarried, or bored into sponges, leaving moons, planets, and the sun itself as the local problems of interest. Such bodies are 'problems' because they deform space with gravity wells, which trap resources, but their status as development obstacles can be abstracted further. These worlds, at least partially isolated from the emerging deep-space *commercium* by their own mass, have been shaped by gravity into approximate spheres, which is to say – from the developmental perspective – into the very worst shapes that are mathematically *possible*, since they minimize the ratio of (reactive) surface to volume, and thus restrict resource accessibility to the greatest conceivable extent. Way out there, in deep space and the

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<sup>139</sup> Nick Land, "Implosion":  
<https://oldnicksite.wordpress.com/2011/04/29/implosion/>

deep future, the gathering developmental impulse is to go full Vogon, and demolish them completely.<sup>140</sup>

When seen from outside, planets are burial sites, where precious minerals are interred. By digging through the earth's mantle, for instance, all the way down to its interior end, 3,000km beneath the surface, one reaches a high-pressure iron-nickel deposit over 6,500km in diameter – a planet-vaulted metal globe roughly 160,000,000,000 cubic kilometers in size, doped by enough gold and platinum to coat the entire surface of the earth to a depth of half a meter. To a moderately advanced off-world civilization, pondering the practicalities of its first planet-scale demolition, leaving this buried resource trove in place has a robotic-industrial opportunity cost that can be conservatively estimated in the region of  $1.6 \times 10^{23}$  human-level intelligences, a mineral stockpile sufficient to manufacture a trillion sentient self-replicating probes for every star in the galaxy. (Even ardent conservationists have to recognize how tasty this morsel will look.)

*Lift-off*, then, is merely a precursor to the first serious plateau of anti-gravity technology, which is oriented towards the more profoundly productive task of *pulling*

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<sup>140</sup> See: "Vogon", *Wikipedia*: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vogon>

The Vogons are a fictional alien race from the planet Voghsphere in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* — initially a BBC Radio series by Douglas Adams — who are responsible for the destruction of the Earth, in order to facilitate an intergalactic highway construction project for a hyperspace express route. Vogons are slug-like but vaguely humanoid, are bulkier than humans, and have green skin. Vogons are described as "one of the most unpleasant races in the galaxy—not actually evil, but bad-tempered, bureaucratic, officious and callous", and having "as much sex appeal as a road accident" as well as being the authors of "the third worst poetry in the universe". They are employed as the galactic government's bureaucrats."

*things apart*, in order to convert comparatively inert mass-spheres into volatile clouds of cultural substance. Assuming a fusion-phase energy infrastructure, this initial stage of off-world development culminates in the dismantling of the sun, terminating the absurdly wasteful main-sequence nuclear process, salvaging its fuel reserves, and thus making the awakened solar-system's contribution to the techno-industrial darkening of the galaxy. (Quit squandering hydrogen, and the lights dim.)

Focus for a few seconds on the economic irritability that arises at the sight of an oil-well flaring off natural gas, through sheer mindless incompetence, then glance at the sun. 'Unsustainable' doesn't begin to capture it. Clearly, this energy machinery is utterly demented, amounting to an Azathothic orgy of spilled photons.<sup>141</sup> The entire apparatus needs to be taken apart, through extreme solar surgery. Since this project has yet to receive sustained consideration, however, the specific engineering details can be safely bracketed for now.

The inexorable logic of techno-industrial efficiency, on its anti-gravity vector, means that *the only consistent motivation for leaving the earth is to dismantle the sun* (along with the rest of the solar-system), but that doesn't play well in Peoria. Unsurprisingly, therefore, those sensitized to political realities, media perceptions, and public relations are inclined to emphasize other things,

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<sup>141</sup> See: H. P. Lovecraft, *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*:  
"[O]utside the ordered universe [is] that amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the center of all infinity—the boundless daemon sultan Azathoth, whose name no lips dare speak aloud, and who gnaws hungrily in inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond time and space amidst the muffled, maddening beating of vile drums and the thin monotonous whine of accursed flutes."

depicting the earth as a destination for cosmic bounty or — even more immediately — for juicy tax-funded pork,<sup>142</sup> rather than as a tricky but highly-rewarding demolition problem.

Conspicuously missing from the public space debate, therefore, is any frank admission that, “(let’s face it folks) — planets are misallocations of matter which don’t really work. No one wants to tell you that, but it’s true. You know that we deeply respect the green movement, but when we get out there onto the main highway of solar-system redevelopment, and certain very rigid, very extreme environmentalist attitudes – Gaian survivalism, terrestrial holism, planetary preservationism, that sort of thing — are blocking the way forward, well, let me be very clear about this, that means jobs not being created, businesses not being built, factories closing down in the asteroid belt, growth foregone. Keeping the earth together means dollars down the drain – a lot of dollars, *your dollars*. There are people, sincere people, good people, who strongly oppose our plans to deliberately disintegrate the earth. I understand that, really I do, you know – honestly – I used to feel that way myself, not so long ago. I, too, wanted to believe that it was possible to leave this world in one piece, just as it has been for four billion years now. I, too, thought the old ways were probably best, that this planet was the place we belonged, that we should – and could – still find some alternative to pulling it apart. I remember those dreams, really I do, and I still hold them close to my heart. But, people, they

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<sup>142</sup> “Time to End Pork Barrel Monster Rocket and Expensive Russian Space Ferry”, *Space Travel*:  
[http://www.space-travel.com/reports/Time\\_To\\_End\\_Pork\\_Barrel\\_Monster\\_Rocket\\_And\\_Expensive\\_Russian\\_Space\\_Ferry\\_999.html](http://www.space-travel.com/reports/Time_To_End_Pork_Barrel_Monster_Rocket_And_Expensive_Russian_Space_Ferry_999.html)

were just dreams, old and noble dreams, but dreams, and today I'm here to tell you that we have to wake up. Planets aren't our friends. They're speed-bumps on the road to the future, and we simply can't afford them anymore. Let's back them up digitally, with respect, yes, even with love, and *then let's get to work...*" [Thunderous applause]

Since, during the present stage of extraterrestrial ambition, pandering to the partisans of cosmic disintegrationism cannot reasonably be conceived as a sure-fire election winner, it is only to be expected that rhetoric of this kind has been muted. Yet, in the absence of some such vision, or consistently extrapolated alignment with anti-gravity, the off-planet impulse is condemned to arbitrariness, insubstantiality, and insincerity of expression. Absent an uncompromised sense of something else, why not stick to this? The result has been, perhaps predictably, a reign of near-silence on the topic of extraterrestrial projects, even in regard to its most limited, immediate, and practically unobjectionable varieties.<sup>143</sup>

If escaping the earth – and gravitational confinement in general – is not an intelligible end, but only a means, what provides the motivation? It is into this cramped, awkwardly-deformed crevice of aspiration that NewSpace must insinuate itself. To speak of 'insincerity' might seem unduly harsh – since there is no reason to suspect conscious deception, or even carefully-calibrated reservation, when NewSpace advocates outline their

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<sup>143</sup> "Why Won't the Political Parties Talk About Space?", *Popular Mechanics*:  
<https://www.popularmechanics.com/space/a11956/why-wont-the-political-parties-talk-about-space-12636543/>

plans. An enveloping structure of implausibility nevertheless announces itself in every project that is advanced, manifested through the incommensurability between the scale of the undertaking and the rewards that supposedly incentivize it. Space tourism, asteroid mining, micro-gravity experimentation and manufacturing... really? Is it genuinely imaginable that these paltry goals finally or sufficiently motivate a prolonged struggle against the terrestrial gravity-trap, rather than serving as fragile *pretexts* or *rationalizations* for the pursuit of far more compelling, yet hazy, unarticulated, or even completely unsuspected objectives?

When this question is extended backwards, and outwards, it gathers force. Stretch it back to the moon, and out to Mars, and the inference becomes increasingly irresistible. None of these 'missions' made, or make, any sense whatsoever, except insofar as they abbreviate some wider, undisclosed impulse. Space activity is not the means to a targeted end, but the end to be advanced by a sequence of missions, whose specific content is therefore derivative, and devoid of intrinsic significance. Once the inarticulate outward momentum decays, leaving nothing but an arbitrary extraterrestrial destination to represent it, the naked absurdity that is exposed rapidly extinguishes the last, flickering embers of popular motivation. Four decades of explicit lunar nihilism attest abundantly to that.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Razib Khan, "Neil Armstrong and the End of the Whig Conceit", *Discover*: <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/gnxp/2012/08/neil-armstrong-and-the-end-of-the-whig-conceit/>

Whilst the partial privatization of space activity ('NewSpace') creatively displaces the problem of purpose, it does not radically dispel it. To some degree, NewSpace substitutes the economic motivations of disparate private operators for the political justification of a concentrated public bureaucracy, and by doing so it relieves the pressure to maintain coherent, communicable, and consensual objectives. Space ambitions are freed to enter the fragmented, competitive terrain of idiosyncrasy, variety, experimentation, and even personally-financed frivolity. It might even be thought that seriousness becomes optional.

When examined more doggedly, however, it is clear that the basic problem persists. The terrestrial gravity-well produces a split between the surface of the earth, and 'orbit' (or beyond), and private capital is no less severely divided by this schism than Rocket-State 'public' hardware. Whilst convertible temporarily into forms of inert, stored value, capital is an essentially modern phenomenon, born in industrial revolution, and typically defined by the diversion of immediate consumption into 'roundabout' production, which is to say: machinery. It is reproduced, or accumulated, by circulating through machines, or apparatus, and it is upon this that the gravity-well compels a decision: is NewSpace capital to be invested, unambiguously, *in space*?

A serious space program is, fundamentally and irreducibly, a process or terrestrial evacuation. It requires the consistent relocation (or de-location) of enterprise, resources, and productive capabilities from the earth into space, at least until the threshold of extraterrestrial autocatalysis is reached, at which point a break has been achieved, and an autonomous off-planet economy

established. Whatever the opportunities for obfuscation (which are probably considerable), the basic *decision* remains unaffected. The accumulation of a terrestrial fortune is not at all the same, and is in fact almost certainly economically inconsistent, with the sustained investment in an off-planet industrial infrastructure. *Either* stuff is being shifted into space, irrevocably, *or not*.

## 3b

### **Menace in the west**

Recognizing the head start obtained by the Soviets with their large rocket engines, which gives them many months of lead-time, and recognizing the likelihood that they will exploit this lead for some time to come in still more impressive successes, we nevertheless are required to make new efforts on our own. For while we cannot guarantee that we shall one day be first, we can guarantee that any failure to make this effort will make us last. We take an additional risk by making it in full view of the world, but as shown by the feat of astronaut Shepard, this very risk enhances our stature when we are successful. But this is not merely a race. Space is open to us now; and our eagerness to share its meaning is not governed by the efforts of others. We go into space because whatever mankind must undertake, free men must fully share. ... I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal,



before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth.

— John F Kennedy<sup>145</sup>

[James Anthony Froude's] "The Bow of Ulysses" ... endorses the old colonialism, nostalgically recalling the days when Britain was not an empire, but rather British colonialists were pirates and brigands, who robbed, conquered and eventually ruled, gradually making the transition from mobile banditry to stationary banditry without the British government paying much attention. In "The Bow of Ulysses" Froude condemns nineteenth century imperialism as unworkably left wing, and inevitably leading [to] the destruction of the British empire, and thus the ruin of the subjects of the British empire, all of which ensued as he envisaged ... The imperialists, those advocating British Empire, were the left, and the colonialists were the right. And the colonialists correctly predicted that if this were to go on, we would get the left that we now have — one of the many strange facts one encounters if one reads old books.

— James A Donald<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> John F Kennedy, "Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs", *Wikisource*: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Special\\_Message\\_to\\_the\\_Congress\\_on\\_Urgent\\_National\\_Needs](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Special_Message_to_the_Congress_on_Urgent_National_Needs)

<sup>146</sup> James A Donald, "Burning the Past", *Jim's Blog*: <https://blog.jim.com/culture/burning-the-past/>

The peculiarities of the 'space race' have yet to be fully unfolded. Through its extraordinary formality, reducing extraterrestrial ambitions to a binary, international competition to put the first man on the moon, it seems – retrospectively – to owe more to the culture and history of organized sports than to technological and economic accomplishments. There would, by definition, be a winner and a loser, which is to say a Boolean decision, conventional and indisputable. Then it would be over. Perhaps it was seen to be pointing at something further, but in fact the moon was a finishing line.

Within a broad geo-strategic context, the space race was a symptom of thermonuclear stand-off. A modern history of warfare that had descended inexorably from a restrained game of princes to unleashed total war, amongst ideologically-mobilized peoples, targeting their basic institutions, industrial infrastructures, and even demographic root-stocks, had consummated itself – virtually – in the MAD potential for swift, reciprocal extermination. Under these circumstances, a regressive sublimation was called for, relaying conflict through chivalric representatives – even Homeric heroes – who competed on behalf of the super-lethal populations they appeased. The flight of an astronaut symbolized antagonism, substituting for a nuclear strike. In this sense, victory in the space race was a thinly-disguised advance payment on the conclusion of the Cold War.

This sublimation is only half of the story, however, because a double displacement took place. Whilst the space race substituted a formal (chivalric) outcome for a military result, it also marginalized the long-envisaged prospect of informal space colonization, replacing it with a predominantly conventional (or socio-political)

objective. The price of unambiguous symbolic triumph was a 'triumph' that relapsed into the *real ambiguity* of (mere) symbolism, with reality-denying, postmodernist, 'moon hoax' temptations already rising. When nothing is won except winning itself, it could scarcely be otherwise. A champion is not a settler, or anything close to one.

What is this real ambiguity? It begins on the frontier, with a series of questions that reaches beyond the meaning of the space race, and into the identity of America. As a country settled within the modern epoch, and thus exhaustively determined by the dynamics of colonialism, America has been condensed from a frontier.

In extended parenthesis, it is worth noting explicitly that the continent's aboriginal population was not yet America, but something earlier, and other, encountered on the frontier. The idea of a 'Native American' is an exercise in historical misdirection, when it is not merely a thoughtless oxymoron. This is not to suggest that these populations were unable to *become American*, as many did, once America had begun in the modern period. By innovating distinctive modes of secession, they were even — in certain cases — able to become radically American. A reservation casino in institutional flight from the IRS is vastly more American than the Federal Reserve, in a sense that will (hopefully) become evident.

The foundation of America was a flight into the frontier, extending a trajectory of escape into a perpetually receding space, or open horizon — the future made geography, and only subsequently a political territory. This original, informal, and inherently obscure space project is as old as America itself — exactly as old. As Frederick Jackson Turner had already noted in 1893, for

America an open frontier is an existential necessity, which is to say: the basic condition of American existence. Once the frontier closes, borders take over, exceptionality withers into insubstantial rhetoric (or worse, its neoconservative facsimile) and necrosis begins.

In this respect, America cannot be sustained as a state with a space program. It requires an open horizon, extended beyond the earth if necessary, sufficient to support a prolongation of its constitutive colonial process. Only on and out of this *frontier* does America have a future, although 'the USA' could (more) comfortably persist without it. That is why, beneath, alongside, and beyond the space race, the frontier 'myth' has been spontaneously extended to extraterrestrial vistas considered as *an essentially American prospect*. (NASA and its works are quite incidental to this, at best.)

Since this claim invites accusations of gratuitous controversy, it is worth re-visiting it, at a more languid pace. Even after re-emphasizing that *America* is not the same as – and is indeed almost the precise opposite of – *the USA*, obvious objections present themselves. Is not the Russian space program the world's most economically plausible? Is not the upward curve of recent Chinese space activity vastly more exuberant? Hasn't the United Nations claimed the heavens on behalf of a common humanity? What, other than cultural-historical accident, and the unwarranted arrogance stemming from it, could imaginably make 'an essentially American prospect' of outer space?

The counter-point to all of these objections is *colonialism*, understood through its radical, exceptional, American lineage. Colonialism of this ultimate variety

consolidates itself from the frontier, and passes through revolutionary thresholds of a very specific type: wars of independence, or secession (rather than comprehensive regime changes) that are *pro-colonial* (rather than anti-colonial) in nature. The colony, as colony, breaks away, and in doing so creates a new society. Successful examples of such events are extremely rare – even singular, or *exceptional*. There is America, and then there are ‘lost causes’, with considerable (and increasing) overlap between them.

What has any of this to do with outer space, beyond impressionistic analogy? Gravity cements the connection. Dividing the surface of the earth and extraterrestrial space is an effective difference, or practical problem, that can be quite precisely quantified in technological terms (fuel to deliverable payload ratios), and summarized economically. For purposes of comparison, transporting freight across the Pacific costs US\$4/kg (by air), or US\$0.16/kg by ocean-bound container vessel (US\$3,500 per TEU, or 21,600 kg). To lift 1 kg of cargo into Low Earth Orbit (LEO), in stark contrast, costs over US\$4,000 (it was over US\$10,000 by Space Shuttle). Call it *the Rift*: an immense structural re-supply problem, incentivizing economic self-sufficiency with overwhelming force. Each kilogram of extraterrestrial product has saved US\$4,000 before further calculations get started. Out in space, the Rift is the bottom line: a cold, anti-umbilical reality.

Whatever the historic colonial impetus to the *American way* – separation and social re-foundation – is reinforced by orders of magnitude in LEO and beyond. This is an environment that might have been precision-engineered for revolutionary colonialism, as science fiction writers

have long recognized. On the flip side lies a more obviously explanatory conclusion: Because developments beyond the Rift are inherently uncontrollable, there is no readily discernible motivation for terrestrial political-economic agencies to fund the emergence of off-planet societies that are on an irresistible conveyor-belt to independence, whilst voraciously consuming resources, opening an avenue of escape, and ultimately laying the void foundations for a competitor civilization of a radically unprecedented, and thus ominously unpredictable kind.

It follows clearly that the *status quo* politics of space colonization are almost fully expressed by *space colonization not happening*. When understood in relation to the eclipsed undercurrent of the frontier analogy — social fission through revolutionary colonialism or wars of independence — the ‘failure’ of large-scale space colonization projects to emerge begins to look like something else entirely: an eminently rational determination on the part of the world’s most powerful territorial states to inhibit the development of socio-technological potentials characterized by an ‘American’ (revolutionary colonial) tendency.

Of course, in a world that grown familiar with interchangeable anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist declarations, the terms of this (Froude / Moldbug / Donald) analysis are initially disconcerting. When detached from the confusions and conflations of a disturbed periphery, however, the pattern is compelling. Colonists are, by their very nature, in flight from the metropolis. It is less than a single step from this acknowledgement to the recognition that they tend to independence of action, social fission, and political

disintegration, following trends that imperialists – with equal inevitability – seek to curtail. Since colonization, strictly understood, is cultural and demographic transplantation, it only acquires its sense of *expansion* when restrained under imperial auspices. Whilst *colonial* and *rebellious* are not even close to synonymous expressions, they are nevertheless mutually attracted, in near-direct proportion to the rift that separates colony from metropolis. A colonial venture is a rebellion of the most practical and productive kind, either re-routing a rebellion from time into space, or completing itself in a rebellion that transforms an expedition into an escape. Since the triumph of imperialism over colonialism beginning in the second half of the 19th century, it is only in (and as) America that this system of relations has persisted, tenuously, and in large measure occulted by the rise of an imperial state.

It is helpful, then, to differentiate in principle (with minimal moral excitability) between a *colonial* space project, oriented to extraterrestrial settlement, and an *imperial* space program, or policy, designed to ensure terrestrial control over off-planet development, maintain political integrity, and thus secure returns on investment across the Rift. From the perspective of the territorial state, an (imperial) space program that extracted economic value from beyond earth's gravity well would be ideal, but this is an ambition unsupported by the vaguest flickerings of historical precedent (and obstructed by at least four orders of magnitude of yawning economic gulf). Second best, and quite satisfactory, is the simple prevention of colonial space projects, substituting political space theater as an expensive (but low-risk and affordable) alternative. The occasional man on the moon

poses no great threat to the order of the world, so long as we “bring him safely back to earth.”

America was an escape from the Old World, and this definition suffices to describe what it still is – insofar as it still is – as well as what it can be, all that it can be, and what any escape from the new old world – if accurately named, would also be. When outlined by the shadows of dark enlightenment, America is the problem that the USA was designed to solve, the door that the USA closes, the proper name for a society born from flight.

As Nietzsche never exactly said: *Am I understood?*  
*America against the stars and stripes ...*



## Extracts from *Xenosystems*

### Nick Land

#### Quit

Foseti writes:

There's a lot of hand-wringing in these parts of the interwebz about what reactionaries should do.

I have no idea. I certainly have no grand plans to change the world. I like knowing what's going on around me and I like open discussions – i.e. ones that are not choked to death by political correctness.

However, if I were to suggest a plan, I'd say tell the truth.<sup>147</sup>

His (slightly) more detailed suggestions are also commendable. The Cathedral provokes reaction by mandating fantasy over reality, and there is no doubt much that could be done about that.

There is a sub-question about all this, however, which is scarcely less insistent: What do 'we' really want?

*More cybernetics*, argues the determinedly non-reactionary Aretae. Of course, *Outside in* agrees.

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<sup>147</sup> Foseti, "What to Do", *Foseti*:  
<https://foseti.wordpress.com/2013/02/26/what-to-do/>

Social and technical feedback machinery is reality's (only?) friend, but what does the Cathedral care about any of that? It's winning a war of religion. Compulsory anti-realism is the reigning spirit of the age.

The only way to get more tight-feedback under current conditions is by splitting, in every sense. That is the overwhelming practical imperative: Flee, break up, withdraw, and evade. Pursue every path of autonomization, fissional federalism, political disintegration, secession, exodus, and concealment. Route around the Cathedral's educational, media, and financial apparatus in each and every way possible. Prep, go Galt, go crypto-digital, expatriate, retreat into the hills, go underground, seastead, build black markets, whatever works, but *get the hell out*.

Truth-telling already presupposes an escape from the empire of neo-puritan dreams. 'We' need to throw open the exit gates, wherever we find them, so the wreck can go under without us. Reaction begins with the proposition that nothing can or should be done to save it. Quit bailing. It's done. The sooner it sinks the better, so that something else can begin.

More than anything we can say, practical exit is the crucial signal. The only pressure that matters comes from that. To find ways out, is to let the *Outside in*.

### **Exit Test**

What can Exit do? It looks as if France is going to provide an important demonstration:

France has become a defeatist nation.

A striking indicator of this attitude is the massive emigration that the country has witnessed over the last decade, with nearly 2 million French citizens choosing to leave their country and take their chances in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the United States and other locales. The last such collective exodus from France came during the French Revolution, when a large part of the aristocracy left to await (futilely) the king's return. Today's migration isn't politically motivated, however; it's economic.

This departing population consists disproportionately of young people — 70% of the migrants are under 40 — and advanced-degree holders, who do their studies in France but offer their skills elsewhere. The migrants, discouraged by the economy's comparatively low salaries and persistently high unemployment — currently at 10.9% — have only grown in number since Socialist Francois Hollande became president.

The young and enterprising in France soon realize that elsewhere — in London, say — obstacles to success are fewer and opportunities greater. The British capital is now France's sixth-largest city, with 200,000 to 400,000 emigres.

The exile rolls also include hundreds of thousands of French retirees, presumably well-off, who are spending at least part of their

golden years in other countries. Tired of France's high cost of living, they seek out more welcoming environments.

My beloved country, in other words, has been losing not only its dynamic and intelligent young people but also older people with some money. I'm not sure that this social model can work over the long term.<sup>148</sup>

It will be extremely interesting to see.

### **Exit Notes (#1)**

Some notable attempts to dial back the NRx commitment to *exit over voice*, as inherited from Moldbug, have been seen recently. (I think NBS was crucial in advancing this argument, but I couldn't find his post immediately — I'll link to it if someone nudges me helpfully.) It's undoubtedly a central discussion throughout the reactosphere at the moment.

Some preliminary thought-gathering on the topic:

(1) Exit is a scale-free concept. It can be applied rigorously to extreme cases of sociopolitical separation, from secession to extraterrestrial escapes. Yet these radical examples do not define it. It's essence is the commercial relation, which necessarily involves a non-transaction option. Exit means: *Take it or leave it*

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<sup>148</sup> Pascal Bruckner, "France, a down-in-the-dumps nation", *LA Times*:  
<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-bruckner-france-gloom-and-doom-20140223-story.html#axzz2u9H0D8IS>

(but don't haggle). It is thus, at whatever scale of expression, the concrete social implementation of freedom as an operational principle.

(2) As a philosophical stance, Exit is anti-dialectical. That is to say, it is the insistence of an option against argument, especially refusing the idea of *necessary political discussion* (a notion which, if accepted, guarantees progression to the left). *Let's spatialize our disagreement* is an alternative to resolution in time. Conversations can be prisons. No one is owed a hearing.

(3) In regards to cultural cladistics, it can scarcely be denied that Exit has a Protestant lineage. Its theological associations are intense, and stimulating.

(4) Exit asymmetries have been by far the most decisive generators of spontaneous anti-socialist ideology. The iconic meaning of the Berlin Wall needs no further elucidation. The implicit irony is that *people flee towards Exit*, and if this is only possible virtually, it metamorphoses automatically into delegitimation of the inhibitory regime. (Socialism is Exit-suppressive by definition.)

(5) *Exit is an option*, which does not require execution for its effectiveness. The case for Exit is not an argument for flight, but a (non-dialectical) defense of the opportunity for flight. Where Exit most fully flourishes, it is employed the least.

(6) Exit is the alternative to voice. It is defended with extremity in order to mute voice with comparable extremity. To moderate the case for Exit is implicitly to

make a case for voice. (Those who cannot exit a deal will predictably demand to haggle over it.)

(7) Exit is the primary Social Darwinian weapon. To blunt it is to welcome entropy to your hearth.

### **Go Scotland!**

Tribal politics excites the autobiographical impulse, which I'll pander to for just a moment (without pretending to any particular excitement). My immediate ancestry is a quarter Scottish, and — here's the thing — those grandparents were Wallaces. Seriously, they were these guys:



... but it's my remaining three-quarters of mongrelized Brit that is leading this post to its destination. In particular, the 37.5% of English blood coursing through my veins is the part murmuring most enthusiastically for Scotland to vote 'Yes!' to departure this week.

Scotland is hugely over-represented in the UK Parliament, shifting the country's politics substantially to

the Left. While Scottish exit wouldn't necessarily ensure a permanent conservative government — electoral democracy simply doesn't work like that — it's hard to argue that the result could be anything other than an ideological rebound of sorts, with the rump UK's entire political spectrum shunting right. Since such an outcome would almost certainly prolong the viability of liberal democracy, perhaps even worldwide (due to contagion effects), it would be unseemly for any neoreactionary to get adrenalized about it. England would nevertheless undergo a minor restoration, conceivably broadening the political imagination in a modestly positive way.

Every increment of dynamic Anglo capitalism adds resources that will eventually be of great use — especially now, with public ledger crypto-commerce coming online. It is a grave error to become so fixated upon the death of the demotic power structure that positive techno-commercial advances are simply written off, or worse, derided as life-support apparatus for the enemy. Even a minor Anglo-capitalist revitalization would produce *some* deep value (as early, or creative destruction-phase Thatcherism did, amid its manifold failures).

Far more significantly, Scottish secession would mark a turning of the tide, with great exemplary potential. Beginning its new life as a hotbed of socialist lunacy, an independent Scotland would be forced — very rapidly — to grow up, which of course means moving sharply to the right. The more theatrical the transitional social crisis, the more thoroughly leftism-in-power would be humiliated. As everyone now knows, such lessons in the essentially incompetent nature of leftist social administration never have any more than a limited effect, since humans are

congenitally stupid creatures who find profound learning next-to-impossible. Despite this, they are the only remotely effective lessons history offers. However pitiful mankind's political-economic education may be, it is owed entirely to the disaster spectacle of leftism in power. A fresh lesson — the more brutally calamitous the better — should always be welcomed unambiguously. If wild-eyed socialists were to drive Scotland over a cliff, they would be presenting a precious gift to the world thereby. (Sadly, in the opinion of this blog, the probability of such an eventuality is relatively low — Scottish canniness can be expected to re-assert itself with remarkable speed once the Sassenach dupes are no longer subsidizing its disappearance.)

The secession of Scotland, from the perspective of the rump UK, is already a (relative) purge of leftist entropy. With the return of an independent Scotland to minimally-functional, and thus moderately right-corrected government, this purge becomes absolute. A quantum of leftist insanity will have been extinguished, since its condition of existence was a relation of political dependency. No one resorts to beggary when abandoned, solitary, upon a desert island. Compulsory self-reliance mandates adjustment to the right (whether preceded by collapse or not).

An independent Scotland would work, most probably quite quickly. It then lights a beacon of disintegration, first across the Anglosphere, and subsequently more widely. The time of fragmentation will have come. The present world epoch of democracy will then have arrived at its final stage — promoting the break-up of the states it has built (and with them, eventually, itself). Scotland



could light the touch-paper. It would save everybody some time if it did.

[...]

ADDED: As Bremmer explained, Scottish independence would “tilt the entire U.K. political spectrum to the right.” That would boost the odds of a conservative majority winning in 2015. [...] ... “If Scotland votes ‘yes,’ down the road would come the ultimate irony,” Bremmer said. “The U.K. would be more likely to pull out of the E.U., while Scotland clamors to get in.”

### **Age of Exit**<sup>149</sup>

Mark Lutter’s forecast for the general landscape of 21st century politics leaves plenty to argue with, from all sides, and even vociferously, but the basic trend-line he projects is persuasive (at least to this blog):

... the costs of exit are going down. Increased mobility and smaller political units will allow people increasingly to vote with their feet. The old political questions of which ideological empire controls which territory will give way to a choose-your-own-governance meta system. [...] Thus, to be successful, political units will have to attract residents—that is, to providing better services at lower cost. Increased competition among smaller political units will spur innovation, leading to new forms of governance.

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<sup>149</sup> This post is from *Urban Future* (2.1) rather than *Xenosystems*

Many will fail. But the successful will be replicated, outcompeting more stagnant forms. Singapore, Dubai, Hong Kong, Switzerland, and Lichtenstein show the beginnings of such success. [...] Not all the governments will be libertarian. In fact, most probably will not be. Some will experiment with higher levels of redistribution; others with petty tyrannies, zealous zoning and even social exclusion. However, competition will eliminate unsuccessful models. Ultimately, the meta-rules that are emerging are decidedly libertarian in flavor, as choice will govern the survival of political units.<sup>150</sup>

The left won't like this, for obvious reasons. It is dissolidarity incarnate, with an egalitarian-democratic promise that is minimal, at best. I'm not sure whether the criticism has developed beyond indignant scoffing to calmly-formulated theoretical antagonism yet, but it surely will.

The right's objections are likely to be more diverse. Most pointedly, from the perspective here, there is room for deep skepticism about the harshness of the selection mechanisms Lutter is counting upon. Driving a state into insolvency, and liquidation, is no easy thing. For those, especially, who would be delighted to see effective inter-state Darwinism cropping micro-states for adaptive excellence, cold realism concerning the capabilities of states to forestall such outcomes is essential. If

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<sup>150</sup> Mark Lutter, "The Age of Exit has Arrived", *Foundation for Economic Education*:  
<https://fee.org/articles/the-age-of-exit-has-arrived>

widespread conflict-free high-functionality futures sound too good to be true, they probably are.

### **Exit Foundations**

Having lost count of the number of times the demand for *exit guarantees* has come up as an objection to the Patchworked-Neocameral model, it seems worthwhile to reproduce Moldbug's most directly on-point, pre-emptive response to the question. The question being: *What is to stop a regime, once it is entirely unshackled from all domestic political constraint (i.e. Neocameralized), from extinguishing the exit options of its residents?*

As a prefatory note: Like the Misesian praxeology from which it is cladistically descended, the Moldbuggian System is a *transcendental* political philosophy, which is to say that it deals with ultimate or unsurpassable conditions. You have reached the transcendental when there is no higher tribunal, or court of appeal. This is the socio-cosmic buffers. If you don't like what you're seeing here, there's still no point looking anywhere else, because this is all you're going to get:

To live on a Patchwork patch, you have to sign a bilateral contract with the realm. You promise to be a good boy and behave yourself. The realm promises to treat you fairly. There is an inherent asymmetry in this agreement, because you have no enforcement mechanism against the realm (just as you have no enforcement mechanism against the United States). However, a realm's compliance with its customer-service agreements is sure to be a matter of rather intense attention among residents and

prospective residents. And thus among shareholders as well.

For example, I suspect that every customer-service agreement will include the right to remove oneself and one's assets from the realm, at any time, no questions asked, to any other realm that will accept the emigrant. Possibly with an exception for those involved in the criminal-justice process – but this may not even be needed. Who wants a criminal? Not another realm, surely.

Suppose a realm unilaterally abrogates this right of emigration? It has just converted its residents into what are, in a sense, slaves. It is no longer Disneyland. It is a plantation. If it's any good with cinderblocks, barbed-wire and minefields, there is no escape. What do you say if you're stuck on this farm? You say: "yes, Massa." A slave you are and a slave you will be forever.

This is terrible, of course. But again, the mechanism we rely on to prevent it is no implausible *deus ex machina*, no Indian rope-trick from the age of Voltaire, but the sound engineering principle of the profit motive. A realm that pulls this kind of crap cannot be trusted by anyone ever again. It is not even safe to visit. Tourism disappears. The potential real-estate bid from immigrants disappears. And, while your residents are indeed stuck, they are also remarkably sullen and display no great interest in slaving for you. Which is a more valuable patch of real estate, today: South Korea,

or North Korea? Yet before the war, the North was more industrialized and the South was more rural. Such are the profits of converting an entire country into a giant Gulag.

Is that all? Yes — that's all. Beyond the rational economic incentives of the Sovereign Corporation, controlled within a Patchwork-environment (of competition for human resources), there is nothing to which an appeal can be made. The end.

### **Geopolitical Arbitrage**

Stross:

... things will get *very* ugly in London when the Square Mile and investment banking sector ups and decamps for Frankfurt, leaving the service sector and multiethnic urban poor behind.<sup>151</sup>

The specifics of this prediction are nutty, if only because mainland Europe is going down the tubes much faster than the UK, but the *abstract anxiety* is spot on. The globalization of the right is entirely about geopolitical arbitrage (while that of the left is about homogenizing global governance). All the critical trends point towards the exacerbation of the 'problem'. The 21st century is the epoch of fragmentation — unlike anything seen since the early modern period — shifting power to the footloose, and away from megapolitical systems of territorial dominion. *Being left behind* is the rising threat, and we

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<sup>151</sup> See:

<http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2016/01/long-range-forecast.html#comment-1990181>

can confidently expect to see it consolidating as the subtext of all leftist grievance. *You can't just leave.* Watch.

The obstacles to geopolitical arbitrage — i.e. spatial Exit pressure — are security constraints. It requires defensible off-shore bases (and Frankfurt most certainly isn't going to provide one). Eyes need to be fixed firmly on secessionary dynamics (fragmentation), techno-commercial decentralization of hard security, crypto-anonymization, artificial intelligence, and the emergence of capital outposts in the Western Pacific region. More exotic factors include opportunities for radical exodus (undersea, Antarctic, and off-planet), facilitated by *territorial production* (artificial islands). The machinery of capture needs to keep *all* of these escape routes firmly suppressed in order to perpetuate itself. That simply isn't going to happen.

Capital is learning faster than its adversaries, and has done so since it initially became self-propelling, roughly half a millennium ago. It's allergic to socialism (obviously), and tends to flee places where socialist influence is substantially greater than zero. Unless caged definitively, eventually it breaks out. Over the next few decades — despite ever deeper encryption — it should become unmistakable which way that's going.

## **Flea Politics**

One time-tested way to shed parasites is to take a dip:

Foxes will actually take a stick when they have fleas and get into the water slowly. They let the

water raise up to their necks and hold the stick up in the air. As the water goes higher up their face, the fleas will climb higher. Eventually the fox will just have it's nose out of the water while holding the stick. The fleas will climb up the stick and the fox will sink under the water and let the flea infested stick float down the river to the flea's watery grave.<sup>152</sup>

As Balaji Srinivasan remarked (on Ultimate Exit): "... but the best part is this: the people who think this is weird, the people who sneer at the frontier, who hate technology — they won't follow you out there."<sup>153</sup>

Did you really think it was going to be that easy?<sup>154</sup>

Space de-colonization is already preparing to queer-up the escape trajectory:

As venture capitalist space entrepreneurs and aerospace contractors compete to profit from space exploration, we're running up against increasingly conflicting visions for human futures in outer space. Narratives of military tactical dominance alongside "NewSpace" ventures like asteroid mining projects call for the defense, privatization, and commodification of

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<sup>152</sup> See: "Lakota Worlf Reserve":  
<http://www.everythingwolf.com/forum/threadview.aspx?thread=9413p1>

<sup>153</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOubCHLXT6A>

<sup>154</sup> See: "When discussing Humanity's next move to space, the language we use matters.":  
<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/urban-scientist/when-discussing-humanity-8217-s-next-move-to-space-the-language-we-use-matters/>

space and other worlds, framing space as a resource-rich “frontier” to be “settled” in what amounts to a new era of colonization ... [...] we have to stake a claim in the territory of space programs now. We need to add our voices, perspectives, plans, our *cares*. There isn’t time to wait. We can’t sit back and say: Space isn’t urgently important, we should be looking at problems here on Earth. First of all, much of space science is looking at and working on problems here on Earth (from conflict, migration, and drought to climate change, deforestation, and more). Secondly, SpaceX, Boeing, and others are preparing new craft and taking humans into space *now*—and human technology is leaving the solar system. Perhaps it’s not happening on the timeline you would prefer, but it’s already happening and has been for decades, and they’re pretty much doing it without us ... So what’s next? We—all us queer, trans, disabled, black, native, etc. folk and more—we need to fight back, take back, de-colonize and re-imagine our futures in outer space, we need to *pop up where they least expect us*. (Emphasis in original.)<sup>155</sup>

Leaving those ‘cares’ behind is going to take a colder exit.

ADDED: From VXXC on twitter — “In space no one can hear you whine.”

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<sup>155</sup> Michael Oman-Regan, “Queering Outer Space”, *Medium*: <https://medium.com/space-anthropology/queering-outer-space-f6f5b5cecd0>



## Sentences (#55)

Collapse traps people:

*You have to know when to leave.*<sup>156</sup>

Most don't, and won't, of course.

(Treat this as a promissory note on an installment of provocative skepticism viz the 'eventually its necessary to stand and fight, or even take things back' proposition that haunts NRx like a chain-rattling ghost, now more than ever, in the shadow of the impending Trumpenreich. Zombie-fighting-types can assume that the tacit XS stance ("flee you fools") is at least as infuriating as they would expect it to be.)

## Bluexit

Simply, yes:

Don't organize. Pack. [...] Not literally, of course. Not even the good people of Canada should have to stomach a mass migration of moping American liberals mumbling, "Live locally ... make art." What I mean is that it's time for blue states and cities to effectively abandon the American national enterprise, as it is currently constituted. Call it the New Federalism. Or Virtual Secession. Or Conscious Uncoupling —

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<sup>156</sup> See: *FerFALL: Understanding Societal Collapse*:  
<https://www.peakprosperity.com/podcast/98435/ferfal-understanding-societal-collapse>

though that's already been used. Or maybe Bluexit.<sup>157</sup>

## Identity Hunger

Handle has an excellent post<sup>158</sup> up on this, referencing Nydwracu, who has made a momentous project out of it. It's huge, and old, and quite impossible to summarize persuasively. It's also impossible to avoid, especially for the Outer Right.

Steve Sailer told a joke that I'm going to mangle. A monstrous alien invasion assails the earth, and people have to decide how to respond. The conservatives say, "What's there to think about? We have to get together to defeat this thing." Liberals respond: "Wait! They probably have good reasons to hate us. It must be something we've done. Until we work out what that is, we should prostrate ourselves before their grievances." Finally the libertarians pipe up: "Do they believe in free markets?"

An obvious quibble arises with the libertarian punch-line: *if only*. Libertarians have predominantly demonstrated an enthusiasm for alien invasion that is totally detached from any market-oriented qualification. As their argument goes — *the alien invasion is the free market*. (We'll need to return to this, indirectly.)

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<sup>157</sup> Kevin Baker. "Bluexit: A Modest Proposal for Separating Blue States from Red", *The New Republic*: <https://newrepublic.com/article/140948/bluexit-blue-states-exit-trump-red-america>

<sup>158</sup> "Progressivism ist Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft", *Handle's Haus*: <https://handleshaus.wordpress.com/2013/09/20/progressivism-ist-gemeinschaft-und-gesellschaft-2/>

The appetite for identity seems to be hard-wired in the approximate manner of language, or religion. You have to have one (or several) but instinct doesn't provide it ready made. That's why identity corresponds to a hunger. It's something people need, instinctively, with an intensity that is difficult to exaggerate. Symbolically-satiable needs are political rocket fuel.

Providing an expedient plug for the aching identity socket is as close to politics-in-a-nutshell as anything is going to get. At the core of every ideology is a determination of the model identity — sect, class, race, gender, sexual-orientation ... — and mass implementation of this 'consciousness' is already consummate triumph. After psychological latching onto the relevant 'thede' takes place, nothing except tactics remains.

Reaction seeks to defend the dying thedes among its *own people* — which is already a suggestive repetition. Neoreaction goes meta, in a world in which the proscription of certain thedes almost wholly defines concerted enemy action. For one reasonable construction of the reactionary mainstream (\*ahem\*), this is already to have arrived at a natural stopping point. *We want our thedes back*. Despite the evident obstacles, or obstacle (the Cathedral) in its path, this approach plays into the grain of human nature, and thus tends — understandably — to scare those it wants to scare. If it begins to work, it will face a serious fight.

*Outside in*, whose mission is awkwardness, is determined to complicate things. Even the most resolute thedens will probably welcome the first appendix, which draws attention to the peculiar introduction of truly morbid *punitive identifications*. There's no reason to think this is

new — Nietzsche denounced Christianity for doing it — but it rises to unmistakable prominence during the decadence of modernity. Primary identifications, for select — targeted — groups, cease to be positive thedes, except insofar as these have become radically negativized. What ‘one’ is, primarily, if not shielded by credible victimage, is some postmodern variant of the *sinner* (racist, cisgendered, oppressor). Such is the hunger for identity, that even these toxic formations of imposed psychic auto-destruction are *embraced*, creating a species of cringing guilt-consumed sacrificial animals, penned within the contours of ‘our’ old thedes. Redemption is promised to those who most fully resign themselves to their own identitarian toxicity, who thus attain a perverse superiority over those insufficiently convinced of the need for salvation through self-abolition. “We really, *really* deserve to die” beats out a weak “We really deserve to die,” and anybody who still thinks that it’s OK to live is simply *lost*. (Only *sinner*s are included in this arms-race, and the Cathedral tells us clearly who they are.)

An additional complication will be far less digestible, which is precisely why I would like to align it with the *Outer Right*. Perhaps escaping this structure of captivity cannot possibly take a reverse path, and a heading into dis-identifications, artificial identities, and identitarian short-circuits is ‘our’ real destiny. The identity-envy of the right — however deeply-rooted in an indisputable history of relentless Cathedralist aggression — cannot ever be anything but a weakness, given what we know about the political gradient of modern time. The fact it knows we want to be something, and *what it is we want to be*, is the alpha and omega of the Cathedral’s political competence. It knows what its enemies would be, if they could be what they want to be. It does not take a deep immersion in

Sunzi to realize the strategic hopelessness of that situation.

I want the Cathedral to be obliterated by monsters, which it does not recognize, understand, or possess antibodies against. There is an idiosyncratic element to that, admittedly. I identify far more with the East India Company than the United Kingdom, with the hybrid Singlosphere than the British people, with clubs and cults than nations and creeds, with Yog Sothoth than my ancestral religion, and with Pythia than the Human Security System. I think true cosmopolitans — such as the adventurers of late 19th century Shanghai (both English and Chinese) — are superior to the populist rabble from which nationalism draws its recruits. That's just me.

What isn't just me, is what the Cathedral knows how to beat. That, I strongly suspect, at least in the large majority of cases, is you.

### **Capitalism vs the Bourgeoisie**

John Gray makes some telling observations about the debilitating practical paradoxes of the late-20th century right.

Summing up Thatcher's outlook, [Charles] Moore writes of her "unusual mindset, which was both conservative and revolutionary." It is a shrewd observation, but Thatcher's reactionary nostalgia and revolutionary dynamism had something in common: the sturdy individualism to which she looked back was as much a fantasy

as the renewed bourgeois life she projected into the future.<sup>159</sup>

Once ‘sturdy individualism’ is dismissed as a fantasy, a horror story of some kind is the only imaginable outcome. If people are really too pathetic to take responsibility for their lives, what else could we possibly expect?

It has surely to be granted that anybody useless enough to be inadequate to the basics of their own survival, is scarcely going to exhibit the altruistic surplus value required to effectively take care of anybody else. Maybe God will make good the deficit, or — to plunge fully into feel-good superstition — ‘society’? The ultimate implication of Gray’s argument is that humans aren’t fit to live. (Which isn’t to say that he’s wrong.)

The future belongs to frontier people. If no significant fraction of the human species is any longer capable of being that, then it’s time for an evolutionary search for something that is. Don’t expect it to be pretty.

### **Meta-Neocameralism**

First thing: “Meta-Neocameralism” isn’t anything new, and it certainly isn’t anything post-Moldbuggian. It’s no more than Neocameralism apprehended in its most abstract features, through the coining of a provisional and dispensable term. (It allows for an acronym that doesn’t lead to confusions with North Carolina, while

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<sup>159</sup> John Gray, “Margaret Thatcher’s Unintended Legacies”, *The New Republic*:  
<https://newrepublic.com/article/114223/margaret-thatcher-review-ed-john-gray>

encouraging quite different confusions, which I'm pretending not to notice.)

Locally (to this blog), the "meta-" is the mark of a prolegomenon<sup>160</sup>, to a disciplined discussion of Neocameralism which has later to take place. Its abstraction is introductory, in accordance with something that is yet to be re-started, or re-animated, in detail. (For existing detail, outside the Moldbug canon itself, look here<sup>161</sup>.)

The excellent comment thread here<sup>162</sup> provides at least a couple of crucial clues:

**nydwracu** (23/03/2014 at 6:47 pm):  
*Neocameralism doesn't answer questions like that [on the specifics of social organization]; instead, it's a mechanism for answering questions like that. ... You can ask, "is Coke considered better than RC Cola?", or you can institute capitalism and find out. You can ask, "are ethno-nationalist states considered better than mixed states?", or you can institute the patchwork and find out. ...*

**RiverC** (23/03/2014 at 3:44 am):  
*Neo-cameralism is, if viewed in this light, a 'political system system', it is not a political system but a system for implementing political*

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<sup>160</sup> I realize this doesn't work in Greek, but systematic before-after confusion is an Outside in thing.

<sup>161</sup> Peter A Taylor, *A Gentle Introduction to Mencius Moldbug's "A Gentle Introduction to Unqualified Reservations"*:  
<http://home.earthlink.net/~peter.a.taylor/moldbug.htm>

<sup>162</sup> Nick Land, "Fission", *Xenosystems*:  
<http://www.xenosystems.net/fission/>

*systems. Of course the same guy who came up with it also invented an operating system (a system for implementing software systems.)*

MNC, then, is not a political prescription, for instance a social ideal aligned with techno-commercialist preferences. It is an intellectual framework for examining systems of governance, *theoretically* formalized as disposals of sovereign property. The *social* formalization of such systems, which Moldbug *also* advocates, can be parenthesized within MNC. We are not at this stage considering the model of a desirable social order, but rather the abstract model of social order in general, apprehended radically — at the root — where ‘to rule’ and ‘to own’ lack distinct meanings. Sovereign property is ‘sovereign’ and ‘primary’ because it is not merely a claim, but *effective possession*. (There is much more to come in later posts on the concept of sovereign property, some preliminary musings here<sup>163</sup>.)

Because MNC is an extremely powerful piece of cognitive technology, capable of tackling problems at a number of distinct levels (in principle, an unlimited number), it is clarified through segmentation into an abstraction cascade. Descending through these levels adds concreteness, and tilts incrementally towards normative judgements (framed by the hypothetical imperative of *effective government*, as defined within the cascade).

(1) The highest level of practical significance (since MNC-theology need not delay us) has already been touched upon. It applies to social regimes of every conceivable type, assuming only that a systematic mode

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<sup>163</sup> [Dead link]



of sovereign property reproduction will essentially characterize each. Power is *economic* irrespective of its relation to modern conventions of commercial transaction, because it involves the disposal of a real (if obscure) quantity, which is subject to increase or decrease over the cyclic course of its deployment. Population, territory, technology, commerce, ideology, and innumerable additional heterogeneous factors are components of sovereign property (power), but their economic character is assured by the possibility — and indeed necessity — of more-or-less explicit trade-offs and cost-benefit calculations, suggesting an original (if germinal) fungibility, which is merely arithmetical coherence. This is presupposed by any estimation of growth or decay, success or failure, strengthening or weakening, of the kind required not only by historical analysis, but also by even the most elementary administrative competence. Without an implicit economy of power, no discrimination could be made between improvement and deterioration, and no directed action toward the former could be possible.

The effective cyclic reproduction of power has an external criterion — survival. It is not open to any society or regime to decide for itself what works. Its inherent understanding of its own economics of power is a complex measurement, gauging a relation to the outside, whose consequences are life and death. Built into the idea of sovereign property from the start, therefore, is an *accommodation to reality*. Foundational to MNC, at the very highest level of analysis, is the insight that *power is checked primordially*. On the Outside are wolves, serving as the scourge of Gnon. Even the greatest of all imaginable God-Kings — awesome Fnargl included — has ultimately to discover consequences, rather than

inventing them. There is no principle more important than this.

Entropy will be dissipated, idiocy will be punished, the weak will die. If the regime refuses to bow to this Law, the wolves will enforce it. Social Darwinism is not a choice societies get to make, but a system of real consequences that envelops them. MNC is articulated at the level — which cannot be transcended — where realism is mandatory for any social order. Those unable to create it, through effective government, will nevertheless receive it, in the harsh storms of Nemesis. Order is not defined within itself, but by the Law of the Outside.

At this highest level of abstraction, therefore, when MNC is asked “which type of regimes do you believe in?” the sole appropriate response is “those compatible with reality.” Every society known to history — and others beside — had a working economy of power, at least for a while. Nothing more is required than this for MNC to take them as objects of disciplined investigation.

(2) Knowing that realism is not an optional regime value, we are able to proceed down the MNC cascade with the introduction of a second assumption: Civilizations will seek gentler teachers than the wolves. If it is possible to acquire some understanding of collapse, it will be preferred to the experience of collapse (once the wolves have culled the ineducable from history).

Everything survivable is potentially educational, even a mauling by the wolves. MNC however, as its name suggests, has reason to be especially attentive to the most abstract lesson of the Outside — the (logical) priority of *meta-learning*. It is good to discover reality, before — or

at least not much later than — reality discovers us. Enduring civilizations do not merely know things, they know that it is important to know things, and to absorb realistic information. Regimes — disposing of sovereign property — have a special responsibility to instantiate this deutero-culture of learning-to-learn, which is required for intelligent government. This is a responsibility they take upon themselves because it is demanded by the Outside (and even in its refinement, it still smells of wolf).

Power is under such compulsion to learn about itself that recursion, or intellectualization, can be assumed. Power is selected to check itself, which it cannot do without an increase in formalization, and this is a matter — as we shall see — of immense consequence. Of necessity, it learns-to-learn (or dies), but this lesson introduces a critical tragic factor.

The tragedy of power is broadly coincident with modernity. It is not a simple topic, and from the beginning two elements in particular require explicit attention. Firstly, it encounters the terrifying (second-order) truth that practical learning is irreducibly experimental. In going ‘meta’ knowledge becomes scientific, which means that failure cannot be precluded through deduction, but has to be incorporated into the machinery of learning itself. Nothing that cannot go wrong is capable of teaching anything (even the accumulation of logical and mathematical truths requires cognitive trial-and-error, ventures into dead-ends, and the pursuit of misleading intuitions). Secondly, in becoming increasingly formalized, and ever more fungible, the disposal of sovereign power attains heightened liquidity. It is now possible for power to trade itself away, and an explosion of social bargaining results.

Power can be exchanged for ('mere') wealth, or for social peace, or channeled into unprecedented forms of radical regime philanthropy / religious sacrifice. Combine these two elements, and it is clear that regimes enter modernity 'empowered' by new capabilities for experimental auto-dissolution. Trade authority away to the masses in exchange for promises of good behavior? Why not give it a try?

Cascade Stage-2 MNC thus (realistically) assumes a world in which power has become an art of experimentation, characterized by unprecedented calamities on a colossal scale, while the economy of power and the techno-commercial economy have been radically de-segmented, producing a single, uneven, but incrementally smoothed system of exchangeable social value, rippling ever outward, without firm limit. Socio-political organization, and corporate organization, are still distinguished by markers of traditional status, but no longer strictly differentiable by essential function.

The modern business of government is not 'merely' business only because it remains poorly formalized. As the preceding discussion suggests, this indicates that economic integration can be expected to deepen, as the formalization of power proceeds. (Moldbug seeks to accelerate this process.) An inertial assumption of distinct 'public' and 'private' spheres is quickly disturbed by thickening networks of exchange, swapping managerial procedures and personnel, funding political ambitions, expending political resources in commercial lobbying efforts, trading economic assets for political favors (denominated in votes), and in general consolidating a vast, highly-liquid reservoir of amphibiously 'corporacrat' value, indeterminable between 'wealth'

and ‘authority’. Wealth-power inter-convertibility is a reliable index of political modernity.

MNC does not **decide** that government *should* become a business. It recognizes that government *has* become a business (dealing in fungible quantities). However, unlike private business ventures, which dissipate entropy through bankruptcy and market-driven restructuring, governments are reliably the worst run businesses in their respective societies, functionally crippled by defective, structurally-dishonest organizational models, exemplified most prominently by the democratic principle: *government is a business that should be run by its customers* (but actually can’t be). Everything in this model that isn’t a lie is a mistake.

At the second (descending) level of abstraction, then, MNC is still not recommending anything except theoretical clarity. It proposes:

- a) Power is destined to arrive at experimental learning processes
- b) As it learns, it formalizes itself, and becomes more fungible
- c) Experiments in fungible power are vulnerable to disastrous mistakes
- d) Such mistakes have in fact occurred, in a near-total way
- e) For deep historical reasons, techno-commercial business organization emerges as the preeminent template for

government entities, as for any composite economic agent. It is in terms of this template that modern political dysfunction can be rendered (formally) intelligible.

(3) Take the MNC abstraction elevator down another level, and it's still more of an analytic tool than a social prescription. (That's a good thing, *really*.) It tells us that every government, both extant and potential, is most accessible to rigorous investigation when apprehended as a *sovereign corporation*. This approach alone is able to draw upon the full panoply of theoretical resources, ancient and modern, because only in this way is power tracked in the same way it has actually developed (in tight alignment with a still-incomplete trend).

The most obvious objections are, *sensu stricto*, romantic. They take a predictable (which is not to say a casually dismissible) form. Government — if perhaps only lost or yet-unrealized government — is associated with 'higher' values than those judged commensurable with the techno-commercial economy, which thus sets the basis for a critique of the MNC 'business ontology' of governance as an illegitimate intellectual reduction, and ethical vulgarization. To quantify authority as power is already suspect. To project its incremental liquidation into a general economy, where leadership integrates — ever more seamlessly — with the price system, appears as an abominable symptom of modernist nihilism.

Loyalty (or the intricately-related concept of *asabiyyah*) serves as one exemplary redoubt of the romantic cause. Is it not repulsive, even to entertain the possibility that loyalty might have a price? Handle addresses this directly

in the comment thread already cited (24/03/2014 at 1:18 am). A small sample captures the line of his engagement:

Loyalty-preservation incentivizing programs are various and highly sophisticated and span the spectrum everywhere from frequent flier miles to 'clubs' that are so engrossing and time consuming in such as to mimic the fulfillment of all the community, socialization, and identarian psychological functions that would make even the hardest-core religious-traditionalist jealous. Because lots of people are genetically programmed with this coordination-subroutine that is easily exploitable in a context far removed from its evolutionary origins. Sometimes brands 'deserve' special competitive loyalty ('German engineering!') and sometimes they don't (Tylenol-branded paracetamol).

There is vastly more that can, and will, be said in prosecution of this dispute, since it is perhaps the single most critical driver of NRx fission, and it is not going to endure a solution. The cold MNC claim, however, can be pushed right across it. Authority is for sale, and has been for centuries, so that any analysis ignoring this exchange nexus is an historical evasion. Marx's M-C-M', through which monetized capital reproduces and expands itself through the commodity cycle, is accompanied by an equally definite M-P-M' or P-M-P' cycle of power circulation-enhancement through monetized wealth.

A tempting reservation, with venerable roots in traditional society, is to cast doubt upon the prevalence of such exchange networks, on the assumption that power — possibly further dignified as 'authority' — enjoys a

qualitative supplement relative to common economic value, such that it cannot be retro-transferred. Who would swap authority for money, if authority cannot be bought (and is, indeed, “beyond price”)? But this ‘problem’ resolves itself, since the first person to sell political office — or its less formal equivalent — immediately demonstrates that it can no less easily be purchased.

From the earliest, most abstract stage of this MNC outline, it has been insisted that *power has to be evaluated economically, by itself, if anything like practical calculation directed towards its increase is to be possible*. Once this is granted, MNC analysis of the governmental entity in general as an economic processor — i.e. a business — acquires irresistible momentum. If loyalty, *asabiyyah*, virtue, charisma and other elevated (or ‘incommensurable’) values are *power factors*, then they are already inherently self-economizing within the calculus of statecraft. The very fact that they contribute, determinately, to an overall estimation of strength and weakness, attests to their implicit economic status. When a business has charismatic leadership, reputational capital, or a strong culture of company loyalty, such factors are monetized as asset values by financial markets. When one Prince surveys the ‘quality’ of another’s domain, he already estimates the likely expenses of enmity. For modern military bureaucracies, such calculations are routine. Incommensurable values do not survive contact with defense budgets.

Yet, however ominous this drift (from a romantic perspective), *MNC does not tell anybody how to design a society*. It says only that an effective government will



necessarily look, to it, like a well-organized (sovereign) business. To this one can add the riders:

a) Government effectiveness is subject to an external criterion, provided by a selective trans-state and inter-state mechanism. This might take the form of Patchwork pressure (Dynamic Geography) in a civilized order, or military competition in the wolf-prowled wilderness of Hobbesian chaos.

b) Under these conditions, MNC calculative rationality can be expected to be compelling for states themselves, whatever their variety of social form. Some (considerable) convergence upon norms of economic estimation and arrangement is thus predictable from the discovered contours of reality. There are things that will fail.

Non-economic values are more easily invoked than pursued. Foseti (commenting here<sup>164</sup>, 23/03/2014 at 11:59 am) writes:

No one disputes that the goal of society is a good citizenry, but the question is what sort of government provides that outcome. [...] As best I can tell, we only have two theories of governance that have been expressed. [...] The first is the capitalist. As Adam Smith noted, the best corporations (by all measures) are the ones that are operated for clear, measurable and selfish

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<sup>164</sup> Nick Land, "Revenge of the Nerds", *Xenosystems*:  
<http://www.xenosystems.net/revenge-of-the-nerds/>

motives. [...] The second is the communist. In this system, corporations are run for the benefit of everyone in the world. [...] Unsurprisingly, corporations run on the latter principle have found an incredibly large number of ways to suck. Not coincidentally, so have 20th Century governments run on the same principle. [...] I think it's nearly impossible to overstate the ways in which everyone would be better off if we had an efficiently, effective, and responsive government.

## **The Deal**

NRx repudiates public politics. Turn that around, and it's the thesis: *Politics happens in private*.

Specifically — as a political philosophy — NRx advocates the privatization of government. It makes a public case for that, in the abstract, but only for purposes of informational and theoretical optimization. It is not, ever, *doing* politics in public, but only thinking about it under conditions of minimal intelligence security. Concrete execution of political strategy occurs through private deals.

The currency of such deals was formalized<sup>165</sup> by Mencius Moldbug, as *primary* (or *fungible sovereign*) *property*. It corresponds to the conversion — whether notional or

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<sup>165</sup> Mencius Moldbug, "The Magic of Symmetric Sovereignty", *Unqualified Reservations*:  
<http://unqualified-reservations.blogspot.co.uk/2007/05/magic-of-symmetric-sovereignty.html>

actual — of hard power into business assets. This conversion is what ‘formalism’ means. It’s an important contribution to political philosophy, and political economy, but it’s also a negotiating position.

Cries for (public) *Action!* will always be with us, at least until things are radically sorted out. They should be ignored. No public action is serious.

The serious thing is *the deal*, which substitutes for any semblance of revolution, and also for regime perpetuation. Shadow NRx — which acts outside the sphere of public visibility — is a political vulture fund. This blog does not want to know who, or what, it is. Its deep secrecy is the same as its reality. Our concern is restricted to the way it necessarily acts, in compliance with an absolute principle. We ask only: *What does the deal have to be like?*

In its essence it is this: *Stand down effective capabilities for regime preservation in exchange for primary property stock*. The form thus indicates the relevant principals — holders of the keys to hard power. What is on offer for them, as NRx develops in reality (the shadows), is formalization of their implicit social authority, through the emergence of a new — ultimate or ‘transcendental’ — commercial medium. The whole of Neocameral transition is realized through this.

“Turn everything you have into rigorous code, and everything changes. We can help with the technicalities.”

“Why should I do that?”

“It will be worth it.”

That's the vulture fund aspect. Hard power capability is systematically under-valued under conditions of Cathedral-demotic degeneracy, since it is squandered on the ever-more inefficient preservation of an insane religious establishment — the Atheo-Oecumenic Ecclesiocracy — and compensated accordingly, from the charred scraps of chronic policy disaster. After dysfunctional domestic social programs, election buying, and Jacobin foreign policy crusades have been paid for, what remains to reward competent governance?

Administrative capability is slaved to the Cathedral, which means to a zealous pursuit of impossible objectives, and thus accelerating waste. As a business opportunity ("We can help with the technicalities"), the attraction of defection grows, therefore, in strict proportion to the triumph of progressivism. This is critical, because the threshold risks of transition are immense, and *the deal* has to cover them.

"all that complex governance you're doing under increasingly ludicrous circumstances? we want to help you turn it into a business."

— @outsideness, january 23, 2016

... "you do get that you're basically working as a poorly paid security goon for jim jones at the moment?"

— @outsideness january 23, 2016

The Cathedral is the Peoples Temple.

## Order and Value

A piece of machinery that reduces<sup>166</sup> (local) disorder has value. It might be a functional police force, a catallactic economic arrangement, or a sociopolitical mechanism implementing dynamic geography (or Patchwork). Others might be listed. Any complex adaptive system<sup>167</sup> works like this (until it ceases working). Since Schrödinger, it has been taken as an abstract definition of life. In certain strands<sup>168</sup> of philosophy, it has also been taken as the complete, rigorous meaning of a *machine* (as counterposed to a 'gadget' – which works only within a larger machinic assemblage). Only by exporting entropy does anything of even minimal complexity get to continue

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<sup>166</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilya\\_Prigogine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilya_Prigogine)

<sup>167</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complex\\_adaptive\\_system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complex_adaptive_system)

"A complex adaptive system is a system in which a perfect understanding of the individual parts does not automatically convey a perfect understanding of the whole system's behavior. The study of complex adaptive systems, a subset of nonlinear dynamical systems, is highly interdisciplinary and blends insights from the natural and social sciences to develop system-level models and insights that allow for heterogeneous agents, phase transition, and emergent behavior.

"They are complex in that they are dynamic networks of interactions, and their relationships are not aggregations of the individual static entities, i.e., the behavior of the ensemble is not predicted by the behavior of the components. They are adaptive in that the individual and collective behavior mutate and self-organize corresponding to the change-initiating micro-event or collection of events. They are a "complex macroscopic collection" of relatively "similar and partially connected micro-structures" formed in order to adapt to the changing environment and increase their survivability as a macro-structure.

<sup>168</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

its existence. The production of order is functionality in its most elevated, teleological sense.

A piece of rhetoric which merely celebrates order, as something nice to have, is worth nothing in itself. “We want order” is the “give us free stuff” slogan of intellectually degenerated reaction. When examined closely, it is indistinguishable from political pan-handling. (Democracy has taught everyone how to beg.) It is unlikely that even the most radically degraded libertarian would be shameless enough to consider “wealth is good, poverty is bad” anything more than an expression of sub-comic emotional incontinence. “Order is good, chaos is bad” is a slogan of exactly equivalent merit. “We want order” is just “we want money” at a superior level of generality. Monkeys want peanuts, but we are reluctant to dignify their hungry hooting with the label ‘political philosophy’.

Entropy dissipation is a *problem*. It might quite reasonably be considered *the* problem. Any serious social theory is respected insofar as it elicits the question: *So how is entropy dissipated?* The main current of Anglophone intellectual culture focuses tightly upon it, in a broad lineage from Newtonian mechanics, the Scottish Enlightenment, the science of heat, classical economics, and Darwinian naturalism, into theories of complexity, distributed systems, dynamic networks, and productive multiplicities. *Spontaneous order* is the consistent topic. ‘Spontaneous’ means only: *Does not presuppose that which it is tasked with explaining*. If the genesis of order is not being theorized, order is merely being assumed, and then consumed. The difference is between a supply side problematic (“how is order practically produced?”) and an empty demand (“we want more order”). The

former is *industrial*, the latter simply tyrannical, when it is anything at all beside vacuous noise.

Unless a pol-econ. theory can contribute to an explanation of the *production of order* (dissipation of entropy), it is wasting everyone's time. "But I really *want* order" is just silliness. It's astounding that it could ever be thought otherwise.

### **Against Universalism**

There's a philosophical objection to any refusal of universalism that will be familiar from other uses (the denunciation of relativism, most typically). It requires only one step: *Isn't the denial of the universal itself a universalist claim?* It's a piece of malignant dialectics because it demands that we agree. We don't, and won't ever, agree. Agreement is the worst thing that could happen. Merely assent to its necessity, and global communism, or some close analog, is the implicit conclusion.

If there is a universal truth, it belongs only to Gnon, and Gnon is a dark (occulted) God. Traditional theists will be at least strongly inclined to disagree — *and that is excellent*. We disagree already, and we have scarcely begun.

There is no 'good life for man' (in general) — or if there is we know nothing of it, or not enough. Even those persuaded that they do, on the contrary, know what such a life should be, promote its universality only at the expense of being denied the opportunity to pursue it. If we need to agree on the broad contours of such a model for human existence, then reaching agreement will

precede it — and ‘reaching agreement’ is politics. Some much wider world acquires a veto over the way of life you select, or accept, or inherit (the details need not detain us). We have seen how that works. Global communism is the inevitable destination.

The alternative to agreement is schism. Secession, geopolitical disintegration, fragmentation, splitting — disagreement escapes dialectics and separates in space. Anti-universalism, concretely, is not a philosophical position but an effectively defensible assertion of diversity. From the perspective of the universal (which belongs only to Gnon, and never to man), it is an experiment. The degree to which it believes in itself is of no concern that matters to anything beyond itself. It is not answerable to anything but Gnon. What anyone, anywhere, thinks about it counts for nothing. If it fails, it dies, *which should mean nothing to you*. If you are compelled to care about someone else’s experiment, then a schism is missing. Of course, you are free to tell it that you think it will fail, if it is listening, but there is absolutely no need to reach agreement on the question. This is what, in the end, non-communism means.

Non-universalism is hygiene. It is practical avoidance of other people’s stupid shit. There is no higher principle in political philosophy. Every attempt to install an alternative, and impose a universal, reverts to dialectics, communization, global evangelism, and totalitarian politics.

This is being said here now, because NRx is horribly bad at it, and degenerates into a clash of universalisms, as into an instinctive equilibrium. There are even those who confidently propose an ‘NRx solution’ for the world.



Nothing could be more absurd. The world — as a whole — is an entropy bin. The most profoundly degraded communism is its only possible ‘universal consensus’. (Everyone knows this, when they permit themselves to think.)

All order is local — which is to say *the negation of the universal*. That is merely to re-state the second law of thermodynamics, which ‘we’ generally profess to accept. The only thing that could ever be universally and equally distributed is noise.

Kill the universalism in your soul and you are immediately (objectively) a neoreactionary. Protect it, and you are an obstacle to the escape of differences. That is communism — whether you recognize it, or not.

## **Against Universalism II**

Preliminary throat-clearing (as in part one): In its most rigorous construction, ‘universalism’ is robust under conditions of rational argument (i.e. evidence-based logico-mathematical criticism). Mathematical theorems, in particular [sic], are universal truths. Any assertions that can be constructed to a comparable level of formal rigor (and ultimately *mechanization*) can lay claim to the same status. However, with the slightest departure from this — rigidly algorithmic — criterion, controversy rapidly begins. This is not the place and time to argue the case for transcendental philosophy (within which praxeology is included), but such a case could be made. Ditto strictly proceduralized empirical science. All of this is a digression.

The question of universalism as it concerns us here is not a matter of meta-mathematics, epistemology, or the philosophy of science. It is rather directed at *the political scope of argument*. Is it mandatory to demand that argument, according to the highest principles of (logical) cognitive compulsion, be imposed globally? Does the quality of argument — however exalted — require its unrestricted application across space and time? It is the affirmative response to *this* question that defines universalism in its ideological sense. Pure Jacobinism, of course, answers *yes*. There is a universal duty to compel submission to the truth. This is the secular form of evangelical salvationism.

The contrary suggestion, here defended, is that — under real global conditions — universalism is a catastrophic mistake. The social scope of rational discussion is itself strictly bounded, and attempts to extend it (coercively) beyond such limits are politically disastrous. *Laissez-faire* envelops the sphere of imperative rationality, and respects its practical contour. Stupidity does not need to be hunted down and exterminated. All historical evidence indicates that it cannot be.

If the universal triumph of reason is an impractical goal, democratic globalism is exposed as a preposterous error. Minimizing the voice of stupidity is the realistic — and already extremely challenging — alternative. Rare enclaves of rigorously self-critical realism have as their primary obligation the self-protection of their (evidently precarious) particularity. In the wider world, fanatical ignorance and grotesque cognitive malformation rage rampantly. Borders, filters, tests, and selection mechanisms of all kinds provide the only defenses against it.

The universalist (Jacobin) model is always a conversation. *You have to join together first, simply to talk, and after that reason will prevail.* That's the path of the *Zeitgeist* — Hegelianism at its most arcane, expedient progressivism at more common levels of popularity — with its twin-stroke motor of aggressive proselytization and mass embrace. “Invade the world, invite the world” is the Sailer formula (quasi-random link<sup>169</sup>). *Amalgamate, then elevate* (in the direction of ascending rationality). This isn't a (theoretically convincing) claim about the unique structure of mathematical proof, it's a (factually trashed) claim about the global uniformity of human brains. The ‘universality’ it invokes is that of convergence upon the authority of reason. In other words, it's a bizarre progressive myth that all self-protective sanity seeks to maximally distance itself from.

People learn, but only very rarely through sophisticated argument, or its ‘cunning’ socio-political avatars. They learn because they fail badly, and it hurts. ‘Mankind’ is a progressive myth, incapable of learning anything. When real cultures learn, it is because they have been locked in intimate particularity, such that the consequences of their own cognitive processes impact intensely upon them. Anything that separates an individual, or a group, from the results of its own thoughts, is an apparatus of anti-learning. Progressive universalism is precisely this.

Dis-amalgamation — isolation — is the way to learn. It's how speciation happens, long before learning becomes

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<sup>169</sup> See: “Four Failed Immigration Approaches And A Disturbing Thought About Those Happy Hispanic Workers”: <http://www.vdare.com/articles/four-failed-immigration-approaches-and-a-disturbing-thought-about-those-happy-hispanic-work>

neurological. Individuation (at whatever scale) establishes the foundation for trade, communication, and intellectual exchange. Micro-states commercialize. Macro-states decay into political resource allocation, and entropic sludge. Protect your own patch if you want to have anything to talk about.

There's going to be a lot of talk about 'universalism' rolling in:

apparently it's a neocon evil to say that western civilization is based in universalism. funny. i thought it was jeffersonian.

— john podhoretz (@jpodhoretz) april 27, 2016

It's a suicidal ideology in its death-spasm phase, but it won't die quietly.

ADDED:

imperialism is the necessary logical consequence of universalism...

— huntington [pic.twitter.com/u4twycppeu](https://pic.twitter.com/u4twycppeu)

— spatel (@rjrasva) may 15, 2015

If the West could still do imperialism, that would be one thing, but it can't (and can't even stop doing the opposite).

## **Independence**

The philosophical antonym to ‘universality’ is ‘particularity’. Its broader, ideological antonym is something closer to *independence*.

This isn’t a word greatly emphasized by NRx up to this point, or — for that matter — one figuring prominently in contemporary discussions of any kind. That’s strange, because it orchestrates an extraordinary set of conceptual connections.

Independence is a rough synonym for *sovereignty*, to begin with. The profound association between these terms bears quite extreme analytical pressure. The sovereign is that instance capable of independent decision. An independent state is indistinguishable from a sovereign one, and to impugn its real sovereignty is to question its effective independence. Secession is a process of independence. A (Moldbuggian) Patchwork is a network of independent geopolitical entities. All relevant trends to geopolitical fragmentation are independence-oriented. Each executed *Exit* option (even on a shopping expedition) is an implicit declaration of independence, at least in miniature. (The relations between *independence* and *connectivity* are subtle and complex.)

Remaining (for a moment) in the narrowest NRx channel, the entire passivism discussion is independence related. Protest (‘activism’) is disdained on account of its fundamental dependency (upon sympathetic political toleration). No social process genuinely directed towards independence would fall within the scope of this criticism. (The ‘Benedict Option’ is one obvious example.) ‘Build something’ epitomizes independence process.

Cannot the entire range of contentions over the individualism / collectivism dyad be recast in terms of independence? Dependency exists on a spectrum, but the defining attitude towards it tends to polarization. Is dependence to be embraced, or configured as a problem to be worked against? This blog is highly tempted to project the Left / Right or 'principal political' dimension along the axis these distinct responses define. The Left is *enthused* by inter-dependency, and (to a greater or lesser extent) *accepts* comparative independence, while for the Right this attitudinal system is exactly reversed. (The most fundamental tensions within the reactosphere are clearly related to this articulation.)

One inevitable point of contention — honed over decades of objection to libertarianism — is captured by the question: *Are not children essentially dependents?* Yes, of course they are, but is growing up anything other than a process of independence? From one perspective, a family can be interpreted as a model of inter-dependence (without obvious inaccuracy). Yet, from another, a family is an independence-production unit, both in its comparative autonomy in respect to the wider society, and as a child-rearing matrix. Families are loci of independence struggle (to which the Left response is: *They shouldn't have to be*). Dependency culture is the Left heartland.

Independence and autonomy are very closely related terms. All discussions of autonomy, and even of automation, click quite neatly onto this template, but this is a point exceeding the ambitions of the present post.

Abstraction, too, is a topic the tantalizingly overlaps independence. Whether cognitive independence *entirely*

*accommodates intelligence optimization* is also a question for another occasion.

NRx, XS tentatively proposes, is *a political philosophy oriented to the promotion of independence*. (Much pushback is, naturally, expected.)

### **Neocameralism #1**

Clippings from this<sup>170</sup>, end-2007 Moldbug Neocameralism essay (with minimal commentary):

It is very hard to show that any new form of government is superior to that practiced now. It is even harder to show that any new form of government is superior to any practiced ever. [...] Nonetheless, unless these problems are not just hard but actually unsolvable, innovation in the form of government is possible. ... Certainly, the very idea of innovation in government should not frighten you. If it does, there is no point at all in thinking about government. This is conservatism to the point of mental disorder. I simply cannot contend with it, and I refuse to try. If you cannot set yourself outside your own beliefs and prejudices, you are not capable of normal civilized discourse.

Neocameralism is not (simply) reactionary because it has never been fully instantiated up to this time. It is a proposed political-economic innovation.

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<sup>170</sup> Mencius Moldbug, "Neocameralism and the Escalator of Massarchy", *Unqualified Reservations*: <http://unqualified-reservations.blogspot.co.uk/2007/12/neocameralism-and-escalator-of.html>

Let's start with my ideal world – the world of thousands, preferably even tens of thousands, of neocameralist city-states and ministates, or neostates. The organizations which own and operate these neostates are for-profit sovereign corporations, or sovcorps. For the moment, let's assume a one-to-one mapping between sovcorp and neostate. [...] Let's pin down the neocameralist *dramatis personae* by identifying the people who work for a sovcorp as its agents, the people or organizations which collectively own it as its *subscribers*, and the people who live in its neostate as its *residents*.

A Neocameral 'neostate' is not owned by its residents *or its agents*. Its 'monarch' (or 'CEO') is *an executive appointment*. (90% of all confusion about Neocameralism, and Neoreaction in general, stems from a failure to grasp this elementary point.) Note: 'subscribers' (plural). More coming on this immediately.

Every patch of land on the planet has a primary owner, which is its sovcorp. Typically, these owners will be large, impersonal corporations. We call them sovcorps because they're *sovereign*. You are sovereign if you have the power to render any plausible attack on your primary property, by any other sovereign power, unprofitable. In other words, you maintain *general deterrence*. [...] (Sovereignty is a flat, peer-to-peer relationship by definition. The concept of hierarchical sovereignty is a contradiction in terms. ...) [...] The business of a sovcorp is to make money by deterring



aggression. Since human aggression is a serious problem, preventing it should be a good business. Moreover, the existence of unprofitable governments in your vicinity is serious cause for concern, because unprofitable governments tend to have strange decision structures and do weird, dangerous things. [...] (Nuclear deterrence (mutual assured destruction) is only one small class of deterrent designs. To deter is to render predictably unprofitable. Predictably unprofitable violence is irrational. Irrational violence is certainly not unheard of. But it is much, much rarer than you may think. Most of the violence in the world today is quite rational, IMHO.) [...] General deterrence is a complex topic which deserves its own post. For the moment, assume that every square inch of the planet's surface is formally owned by some sovcorp, that no one disagrees on the borders, and that deterrence between sovcorps is absolute.

Patchwork is a (transcendentally) *flat network*. No global sovereign. At the ultimate level of its instantiation, it consists of P2P connections between *independent nodes*.

This does not solve the problem of constructing a stable sovcorp. The central problem of governance is the old Latin riddle: who guards the guardians? The joint-stock corporate design solves the central problem by entrusting guardianship in the collective decisions of the corporation's owners, voting not by head but by percentage of profit received. [...] The joint-stock model is hundreds of years old. It is as proven as

proven can be. [...] ... However, in the sovereign context, the corporate joint-stock ownership and decision structure faces serious challenges which do not exist for a conventional secondary corporation. [...] In the conventional secondary corporation, the control of the owners is unchallenged and unchallengeable, at least as long as the sovereign's rule of corporate law is functioning properly. The corporation is incorporated under the oversight of a sovereign protector, or sponsor. This is what makes it a secondary corporation. ...

The Neocameral organizational problem is here defined.

... classical political thought concurred in considering imperio in imperium, ie, internal subauthorities powerful enough to resist or even control the center, a political solecism. In case you are not too special to have ever worked in a cube, you are probably aware that imperio in imperium is a solecism in Powerpointia as well. One small difficulty, however, is that imperio in imperium means basically the same thing as separation of powers. Hm. [...] Internal management in modern Western corporations is pretty good. At least by the standards of modern government, imperio in imperium is nonexistent. (It should not be confused with the normal practice of internal accounting, which does not in any way conflict with an absolute central authority and a single set of books.)

The model for avoidance of *imperio in imperium* is joint-stock business organization. It is thus equivalent to

the *control of executives*, or the *preservation of sovereign capital imperatives* (through effective resolution of the principal-agent problem<sup>171</sup>). Solution of

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<sup>171</sup> Hyperlink to:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principal-agent\\_problem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principal-agent_problem)

"The principal-agent problem, in political science and economics, (also known as agency dilemma or the agency problem) occurs when one person or entity (the "agent") is able to make decisions on behalf of, or that impact, another person or entity: the "principal". This dilemma exists in circumstances where agents are motivated to act in their own best interests, which are contrary to those of their principals, and is an example of moral hazard.

"Common examples of this relationship include corporate management (agent) and shareholders (principal), politicians (agent) and voters (principal), or brokers (agent) and markets (buyers and sellers, principals). Consider a legal client (the principal) wondering whether their lawyer (the agent) is recommending protracted legal proceedings because it is truly necessary for the client's well being, or because it will generate income for the lawyer. In fact the problem can arise in almost any context where one party is being paid by another to do something where the agent has a small or nonexistent share in the outcome, whether in formal employment or a negotiated deal such as paying for household jobs or car repairs.

"The problem arises where the two parties have different interests and asymmetric information (the agent having more information), such that the principal cannot directly ensure that the agent is always acting in their (the principal's) best interest, particularly when activities that are useful to the principal are costly to the agent, and where elements of what the agent does are costly for the principal to observe (see moral hazard and conflict of interest). Often, the principal may be sufficiently concerned at the possibility of being exploited by the agent that they choose not to enter into the transaction at all, when it would have been mutually beneficial: a suboptimal outcome that can lower welfare overall. The deviation from the principal's interest by the agent is called "agency costs".

"Besides the agency problem between shareholders and managers, there is also another type of agency problem: the one derived from the existence of big shareholders and small shareholders, which is quite a common phenomenon in a listed company. In the process of dividend distribution, there exists not only information asymmetry but the different influence between

the P-A problem at the level of State governance is the task of Neocameral administrative design.

Briefly, there are two options for sovcorp governance on a neocameralist patchwork planet. One is *cross-listing* and the other is *cryptogovernance*. In cross-listing, sovcorps list on each other's secondary exchanges, taking great care to select only the most reputable sponsors, and demanding a backdoor in which they can switch sponsors at the slightest hint of weirdness. [...] Cross-listing can probably be made to work. However, it is dangerous as a single line of defence. For an ideal sovcorp, it should be combined with some degree of cryptogovernance. [...] Cryptogovernance is any system of corporate government in which all formal decisions are endorsed and verified cryptographically. A sponsor can still be very useful for cryptogovernance, but it is not required. Shareholders in a cryptogoverned corporation – known as subscribers – use private keys to sign their contributions to its governance. They may or may not be anonymous, depending on the corporation's

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big and small shareholders. Small shareholders' behaviors are affected by the big shareholders' decision; in return, they can also impact the big shareholders' decision but not significantly. Under such circumstance, the big shareholders will encroach on the interests by dividend policy.

"Various mechanisms may be used to align the interests of the agent with those of the principal. In employment, employers (principal) may use piece rates/commissions, profit sharing, efficiency wages, performance measurement (including financial statements), the agent posting a bond, or the threat of termination of employment to align worker interests with their own.

rules. [...] If you are an American, have you ever wondered what the letters SA, or similar, which you see all the time in the names of European companies, mean? They mean “anonymous society.” If this strikes you as weird, it shouldn’t.

Do any #HRx<sup>172</sup> types still think this is their universe?

The neat thing about cryptographic government (which is actually much easier than it sounds – we’re talking a few thousand lines of code, max) is that it can be connected directly to the sovcorp’s second line of defense: a cryptographically-controlled military. [...] Cryptographic weapons control, in the form of permissive action links, is already used for the world’s most powerful weapons. However, there is nothing in principle preventing it from being extended down to small arms – for example, with a radio activation code transmitted over a mesh network. Military formations loyal to the CEO will find that their weapons work. Rebel formations will find that theirs don’t. The outcome is obvious. Moreover, the neocameralist state has no incentive to deal kindly with traitors, so there is no way for an attacker to repeatedly probe the system’s weaknesses. [...] The one difficulty with cryptographic weapons control is that it fails, and devolves into simple military rule, if the authorization keys are kept anywhere near the weapons. Weaponholders can gather unlocked or noncryptographic weapons secretly, and use

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<sup>172</sup> Hyperlink to: <http://www.xenosystems.net/hrx-ii/>

them to arrest the keyholders – for example, the directors of the sovcorp. [...] The solution is simple: keep the sovcorp's directors, or whoever has ultimate control of the highest grade of military keys, outside the sovcorp's neostate. Even if the CEO himself rebels, along with all of his subordinates, any formation loyal to the directors can defeat them. The result is internal military stability.

Agree with where Moldbug is going with this, or not, the line of thought is profoundly illustrative of the Neocameral problem, as originally conceived, which lies within the general framework of *cryptographic property protection* (and not that of romantic political attachment).

#### **Quote Note (#272)**

Frederick Jackson Turner, from his essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893):

From the conditions of frontier life came intellectual traits of profound importance. The works of travelers along each frontier from colonial days onward describe certain common traits, and these traits have, while softening down, still persisted as survivals in the place of their origin, even when a higher social organization succeeded. The result is that, to the frontier, the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness, that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to

find expedients, that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends, that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom — these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. [...] Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. [...] For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. There is not *tabula rasa*. The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and

indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier.<sup>173</sup>

Recollected with reference to the prospects of seasteading and space colonization, and their continuity with a distinctive Anglophone cultural impetus to resolve political tension through dissociation in space (with *Exit* as its key).

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<sup>173</sup> See:  
<https://www.learner.org/workshops/primarysources/corporations/docs/turner2.html>



## The Atomization Trap

### Nick Land

“Hands up everyone who hates atomization.” That isn’t a call for surrender (at least overtly), but merely an informal poll.

Now try it differently:

“Hands up everyone who hates atomization, but this time *without looking around*.” Was the decision-process – perhaps ironically – a little slower this time? It’s worth thinking about that. Taking a shortcut that bypasses the social process might be expected to speed things up. Yet on the other hand – introducing the delay – comes the hazy recognition: If you make the call privately, you’re already complicit. A minor formal re-organization of the question transforms it insidiously. *What do you think of atomization, speaking atomistically?* It becomes a strange, or self-referential loop. Modern history has been like that.

First, though, a few terminological preliminaries. An ‘atom’ is etymologically indistinct from an ‘individual.’ At the root, the words are almost perfectly interchangeable. Neither, relative to the other, carries any special semantic charge. So if ‘atomization’ sounds like a metaphor, it really isn’t. There’s nothing essentially derivative about the word’s sociological application. If it appears to be a borrowing from physics, that might be due to any number of confusions, but not to a displacement from an original or natural terrain. Atoms and societies belong together primordially, though in tension. That’s what being a

social animal – rather than a fully ‘eusocial’ one (like an ant, or a mole-rat) – already indicates.

Individuals are hard to find. Nowhere are they simply and reliably *given*, least of all to themselves. They require historical work, and ultimately fabrication, even to float them as functional approximations. A process is involved. That’s why the word ‘atomization’ is less prone to dupery than ‘atom’ itself is. Individuality is nothing outside a destiny (but this is to get ahead of ourselves).

It’s difficult to know where to begin. (Did Athens sentence Socrates to death for being a social atomizer?) Individualism is stereotypically WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic), and so tends to lead into the labyrinth of comparative ethnography. It has been unevenly distributed, in roughly the same way that modernity has been. Since this is already to say almost everything on the topic, it merits some dismantling.

The work of Walter Russell Mead provides a useful relay station. The historical questions he has engaged – which concern nothing less than *the outcome of the world* – have been embedded within an intellectual framework shaped by special attention to modern providential Christianity. What has been the source of the ‘manifest destiny’ which has placed the keys to global mastery in the hands of a progressively distilled social project, Protestant, then Puritan, then Yankee? If not exactly or straightforwardly ‘God’ (he is too subtle for that), it is at least something that the lineage of Reform Christianity has tapped with unique effectiveness. Protestantism sealed a pact with historical destiny – to all appearances defining a specifically modern global teleology – by

consistently winning. Individualization of conscience – *atomization* – was made fate.

Six years after *Special Providence* (2001) came *God and Gold*, which reinforced the Anglo-American and capitalistic threads of the narrative. The boundaries between socio-economic and religious history were strategically melted, in a way pioneered by Max Weber, Werner Sombart, and – more critically – by numerous Catholic thinkers who have identified, and continue to identify, the essence of modernity as a hostile religious power. Eugene Michael Jones is Walter Russell Mead on the other side of the mirror. The story each is telling transforms without significant distortion into that of the other, once chilled below the threshold of moral agitation. Whatever it was that happened to Western Christianity in the Renaissance unleashed capitalism upon the world.

It is possible to be still cruder without sacrificing much reality. When considered as rigid designations, Atomization, Protestantism, Capitalism, and Modernity name exactly the same thing. In the domain of public policy (and beyond it), *privatization* addresses the same directory.

While any particular variant of implicit or explicit Protestantism has its distinctive theological (or atheological) features, just as any stage of capitalistic industrialization has its concrete characteristics, these serve as distractions more than as hand-holds in the big picture. The only truly big picture is *splitting*. The Reformation was not only a break, but still more importantly a normalization of breaking, an initially informal, but increasingly rigorized, protocol for social disintegration. The ultimate solution it offered in regard

to all social questions was not argumentation, but exit. Chronic fission was installed as the core of historical process. Fundamentally, that is what atomization means.

Protestantism – *Real Abstract Protestantism* – which is ever more likely to identify itself as post-Christian, post-theistic, and post-Everything Else, is a self-propelling machine for incomprehensibly prolonged social disintegration, *and everyone knows it*. Atomization has become an autonomous, inhuman agency, or at least, something ever more autonomous, and ever more inhuman. It can only liquidate everything you’ve ever cared about, by its very nature, so – of course – no one likes it. Catholicism, socialism, and nationalism have sought, in succession, coalition, or mutual competition, to rally the shards of violated community against it. The long string of defeat that ensued has been a rich source of cultural and political mythology. Because there is really no choice but to resist, battle has always been rejoined, but without any serious sign of any reversal of fortune.

Under current conditions, atomization serves – uniquely – as an inexhaustible tube of reactionary glue. Profound aversion to the process is the sole common denominator of our contemporary cultural opposition, stretching from traditionalist Catholicism to alt-right ethno-nationalism. “Whatever our preferred glue, can’t we at least agree that things have become unglued – and are ever less glued?” That seems very far from an unreasonable aspiration. After all, if coalition building is the goal, what – imaginably – could provide a better rallying point than the very principle of social integrity, even if this is invoked purely, and negatively, by way of an anathematization directed at its fatal historic foe?

Atomization, in this regard, brings people together, at least conversationally, though this works best when the conversation doesn't get very deep.

Scarcely anybody wants to be atomized (they say). Perhaps they read Michel Houellebecq's 1998 novel *Atomised* (or *Elementary Particles*), and nod along to it. How could one not? If that's where it ended, it would be hard to see the problem, or how there ever came to be a problem, but it doesn't end there, or anywhere close, because atomization makes a mockery of words. Atomization was never good at parties, unsurprisingly. It's unpopular to the point of essence. There's the Puritan thing, and the Ayn Rand thing, and the nerd thing, and the trigger for Asperger's jokes – if that's actually a separate thing – and no doubt innumerable further social disabilities, each alone disqualifying, if receiving a 'like' in some collective medium is the goal, because nobody likes it, as we've heard (for half a millennium already). But what we've heard, and what we've seen, have been two very different things.

Atomization never tried to sell itself. Instead, it came free, with everything else that was sold. It was the formal implication of dissent, first of all, of methodical skepticism, or critical inquiry, which presupposed a bracketing of authority that proved irreversible, and then – equally implicit originally – the frame of the contractual relation, and every subsequent innovation in the realm of the private deal (there would be many, and we have scarcely started). "So what do you think (or want)?" That was quite enough. No articulate enthusiasm for atomization was ever necessary. The sorcery of revealed preference has done all the work, and there, too, we have scarcely started.

Atomization may have few friends, but it has no shortage of formidable allies. Even when people are readily persuaded that atomization is undesirable, they ultimately want to decide for themselves, and the more so as they think that it matters. Insofar as atomization has become a *true horror*, it compels an intimate cognitive and moral relation with itself. No one who glimpses what it is can delegate relevant conclusions to any higher authority. Thus it wins. Every Catholic of intellectual seriousness has seen this, for centuries. Socialists have too, for decades. The moment of ethno-nationalist revelation cannot long be delayed. Under modern conditions, every authoritative moral community is held hostage to private decision, even when it is apparently affirmed, and especially when such affirmation is most vehemently asserted. (The most excitable elements within the world of Islam see this arriving, and are conspicuously unhappy about the fact.)

Substantially, if only notionally, freedom of conscience might tend to collectivity, but formally it locks-in individualism ever more tightly. It defies the authority of community at the very moment it offers explicit endorsement, by making community an urgent matter of private decision, and – at the very peak of its purported sacredness – of *shopping*. Religious traditionalists see themselves mirrored in whole-food markets, and are appalled, when not darkly amused. “Birkenstock Conservatives” was Rod Dreher’s grimly ironic self-identification. Anti-consumerism becomes a consumer preference, the public cause a private enthusiasm. Intensification of collectivist sentiment only tightens the monkey-trap. It gets worse.

American history – at the global frontier of atomization – is thickly speckled with *elective communities*. From the Puritan religious communities of the early colonial period, through to the ‘hippy’ communes of the previous century, and beyond, experiments in communal living under the auspices of radicalized private conscience have sought to ameliorate atomization in the way most consistent with its historical destiny. Such experiments reliably fail, which helps to crank the process forward, but that is not the main thing. What matters most about all of these co-ops, communes, and cults is the semi-formal contractual *option* that frames them. From the moment of their initiation – or even their conception – they confirm a sovereign atomization, and its reconstruction of the social world on the model of a menu. Dreher’s much-discussed ‘Benedict Option’ is no exception to this. There is no withdrawal from the course of modernity, ‘back’ into community, that does not reinforce the pattern of dissent, schism, and exit from which atomization continually replenishes its momentum. As private conscience directs itself towards escape from the privatization of conscience, it regenerates that which it flees, ever more deeply within itself. Individuation, considered impersonally, likes it when you run.

As is well understood, ‘atoms’ are not atoms, and ‘elements’ are not elements. Elementary particles – if they exist at all – are at least two (deep) levels further down. Human individuals are certainly no less decomposable. Marvin Minsky’s ‘society of mind’ is but one vivid indication of how historical sociology might tilt into the sub-atomic realm. Particle accelerators demonstrate that shattering entities down to the smallest attainable pieces is a technological problem. The same holds in the social realm, though naturally with very different technologies.

To dismiss individuals as metaphysical figments, therefore, would be the most futile of diversions. Atomization has no constraining metaphysics, whether in particle physics or in the dynamic anthropological, socio-historical process. If it promises at times to tell you what you really are, such whispers will eventually cease, or come to deride themselves, or simply be forgotten. Protestantism, it has to be remembered, is only masked, momentarily, as a religion. What it is underneath, and enduringly, is a way of breaking things.

After so much has already been torn apart, with so many monstrosities spawned, it is no doubt exhausting to be told that while almost everything remains to be built, no less still waits to be broken. Atomization has already gone too far, we are incessantly told. If so, the future will be hard. There can be no realistic doubt that it will be extremely divided. The dynamo driving things tends irresistibly in that direction. Try to split, and it whirls faster.

“Hands up everyone who hates atomization.” No, that isn’t a question anymore. It would be a call for surrender, if surrender mattered, but it doesn’t, as we’ve seen. Keep on fighting it, by all means. It likes that.



# Atomization and Liberation

## Justin Murphy

**Abstract.** *The problem with human atomization — the accelerating tendency of traditional social aggregates to disintegrate — is only that the process remains arrested at the level of the individual. The modern political Left, as an intrinsically aggregative tendency, bemoans individualism but functions as a machine for conserving it against already active forces that would otherwise disintegrate it. One of the only empirically mature pathways to collective liberation is through human atomization becoming autonomous: accepting the absolute foreclosure of anthropological agency is a causal trigger activating novel, individuated, affective capacities, which become capable of recomposing as intensive, nonlinear, collective excitations (Cyberpositive AI-aligned Communism, or the CAIC protocol).*

Modernity can be thought of as a process of atomization, arguably initiated by the Protestant Reformation.<sup>174</sup> Today, atomization is something that almost everyone protests (on the left and right), but protest itself is an atomization dynamic, automatically reproducing the mold of Protestant schismatics. In our sincerely felt repulsion to atomization, we instantiate a distance between ourselves and this supposedly external alienating phenomenon, the cause of which is imputed to something or someone else, somewhere else. This helps to explain other puzzling phenomena, such as “community-building” political activists, the attitudes and

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<sup>174</sup> Land, Nick. “The Atomization Trap.” *Jacobite*, June 6, 2017. <https://jacobitemag.com/2017/06/06/atomization/>.

behaviors of whom are maximally inhospitable to most people everywhere. No matter how hard such groups sincerely want and try to connect with “the masses”, they continue to repulse the masses more and more, because their interest in building a commons is predicated on opposition to the only, last thing that humans today generally have in common: atomization.

The currently dominant tendency in debates about the acceleration of capitalism is to see such critiques of the modern left-activist project as implicitly aligned with right-wing implications. But coming to see the deep complicity between leftism and everything most abhorrent about modernity is an ideologically under-determined realization. If the history of left politics thus far has been a fever dream of capitalism itself, updating one’s mental model accordingly is not a defection to the right but entrance onto a different virtual plane, at once drastically more modest but somehow, also, more vast. What is called accelerationism triggers the mental space in which it becomes possible to answer the following question with a new degree of impartiality: what exactly is the object of one’s political desire anyway, after the questioning subject extricates itself from the history of strategic dissimulations it has undertaken to survive the competitive constraints of reality? This question is a heuristic for continuing a collective rush toward liberation after the final, irredeemable implosion of modernity’s ideological scaffolding, a translation of previous, primitive ideological investments into a research program for a cyber-positive, evolution-positive, AI-aligned lust for liberation beyond what is currently called politics.

## **Presumptive Aggregationism**

It's important to see how the classic modern ideological cleavages are separated not so much by strongly argued and differentiated empirical propositions but by different background imagery. These background images are never rigorously scrutinized propositions, but more like presumptions that sediment as the common ground of multiple intelligences communicating in multi-dimensional space. They emerge as necessary, organizing simplifications across a mass stratified social space (attuning large groups to different vocabularies and tendencies by elective affective affinities). Theoretical progress on questions of politics is gained today only by leveraging information-technological acceleration: the strategic-communicational necessity of investing in naïve molar presumptions in order to effect a large stratified social space no longer holds, so it is possible and hugely profitable (intellectually) to have done with all of the errors and deceptions that have always laid dormant in modern ideological thought. Communicating with high fidelity and objective rigor to two people in the smooth open space of cyberwar is exponentially more powerful than communicating to thousands of people at the cost of buying into a whole package of ancient logical and empirical errors.

The presumed historical progression in the left tradition, at least since Rousseau, is that human culture began in a state of relatively non-individuated, collective consistency with nature, before moving onto primitive capital accumulation via slavery and patriarchy, onward to the explosion of industrial modernity and beyond. Capitalism, modernity and enlightenment, and everything else generally associated with the rise of

European white male dominance, produced the modern individual subject, predicated on a variety of crosscutting social categories (class, race, gender, etc.). From here, radical collective liberation or even just any type of progress is presumed to involve transition from individualism upward toward some kind of larger aggregate: the cadre, the activist group, the union, the sector, the class, the party, the Soviet, the factory, the social movement, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and so on — a whole bestiary of fantastic molar aggregates.

One of the most paralyzing problems for those who have sought to continue the search for collective liberation in the face of techonomic acceleration (what many people call “left accelerationism” or “l/acc” for short) is that, so far, they have been invariably pitched at aggregate social entities which do not in fact exist, at a time when in fact one of the primary political problems is that the contemporary form of atomized human life increasingly lacks the capacity to maintain even low-level aggregates (friendship, marriage, social clubs, etc., all marked by entropic trends since WWII).<sup>175</sup> The most obvious and widespread form of deceptive left discourse is any statement to the effect of: ‘the left should...’ because it presumes the existence of an aggregate body that in no

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<sup>175</sup> On the U.S. case of generally declining civic involvement, see Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. On marriage in the U.S., see Pew Research Center. “The Decline of Marriage And Rise of New Families,” November 18, 2010. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/11/pew-social-trends-2010-families.pdf>. On the decline of friendship and number of people with no confidants, also in the U.S., see McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears. “Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades.” *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 3 (June 1, 2006): 353–75.

meaningful way exists, other than as an apparatus interpolating a portion of the population with a particular complex of shared repetition compulsions. The most vexing problem for anyone who identifies with the left would appear to be the problem that 'the left' as a world-historical entity has gone extinct, but because of selection effects this problem receives no serious effort from left-interpolated subjects: in a world where 'the left' is objectively extinct, any remaining subjective leftism is best thought of as 'consumer demand for the belief that the left still exists'. Capitalism's devilish efficacy is that it fulfills this widespread consumer demand perfectly well. Many brands can still do quite well finding talented and good-spirited minds able and willing to say 'the left' is a currently existing entity that has potential to act. The right is perfectly happy for this belief to persist because no quantity or intensity of false beliefs can outsmart a system based on the manipulation of reality through intelligent exploitation.

Corresponding to the false belief in aggregates that do not effectively exist, the *bête noire* of modern leftism is the dreaded Individual. If effective aggregates appear not to exist, it is only taken as evidence that the inquirer is infected by Individualism. The modern leftist orientation to capitalism is, at its core, a game of three-card monte where signifiers are re-shuffled to perpetually defer logical-objective falsification. Belief in an untenably posited object is sustained by a new posited object, the only evidence for which is that it is presupposed to be the force that makes the first object *appear* non-existent. How to move from our current state of atomized individualism to an effective social aggregate capable of transforming capitalism? First, we are told, agree that atomizing individuals are bad. Second, insist at all cost

that an effective social aggregate called ‘the left’ exists (it only needs to be enlarged in order to gain its power to act). Third, try to get others to transmit this set of beliefs until ‘the left’ is large enough to numerically overpower Capital.

A rarely mentioned but seminal citation for modern left activism is, therefore, Plato’s infamous Noble Lie or “magnificent myth” (γενναῖον ψεῦδος): in short, a Noble Lie is a false belief that “would save us, if we were persuaded by it.”<sup>176</sup> The activist privately knows that ‘the left’ is basically non-existent but believes it can be forged into existence by nobly telling enough people that it already exists. Activists admit all of this plainly, as they often speak of the need to generate hope in the masses; this is enough to justify the articulation of any particular idea, regardless of its truth or falsity. Only today has the deceptive core of modern leftism come into sincere self-consciousness. For instance, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams argue rather explicitly that one of the tasks of ‘the left’ is to design more sophisticated lures capable of propelling atomized individuals into effective, collective motion.<sup>177</sup> Of course, it is true that creative flights from

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<sup>176</sup> See Book 3, 415c–d in Plato. *The Republic*. Edited by G.R.F. Ferrari. Translated by Tom Griffith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. The quote is from 621b, regarding the Myth of Er.

<sup>177</sup> Srnicek, Nick, and Alex Williams. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. London: Verso, 2016. “Lures” is somewhat cheeky, but not unfair. They specifically suggest that we should deploy utopian imagination (e.g. seductive imagery orthogonal to objective possibility; lures) to trigger in people affects such as hope, in order to mobilize them. This is justified on politically realist grounds (such affects are “necessary to any political project”), just like the Noble Lie. “By generating and channeling these affects, utopian thinking can become a spur to action, a catalyst for change; it disrupts habits and breaks down consent to the existing order. Futural thinking,

the rational-objective map of the world, such as fictional story-telling, can generate objective political effects on the world, but it is something else entirely to offer a rational-objective map for social change including a plank involving the deployment of fictions to create hopes and desires in others, expressly in contradistinction to what is scientifically valid within rational, probabilistic frameworks.<sup>178</sup> Now, creative beings who are possessed by visions can and should express those visions; such 'fictions' will indeed reshape reality, but primarily because those 'fictions' are in some sense reality operating through the body that expresses them. That is 'hyperstition': fiction that produces reality but because it is in some sense *real*, some of the evidence for which consists in the demonstrable objective effects it produces. But producing effects is not the only characteristic; the con artist produces real effects, for instance, but does not transform reality so much as twist it, in a way that always ultimately snaps back. Hyperstition is not a limitless capacity of social groups to produce new realities through shared enunciations. Hyperstitions only work to the degree they enter into feedback with an outside, issuing from contact with the chaos of objective reality and feeding into that objective reality. Effective hyperstitions are therefore creative truths, or real fictions, which are no less accountable to objective reality than scientific research. But rational-objective proposals to change 'society' (an outside of staggering complexity), by exploiting the hyperstitional nature of reality-circuitry,

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extended by communications mechanisms, generates collective affects of hope that mobilize people to act on behalf of a better future — affects that are necessary to any political project."

<sup>178</sup> "Whereas scientific approaches attempt to reduce discussions of the future to fit within a probabilistic framework, utopian thought recognizes that the future is radically open."

are nothing short of scams. They traffic in promises they cannot keep. Then they exhort others to promote the scam, to forever defer the admission of having been scammed. Srnicek and Williams perhaps represent a milestone in the modern left tradition, for it is as if they are, in some sense, coming clean: As if the last great hope of saving the modern left tradition is to admit that it's based on trickery, but then share the source code and exhort the masses to use it. Unfortunately, an open-source con game is still a con game.

Aggregative leftist proposals could potentially change the world, but only if enough people trust in, and follow the dictates, of the proposers (e.g. some go off and make enough cool science fiction to constitute a new hegemony, engineers go off and make communist robotics, etc.) — but why should any of these actors *trust* the proposers' claims that following this program will *work* to bring about a more desirable world? Ultimately the answer is: because that trust is necessary to make it work, so if you don't trust it, you are guilty of being the cause of it not working. When the basic problem of contemporary capitalism is that we are all hyper-mistrusting atoms hell-bent on exploiting each other, a political project with this circular structure simply dodges the puzzle of irreversible atomization dynamics. Its degree of success is not measured by how well it brings about the better world (never) but by how adeptly it forestalls any ultimate reckoning with the puzzles it is essentially paid by capital to not address. A project with this structure cannot be operative for anyone other than the small number of already left-interpolated subjects, who are not themselves moved by this 'vision' so much as they are hopeful that it will move others (such as their apolitical friends, who are implicitly assumed to be dumber — enough to be moved



by a lure which the already-initiated are not personally moved by because they know it is only a lure...).

Ultimately, the only effective force in a hyper-complex social system more intelligent than any one of its sub-entities is some type of novel engineering realization that allows some actually existing entity to manipulate actually existing entities with a non-trivial probabilistic effect on the whole, where the novelty of the realization provides a demonstrable edge over those other, competing entities with the interest and capacity to thwart the novel manipulations.

An exciting and inspiring 'vision of the future' may generate short-term interest and energy, but absent a genuine advancement in the engineering blueprint, producing ever more creative images of a hopeful future is, in fact, the most insidious, willfully perverse form of atomic hyper-exploitation conceivable. Srnicek and Williams should be applauded for becoming conscious of the fact that leftism is predicated on the fabrication of lures, which provides the genuine service of helping to close this entire, doomed trajectory. What would be willfully destructive would be to insist that this insight is an advancement of the engineering blueprint, so that if you believe in collective liberation you should promote the promotion of lures, and if one finds that this insight does not increase one's powers to act then it's only evidence that you're an atomizing individualist! Collective liberation is not an emergent outcome of multi-level marketing schemes.

## Atomic Liberation Pathways

If the upward, aggregative presumption of left-modernity is, as I have argued, a meme-commodity supplied by entrepreneurial Noble Liars, for profit, to a small portion of consumers whose demand is that reality be other than it is, then it stands to reason that the objective diagram of collective liberation for  $n$  atomized individuals suggests projects of subjective disaggregation and objective recomposition. You think you are one and you suffer because you are disconnected from others, but really you suffer because you are many — a primordial commune — that has been bribed by the future to speak and act as if it is one.

Certain currents in the history of theory give some reason to believe that modernity's atomization tendency is less gloomy than it seems. The atomization of pre-modern collectivities may give us the wretched bourgeois individual, but for the same reasons it will tear asunder the bourgeois individual. The entire modern capitalist legal order is predicated on this particular, fragile unit of aggregation (even the corporation is required to be an individual), but the forces it has unlocked are constantly chipping away at this temporary container. This is how one should understand Marx's dictum about the relations of production coming to be contradicted by the forces of production. For more than a century this has been presumed to be an aggregative dynamic. As capitalist relations unlock economic productivity, this productivity exceeds the relations, which are now felt as fetters, resulting in "an era of social revolution".<sup>179</sup> Leftists

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<sup>179</sup> Marx, Karl. "Preface." In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

generally have assumed this contradiction of capitalism generates aggregative effects: the class consciousness of the proletariat is a becoming-aggregate of once isolated, alienated individual workers. Class consciousness then aggregates to a dictatorship of the proletariat, and so on upward, to a vision of full communist 'species being'. But one is hard-pressed to find theoretical or empirical evidence that this presumption is anything more than a kind of spatial-metaphorical supplement, i.e. a prejudice.

If we apply the heuristic highlighted above — to read all modern activist discourse as encrypted by its sender to survive competition — it is easy to see Marx's aesthetic reliance on grandiose aggregationism as a function of late nineteenth-century rhetorical conditions. When large satanic factories appear to be taking over the world, nobody is going to join your group unless the group promises to be big. But today, when large factories are disappearing from the wealthy Western countries, and production/consumption is now satanically atomic and unsubstantial, nobody is going to join your group unless it promises to be small (exclusively organized around specific identity dimensions, with strong walls). In short, only today are we able to see the radically under-determined, schizophrenic undecidability at the core of all human political judgment and activity, the logical symmetry between fundamentally opposite conclusions regarding the good/bad, up/down, left/right movements of the world. Left-modernist metaphors of aggregation are not sacred.

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<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.

This, of course, was recognized by Deleuze and Guattari in their move to theorize ‘molecular politics’. They, perhaps better than anyone yet, recognized that when atomization also atomizes the individual into sub- or pre-individual energies, then everything changes. One point of Deleuze and Guattari’s project is to explore the capacities we gain simply as an automatic result of capitalism’s self-sabotaging gift of perpetually generating free atomic fission. ‘We do not yet know what a body can do’ in part because capitalism is never done surgically decimating every reachable particle in search of negentropy.

It is possible that, at the end of the atomization process, there is nothing but cold, dead silence... some kind of techno-commercial vertigo of intolerable distances. It’s an open empirical question. But if the revolutionary intellectual tradition means anything, it means there are reasons to believe atomization is the material cosmic process for which the concept of liberation has been the ideologically encrypted signal. Cyberpositive, AI-aligned Communism (CAIC, pronounced *kayak*, *cake*, or *kek*, depending on the cyberregional dialect) solves all problems of oppression via splits and recombinations. It is diagrammatically equivalent to the neoreactionary mantra of exit, but socio-aesthetically distinct. That is, it is formulated and distributed through a different cypher, the keys to which are held by those particular meat machines spawned in a particular, contingent sociological lineage (the descent of figures such as Marx, etc.). The sociological interpolation of ideological subjectivities is, as we have seen, fully reversible given a correct decryption. All forms of differential socialization are outcomes of the same primordial cosmic signal animating meat to different rhythms due to the different encryptions

imposed by historically-earlier receivers of the signal. The signal is one, no matter what we say; yet how we say it — the encoding — determines who will receive it. In turn, strategic consideration of potential receivers conditions how we say it (any anticipation of future rewards or punishments is an operation of capital or, more literally, visitation by an alien come to you from the future).

The perpetuation of systemic inequality and violence has nothing to do with some classes or groups controlling or dominating others; it has to do with a continuous, ceaseless invasion of our bodies by attitudinal and behavioral programs that whisper to us in variable, evolved cyphers. Individuals can only decrypt so much, and intelligence is roughly equivalent to one's power of decryption. To be a living human individual today means you are an ancestor of those who obeyed the alien dictates and in turn agreed to re-encrypt and re-transmit the signal. The highly undesirable megamachine (i.e. capitalism) persists because it is more richly encrypted than any human individual or group is capable of decrypting — and our survival requires that we execute its orders. The history of ideological orientations toward the megamachine, the evolution of variable mental and behavioral responses to alien visitation, is simply the entropic unfolding of the one true cosmic signal.

The atomic liberation wager forgoes any claim to restructuring anything with a complexity greater than or equal to one's objective processing power. In the absolute renunciation of this claim we maximize the energies available to being affected by the immanent cosmic tendency of atomization. We do not yet know what will come of these energies, for the same reason we cannot manipulate the megamachine as such: we have not the

processing power to know what we can do if we divide ourselves and test all possible combinations of interpersonal machinery. 10 humans who each atomize to 5 sub-agents each ( $n=50$ ) before recomposing into a new group of 10 would already have to navigate a search space of more than 2 million possibilities, so nobody can assert *a priori* what would or would not become possible. Some of these potential combinations would function as novel, different encryption keys: the alien whispers would suddenly *sound different*, the rhythm changes.

One must recall that all of normal human life, especially in left-wing circles, is generally organized around arresting potential atomic combinatorics. Combinatorial explosion is the definition of unpredictability, fear, and danger, in their most mathematically pure form. When we forgo the pretension of selling to others a more preferable vision of the future, we become affected by a novel source of legitimate confidence in the *empirical possibility* of finding hitherto unknown, atomic combinations, that may deliver a higher-fidelity transmission of the same signal that the modern-left activist cypher transmitted only with extreme noise and data corruption: namely, something that would look, sound, and feel like what people really have in mind when they speak of *liberation*, triggered through the acceptance, rather than the arresting, of atomization dynamics.

It has been suggested before that one way to summarize the accelerationist realization is: 'It's too late, always.' But if time is a spiral,<sup>180</sup> then traversing it to the end (arriving

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<sup>180</sup> Land, Nick. 2014. *Templexity: Disordered Loops through Shanghai Time*. Urbanatomy Electronic, §8.5. Land, Nick.

too late) is tantamount to arriving, finally, at something that deserves to be considered a beginning. Now that we admit it's too late, the affective quality of everything changes, for all of our failed exertions can finally be comprehended. It makes sense why all of our attempts to change the world have only ever drilled the world deeper into fascist confusion: we were always a day late and a dollar short, all this time. CAIC consists in nothing more than an 'assortative mating' of those atomic, pre-individual energies that receive positive affective charge from this realization. And all of this is quite beside what can or cannot be established via critical philosophy; in the first instance, all that matters is that an idea finds joy, i.e. power, in a given body. If it can't, test whether it might find joy in one of  $n$  molecular subdivisions of a body's personality.

In later stages, we may advance our understanding of joy's engineering — but the empirical justification of the present claim is established satisfactorily if it works on even one body. I can testify it works on my own. QED. Nobody needs to like or trust me for the mechanism's empirical functioning to be assured. Unlike the mobilization-engineering diagram of 'inventing the future' through effective macro image-creation, the ethical auto-ecstasy of first-stage CAIC does not depend on convincing anyone, anywhere.

In any event, it has been realizations such as this one that have led me to quit all the little doomed left-wing groups; not to 'agree with' capitalism but to simply acknowledge the objective degree to which the global capitalist

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"Extropy." Outside in, February 20, 2013.  
<http://www.xenosystems.net/extropy/>.

cybernet has consumed reality itself, to the point of becoming for most intents and purposes coterminous with it. Therefore, one is released from a number of idiotic notions about some personal responsibility to change or resist what are effectively transcendental structures. What a sad idea. It now seems likely that all those who remain affected by this masochistically false notion of responsibility are impotent to change the world, in part *because* they believe they must. Alternatively, the Spinoza–Nietzsche–Deleuze liberation model can be reduced with reasonable fidelity to the maxim that one should do whatever makes one feel most joyous, so long as we have a sufficiently high-resolution and empirically tractable understanding of true joy. The naïve objection that such a maxim endorses evil or cruelty is wrong for the simple reason that evil or cruelty induces all kinds of negative feedback at the psycho– and socio-logical levels; i.e. it curbs the growth of one’s power/joy whereas genuine communist aggregation of particles will be known by its positive feedback on the growth of one’s power.

### **Empirical Reflections**

Some pursuit of atomic liberation pathways can be found today with the interest in pre-individual or “dividual” phenomena.<sup>181</sup> But beyond a small number of theoretical texts in the Deleuzian line, few human beings have been

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<sup>181</sup> Raunig, Gerald. *Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution*. Translated by Aileen Derieg. South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2016. Lazzarato, Maurizio. *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*. Translated by Joshua David Jordan. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2014.



willing to update their operational attitudes and behaviors in the relatively drastic fashion that would be required of anyone seeking to take the accelerationist realization seriously. Full accelerationism, unconditional on any normative ideological preference or purpose, is a belief about the empirical world that generates no determinate political praxis — even foreclosing it, or at least anything currently recognizable as political praxis — but nonetheless alters its host body with politically substantial effects. Otherwise, it would be a distinction that makes no difference. But as with any set of ideas, it is easy and widespread for people to ‘adopt’ beliefs which never integrate with their real, revealed, operational beliefs. So when I speak of the political effectivity of accelerationism, I am speaking of dynamics triggered only to the degree it is integrated into one’s behaviorally operative neural nets, that is, when everything else you think and feel moves to equilibrate with this belief.

One of the politically substantial effects of the accelerationist realization is that it concretely decimates bourgeois ego investments into their unformed, atomic components. Paradoxically, this empirical claim about technocapitalist reality, which forecloses all hope of praxis, triggers concrete affective changes that map quite precisely onto the atomic liberation pathway.

Why? This occurs because the one individuated bourgeois ego that we by default inhabit is ultimately composed and attuned by the sum total of sad ideas that command our attention and behavior on a daily basis (that if only I didn’t have to work I would be happy; if only I could do some impossible thing, such as control more intelligent people, then I could possibly begin to live, etc.). The bourgeois capitalist ego is essentially the center of a

spider's web of sad 'if onlys', as a defining characteristic of capitalism is the postponement of desire for a greater, future return.

Any thought that could destroy all sad 'if onlys' in one fell swoop is, in a very real sense, an immanent extraction of one's vital energies from precisely the apparatus of capture that holds together so much institutionalized misery in a durable order over time. Human creatures who learn, even in the most groping fashion, to extricate themselves from this web in a reproducible and transmittable fashion will be the only true heirs to the revolutionary political tradition — and yet they will enter it through becoming politically unconditional.

The knee-jerk objection of activist 'materialism' is to call what I am saying 'idealism' and to point out, mockingly, that people are oppressed by soul-crushing exploitation and poverty, not by their sad ideas. For many activists, this is a founding assumption of projects to change society, but from a scientific perspective it's not at all obvious. First of all, there is a large body of evidence that suggests believing in the existence of systemic injustice is more oppressive than believing the system is just.<sup>182</sup> In short, activism may have less to do with solving problems of human oppression than generating and amplifying them. The activist amplifications of tragic human

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<sup>182</sup> This school of thought is called "system-justification theory", a body of psychological research that has sought to uncover why people tend to support political and economic systems it might be in their interest to transform. For a review, see Jost, John T., Mahzarin R. Banaji, and Brian A. Nosek. "A Decade of System Justification Theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the Status Quo." *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6 (December 1, 2004): 881–919. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00402.x.

existence are then cited as the increasingly dire and urgent reasons why one must commit to more activism.

To think this through even further, consider a thought experiment. Assume we have some population of abjectly oppressed, poor, marginalized manual laborers with the typical portfolio of sad activist ideas (they are oppressed by a system they could potentially change; they are in every way just as able as every rich person, if only they were not oppressed, etc.). The Spinoza-Nietzsche-Deleuze hypothesis is that if this population could hypothetically be treated to a sudden massive cognitive reorientation, in which they only entertained mental phenomena that maximized their joy or power, and just ignored or skipped over all mental phenomena that made them sad, then this population would show more cognitive and behavioral indicators of collective political liberation than the activist workers. This hypothesis is far more plausible than activist wisdom is willing to admit. The social scientific evidence suggests to me that these workers would likely have more energy before and after work, they would have more openness to creative connections with each other, and they would have far greater immediate well-being than the activist workers who believe it is their obligation to work more after work trying to achieve a goal they privately suspect to be empirically impossible. The activist hypothesis is that such a cognitive reorientation would not produce dynamics of collective liberation, but that a massive restructuring of their material power in the economy in the workplace would.

Interestingly, we have some test cases of what happens when human beings are treated to hypothetical cognitive restructuring à la Spinoza-Nietzsche-Deleuze. They are highly imperfect as case studies, but they may provide

some causal leverage. The first example is the well-documented causal link between pain and ecstasy: with the right attitude, abject toil under brutal conditions can generate exceptionally enjoyable and empowering affects, which figures such as Simone Weil have shown to be efficient motors of accelerative communist dynamics.<sup>183</sup> We also have some examples of material restructuring à la activist wisdom. Lottery winners, for instance, are actually a relatively strong natural experiment for testing the effects of substantial, randomly assigned improvement of material conditions. And the data are quite clear that such changes to material conditions do not durably increase positive affect.<sup>184</sup> So the Spinoza-Nietzsche-Deleuze model appears far more empirically plausible than many believe, and nearly universal assumptions in left-activist circles appear surprisingly questionable.

Another interesting consideration from a scientific perspective is that activists may be ‘treatment non-compliant’, possibly leading them to systematically biased inferences and making them uniquely untrustworthy spokespeople for how social change actually occurs. In short, the strange human breed called ‘activists’ might be those particular creatures who are so far gone under the weight of sad affect that they privately

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<sup>183</sup> Glucklich, Ariel. “Pain and Ecstatic Religious Experience.” Oxford Handbooks Online, May 2015.

doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.013.38. White, George Abbot. “Simone Weil’s Work Experiences: From Wigan Pier to Chrystie Street.” *CrossCurrents* 31, no. 2 (1981): 129–62.

<sup>184</sup> When compared to victims of catastrophic accidents who are rendered paraplegic, lottery winners are actually less susceptible to positive affect. Brickman, Philip, Dan Coates, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman. “Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: Is Happiness Relative?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36, no. 8 (1978): 917.

decline to undergo available positive affective ‘treatments’ but publicly offer their experience as evidence of null effect. If subjects of a randomized medical experiment are assigned to take a pill, and they say they took the pill when in fact they refused or forgot — the results of this experiment will understate the real effect of the pill. Activist types who deeply believe and insist that only macro-material change can affect the probability of their liberation are likely treatment non-compliers, as this belief will lead them to become increasingly closed off to molecular experimentation. If affective variation along atomic liberation pathways does not produce results for these types, it does not necessarily mean that affective variation is impotent idealism. Humanity’s collective-emancipatory potential via the atomic pathways could still be an objectively explosive quanta; we might just be drastically under-estimating it due to the over-representation of treatment non-compliers, who self-select into the cultural organs possessed of cultural authority on this question (academia, journalism, activist theory, etc).

The concrete revolutionary potency of the atomic pathways is therefore one of the best kept secrets of the global-cosmopolitan progressive catechism, and another example of why it is quite reasonable and useful to see this cultural formation as a Cathedral — replete with old-fashioned suppression of knowledge rightly seen as dangerous to social stability. To those who still might say that such acceleration-consistent micro-political liberation pathways could only be a kind of fake individualistic freedom enjoyable only from comfortable bourgeois stations, we need only recall that accelerating atomization means almost the opposite: the comfortable bourgeois individual disintegrating into a veritable party,

comprised of the multiple and decidedly non-bourgeois agents the individual once repressed. This is not the masturbation of a comfortable individual, as some might allege. It is much more like an infinitely expanding commune of human and inhuman entities masturbating on oneself — an untenably uncomfortable individual finally learning to desire what desires it, having accepted that it's far too late to do otherwise.

## Independence Games

### Nick Land

North Korea's nuclear test on September 3 was registered as a rare literal geopolitical earthquake. Some public uncertainty persists about the scale and significance of the tremor. It has been reported in a range of magnitudes from 6.1 to 6.3 (or even higher), on the logarithmic Richter Scale. An event of this size suggests an explosion of several hundred kilotons of TNT, and is consistent with the detonation of a thermonuclear device. North Korean confirmation of exactly this occurrence has been received with unprecedented seriousness.

Nuclear non-proliferation is more idea than reality. Its only substance is a comparative sluggishness when estimated against the benchmark of some generally unstated nightmare scenario. According to such counter-factual consideration, nuclear weapons *might* have been more widespread than they are by now. But exponential processes look like this. They start small, and don't seem to be going anywhere dramatic for a while. As the celebrated fable<sup>185</sup> of exponentiation shows, a modest bowl of rice gets you quite a long way into the chess board. The supposedly common-sense assumption that *uncontrollable nuclear proliferation isn't yet happening* requires an argument. (This short essay makes the other argument.)

The nuclear 'club' is too unwieldy to share any kind of seriously constraining principle. There is nothing

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<sup>185</sup> See: <http://mathforum.org/sanders/geometry/GP11Fable.html>

identifiable that entitles a nation to membership, beyond naked possession of doomsday-tier military capability. The club was trans-ideological from the start, and quite soon afterwards highly multicultural. Among members, reciprocal distrust and even hostility is the norm, which – given the runaway action-reaction process that settled the membership roster – could scarcely be unexpected. The behavior of members is controlled by nothing beyond game theory. It's also very much worth mentioning that nobody who manages to get into the club can, in any practical way, be thrown out.

The United States detonated the world's first thermonuclear, two-stage, fusion, or (Teller-Ulam design<sup>186</sup>) 'hydrogen' bomb at Enewetak Atoll on November 1, 1952. The Soviet Union responded less than a year later, testing its own H-bomb on August 12, 1953. Tests – or demonstrations – followed in succession from The United Kingdom (November 1957), China (June 17, 1967), and France (August 1968). Israel is thought to have conducted a joint test with the Republic of South Africa – the so-called 'Vela Incident' – in September 22, 1979. In 1991 the South African government claimed to have assembled, and later unilaterally dismantled, six nuclear devices. India expanded the spiral of thermonuclear proliferation into South Asia with a test in May 1998. Pakistan is not known to have tested anything beyond 'boosted fission' devices, but its formidable nuclear capability is not in question. (A longer essay would have found space at this point to acknowledge Pakistani Abdul Qadeer Khan's disproportionate contribution to the global proliferation dynamic.) Saudi nuclear cooperation with Pakistan can be expected to accelerate the spread of

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<sup>186</sup> See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thermonuclear\\_weapon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thermonuclear_weapon)



nuclear weaponry into the Arabian Peninsula, once Iranian progress in the military application of the technology triggers the long-anticipated Sunni-Shia arms-race in weapons of mass destruction. Hence the chain of proliferation steadily lengthens on its main axis, through Cold War superpower rivalry, into Chinese triangulation, a responsive Indian bomb, and then into the fractured world of Islam, via Pakistan (with unreciprocated Israeli nuclear prowess as additional prompt, and pretext).

The one-dimensional character of this narrative is an artifact of its immaturity. The under-development of the proliferation process appears to present the 'international community' with no more than a single crisis at any time. Things will not look this way for long. There is nothing essentially mono-linear about the dynamic of cross-escalation. Increasing momentum is already taking it off the tracks. As Richard Fernandez notes<sup>187</sup>, lines of nuclear escape are occurring in several directions at once:

In security affairs the old East-West game payoff matrix has been replaced by a multidimensional array of new players many of them sub-national, some of them unknown. The big wild card is technology. Disruptive technological change and new modes of warfare associated with them have upset the old calculus. North Korea, Iran are not outlier threats but leading indicators of the changed dynamic. They are the first samples of a new threat coming onstream.

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<sup>187</sup> Richard Fernandez, "After the Smash":  
<https://pjmedia.com/richardfernandez/2017/10/13/after-the-smash/>

North Korea claims to have tested thermonuclear weapons in January 2016, following fission device tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013). Whether as a matter of analytical realism, or of strategically motivated public skepticism, the claim was met by orchestrated Western disparagement. The 2017 test shattered this wall of denial. In the words of Scott D. Sagan, writing at Foreign Affairs: “North Korea no longer poses a nonproliferation problem; it poses a nuclear deterrence problem”

While, if traced as a simple historically consistent curve, it is not yet impossible to see a process of deceleration in this time-line, such an optic is ceasing to convince. It seems to be part of a collapsing world order, which is taking its structures of perception down with it. The assumption of continuity, for instance, now seems reckless in the extreme. Historical *discontinuity* in the proliferation dynamic has been especially notable over recent decades, due to a hardening pattern whose incentive effects could not easily be more ominous. The surrender of thermonuclear ambitions has acquired a stark correlation with subsequent regime destruction, unlike anything seen in the previous era of Cold War superpower patronage.

Ukraine voluntarily surrendered its nuclear arsenal to Russia upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In the Gorbachev era, this decision no doubt appeared rational – and even prudent. Subsequent regional developments make it far harder to excuse. It remains to be seen whether Ukrainian national independence will have finally been sacrificed to this high-minded call, but rudimentary geopolitical and domestic security already has been.

The prevailing racial hysteria of our age hazes any analysis of South African regime change in comparable terms, as it already hazed the process itself. Future historians will have clearer eyes. It certainly *seems* to fit the pattern. No less than with Juche, the experience of apartheid is that sensitivity to international ‘polite opinion’ is vastly increased by the absence of nukes.

The Libyan lesson has been the most lurid to date. Libyan denuclearization “was peacefully resolved on December 2003” Wikipedia explains.<sup>188</sup> In a separate article<sup>189</sup> it adds the appendix (more helpfully still) that “Muammar Gaddafi, the deposed leader of Libya, was captured and killed on 20 October 2011 during the Battle of Sirte. ... videos of his last moments show rebel fighters beating him and one of them sodomizing him with a bayonet before he was shot several times as he shouted for his life.” It would be difficult to devise a more graphic educational resource *against* international WMD non-proliferation compliance.

This is the background against which North Korean nuclear obstreperousness is to be gauged. The regime had, in any case, already made obnoxiousness into a local specialism. Its delinquent international behavior has long been the stuff of dark comedy. The country’s cultivated image takes *prickly* into territory the zoological porcupine lineage has yet to explore.

In respect to strategic fundamentals, however, the regime’s feral punk-performance attitude to diplomatic conduct is not the principal issue. Bad attitude makes for

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<sup>188</sup> See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disarmament\\_of\\_Libya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disarmament_of_Libya)

<sup>189</sup> See:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death\\_of\\_Muammar\\_Gaddafi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Muammar_Gaddafi)

stimulating diplomatic theater, but it decorates the fundamentals of threat. *Focus on capabilities, not motivations*, is a strategic principle that cannot be over-stressed. In the case of North Korea, and others no doubt soon to follow, however, it is a principle that requires complete inversion. A definite *incapacity* rises, instead, to strategic prominence.

The extremity of the emerging North Korean threat is a function of weakness, in many respects, but most centrally regarding its new responsibilities for deterrence management. Insecure nuclear arsenals are destabilizing, since they incline to first use, on the *use-it-or-lose-it* principle. Vulnerability to a first-strike is a continuous prompt to pre-emption.

North Korea is a geographically small nation, with crude command-control structures, very limited early warning capabilities, and an exclusive reliance on exposed land-based ballistic missile platforms for warhead delivery. In other words, it is destined to remain on a hair-trigger from the moment it crosses the deterrence threshold. Rather than being a splitting headache to the world order by relentless, malignant initiative, it will henceforth be one by simple strategic default. The world will have become a city built under Vesuvius, quite regardless of any planning decisions or philosophies of risk. An epoch of peril is opening.

Under these conditions, mere ‘capability’ becomes extraordinarily provocative, and incompetence<sup>190</sup> is automatically terrorizing. Yet, while this dilemma is not

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<sup>190</sup> Michael Austin, “Can Kim Jong-un Control His Nukes?”: <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/10/27/can-kim-jong-un-control-his-nukes/>

difficult to understand, it is perhaps a little *too* difficult to be captured by any public debate conducted at a realistically imaginable level of sophistication. Insofar as there is anything like a court of global mass opinion, it can be confidently expected to miss the strategic essentials and lose itself in multilateral theater performances. Geostrategic realities and mass perceptions are on diverging trajectories.

The prevalent delusions tend to be simplifying, and retarded (in the strict sense). They lag the diffusive trend, and thus invoke unrealistically economical structures of agency, drawn back towards the long-lost ideal of bipolarity. The age of superpowers still dominates the nuclear imagination.

Because there is no road through Pyongyang that doesn't end in a pit full of diplomatic punji sticks, the temptation is to fantasize a road through Beijing. No such thoroughfare exists. Relations between China and the North Korean regime have reached their lowest point since the Korean War, and are now frankly hostile. The Kim Jong-un regime has sought to extirpate Chinese influence from its leadership, with spectacular ruthlessness.<sup>191</sup> Targeting of Chinese urban centers by the North Korean arsenal is no longer unimaginable<sup>192</sup>, or, in China, unimagined. After all, the natural target of a deterrent is the greatest threat to the wielding nation's

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<sup>191</sup> "North Korea 'executed five security officials with anti-aircraft guns' over false reports", <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/27/north-korea-executed-five-security-officials-anti-aircraft-guns/>

<sup>192</sup> Tyler Cowen, "North Korea is Playing a Longer Game than the U.S.": <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-10-17/north-korea-is-playing-a-longer-game-than-the-u-s>

sovereignty. It is near-inevitable that China will occupy this role in the North Korean case. Chinese impotence in respect to North Korea is what the North Korean nuclear arsenal is largely – and perhaps even primarily – about.

Tyler Cowen describes<sup>193</sup> Robert Heinlein's (1966) *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* as "perhaps the best novel for understanding the logic of a future conflict with North Korea." He then adds: "furthermore Catalonians should read it too. Most of all, I recall upon my reread that this book was my very first exposure to game-theoretic reasoning." Not only exotic bombardment (by "electronic catapult"), independence struggle, and games, but also a world order reconstructed by the rise of China, and even a "malicious AI" who acquires strategic agency. Evidently, already half a century ago, Heinlein is exploring a durable cluster of concerns. At the very core: *There can be no question of achieving or maintaining independence without the capacity to inflict serious harm upon those who might seek to prevent it.*

*Independence*, in its geopolitical sense, fuses liberty and security indissociably. Autonomy – which is exactly *sovereignty* – requires insensitivity to coercion, and is thus the negative of foreign compelling threats. The analytical equivalence between reciprocal independence and a 'balance of terror' submits national autonomy to a geopolitical form of general relativity. Since no such thing as *absolute security* is realistic, sovereignty exists only in degrees, within tense networks. The tension is the game.

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<sup>193</sup> Tyler Cowen, "Rereading '*The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*'": <http://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2017/10/rereading-moon-harsh-mistress.html>

Thomas Schelling's pioneering application<sup>194</sup> of game theory to nuclear strategy remains the point of ingress into this world. The core reality of MAD games is easily misunderstood. Massive (or non-reiterating) retaliation is – *at the stage it comes due* – by immediate estimation irrational. It is then *too late* to contribute anything but compounded harm, regardless of its occasion. Under hypothetical conditions of amnesia and unconstrained action, it can never make sense. Yet, paradoxically, the ability to make credible retaliatory threats is the basic underpinning of rationality during prior negotiation games. Without it, there can be no *reason* for competitor restraint. The requirement, then, is for a future agent to be firmly committed to a conditional course of action that – at the potential point of execution – will be non-compelling.

Mutual assured destruction has been derided for its madness, but it is no less an outer-limit of sanity. Its logic is as rigorously implacable as any found within the social and historical sciences. The extreme moral disturbance that it arouses speaks in favor of its uncompromised rationality. Anguished intuition counts for nothing in its cold calculus, unless as a technical obstacle. The fact that people find this logic of inherited fatal commitments intolerable, as dramatized with exceptional vividness in the opening sequences of the 1983 movie *WarGames*, is *our* problem. The process is re-routed by our squeamishness, but not at all derailed. It has long been suspected that humans are too weak for MAD.

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<sup>194</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Harvard University Press, 1960)

As an expression of absolute commitment, suicide terrorism appears to provide MAD with a microscopic model, but it is a weak and misleading one. Beyond difference in scale, suicide terrorism fails through execution. It communicates through actualization – or demonstration of will – which is the negative of deterrence. (Or perhaps, deterrence of a kind, expensively purchased.) The terror at the edge of the present, and of the future, has different models. Among these, civilization-scale ‘quantum suicide’ is perhaps the most exotic philosophical and ideological conception<sup>195</sup> on its way to us. Given the assumption of a (Level-3<sup>196</sup> or higher) multiverse, comprehensive apocalypse is rationalized as the pruning of sub-optimal branches. It operates as reality editing. The game theoretic consequences of such a perspective are intriguing. It increases the credibility of threats (if accepted as a serious intellectual commitment), while adapting the pay-off matrix in a fashion that can only be considered destabilizing. Classic MAD works best among those who envisage an outcome as the worst thing in the world, yet commit to it anyway.

We approach here one of the very deepest problems in social and institutional engineering. It might be called the *Odysseus Problem*. In sailing past the Sirens, Odysseus anticipated the subversion of commitment, and thus put in place a socio-technical mechanism to bind his own future action. The structure is that of a ‘chicken game’ – a mutant variant of prisoner’s dilemma, in which *the player who swerves loses*. If you *could* back down, you *might*. In

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<sup>195</sup> See: “Quantum Suicide and Immortality”:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum\\_suicide\\_and\\_immortality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_suicide_and_immortality)

<sup>196</sup> See: “The Multiverse Hierarchy”:

<https://arxiv.org/pdf/0905.1283.pdf>



both Odysseus' dilemma and that of the chicken player, the elimination of future discretion figures as a strategic resource. The requirement for self-binding inclines to a technological freezing of decision. Strategic problems of the 'chicken game' type thus tend inexorably to automation.

If AI is brought into play by the intrinsic dynamics of nuclear confrontation, it does not stop there. AI has a WMD potentiality proper to itself. There is no obvious horizon to what an algorithm could do. The same capabilities that enable algorithmic control of WMD arsenals equally enable such arsenals to be swapped-out for AI itself. An enemy arsenal under algorithmic control is only 'theirs' by contingencies of software dominance. From the military perspective – among others oriented to negative capability – the potential destructiveness of the technology is without determinable limit. Anything under software control falls into its realm. Which is to say that, asymptotically, everything does. But it doesn't end there. AI also promotes an advance into virtuality.

Nuclear weaponry cuts a convergent path into purity of conception. No hydrogen bomb has yet been used against an enemy (or "in anger" as the singularly inappropriate expression goes). Thermonuclear warheads remain among a select category of virtual weapons, alongside a variety of chemical and biological agents, whose usage has been exclusively diplomatic, or even philosophical. The value of this military machinery is strictly counter-factual. Those 'possible worlds' in which they have been operationalized support little, if any, value of any kind. Weaponry supporting their potentiality floats the ontological option of extreme negative utility. They are – in the most rigorous sense – *nightmare generators*.

There is no reason (at all), then, to think that nuclear weapons are the last word in mass destruction. Nor can it be assumed that mass destruction is the ultimate criterion for deterrent weaponry. It is not only that high-energy physics opens a vast, rambling bestiary of virtual catastrophes which we have scarcely begun to peruse (although this is true). Physics has no monopoly on disaster, regardless of what its recent privileges might suggest.

It can never be a virtue for a weapon to be indiscriminate, which is to say *imprecise*. Turned around, we can say without hesitation or reservation that it is meritorious in any weapon, however absolutely devastating, for the greatest possible proportion of the damage it produces to be inflicted upon the enemy. In other words, a good weapon discriminates specifically against enemy interests. It *hunts*. There can be no serious doubt that the genomic biosciences and software engineering have more to contribute to this pursuit than physics possibly could.

Stuart Russell describes<sup>197</sup> autonomous weapons as a “new, scalable class of WMDs.” The systems he is considering would be exemplified by drone swarms, “hunting in packs like wolves” (as one DARPA employee was indiscreet enough to reveal). Given enormous industrial production runs, performance specifications unshackled from human limitation, and targeting algorithms set for indiscriminate lethality, the devastating potential of such weapons would be hard to exaggerate.

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<sup>197</sup> Stuart Russell, “Lethal Autonomous Weapons”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYQ7p3pWwr4>

Their key, confidently predicted vulnerabilities, however, are at least as significant.

As Russell emphasizes, autonomous weapons could be subverted by a hostile “software update.” They could be hacked. Behind the menace of the hacker lies that of advanced artificial intelligence, mustering superior powers of cryptographic lock-picking and soft intrusion. Autonomous weaponry is therefore nested into a more profound threat.

AI designates a culmination of sorts. Nowhere else does *destructive capability* and *rigid commitment* promise to intersect more dynamically. Nothing separates the weapon from the game. It also counts, potentially, as an escalation.

Much criticism<sup>198</sup> of the Cold War nuclear arms race already<sup>199</sup> configured it as an *existential risk*, before the term had been coined. Between an *X-risk* and an extreme *deterrent* there is no definite boundary. The difference is technical. Deterrence is a mode of employment. It uses negative utility. In this respect anything bad could be useful, were it not that a deterrent requires a trigger, under the control of the negotiating agent (at the point of negotiation). To threaten a potential aggressor with an asteroid strike makes no sense, unless an asteroid strike can be delivered. The same holds for geological disasters in general. All of which means that the acquisition of engineering capabilities on the largest scales, such as geo-engineering, weather control, climate regulation, and

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<sup>198</sup> See: *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*

<sup>199</sup> See: “Nuclear Winter”:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear\\_winter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_winter)

asteroid defenses – perhaps developed explicitly to avert potential existential risks – will inevitably expand the domain of deterrence options. In other words, techno-economic progress and the escalation of deterrence infrastructure are only formally differentiated. There is no materially persuasive way to improve the world that does not – on its occult side – widen the horizons of geopolitical horror.

Beside what could be had, there is the question of who has it. Beside the qualities of WMD-armed antagonists, their mere number is a source of terror, itself. It is only natural that multilateral deterrence should be found more threatening than its bilateral ideal, and now distant predecessor. Complexity scales nonlinearly in networks, and quickly becomes mathematically intractable. No one has any idea how massively distributed networks of insecurity would work. It is quite probably impossible to know. Deterrence is about to change phase.

Toothpaste doesn't return to the tube just because it makes a mess. Once it is out, inconvenience has ceased to be any kind of argument against it. The dangers of a world in which ubiquitous deterrence capacity reigns are both obvious and immense. This is nevertheless the world we are entering. The trends driving it, from both the geopolitical and the techno-economic sides, are by any realistic estimation irresistible. Cheaper and more diverse nightmare weaponry is becoming available within an increasingly disintegrated international order. A variety of self-reinforcing dynamics – including but not restricted to those of the arms-race type – are further stimulating the process. Cascading acceleration is all but inevitable.

When conceived with maximal cynicism (i.e. realism), geostrategic independence is a direct function of deterrence capability. *Don't tread on me* is the colloquial statement, whose perfect applicability is commonly under-estimated. The rattlesnake, combining fearsome weaponry with signaling, makes for a natural totem of deterrence. Neither venom, nor rattle, is dispensable. "Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments," runs the famous analogy, attributed to Frederick the Great. Game theory recognizes military capability as a communication medium.

It is not only that robust independence depends upon deterrence. Reciprocally, geostrategic liberty necessarily tends to the production of deterrence capability. An alien freedom, which *could do anything*, is – ineliminably – a threat. It provides the comprehensive model of the military threat. Whether 'they hate us for our freedom' or not, they have no choice but to fear us for it, and inversely. Geopolitics has no other origin. Any state without the will to scare also lacks the will to exist.

It's all far more basic than we've been led to believe. As Niall Ferguson writes (realistically):

In the final analysis, borders are a function of power. If you can't defend them, they are just dotted lines. The Kim dynasty's calculation has been that nukes are the ultimate border guards. We shall soon find out if that calculation was correct. If so, many more states will want them.

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<sup>200</sup> Niall Ferguson, "Borders are back and a new game looms": <http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2017/09/26/borders-are-back-and-new-game-looms/4IBUAiMEWlykb41VjegrqK/story.html>

Every geopolitical entity that is serious about sovereignty will want them, or something of at least equivalent deterrent credibility. The only alternative is naked dependency, made ever more uncomfortable by increasing global multipolarity, among the stark wreckage of any 'world order' or 'international community' grounded in the collective fantasy of miraculously authorized super-national norms. *Explosive proliferation* will be something the world has not seen before, even if it has already actually been there to see. We can be confident that the geopolitical order will be reconfigured by it.

What does explosive proliferation mean? Potentially, many things. For instance, vectors of technological – and thus economic – development are certain to be, to some significant degree, oriented by it. As artificial intelligence is factored into policy decision-making not only as an essential contributor to command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I), but as an intrinsic weapon of mass destruction, its prominence will be still further elevated.

WMD proliferation implies a multiplication of real geopolitical agencies. It is rigorously indistinguishable – in both directions – from a disintegrated world. Established relations of dependency are broken, releasing unanticipated – and evidently hazardous – freedoms. Whether or not this is the world we want, it looks increasingly inevitable that it is the world we are to have.

# Leviathan Rots

## Vincent Garton

### 1. The King of the Proud

*Nothing on earth is its equal — a creature without fear. It looks down on all that are haughty; it is king over all that are proud.*

— Job 41:33–34

Abraham Bosse's frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* is one of the most famous images in the history of philosophy. It shows the enormous figure of the 'mortall God', the blurry aggregate of the faces of all the various men and women of the commonwealth, as a collective sovereign towering as one over the countryside. The picture is striking, yet it leaves unanswered a crucial question: Why, exactly, did Hobbes choose to call this enormous beast 'Leviathan'? Hobbes himself, of course, gives an answer: 'the great power of [man's] Governour [...] I compared to Leviathan, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one and fortieth of Job; where God having set forth the great power of Leviathan, called him King of the Proud.'<sup>201</sup> But this is curiously perfunctory. The image of the 'one and fortieth of Job' is not at all as reassuring as Bosse's — which already seems scary enough. In the Book of Job, Leviathan is a horrific

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<sup>201</sup> T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXVIII

creature. Armoured with plated shields, snarling with 'fearsome teeth', 'its snorting throws out flashes of light; its eyes are like the rays of dawn. Flames stream from its mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. [...] It makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron' (Job 41:20–21, 31). Hobbes obscures this frightening image even as he cites it. Emblazoned as it is in the title of work, however, for any reader who is scripturally aware — as indeed Hobbes's readers were — it lurks irrepressibly in the background of the text. Chained between the lines, its thrashing echoes across Hobbes's relentless argumentation.

Carl Schmitt, who fancied himself — with more than a grain of justification — the Hobbes of the twentieth century, proposed to solve the contradiction in an esoteric piece of iconographic research, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*. For Schmitt, the problem was simple: Hobbes had picked the wrong image. With more than an overtone of anti-Semitism — he was, at least in public, by this point in 1938 a devoted acolyte of the Nazi regime — Schmitt complains that the pre-existence of the scriptural, Jewish image of the Leviathan, supposedly entirely other than the rigorous Hobbesian construction of the symbol, defeated Hobbes's purposes. Leviathan, Schmitt states, 'evokes [...] dreadful Asiatic myths of an all-demanding Moloch or an all-trampling Golem. According to cabbalistic views, the leviathan is thought of as a huge animal with which the Jewish God plays daily for a few hours'.<sup>202</sup> This parade of 'Asiatic' horrors could only be construed as entirely opposite to Hobbes's intentions; as the apex image of the modern state, Hobbes used it 'without horror and without

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<sup>202</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, tr. G. Schwab and E. Hilfstein, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 57.



reverence', an entirely rational and un-'cabbalistic' construction.<sup>203</sup> Poor Hobbes, however, was overwhelmed: just a few years after *Leviathan's* appearance, we are told, Spinoza the liberal Jew perceived at once the contradictions, and forced the 'barely visible crack' open, 'sapping the leviathan's vitality from within' and opening the 'telling inroad of modern liberalism'.<sup>204</sup>

Schmitt's fable puts Hobbes in an unenviable position: while rescuing Hobbes's thought from the supposed problems of his symbol and restoring it, Schmitt undermines both the extent of his influence and the depth of his imagery. Liberal political theory, going back to Spinoza, is construed as something radically anti-Hobbesian, a cancer perverting *Leviathan* from within that metastasised almost immediately after Hobbes's formulation of the concept. If there is a moment of salvation for Schmitt, it is merely that 'on the thought processes of total technology the leviathan can no longer make a sinister impression' — this manifest failure of the symbol will, at last, free Hobbes from the 'dreadful Asiatic myths', finally permitting the sober application of his theory to the Hobbesian age of modern politics.

Let us begin by offering to be more generous to Hobbes than Schmitt was. Liberal political theory is not, today, an anti-Hobbesian construct: the construction of any state on a constitutional basis depends on certain Hobbesian assumptions, the assumptions of a social contract theory. Together with Machiavelli's *Prince*, Hobbes's *Leviathan* offers a descriptive analysis that was central to the birth

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>204</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, 57.

of political science, and it is an analysis with staying power precisely because of the force of its representation of the state form in abstract.

Yet Schmitt is correct in one respect. The quality of Leviathan as religious symbol — the terror of its image in Job, its subjugation as a plaything of God — is of decisive importance not just for the immediate trajectory of Hobbes's political theory, as Schmitt thought; it points to a problem inherent to the practice of politics. For in Hobbes's political theology, we enter — to use his own phrase — a 'kingdom of darkness'.

It is a darkness that overwhelms not just Hobbes, but modern politics as such.

## 2. The Enthusiast

*Everything under heaven belongs to me.*

— Job 41:11

The term 'catastrophe' in the general sense in which we use it today originates in the prophetic upheaval of the Hobbesian era, the English Civil War. Perhaps the earliest surviving usage is to be found in a short Fifth-Monarchist pamphlet of 1654 entitled, appropriately, *The Grand Catastrophe*: here, the 'grand catastrophe' is identified with God's 'resolve [...] to change the forme of Government from what it was now [...] unto what it was better'.<sup>205</sup> The historical significance of this obscure text

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<sup>205</sup> 'Johannes Cornubiensis', *The Grand Catastrophe, or the change of Government, being a word about the last turne of these times* (1654), 2.

far exceeds the content of its arguments. It stands, chronologically, at the head of an entire ‘catastrophic’ literature of the later seventeenth century that purported to divine the significance of the ongoing motions of politics according to the movements of the heavens. In the 1680s we find the *Catastrophe Mundi, or, Europe’s many mutations* of the mathematician and astrologer John Holwell beside the similarly titled *Catastrophe Mundi, or Merlin Reviv’d* of the magician, associate of John Dee, and former Civil War propagandist William Lilly, each offering its occult prognoses of the impending arrival of a new order of the European states.<sup>206</sup>

If the occult stands at the historical root of the concept of catastrophe, however, there is also something peculiarly catastrophic about the occult. The term disaster, after all, is equally astrological: *dis-aster*, the falling constellation — ‘the stars down to earth’. The association between turmoil in heaven and earth is in itself hardly specific to the Western occult tradition, of course: this is the heart of astrology as such, reaching back to the ancient magi of Babylon, repeated equally on the other side of the world in the Chinese notion of the ‘mandate of heaven’ or ‘heaven’s command’, *tianming*, 天命, which locates the underlying order of the labyrinth of the political in the will of heaven made manifest as fate.<sup>207</sup> But where *tianming* posits a transcendent order, it is ostensibly in

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<sup>206</sup> J. Holwell, *Catastrophe Mundi, or, Europe’s many mutations until the year 1701...* (1682); W. Lilly, *Catastrophe Mundi: or, Merlin Reviv’d, in a Discourse of Prophecies and Predictions* (1683).

<sup>207</sup> On the differences in Chinese and Western conceptions of technics and time, see Y. Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016); A. Greenspan, *Shanghai Future: Modernity Remade* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014).

the modern West — beginning in the Hobbesian moment and extended in the relentless naturalisation of ‘catastrophe’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, firstly after the great Lisbon earthquake, and then in the geological theory of *catastrophism* — that the occult reality of ‘catastrophe’ assumes the aspect of something truly monstrous, a figure of absolute exteriority, of heterotopic nightmare.

And so back to Hobbes himself. To the modern reader, the serious political theorist, it seems almost embarrassing that nearly half of *Leviathan* is made up of its treatment of theology in Parts III and IV, with its discussion of the ‘kingdom of darknesse’ and its sprawling digressions on prophecies and scriptural esoterica, demons, witchcraft, and miracles. Yet Hobbes’s text is not just wracked by, but is *founded* on a psychotic intolerance of the ‘Enthusiasts’, the ‘theomancers’, the ‘prophets’, those men and women throughout human history who have claimed that God could speak through them; who have claimed, more radically, to see beyond politics directly into the occult circuitry of which all human affairs are merely the simulated emanation.<sup>208</sup> From Hobbes’s perspective, the catastrophic occultist stands in the gloom of the outside, looming as a spectre of militant opposition to the suspension of catastrophe by the state, welling up from the residues of reality the state has failed to overcome.

Over and over, *Leviathan* returns to the need to suppress the Enthusiast in all its guises: in chapter 7, chapter 8,

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<sup>208</sup> My argument owes much to Takuya Okada’s ‘Thomas Hobbes on Christian Religion in the Context of the English Civil War: His Use of the Bible in *Leviathan*’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Tokyo, 2016).

chapter 12, chapter 32, chapter 34.... Casting his gaze over the vista of ruin wrought in seventeenth-century England by the enthusiastic sects, Hobbes could see all too well that this figure was the single most dangerous vulnerability of the commonwealth. Leviathan may be a terrible beast, a plated colossus impregnable to any human weapon, churning whirlpools of slaughter with its belly as it breathes the fire of reason from its mouth. Yet above Leviathan there stands God, transcendent mystery — and to lay claim to the voice of God himself leaves Leviathan among the detritus of the transcended. Schmitt was precisely correct in seeing the Jewish image of Leviathan as making it a ‘plaything of God’, then; but he was disastrously wrong in assuming that this is a problem exterior to Hobbes’s theory. This paranoia is central to Hobbes himself. ‘Everything under Heaven belongs to me’ — *yet not Heaven itself*....

Hobbes’s answer to the problem was simple — at first sight, at least. Thought must be controlled at its very roots, in its ulterior basis in myth. The very possibility of the theomantic short-circuit around Leviathan must be stamped out; all human disagreements must be evaporated first into the determinate text of scripture, and ultimately into the orthodoxy pronounced in the commands of the *Persona Civitatis*, the aggregate ‘Person of the Common-wealth’. He puts the point most sharply in an earlier part of the book, while discussing the universal basis of the pagan commonwealths: ‘Sometimes,’ he says, the ‘insignificant Speeches of Mad-men [were] supposed to be possessed with a divine Spirit; which Possession they called Enthusiasme; and these kinds of foretelling events, were accounted Theomancy [...] And therefore the first Founders, and Legislators of Common-wealths [...] have in all places

taken care, First, to imprint in their minds a beliefe, that those precepts which they gave concerning Religion, might not be thought to proceed from their own device.’

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If the modern liberal disdains the kind of supercilious totalitarianism implied in this solution — and of course, for Hobbes, in a Christian commonwealth this is not a matter of spreading lies in the form of pagan myths, but of upholding the truth of scripture itself — she may see Hobbes’s point better when confronted by the reality of the civil war in the context of which he was writing. His later retrospective, *Behemoth*, sketched the problem in gruesome detail. The English Civil War had its roots in the proliferation of swarming sects with infinite ‘names and peculiar doctrines’, incubating chambers spawning ‘enemies which arose against his Majesty from the private interpretation of the Scripture, exposed to every man’s scanning in his mother-tongue’.<sup>210</sup> On the surface, this is a limited point about a specific historical episode; but in its shadow lies the nightmare of society itself. For radically, in an ordered society, the insectoid buzz of heterodoxy must *always and already* appear as a nightmare. The liberal who proclaims against Hobbes the doctrine of free speech will often prove just as susceptible to the terror: for the state, there must always be a limit to thought.

There is, however, a curious quality, a deep dissatisfaction, lurking in Hobbes’s mythic solution of the problem — on its *own* terms, and not just those of an exterior moralism. If the commonwealth installs itself as

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<sup>209</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XII.

<sup>210</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth: or, the Long Parliament*, Dialogue I.

the king of the proud, the avatar of God, how does it not itself become sectarian? To maintain itself, the state must neuter or eliminate 'every religion that exalts itself to be its judge'; but in doing so, the state must itself assume the aspect of a 'definite form of religion', becoming the fount of truth.<sup>211</sup> So far, so good, perhaps, as long as the commonwealth can monopolise the thought of its members — but in the emergency where it cannot, things soon take on a rather different appearance. The more sharply it is confronted by the prophets of catastrophe, the more ruthlessly sectarian it must become, dividing the good and the evil, denouncing its enemies with furious vitriol. The *Persona Civitatis* becomes caught in the very matrix of the religious paranoia it denounces, as it shrieks the ill omens betokened by its opponents. It is precisely this contradiction that Leo Strauss articulated through the paradox of Hobbes's 'Platonism'. Following Plato, Strauss argued, Hobbes desires a 'completely passionless, purely rational political philosophy', yet he wishes also a 'norm [...] applicable under all circumstances, under the most unfavourable circumstances, in the extreme cases' (the case, we may add, of the Enthusiast). And so his norm enters, despite itself, into 'accord with the passions'; it must become radically anti-Platonist.<sup>212</sup> Finally, pretending to transcend the Enthusiast, the commonwealth itself becomes a 'demonic machine', a tremendous enthusiasm mobilised against every other, all themselves constituted as enthusiasms relative to it.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> F. Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', *Untimely Meditations*.

<sup>212</sup> L. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* [1936], tr. E. Sinclair (Chicago and London, 1952), 150.

<sup>213</sup> On Leviathan as infernal machine, see P. Springborg, 'Hobbes and Schmitt on the name and nature of Leviathan revisited', in Johan Tralau (ed.), *Thomas Hobbes and Carl*

The process, of course, operates just as much in the opposite direction. The sect tends to become like a state. This is the sociological tendency described in Max Weber's theory of the routinisation of charisma, the processes of mediation that transform the compact charismatic community that adheres around a leader 'completely outside everyday social organisation' into an extensive and bureaucratised institutional church:<sup>214</sup> from the early Christians to the Catholic Church; from the immediacy of the original Raëlian UFO cult, where the revelations of the literally alien Outside were made manifest directly to the faithful, to the bureaucracy of the latter-day Raëlians, with its increasing regulation of access to the divine.<sup>215</sup> The same idea is found equally in the genealogy of the state itself, in Rousseau's figure of the Legislator, that promethean silhouette at the origin of every state whose genius projects its entire constitutional course — is this not the figure of a prophet?<sup>216</sup> Can there be an orthodoxy that is more than an overgrown heterodoxy? Can there be a heterodoxy that does not assume the position of an orthodoxy? The whole endeavour of human politics seems little more than the current alternating between the two, the state flipping

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Schmitt: *The Politics of Order and Myth* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 39–58.

<sup>214</sup> M. Weber, *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization*, tr. A. M. Henderson and T. Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 367.

<sup>215</sup> See S. J. Palmer, *Aliens Adored: Raël's UFO Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 101.

<sup>216</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter 7. As Schmitt recognises, the gaze of the Legislator lurks at the root of every constitution: C. Schmitt, *Dictatorship: From the Origin of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to the Proletarian Class Struggle*, tr. M. Hoelzl and G. Ward (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 109–10.



across the cycles of history, oscillating endlessly between sect and church.

### 3. The Despot and the Patchwork

*Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down its tongue with a rope? ... Will traders barter for it? Will they divide it up among the merchants?*

— Job 41:1, 6

The character of the state — not just in the architecture of Hobbes's theory, but *as such* — is precisely that of a demonic machine. The impasse of enthusiasm is not simply an intellectual failing on Hobbes's part, then; we cannot dissociate, as Schmitt attempted, the rational sovereign of Bosse's image from the esoteric Leviathan of Job 41. To sustain itself in the most extreme of conditions, the rational sovereign must become entirely, furiously, irrational. This impasse is inherent to the state form itself. Hobbes's enduring insight lies precisely in his ability, at the very origins of the modern state, to formulate its paradoxes so decisively.

Two competing responses have arisen to the manifest terror of Leviathan. They are, respectively, a *revivalist* and an *antagonist* response. The revivalist response is best characterised by Schmitt, who mourns the fall of 'the "mortal god" [...] from his throne': in the pluralistic society, he complains, 'the parties slaughter the powerful Leviathan and slice pieces from the flesh of his body'.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> C. Schmitt, 'Staatsethik und pluralistischer Staat', quoted in J. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against*

Gripped by processes outside the control of the state, the world has decayed from the Hobbesian ideal — so we are told. Yet it is precisely this degeneracy that lets us see, with crystal clarity, the enduring wisdom of the sage of Malmesbury, and behoves us to restore Leviathan's ruined throne. Shorn of his inconvenient imagery, Hobbes must be revived. In his essay on the 'Dark Enlightenment', Nick Land has — seemingly unknowingly — repeated this Schmittian complaint. 'Governments are made out of people,' Land states, 'and they will eat well'. The question, then, is this: 'How can the sovereign power be prevented — or at least dissuaded — from devouring society?'<sup>218</sup> For Schmitt, the question was of similar dimensions: How is the independence of 'the political' from the aesthetic, the economic, from all the other 'various relatively independent endeavours of human thought and action', to be maintained?<sup>219</sup>

In the end, Hobbes shows us that it cannot be maintained. Precisely like Schmitt, like the 'Dark Enlightenment', Hobbes wanted a sovereign as restrained as necessary for a stable society: it would deal not with 'sciences Mathematicall', for instance, but strictly with law and ethics, maintaining merely the covenant that is the essential ground of any civil society.<sup>220</sup> But to be sustained even in the most radical state of exception, in conditions of overwhelming catastrophe, the commonwealth's domination must expand irrepressibly

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*Politics as Technology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 276.

<sup>218</sup> N. Land, 'The Dark Enlightenment':

<http://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/>

<sup>219</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, tr. George Schwab (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2007), 25.

<sup>220</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXI.

from the radical root of human thought into every circle of existence. It *must* 'devour society'. This was the root of Hobbes's byzantine obsession with the occult, the delirious loops that trapped him in the 'kingdom of darkness': even the most restrained of states cannot tolerate the existential opposition of the Enthusiast, and as sectarian exceptions and negative glitches flood the body of Leviathan, the shields over its body must lock down, and the monster must transform into its terrible mode of siege, switching from Bosse to Job as it becomes a creature of fire and blood. Schmitt, just prior to the dawn of the Third Reich, tried to distinguish the 'qualitative totalitarianism' necessary for the sustenance of the state, which he drew from Hegel, from the 'quantitative totalitarianism' of intervention in every sphere of human life.<sup>221</sup> The distinction failed. Once threatened, Leviathan must warp everything around itself in order to maintain its existence — all thought, all ideology, all behaviour. Politics must get a grip — whatever the cost.

If revivalist Hobbesianism proves foreclosed, the political theorist may feel led to an *antagonist* response to Hobbes. Land himself posits this alternative when he suggests that neoreaction is 'recognizably Hobbesian [...] devoid from its beginning of any Rousseauistic enthusiasm for popular expression': if Hobbes is too frightening, perhaps we should turn to Rousseau.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> C. Schmitt, 'Weiterentwicklung des totalen Staats in Deutschland' (1933).

<sup>222</sup> For an explicit case for radicalism against Hobbes, see, for instance, J. Gilbert, *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism* (London: Pluto, 2014). Gilbert has elsewhere posited this explicitly against Land, accepting Land's dichotomy between Hobbesian reaction and anti-Hobbesian radicalism. See also Gilles Châtelet's

Superficially, this may seem like an obvious choice: after all, is Rousseau not the very opposite of Hobbes, believing mankind to be inherently good, praising the state of nature, condemning human artifice? For the historian of political thought, however, the dichotomy quickly falls apart. Rousseau's underlying 'Hobbism' has been a perennial topic of note: Rousseau, like Hobbes, believes that 'before the social contract there could be neither government nor courts';<sup>223</sup> Rousseau, like Hobbes, sees the natural condition of civilised man as the war of all against all. In his infamous letter to Mirabeau, Rousseau made this explicit. The underlying issue of all political thought, 'the great problem of Politics', he states, is 'to find a form of Government that might place the law above man'. But 'if unfortunately this form cannot be found, and I frankly admit that I believe that it cannot be [...] I would wish the despot could be God. I see no tolerable mean between the most austere Democracy and the most perfect Hobbism' — and democracy, for Rousseau, can only ever be a government of the superhuman.<sup>224</sup>

This may seem like an issue peculiar to Rousseau himself, but the problem can be generalised. Radical democrats in power have ever devoted themselves to the task of political education: for them as for Rousseau, civilised man has become corrupt, and the state must be mobilised

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denunciation of Hobbes's 'social physics' and its neoliberal legacy, in *To Live and Think Like Pigs* (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2014).

<sup>223</sup> I. Hont, 'Adam Smith's history of law and government as political theory', in R. Bourke and R. Geuss (eds), *Political Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131–71: 148.

<sup>224</sup> Rousseau to Mirabeau, 26 July 1767, in J.-J. Rousseau, V. Gourevitch (ed), *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 270.

to restore them to a purer state — the Montagnards and the Leninists each identified perverse and ghoulish tendencies of a corrupted humanity that needed ruthlessly to be stamped out. The reality of popular desire exceeds necessarily their own. But the moment of maturity is endlessly deferred, the exception in which a dictatorship is established yawns into eternity: political education turns into grim authoritarianism. It assumes the character of the sect. This, then, locates exactly the problem of the *Relative Enthusiast*. Just as the state must assume the aspect of sectarianism to stamp out the sects that challenge it, the Enthusiast who wishes to demolish the state by appeal to the transcendent becomes, in power, the king of the proud, since she herself has now taken the mantle of mediator between God and the profane, and must suppress the theomantic short circuit that reaches over her head. The Relative Enthusiast must install, by sociological inevitability, a state. The mask of the anti-Hobbesian is ripped off — and the despot as God stares out from beneath.

Ripping up Leviathan is harder than it seems. Perhaps we will be better served by another vehicle that Land has mobilised to restrain the power of Leviathan — at least on the level of its extensive territoriality. This is the neo-Westphalian theory of the *patchwork*. Derived from the neoreactionary thinker Curtis Yarvin, the patchwork presents an image of endless fission, ‘a global spiderweb of tens, even hundreds, of thousands of sovereign and independent mini-countries’, each with its own internal, ‘neocameralist’ sovereign.<sup>225</sup> This image should not be

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<sup>225</sup> ‘Mencius Moldbug’ (Curtis Yarvin), ‘Patchwork: A Positive Vision (Part 1)’:

<http://unqualified-reservations.blogspot.co.uk/2008/11/patchwork-positive-vision-part-1.html>

dismissed as 'fascist'. It reprises a tradition of Western political thought that reaches back across the doctrine of *cuius regio* to the very origins of nationalism in the medieval French reaction against the universalist pretences of the Emperor; in its substance, it is clearly antagonistic to the universality of the fascist state with its insatiable thirst for conquest and death.

Yet patchwork remains, despite itself, peculiarly ambivalent. It is obsessed with the state: creating new states, cutting up states, states on top of states.... At an elementary level, however, it seems that competition between states must favour states themselves, and for this we have many great proofs throughout history — the emergence of the truly protofascist Qin Empire from the fissiparous warring Chinese states; the rise of Alexander's empire from the Greek *poleis*; the birth of *raison d'état* in Renaissance Italian city-states. (At least part of this tendency has been formulated rigorously by Peter Turchin.)<sup>226</sup> To truly move beyond Leviathan in all its universalising terror requires not the multiplication of Leviathans, at which point we are already within the Hobbesian trap, encouraging the monster in its sectarianism, provoking the pathologies that have led to imperium. It requires a radical ambivalence to the state as such — an uncompromising identification with those processes today of mass production and mass flows of politics that overwhelm and obsolesce the state itself. States, of course, decay. It is something altogether more radical to posit that the state form itself will decay. We must turn from a patchwork of states to the infectious *patchwork within the state*, a recursive dissolution that

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<sup>226</sup> P. Turchin, 'A theory for the formation of large empires', *Journal of Global History* 4:2 (2009), 191–217.

leaves not a network of states, but an endless flux in which the state itself disintegrates into the very war that sustains it. For this conception, we must turn to Nietzsche.

#### 4. The Swarm of the Future

*Who can strip off its outer coat? Who can  
penetrate its double coat of armour?*

— Job 41:13

Nietzsche was the first radically anti-Hobbesian political philosopher. This all-important point has been made, independently, from two very different perspectives. In his book *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, the intellectual historian Hugo Drochon has argued systematically that 'Nietzsche *does* offer a systematic political theory of the state [...] one that is an *alternative* to the social contract tradition'. Where Hobbes writes in a period of decay and collapse yet assumes the role of the philosopher of the commonwealth triumphant, Nietzsche writes in a time of overwhelming bureaucratisation, at the apex of Hegelian *Staatswissenschaft*, yet becomes the philosopher of the state's decay.<sup>227</sup> Meanwhile, in a brief passage of his *The Thirst for Annihilation*, Land, too — despite his later turn to Hobbes — points out the essential novelty of Nietzsche's political theory. For Nietzsche, he says, the state does not merely suspend within its territory the primal war of all against all, as it does in Hobbes and all the theorists who follow him. Rather, 'even in his earliest writings Nietzsche is explicit [...] that the *polis* — along

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<sup>227</sup> H. Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 51.

with its telic integration — is a consequence of pre-political militarism': it is not the regulatory end, but the vessel and conduit of war 'in its uninhibited and extravagant root'.<sup>228</sup>

If we are to escape from the conceptual Hobbesian antinomy, from the crushing unity of the nominally anti-Hobbesian radicalism of many on the left and the explicit reassertion of Leviathan on the right, we could do worse than to return to Land's early work, and begin anew with Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, states are an epiphenomenon, conduits instantiated merely as moments of a great flow of intensities. The state is not a determinate contract, established, as for Hobbes or Rousseau, through agreement implicit or explicit, once and ideally for all eternity — the 'Covenant of every man with every man'.<sup>229</sup> In its origins, it is instead the contingent and violent imposition of force by a 'conquering horde', a military caste 'raised [...] pyramidally upon the lowest, broadest, slavish stratum'.<sup>230</sup> The stratified state itself seethes with viral conflict between its strata — on this, Nietzsche aligns with Marx. 'There is no hope of a nation without war, or a people without conquest.'<sup>231</sup> The most 'transparent' state is not the modern constitutional democracy, then: it is ancient Sparta, which each year declared war upon its own subjects. Tangled unavoidably in the war that forms the condition and basis of its existence, the state is subjected to a 'zone of impotence', penetrated by an 'insurrectionary

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<sup>228</sup> N. Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 105.

<sup>229</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVII.

<sup>230</sup> Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, 10; Nietzsche, 'The Greek State', quoted in Land, *Thirst for Annihilation*, 105.

<sup>231</sup> Katastromancer, 'On Impossibility'. *urcC*: [Dead link]



flow of mobilisation [it] converts and diverts without being able to control and define'.<sup>232</sup>

This alternative conception of the origins of the state has now found considerable empirical support in recent historiography. We may cite here, for instance, Sanjay Subrahmanyam's observation that many of the states of early modern Asia were formed 'through the mediation of migratory elites' circulating across the continent, or Peter Turchin's quantitatively informed 'mirror-empire' theory, which explains the process of 'imperiogenesis' as an escalating arms race between nomad and settler populations.<sup>233</sup> In each case, the high-minded pretensions of the state to transcendence as the 'king of the proud' and avatar of God are collapsed into its transcended reality as a secondary circuit of the grand flux of war – better, it remains the avatar of God, but *War is God*.

For the human political subject, this neo-Heraclitean conception is far more ruinous than that of Hobbes: with the very possibility of a social contract or covenant demolished, the state returns radically to its basis in slavery. Yet this very reduction liberates, renders inhuman, the figure of the Enthusiast, which now reaches beyond the circuit of sectarian politics. In Hobbes's theory, the state must block the road to the occult and catastrophic heart of reality; what is more, it must assume this task with paranoiac obsession, since if it fails, society and history themselves will collapse, endless competing sects erupting from the decaying body politic. In

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<sup>232</sup> S. Metcalf, 'Killing Time', *Abstract Culture* 2:1, Ccru.

<sup>233</sup> S. Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700* (Chichester: Wiley, second edition, 2012), 21; P. Turchin, 'A theory for the formation of large empires', *Journal of Global History* 4:2 (2009), 191–217.

Nietzsche's atheology, by contrast, the state is nothing so important: it is itself an insurrectionary feature of war, disposable and contingent. At its terminus there remains nothing around which it is necessary to route. Catastrophe, once exteriorised, now extends into the state itself; 'the net itself is infected' and the body of Leviathan rots with spectacular diseases.<sup>234</sup> In this context, the *relative* enthusiasm of the traditional sect into which the Hobbesian state itself digresses is juxtaposed to an *absolute*, swarmachinic enthusiasm that is not merely opposed to the state, but ruthlessly indifferent, even ironical, a subjectivity beyond political comprehension pulsing transcendental heterodoxy: not a force of destruction motivated by a feeling of the transcendent, but a force of obsolescence in total communion with war.<sup>235</sup> Nietzsche himself conceived of his work as a *religious* intervention — it is a 'tremendous asset', he stated in a letter, 'to be read like the Bible'.<sup>236</sup> But it was an intervention far beyond anything that had come before.

It is always tempting to perform yet another restoration of Hobbes, whether explicit as in the 'Dark Enlightenment', or occulted as in the Left's straight-Enlightenment nostalgia for the many mutations of social contract theory. All of these accept as friend or enemy the Hobbesian commonwealth as a site of order

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<sup>234</sup> S. Plant and N. Land, 'Cyberpositive' [1994], in R. Mackay and A. Avanessian (eds), *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth and Berlin: Urbanomic/Merve, 2014), 303–13.

<sup>235</sup> The figure of the Absolute Enthusiast is also foreshadowed in Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh's reading of the sectarian: see J.B. Mohaghegh, *Insurgent, Poet, Mystic, Sectarian: The Four Masks of an Eastern Postmodernism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), Part IV: 'Sectarian'.

<sup>236</sup> Nietzsche to Paul Duessen, 26 November 1888 (No. 1159). My translation.

and interiority in which the catastrophic outside is suspended: they thus repeat the trajectory of the Relative Enthusiast. This image itself is Hobbesian, and Schmitt's revivalism lurks in the very distinction between enemy and friend; the counterhegemonic project constructs mirror-empires in place of moving beyond imperium itself. The terminal development of technocapitalism as it overwhelms the state compels the theorist to take a more radically opposite view. That Leviathan can no longer make a 'sinister impression' in an age of 'total technology' is not the mere 'failure of a symbol' that frees Hobbes from the disastrous weight of his symbology, the moment that lets the modern reader at long last 'across the centuries reach out: Thomas Hobbes, now you do not teach in vain!'<sup>237</sup> It is an escalating system-failure that crashes Hobbes's political theology, pointing to the obsolescence of the state form itself, the self-overcoming of the Hobbesian era.

Against Leviathan's grip on humanity, its suppression of heterodoxies, the reality of the fluid and globalised Earth, with its expanding spaces of negativity, its intensifying excesses and flows of mobilisation, and its opportunities for exit, calls us towards a higher register, to formulate an Anti-Leviathan: an enthusiasm that will be absolute, not relative, comfortable in its disjuncture, a theoretical orientation that is not dependent on a praxis of repetition of hegemony, but is open and expectant towards the processes that are ripping up the Leviathan — divesting it of its oceanic pretences, and drowning it in the expansive flux of the deep, green sea....

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<sup>237</sup> Schmitt, *Leviathan in the State Theory*, 86.

# Skins and the Game

## Uriel Alexis

### Skins

Anything is only itself because it's functionally different from everything else. This computer I'm typing at is only itself because it's neither at the next desk, nor does it function in the manner of an apple, amongst many other things.

The degree of differentiation is not absolute. There is a gradient of order from the *inside* core to the *outside*, where others lie. There are, nonetheless, boundaries. Permeable boundaries, but boundaries nonetheless. Discontinuities where the gradient takes a leap.

A system<sup>238</sup> is a difference between system and environment. The more it becomes itself, the more it deepens this difference, this discontinuity. There, at this boundary, lie the operations such a system can perform — the ways it lets the outside in. It is at this threshold that its particular features are engraved.

Any inner endeavor is necessarily tied to an outside behavior. Systems only survive through *structural coupling*, or mutual variation. To be, then, is already to trade away things that are inside.

At any given moment, this difference may become paranoid. It then folds upon itself, and histericizes its

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<sup>238</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*

particularities, which is to say, it *develops an identity*. Entrances are rigidified, reduced and finally narrowed down to one single path of digestion, heavily securitized. *Membranes become skins*. An organism is born out of the system.

Organisms<sup>239</sup> are parasites, though. Paranoiacs can't innovate, can't produce. They just reproduce themselves. So, when skins arise, it's only because the systematics have been pushed one level up. It's only because there are populations that individual organisms can evolve.

### **The Game**

Conflict is primary, demonstrably so, as there's no agreement even on that. Thus strategy imposes itself at every level: moving to stay the same, that's the immediate antinomy. When organisms come into being, systems become a game. The only game in town: variation-selection.

The game the whole system plays at the highest level is fractally repeated within itself. It is on the order provided by the game that organisms parasite, and as they internalize this order, they fragment themselves, dissolving back into the process.

When organisms play the game of variation-selection, there are only so many strategies they can pursue. By far the most important move is *localization* or *individuation*: the ability to internalize, in ever smaller units, costs and

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<sup>239</sup> "Organisation is Suppression", *The Wired*:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B\\_E6CPm2lYsUS243N0YtNG5BTVk/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_E6CPm2lYsUS243N0YtNG5BTVk/view)

benefits. Organisms that don't do that have a way more complicated path ahead, and get used by those that do — like pathogens use humans. Organisms collide and conflict in order to engrave in themselves the only knowledge they can pursue: survival. And *thus* the system thrives.

But it may be that the system itself becomes paranoid. This destroys the game entirely, and organises organisms into a new, supra-organism. The larger the scale of this move, the more risky it is (variation-selection is always played at the highest levels, and supra-organisms have serious disadvantages). An organism — without an internal system — is always already a degenerating order.

On the contrary, an organism may itself systematize, relax and *let go*. This becoming-membrane of skins lets plenty in and individualizes consequences internally. The game is now played at smaller levels, and 'organ individualism' becomes imaginable. From here all the way down to o-degree organization ("intelligent dust cloud" or "grey goo"<sup>240</sup>), it's just acceleration.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Hyperlink to: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grey\\_goo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grey_goo)

"Grey goo (also spelled gray goo) is a hypothetical end-of-the-world scenario involving molecular nanotechnology in which out-of-control self-replicating robots consume all biomass on Earth while building more of themselves, a scenario that has been called *ecophagy* ("eating the environment", more literally "eating the habitation"). The original idea assumed machines were designed to have this capability, while popularizations have assumed that machines might somehow gain this capability by accident."

<sup>241</sup> Hyperlink to :

<https://antinomiamediata.wordpress.com/2017/05/15/inner-time/>

## Leviathan's Termites

Vince Garton argues:

Yet patchwork remains, despite itself, peculiarly ambivalent. It is obsessed with the state: creating new states, cutting up states, states on top of states. ... At an elementary level, however, it seems that competition between states must favour states themselves, and for this we have many great proofs throughout history — the emergence of the truly protofascist Qin Empire from the fissiparous warring Chinese states; the rise of Alexander's empire from the Greek poleis; the birth of *raison d'état* in Renaissance Italian city-states.<sup>242</sup>

Is it true that patchwork must favor states? Surely, systems can become paranoid and organize. The examples he presents of China and the Greek *poleis* would attest to this. But since hegemony is atrophy, every single one of these movements decayed after their formation (Alexander's example immediately so), until they collapsed under their own weight back into a system of moving parts.

Garton is not satisfied:

The question, then, is this: 'How can the sovereign power be prevented — or at least dissuaded — from devouring society?' [...] In the end, Hobbes shows us that it cannot be

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<sup>242</sup> Vince Garton, *Leviathan Rots*:  
<https://www.urbanomic.com/document/leviathan-rots/>

maintained. [...] But to be sustained even in the most radical state of exception, in conditions of overwhelming catastrophe, the commonwealth's domination must expand irrepressibly from the radical root of human thought into every circle of existence. It *must* 'devour society'. [...] Once threatened, Leviathan must warp everything around itself in order to maintain its existence — all thought, all ideology, all behaviour. Politics must get a grip — whatever the cost.

Which brings us to the topic of sovereignty, or self-rule. I want to advance here that sovereignty is indistinguishable from the ability to trade itself away. Without a matrix of commerce — a system — in which bits and pieces flow, all notions of self-rule, autonomy or 'control' are rendered moot. *That which can't break itself apart dies off*. I dug deeply into this elsewhere<sup>243</sup>: power only works to the extent that it is internally checked. An all encompassing monster is rotting indeed.

Land sets the primary steps on this road:

More promising, by far — for the purposes of tractable argument — is a strictly formal or contractual usage of 'control' to designate the exclusive right to *free disposal* or *commercial alienation*. Defined this way, ownership is a legal category, co-original with the idea of contract, referring to those things which one has the right to trade (based on natural law).

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<sup>243</sup> Uriel Alexis, "Neocameralism and Constitutions", *Antinomia Immediata*:  
<https://antinomiaimediata.wordpress.com/2016/08/31/neocameralism-and-constitutions/>



Property is essentially marketable. It cannot exist unless it can be alienated through negotiation. A prince who cannot trade away his territory does not ‘own’ it in any sense that matters.

[...]

Neocameralism necessarily commercializes sovereignty, and in doing so it accommodates power to natural law. Sovereign stock (‘primary property’) and ‘secondary property’ become commercially inter-changeable, dissolving the original distinction, whilst local sovereignty is rendered compliant with the wider commercial order, and thus becomes a form of constrained ‘secondary sovereignty’ relative to the primary or absolute sovereignty of the system itself. Final authority bleeds out into the catallactic ensemble, the *agora*, or *commercium*, where *what can really happen* is decided by natural law. It is this to which sovereign stockholders, *if they are to be effective*, and to prosper, must defer.<sup>244</sup>

A recipe for consistent dissolution, which structurally avoids paranoiac re-capture.

Patchwork, insofar as it breaks its neocameral pieces apart in a systematic *commercium* of sovereignty, is a recipe for the “ambivalence” Garton himself recommends. Recursively implementing its own dynamics into the

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<sup>244</sup> Nick Land, “Quibbles with Moldbug”: <https://oldnicksite.wordpress.com/2013/01/24/quibbles-with-mold-bug/>

organisms that comprise it, Patchwork is a machine that *kills* Leviathans. Neocameral sovcorps are the bacterial termites that rot them away, implementing “the infectious *patchwork within the state*, a recursive dissolution that leaves not a network of states, but an endless flux in which the state itself disintegrates into the very war that sustains it”, of which Garton writes.

Whatever skin or membrane remains is for the game to decide.

## Whitman Gilles Deleuze

With much confidence and tranquility, Whitman states that writing is, fragmentary, and that the *American* writer has to devote himself to writing in fragments. This is precisely what disturbs us — assigning this task to America, as if Europe had not progressed along this same path. But perhaps we should recall the difference Holderlin discovered between the Greeks and the Europeans: what is natal or innate in the first must be acquired or conquered by the second, and vice-versa.<sup>245</sup> In a different manner, this is how things stand with the Europeans and the Americans. Europeans have an innate sense of organic totality, or composition, but they have to acquire the sense of the fragment, and can do so only through a tragic reflection or an experience of disaster. Americans, on the contrary, have a natural sense for the fragment, and what they have to conquer is the feel for the totality, for beautiful composition. The fragment already exists in a nonreflective manner, preceding any effort: we make plans, but when the time comes to act, we "tumble the thing together, letting hurry and crudeness tell the story better than fine work."<sup>246</sup> What is characteristic of America is therefore not the fragmentary, but the spontaneity of the fragmentary:

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<sup>245</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, "Remarks on 'Oedipus,'" in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 101-8, and Jean Beaufret's commentaries in *Remarques sur Oedipe* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 10-18, 1965).

<sup>246</sup> Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, in *The Portable Walt Whitman*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Viking, 1973), "A Happy Hour's Command," pp. 387-88.

"Spontaneous, fragmentary," says Whitman.<sup>247</sup> In America, literature is naturally *convulsive*: "they are but parts of the actual distraction, heat, smoke, and excitement of those times." But "convulsiveness," as Whitman makes clear, characterizes the epoch and the country as much as the writing.<sup>248</sup> If the fragment is innately American, it is because America itself is made up of federated states and various immigrant peoples (minorities) — everywhere a collection of fragments, haunted by the menace of secession, that is to say, by war. The experience of the American writer is inseparable from the American experience, even when the writer does not speak of America.

This is what gives the fragmentary work the immediate value of a collective statement. Kafka said that in a minor literature, that is, in the literature of a minority, there is no private history that is not immediately public, political, and popular: all literature becomes an "affair of the people," and not of exceptional individuals.<sup>249</sup> Is not American literature the minor literature par excellence, insofar as America claims to federate the most diverse minorities, "a Nation swarming with nations"? America brings together extracts, it presents samples from all ages, all lands, and all nations.<sup>250</sup> The simplest love story brings

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<sup>247</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "A Happy Hour's Command," pp. 387-88.

<sup>248</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "Convulsiveness," p. 480.

<sup>249</sup> Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh (New York: Schocken, 1948), entry for December 25, 1911, pp. 191-98.

<sup>250</sup> This is a constant theme in *Leaves of Grass*, in *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose and Letters*, ed. Emory Holloway (London: Nonesuch, 1964). See also Herman Melville, *Redburn: His Maiden Voyage* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1969), chapter 33, p. 169.

into play states, peoples, and tribes; the most personal autobiography is necessarily collective, as can still be seen in Wolfe or Miller. It is a popular literature created by the people, by the "average bulk," like the creation of America, and not by "great individuals."<sup>251</sup> And from this point of view, the Self [*Moi*] of the Anglo-Saxons, always splintered, fragmentary, and relative, is opposed to the substantial, total, and solipsistic I [*Je*] of the Europeans.

The world as a collection of heterogenous parts: an infinite patchwork, or an endless wall of dry stones (a cemented wall, or the pieces of a puzzle, would reconstitute a totality). The world as a *sampling*: the samples ("specimens") are singularities, remarkable and nontotalizable parts extracted from a series of ordinary parts. Samples of days, *specimen days*, says Whitman. Specimens of cases, specimens of scenes or views (*scenes*, *shows*, or *sights*). Sometimes the specimens are cases, in which coexistent parts are separated by intervals of space (the wounded in the hospitals), and sometimes they are specimens of views, in which the successive phases of a movement are separated by intervals of time (the moments of an uncertain battle). In both instances, the law is that of fragmentation. The fragments are grains, "granulations." Selecting singular cases and minor scenes is more important than any consideration of the whole. It is in the fragments that the hidden background appears, be it celestial or demonic. The fragment is "a reflection afar off" of a bloody or peaceful reality.<sup>252</sup> But the fragments — the remarkable parts, cases, or views — must

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<sup>251</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "An Interviewer's Intern," pp. 578-79.

<sup>252</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "A Night's Battle, over a Week Since," pp. 422-24, and "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books," pp. 482-84.

still be extracted by means of a special act, an act that consists, precisely, in writing. For Whitman, fragmentary writing is not defined by the aphorism or through separation, but by a particular type of sentence that modulates the interval. It is as if the syntax that composes the sentence, which makes it a totality capable of referring back to itself, tends to disappear by setting free an infinite *asyntactic* sentence, which prolongs itself or sprouts dashes in order to create spatiotemporal intervals. Sometimes it appears as an occasional enumerative sentence, an enumeration of cases as in a catalog (the wounded in the hospital, the trees in a certain locale), sometimes it is a processional sentence, like a protocol of phases or moments (a battle, convoys of cattle, successive swarms of bumblebees). It is an almost mad sentence, with its changes in direction, its bifurcations, its ruptures and leaps, its prolongations, its sproutings, its parentheses. Melville notes that "no American writer should write like an Englishman."<sup>253</sup> They have to dismantle the English language and send it racing along a line of flight, thereby rendering the language convulsive.

The law of the fragment is as valid for Nature as it is for History, for the Earth as for War, for good as for evil. For War and Nature indeed share a common cause: Nature moves forward in procession, by sections, like the corps of an army.<sup>254</sup> A "procession" of crows or bumblebees. But if it is true that the fragment is given everywhere, in the

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<sup>253</sup> Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in *Herman Melville*, ed. R. W. B. Leavis (New York: Dell, 1962), p. 48. In the same way, Whitman invokes the necessity of an American literature "without a trace or taste of Europe's soil, reminiscence, technical letter or spirit" (*Specimen Days*, "The Prairies and Great Plains in Poetry", p. 573).

<sup>254</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "Bumble-Bees," pp. 488-91.

most spontaneous manner, we have seen that the whole, or an analogue of the whole, nonetheless has to be conquered and even invented. Yet Whitman sometimes places the Idea of the Whole *beforehand*, invoking a cosmos that beckons us to a kind of fusion; in a particularly "convulsive" meditation, he calls himself a "Hegelian," he asserts that only America "realizes" Hegel, and posits the primary rights of an organic totality.<sup>255</sup> He is then expressing himself like a European, who finds in pantheism a reason to inflate his own ego. But when Whitman speaks in his own manner and his own style, it turns out that a kind of whole must be constructed, a whole that is all the more paradoxical in that it only comes *after* the fragments and leaves them intact, making no attempt to totalize them.<sup>256</sup>

This complex idea depends on a principle dear to English philosophy, to which the Americans would give a new meaning and new developments: *relations are external to their terms*. Relations will consequently be posited as something that can and must be instituted or invented. Parts are fragments that cannot be totalized, but we can at least invent nonpreexisting relations between them, which testify to a progress in History as much as to an evolution in Nature. Whitman's poetry offers as many meanings as there are relations with its various interlocutors: the masses, the reader, States, the Ocean...

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<sup>255</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "Carlyle from American Points of View," pp. 602-11.

<sup>256</sup> D. h. Lawrence, in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1964), violently criticizes Whitman for his pantheism and his conception of an Ego-Whole; but he salutes him as the greatest poet because, more profoundly, Whitman sings of "sympathies," that is, of relations that are constructed externally, "on the Open Road" (pp. 174-75).

<sup>257</sup> The object of American literature is to establish relations between the most diverse aspects of the United States' geography — the Mississippi, the Rockies, the Prairies — as well as its history, struggles, loves, and evolution.<sup>258</sup> Relations in ever greater numbers and of increasingly subtle quality: this is, as it were, the motor that drives both Nature and History. War is just the opposite: its acts of destruction affect every relation, and have as their consequence the Hospital, the generalized hospital, that is, the place where brothers are strangers to each other, and where the dying parts, fragments of mutilated men, coexist absolutely solitary and without relation.<sup>259</sup>

The relations between colors are made up of contrasts and complementarities, never given but always new, and Whitman no doubt fabricated one of the most coloristic of literatures that could ever have existed. The relations between sounds or bird songs, which Whitman describes in marvelous ways, are made up of counterpoints and responses, constantly renewed and invented. Nature is not a form, but rather the process of establishing relations. It invents a polyphony: it is not a totality but an assembly, a "conclave," a "plenary session." Nature is inseparable from processes of companionship and conviviality, which are not preexistent givens but are elaborated between heterogeneous living beings in such a way that they create a tissue of shifting relations, in which the melody of one part intervenes as a motif in the

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<sup>257</sup> See Paul Jamatie, *Walt Whitman: Une étude, un choix de poèmes* (Paris: Seghers, 1950), p. 77: the poem as polyphony.

<sup>258</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "Mississippi Valley Literature," pp. 577-78.

<sup>259</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books," pp. 482-84.



melody of another (the bee and the flower). Relations are not internal to a Whole; rather, the Whole is derived from the external relations of a given moment, and varies with them. Relations of counterpoint must be invented everywhere, and are the very condition of evolution.

It is the same with the relationship between man and Nature. Whitman enters into a gymnastic relationship with young oak trees, a kind of hand-to-hand combat. He neither grounds himself in them nor merges with them; rather, he makes something pass between the human body and the tree, in both directions, the body receiving "some of its elastic fibre and clear sap," but the tree for its part receiving a little consciousness ("may-be we interchange").<sup>260</sup> It is the same, finally, in the relationships between man and man. Here again, man must invent his relation with the other. "Camaraderie" is the great word Whitman uses to designate the highest human relation, not by virtue of the totality of a situation but as a function of particular traits, emotional circumstances, and the "interiority" of the relevant fragments (in the hospital, for example, a relation of camaraderie must be established with each isolated dying man).<sup>261</sup> In this way is woven a web of variable relations, which are not merged into a whole, but produce the only whole that man is capable of conquering in a given situation. Camaraderie is the variability that implies an encounter with the Outside — a march of souls in the open air, on the "Open Road." It is in America that the relation of camaraderie is supposed to achieve its maximum extension and density, leading to virile and

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<sup>260</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "The Oaks and I," pp. 515-16.

<sup>261</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books," pp. 482-84. On camaraderie, see Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, "Calamus".

popular loves, all the while acquiring a political and national character — not a totalism or a totalitarianism but, as Whitman says, a "Unionism."<sup>262</sup> Democracy and Art themselves form a whole only in their relationship with Nature (the open air, light, colors, sounds, the night ...); lacking these, art collapses into morbidity, and democracy, into deception.<sup>263</sup>

The society of comrades is the revolutionary American dream — dream to which Whitman made a powerful contribution, and which was disappointed and betrayed long before the dream of the Soviet society. But it is also the reality of American literature, under these two aspects: spontaneity or the innate feeling for the fragmentary, and the reflection on living relations that must constantly be acquired and created. Spontaneous fragments constitute the element through which or in the intervals of which, we attain the great and carefully considered visions and sounds of both Nature and History.

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<sup>262</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "The Death of President Lincoln," p. 467.

<sup>263</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "Nature and Democracy," pp. 639-40.

## Bartleby; or, The Formula

### Gilles Deleuze

"Bartleby" is neither a metaphor for the writer nor the symbol of anything whatsoever. It is a violently comical text, and the comical is always literal. It is like the novellas of Kleist, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Beckett, with which it forms a subterranean and prestigious lineage. It means only what it says, literally. And what it says and repeats is *I would prefer not to*. This is the formula of its glory, which every loving reader repeats in turn. A gaunt and pallid man has uttered the formula that drives everyone crazy. But in what does the literality of the formula consist?

We immediately notice a certain mannerism, a certain solemnity: *prefer* is rarely employed in this sense, and neither Bartleby's boss, the attorney, nor his clerks normally use it ("queer word, I never use it myself"). The usual formula would instead be *I had rather not*. But the strangeness of the formula goes beyond the word itself. Certainly it is grammatically correct, syntactically correct, but its abrupt termination, NOT TO, which leaves what it rejects undetermined, confers upon it the character of a radical, a kind of limit-function. Its repetition and its insistence render it all the more unusual, entirely so. Murmured in a soft, flat, and patient voice, it attains to the irremissible, by forming an inarticulate block, a single breath. In all these respects, it has the same force, the same role as an *agrammatical* formula.

Linguists have rigorously analyzed what is called "agrammaticality." A number of very intense examples can be found in the work of the American poet e. e.

Cummings — for instance, "he danced his did," as if one said in French *il dansa son mit* ("he danced his began") instead of *il se mit adanser* ("he began to dance"). Nicolas Ruwet explains that this presupposes a series of ordinary grammatical variables, which would have an agrammatical formula as their limit: *he danced his did* would be a limit of the normal expressions *he did his dance, he danced his dance, he danced what he did...*<sup>264</sup> This would no longer be a portmanteau word, like those found in Lewis Carroll, but a "portmanteau-construction," a breath-construction, a limit or tensor. Perhaps it would be better to take an example from the French, in a practical situation: someone who wants to hang something on a wall and holds a certain number of nails in his hand exclaims, *J'EN AI UN DE PAS ASSEZ* ("I have one not enough"). This is an agrammatical formula that stands as the limit of a series of correct expressions: *J'en ai de trop, Je n'en ai pas assez, Il m'en manque un ...* ("I have too many," "I don't have enough," "I am one short" ... ). Would not Bartleby's formula be of this type, at once a stereotypy of Bartleby's and a highly poetic expression of Melville's, the limit of a series such as "I would prefer this. I would prefer not to do that. That is not what I would prefer ..."? Despite its quite normal construction, it has an anomalous ring to it.

I WOULD PREFER NOT TO. The formula has several variants. Sometimes it abandons the conditional and becomes more curt: I PREFER NOT TO. Sometimes, as in its final occurrences, it seems to lose its mystery by being

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<sup>264</sup> Nicholas Ruwet, "Parallélismes et déviations en poésie," in *Langue, discours, société*, ed. Julia Kristeva and Nicholas Ruwet (Paris: Seuil, 1975), pp. 334-44 (on "portmanteau-constructions").

completed by an infinitive, and coupled with *to*: "I prefer to give no answer," "I would prefer not to be a little reasonable," "I would prefer not to take a clerkship," "I would prefer to be doing something else" ... But even in these cases we sense the muted presence of the strange form that continues to haunt Bartleby's language. He himself adds, "but I am not a particular case," "there is nothing particular about me," *I am not particular*, in order to indicate that whatever else might be suggested to him would be yet another particularity falling under the ban of the great indeterminate formula, I PREFER NOT TO, which subsists once and for all and in all cases.

The formula occurs in ten principal circumstances, and in each case it may appear several times, whether it is repeated verbatim or with minor variations. Bartleby is a copyist in the attorney's office; he copies ceaselessly, "silently, palely, mechanically." The first instance takes place when the attorney tells him to proofread and collate the two clerks' copies: I WOULD PREFER NOT TO. The second, when the attorney tells Bartleby to come and reread his own copies. The third, when the attorney invites Bartleby to reread with him personally, tête à tête. The fourth, when the attorney wants to send him on an errand. The fifth, when he asks him to go into the next room. The sixth, when the attorney enters his study one Sunday afternoon and discovers that Bartleby has been sleeping there. The seventh, when the attorney satisfies himself by asking questions. The eighth, when Bartleby has stopped copying, has renounced all copying, and the attorney asks him to leave. The ninth, when the attorney makes a second attempt to get rid of him. The tenth, when Bartleby is forced out of the office, sits on the banister of the landing while the panic-stricken attorney proposes other unexpected occupations to him (a

clerkship in a dry goods store, bartender, bill collector, traveling companion to a young gentleman... The formula bourgeons and proliferates. At each occurrence, there is a stupor surrounding Bartleby, as if one had heard the Unspeakable or the Unstoppable. And there is Bartleby's silence, as if he had said everything and exhausted language at the same time. With each instance one has the impression that the madness is growing: not Bartleby's madness in "particular," but the madness around him, notably that of the attorney, who launches into strange propositions and even stranger behaviors.

Without a doubt, the formula is ravaging, devastating, and leaves nothing standing in its wake. Its contagious character is immediately evident: Bartleby "ties the tongues" of others. The queer words, *would prefer*, steal their way into the language of the clerks and of the attorney himself ("So you have got the word, too"). But this contamination is not the essential point; the essential point is its effect on Bartleby: from the moment he says I WOULD PREFER NOT TO (collate), he is no longer *able* to copy either. And yet he will never say that he prefers not to (copy): he has simply passed beyond this stage. And doubtless he does not realize this immediately, since he continues copying until after the sixth instance. But when he does notice it, it seems obvious, like the delayed reaction that was already implied in the final statement of the formula: "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" he says to the attorney. The effect of the formula-block is not only to impugn what Bartleby prefers not to do, but also to render what he was doing impossible, what he was supposed to prefer to continue doing.

It has been noted that the formula, I prefer not to, is neither an affirmation nor a negation. Bartleby "does not

refuse, but neither does he accept, he advances and then withdraws into this advance, barely exposing himself in a nimble retreat from speech."<sup>265</sup> The attorney would be relieved if Bartleby did not want to, but Bartleby does not refuse, he simply rejects a nonpreferred (the proofreading, the errands ...). And he does not accept either, he does not affirm a preference that would consist in continuing to copy, he simply posits its impossibility. In short, the formula that successively refuses every other act has already engulfed the act of copying, which it no longer even needs to refuse. The formula is devastating because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any nonpreferred. It not only abolishes the term it refers to, and that it rejects, but also abolishes the other term it seemed to preserve, and that becomes impossible. In fact, it renders them indistinct: it hollows out an ever expanding zone of indiscernibility or indetermination between some nonpreferred activities and a preferable activity. All particularity, all reference is abolished. The formula annihilates "copying," the only reference in relation to which something might or might not be preferred. I would prefer nothing rather than something: not a will to nothingness, but the growth of a nothingness of the will. Bartleby has won the right to survive, that is, to remain immobile and upright before a blind wall. Pure patient passivity, as Elanchat would say. Being as being, and nothing more. He is urged to say yes or no. But if he said no (to collating, running errands ...), or if he said yes (to copying), he would quickly be defeated and judged useless, and would not survive. He can survive only by whirling in a suspense that keeps everyone at a distance. His means of survival is to prefer *not* to collate, but

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<sup>265</sup> Philippe Jaworski, *Melville, le désert et l'empire* (Paris: Presses de l'Ecole Normale, 1986), p. 19.

thereby also *not* to prefer copying. He had to refuse the former in order to render the latter impossible. The formula has two phases and continually recharges itself by passing again and again through the same states. This is why the attorney has the vertiginous impression, each time, that everything is starting over again from zero.

The formula at first seems like the bad translation of a foreign language. But once we understand it better, once we hear it more clearly, its splendor refutes this hypothesis. Perhaps it is the formula that carves out a kind of foreign language within language. It has been suggested that e. e. cummings's agrammaticalities can be considered as having issued from a dialect differing from Standard English, and whose rules of creation can be abstracted. The same goes for *Bartleby*: the rule would lie in this logic of negative preference, a negativism beyond all negation. But if it is true that the masterpieces of literature always form a kind of foreign language within the language in which they are written, what wind of madness, what psychotic breath thereby passes into language as a whole? Psychosis characteristically brings into play a *procedure* that treats an ordinary language, a standard language, in a manner that makes it "render" an original and unknown language, which would perhaps be a projection of God's language, and would carry off language as a whole. Procedures of this type appear in France in Rousseau and Brisset, and in America in Wolfson. Is this not the schizophrenic vocation of American literature: to make the English language, means of driftings, deviations, de-taxes or sur-taxes (as opposed to the standard syntax), slip in this manner? To introduce a bit of psychosis into English neurosis? To invent a new universality? If need be, other languages will be summoned into English in order to make it echo this



divine language of storm and thunder. Melville invents a foreign language that runs beneath English and carries it off: it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized, the language of the Whale. Whence the interest of studies of *Moby-Dick* that are based on Numbers and Letters, and the cryptic meaning, to set free at least a skeleton of the inhuman or superhuman originary language.<sup>266</sup> It is as if three operations were linked together: a certain treatment of language; the result of this treatment which tends to constitute an original language within language, and the effect, which is to sweep up language in its entirety, sending it into flight, pushing it to its very limit in order to discover its Outside, silence or music. A great book is always the inverse of another book that could only be written in the soul, with silence and blood. This is the case not only with *Moby-Dick* but also with *Pierre*, in which Isabelle affects language with an incomprehensible murmur, a kind of *basso continuo* that carries the whole of language on the chords and tones of its guitar. And it is also the angelic or adamic Billy Budd, who suffers from a stuttering that denatures language but also gives rise to the musical and celestial Beyond of language as a whole. It is like the "persistent horrible twittering squeak" that muddles the resonance of words while the sister is getting the violin ready to respond to Gregor.

Bartleby also has an angelic and Adamic nature, but his case seems different because he has no general Procedure, such as stuttering, with which to treat language. He makes do with a seemingly normal, brief Formula, at best a localized tick that crops up in certain circumstances. And yet the result and the effect are the

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<sup>266</sup> See Viola Sachs, *La contre-Bible de Melville* (Paris: Mouton, 1975).

same: to carve out a kind of foreign language within language, to make the whole confront silence, make it topple into silence. *Bartleby* announces the long silence, broken only by the music of poems, into which Melville will enter and from which, except for *Billy Budd*, he will never emerge.<sup>267</sup> Bartleby himself had no other escape than to remain silent and withdraw behind his partition every time he uttered the formula, all the way up until his final silence in prison. After the formula there is nothing left to say: it functions as a procedure, overcoming its appearance of particularity.

The attorney himself concocts a theory explaining how Bartleby's formula ravages language as a whole. All language, he suggests, has references or assumptions. These are not exactly what language designates, but what permit it to designate. A word always presupposes other words that can replace it, complete it, or form alternatives with it: it is on this condition that language is distributed in such a way as to designate things, states of things and actions, according to a set of objective, explicit conventions. But perhaps there are also other implicit and subjective conventions, other types of reference or presupposition. In speaking, I do not simply indicate things and actions; I also commit acts that assure a relation with the interlocutor, in keeping with our respective situations: I command, I interrogate, I promise, I ask, I emit "speech acts." Speech acts are self-referential (I command by saying "I order you ..."), while constative propositions refer to other things and other words. It is this double system of references that Bartleby Ravages.

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<sup>267</sup> On Bartleby and Melville's silence, see Armand Farrachi, *La part du silence* (Paris Barrault, 1984), p. 40-45.

The formula I PREFER NOT TO excludes all alternatives, and devours what it claims to conserve no less than it distances itself from everything else. It implies that Bartleby stop copying, that is, that he stop reproducing words; it hollows out a zone of indetermination that renders words indistinguishable, that creates a vacuum within language [*langage*]. But it also stymies the speech acts that a boss uses to command, that a kind friend uses to ask questions or a man of faith to make promises. If Bartleby had refused, he could still be seen as a rebel or insurrectionary, and as such would still have a social role. But the formula stymies all speech acts, and at the same time, it makes Bartleby a pure outsider [*exclu*] to whom no social position can be attributed. This is what the attorney glimpses with dread: all his hopes of bringing Bartleby back to reason are dashed because they rest on a *logic of presuppositions* according to which an employer "expects" to be obeyed, or a kind friend listened to, whereas Bartleby has invented a new logic, a *logic of preference*, which is enough to undermine the presuppositions of language as a whole. As Mathieu Lindon shows, the formula "disconnects" words and things, words and actions, but also speech acts and words — it severs language from all reference, in accordance with Bartleby's absolute vocation, *to be a man without references*, someone who appears suddenly and then disappears, without reference to himself or anything else.<sup>268</sup> This is why, despite its conventional appearance, the formula functions as a veritable agrammaticality.

Bartleby is the Bachelor, about whom Kafka said, "He has only as much ground as his two feet take up, only as much

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<sup>268</sup> Mathieu Lindon, "Bartleby," *Delta* 6 (May 1978): 22.

of a hold as his two hands encompass" — someone who falls asleep in the winter snow to freeze to death like a child, someone who does nothing but take walks, yet who could take them anywhere, without moving.<sup>269</sup> Bartleby is the man without references, without possessions, without properties, without qualities, without particularities: he is too smooth for anyone to be able to hang any particularity on him. Without past or future, he is instantaneous. I PREFER NOT TO is Bartleby's chemical or alchemical formula, but one can read inversely I AM NOT PARTICULAR as its indispensable complement. The entire nineteenth century will go through this search for the man without a name, regicide and parricide, the modern-day Ulysses ("I am No One"): the crushed and mechanized man of the great metropolises, but from which one expects, perhaps, the emergence of the Man of the Future or New World Man. And, in an identical messianism, we glimpse him, sometimes as a Proletarian, sometimes as an American. Musil's novel will also follow this quest, and will invent the new logic of which *The Man without Qualities* is both the thinker and the product.<sup>270</sup> And though the derivation of Musil from Melville seems certain to us, it should be sought not in

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<sup>269</sup> Kafka's great text almost reads like another version of "Bartleby." See Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910-1913*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh (New York: Schocken, 1948), p. 26.

<sup>270</sup> Blanchot demonstrates that Musil's character is not only without qualities, but "without particularities," since he has no more substance than he does qualities. See *Le livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard/Folio, 1963), pp. 202-3. This theme of the man without particularities, the modern-day Ulysses, arises early in the nineteenth century, and in France appears in the rather strange book of Ballanche, a friend of Chateaubriand; see Pierre Simon Ballanche, *Essais de palingénésie sociale*, notably "La ville des expiations" (1827), in *Oeuvres complètes* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967).

"Bartleby," but rather in *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*. The incestuous couple Ulrich-Agathe is like the return of the Pierre-Isabelle couple; in both cases, the silent sister, unknown or forgotten, is not a substitute for the mother, but on the contrary the abolition of sexual difference as particularity, in favor of an androgynous relationship in which both Pierre and Ulrich are or become woman. In Bartleby's case, might not his relation with the attorney be equally mysterious, and in turn mark the possibility of a becoming, of a new man? Will Bartleby be able to conquer the place where he takes his walks?

Perhaps Bartleby is a madman, a lunatic or a psychotic ("an innate and incurable disorder" of the soul). But how can we know, if we do not take into account the anomalies of the attorney, who continues to behave in the most bizarre ways? The attorney had just received an important professional promotion. One will recall that President Schreber unleashed his own delirium only after receiving a promotion, as if this gave him the audacity to take the risk. But what is the attorney going to risk? He already has two scriveners who, much like Kafka's assistants, are inverted doubles of each other, the one normal in the morning and drunk in the afternoon, the other in a perpetual state of indigestion in the morning but almost normal in the afternoon. Since he needs an extra scrivener, he hires Bartleby after a brief conversation *without any references* because his pallid aspect seemed to indicate a constancy that could compensate for the irregularities of the two others. But on the first day he places Bartleby in a strange arrangement: Bartleby is to sit in the attorney's own office, next to some folding doors separating it from the clerk's office, between a window that faces the side of a neighboring building and a high screen, green as a prairie, as if it were

important that Bartleby be able to hear, but without being seen. Whether this was a sudden inspiration on the attorney's part or an agreement reached during the short conversation, we will never know. But the fact is that, caught in this arrangement, the invisible Bartleby does an extraordinary amount of "mechanical" work. But when the attorney tries to make him leave his retreat, Bartleby emits his formula, and at this first occurrence, as with those that follow, the attorney finds himself disarmed, bewildered, stunned, thunderstruck, without response or reply. Bartleby stops copying altogether and remains on the premises, a fixture. We know to what extremes the attorney is forced to go in order to rid himself of Bartleby: he returns home, decides to relocate his office, then takes off for several days and hides out, avoiding the new tenant's complaints. What a strange flight, with the wandering attorney living in his rockaway ... From the initial arrangement to this irrepressible, Cain-like flight, everything is bizarre, and the attorney behaves like a madman. Murder fantasies and declarations of love for Bartleby alternate in his soul. What happened? Is it a case of shared madness, here again, another relationship between doubles, a nearly acknowledged homosexual relation ("yes, Bartleby ... I never feel so private as when I know you are here ... I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life ... ")?<sup>271</sup>

One might imagine that hiring Bartleby was a kind of pact, as if the attorney, following his promotion, had decided to make this person, without objective references, a man of confidence [*un homme de confiance*] who would owe everything to him. He wants to make him *his* man.

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<sup>271</sup> Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," in *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories*, ed. Harold Beaver (London: Penguin Classics, 1967), p. 89.

The pact consists of the following: Bartleby will sit near his master and copy, listening to him but without being seen, like a night bird who cannot stand to be looked at. So there is no doubt that once the attorney wants to draw (without even doing it on purpose) Bartleby from behind his screen to correct the copies with the others, he breaks the pact. This is why Bartleby, once he "prefers not to" correct, is already unable to copy. Bartleby will expose himself to view even more than he is asked to, planted in the middle of the office, but he will no longer do any copying. The attorney has an obscure feeling about it, since he assumes that if Bartleby refuses to copy, it is because his vision is impaired. And in effect, exposed to view, Bartleby for his part no longer sees, no longer looks. He has acquired what was, in a certain fashion, already innate in him: the legendary infirmity, one-eyed and one-armed, which makes him an autochthon, someone who is born to and stays in a particular place, while the attorney necessarily fills the function of the traitor condemned to flight. Whenever the attorney invokes philanthropy, charity, or friendship, his protestations are shot through with an obscure guilt. In fact, it is the attorney who broke the arrangement he himself had organized, and from the debris Bartleby pulls a trait of expression, I PREFER NOT TO, which will proliferate around him and contaminate the others, sending the attorney fleeing. But it will also send language itself into flight, it will open up a zone of indetermination or indiscernibility in which neither words nor characters can be distinguished — the fleeing attorney and the immobile, petrified Bartleby. The attorney starts to vagabond while Bartleby remains tranquil, but it is precisely because he remains tranquil and immobile that Bartleby is treated like a vagabond.

Is there a relation of identification between the attorney and Bartleby? But what is this relation? In what direction does it move? Most often, an identification seems to bring into play three elements, which are able to interchange or permute: a form, image, or representation, a portrait, a model; a subject (or at least a virtual subject); and the subject's efforts to assume a form, to appropriate the image, to adapt itself to this image and the image to itself. It is a complex operation that passes through all of the adventures of resemblance, and that always risks falling into neurosis or turning into narcissism. A "mimetic rivalry," as it is sometimes called. It mobilizes a paternal function in general: an image of the father par excellence, and the subject is a son, even if the determinations are interchangeable. The bildungsroman [*roman de formation*], or one could just as easily say the reference novel [*roman de reference*], provides numerous examples.

Certainly, many of Melville's novels begin with images or portraits, and seem to tell the story of an upbringing under a paternal function: *Redburn*, for instance. *Pierre*; or, *The Ambiguities* begins with an image of the father, with a statue and a painting. Even *Moby-Dick* begins by amassing information at the beginning in order to give the whale a form and sketch out its image, right down to the dark painting hanging in the inn. "Bartleby" is no exception to the rule. The two clerks are like paper images, symmetrical opposites, and the attorney fills the paternal function so well that one can hardly believe the story is taking place in New York. Everything starts off as in an English novel, in Dickens's London. But in each case, something strange happens, something that blurs the image, marks it with an essential uncertainty, keeps the form from "taking," but also undoes the subject, sets it



adrift and abolishes any paternal function. It is only here that things begin to get interesting. The statue of the father gives way to his much more ambiguous portrait, and then to yet another portrait that could be of anybody or nobody. All referents are lost, and the formation [formation] of man gives way to a new, unknown element, to the mystery of a formless, nonhuman life, a *Squid*. Everything began *à l'anglaise* but continues *à l'américaine*, following an irresistible line of flight. Ahab can say with good reason that he is fleeing from everywhere. The paternal function is dropped in favor of even more obscure and ambiguous forces. The subject loses its texture in favor of an infinitely proliferating patchwork: the American patchwork becomes the law of Melville's oeuvre, devoid of a center, of an upside down or right side up. It is as if the traits of expression escaped form, like the abstract lines of an unknown writing, or the furrows that twist from Ahab's brow to that of the Whale, or the "horrible contortions" of the flapping lanyards that pass through the fixed rigging and can easily drag a sailor into the sea, a subject into death.<sup>272</sup> In *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, the disquieting smile of the unknown young man in the painting, which so resembles the father's, functions as a trait of expression that emancipates itself, and is just as capable of undoing resemblance as it is of making the subject vacillate. I PREFER NOT TO is also a trait of expression that contaminates everything, escaping linguistic form and stripping the father of his exemplary speech, just as it strips the son of his ability to reproduce or copy.

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<sup>272</sup> Régis Durand, in his *Melville, signes et métaphores* (Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 1980), pp. 103-7, has pointed out the role played by loose lines aboard a whaler, as opposed to formalized riggings. Both Durand's and Jaworski's books are among the most profound analyses of Melville to have appeared recently.

It is still a process of identification, but rather than following the adventures of the neurotic, it has now become psychotic. A little bit of schizophrenia escapes the neurosis of the Old World. We can bring together three distinctive characteristics. In the first place, the formless trait of expression is opposed to the image or to the expressed form. In the second place, there is no longer a subject that tries to conform to the image, and either succeeds or fails. Rather, a zone of indistinction, of indiscernibility, or of ambiguity seems to be established between two terms, as if they had reached the point immediately preceeding their respective differentiation: not a similitude, but a slippage, an extreme proximity, an absolute contiguity; not a natural filiation, but an unnatural alliance. It is a "hyperborean," "arctic" zone. It is no longer a question of Mimesis, but of becoming. Ahab does not imitate the whale, he becomes Moby-Dick, he enters into the zone of proximity [*zone de voisinage*] where he can no longer be distinguished from Moby-Dick, and strikes himself in striking the whale. Moby-Dick is the "wall, shoved near" with which he merges. Redburn renounces the image of the father in favor of the ambiguous traits of the mysterious brother. Pierre does not imitate his father, but reaches the zone of proximity where he can no longer be distinguished from his half sister, Isabelle, and becomes woman. While neurosis flounders in the nets of maternal incest in order to identify more closely with the father, psychosis liberates incest with the sister as a becoming, a free identification of man and woman: in the same way Kleist emits atypical, almost animal traits of expression-stutterings, grindings, grimaces-that feed his passionate conversation with his sister. This is because, in the third place, psychosis pursues its dream of establishing a function of universal

fraternity that no longer passes through the father, but is built on the ruins of the paternal function, a function that presupposes the dissolution of all images of the father, following an autonomous line of alliance or proximity that makes the woman a sister, and the other man, a brother, like the terrible "monkey-rope" uniting Ishmael and Queequeg as a married couple. These are the three characteristics of the American Dream, which together make up the new identification, the New World: the Trait, the Zone, and the Function.

We are in the process of melding together characters as different as Ahab and Bartleby. Yet does not everything instead set them in opposition to each other? Melvillian psychiatry constantly invokes two poles: *monomaniacs* and *hypochondriacs*, demons and angels, torturers and victims, the Swift and the Slow, the Thundering and the Petrified, the Unpunishable (beyond all punishment) and the Irresponsible (beyond all responsibility). What is Ahab doing when he lets loose his harpoons of fire and madness? He is breaking a pact. He is betraying the Whalers' Law, which says that any healthy whale encountered must be hunted, without choosing one over another. But Ahab, thrown into his indiscernible becoming, makes a choice—he pursues his identification with Moby-Dick, putting his crew in mortal danger. This is the monstrous preference that Lieutenant Starbuck bitterly objects to, to the point where he even dreams of killing the treacherous captain. Choosing is the Promethean sin *par excellence*.<sup>273</sup> This was the case with

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<sup>273</sup> George Dumézil, preface to George Charachidzé, *Prométhée ou le Caucase: Essai de mythologie contrastive* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986): "The Greek myth of Prometheus has remained, through the ages, an object of reflection and reference. The god who does not take part in his brothers'

Kleist's Penthesilea, an Ahab-woman who, like her indiscernible double Achilles, had chosen her enemy, in defiance of the law of the Amazons forbidding the preference of one enemy over another. The priestess and the Amazons consider this a betrayal that madness sanctions in a cannibal identification. In his last novel, *Billy Budd*, Melville himself brings another monomaniacal demon into the picture with Claggart: the master-at-arms. We should have no illusions about Claggart's subordinate function: his is no more a case of psychological wickedness than Captain Ahab's. It is a case of metaphysical perversion that consists in choosing one's prey, preferring a chosen victim with a kind of love rather than observing the maritime law that requires him to apply the same discipline to everyone. This is what the narrator suggests when he recalls an ancient and mysterious theory, an expose of which is found in Sade: secondary, sensible Nature is governed by the Law (or laws), while *innately depraved beings* participate in a terrible supersensible Primary Nature, original and oceanic, which, knowing no Law, pursues its own irrational aim through them. Nothingness, Nothingness.<sup>274</sup> Ahab will break through the wall, even if there is nothing behind it, and will make nothingness the object of his will: "To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough."<sup>275</sup> Melville says that only the eye of a

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dynastic struggle against their cousin Zeus, but who, on personal grounds, defies and ridicules this same Zeus... this *anarchist*, affects and stirs up dark and sensitive zones in us."

<sup>274</sup> On this conception of the two Natures in Sade (the theory of the pope in the *New Justine*), see Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 99 ff.

<sup>275</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*, chapter 36 (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), p. 178.

*prophet*, and not a psychologist, is capable of discerning or diagnosing such obscure beings as these creatures of the abyss, without being able to prevent their mad enterprise, the "mystery of iniquity"...

We are now in a position to classify Melville's great characters. At one pole, there are those monomaniacs or demons who, driven by the will to nothingness, make a monstrous choice: Ahab, Claggart, Babo... But at the other pole are those angels or saintly hypochondriacs, almost stupid, creatures of innocence and purity, stricken with a constitutive weakness but also with a strange beauty. Petrified by nature, they prefer... no will at all, a nothingness of the will rather than a will to nothingness (hypochondriacal "negativism"). They can only survive by becoming stone, by denying the will and sanctifying themselves in this suspension.<sup>276</sup> Such are Cereno, Billy Budd, and above all Bartleby. And although the two types are opposed in every way-the former innate traitors and the latter betrayed in their very essence; the former monstrous fathers who devour their children, the latter abandoned sons without fathers-they haunt one and the same world, forming alternations within it, just as Melville's writing, like Kleist's, alternates between stationary, fixed processes and mad-paced procedures: *style*, with its succession of catatonias and accelerations

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<sup>276</sup> See Schopenhauer's conception of sainthood as the act by which the Will denies itself in the suppression of all particularity. Pierre Leyris, in his second preface to the French translation of *Billy Budd* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), recalls Melville's profound interest in Schopenhauer. Nietzsche saw Parsifal as a type of Schopenhauerian saint, a kind of Bartleby. But after Nietzsche, man still preferred being a demon to being a saint: "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will." Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), third essay, § 28, p. 163.

... This is because both poles, both types of characters, Ahab and Bartleby, *belong to this Primary Nature*, they inhabit it, they constitute it. Everything sets them in opposition, and yet they are perhaps the same creature-primary, original, stubborn, seized from both sides, marked merely with a "plus" or a "minus" sign: Ahab and Bartleby. Or in Kleist, the terrible Penthesilea and the sweet little Catherine, the first beyond conscience, the second before conscience: she who chooses and she who does not choose, she who howls like a she-wolf and she who would prefer-not-to speak.<sup>277</sup>

There exists, finally, a third type of character in Melville, the one on the side of the Law, the guardian of the divine and human laws of secondary nature: the prophet. Captain Delano lacks the prophet's eye, but Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, Captain Vere in *Billy Budd*, and the attorney in *Bartleby* all have this power to "See": they are capable of grasping and understanding, as much as is possible, the beings of Primary Nature, the great monomaniacal demons or the saintly innocents, and sometimes both. Yet they themselves are not lacking in ambiguity, each in his own way. Though they are able to see into the Primary Nature that so fascinates them, they are nonetheless representatives of secondary nature and its laws. They bear the paternal image - they seem like good fathers, benevolent fathers (or at least protective big brothers, as Ishmael is toward Queequeg). But they cannot ward off the demons, because the latter are too quick for the law, too surprising. Nor can they save the innocent, the

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<sup>277</sup> See Heinrich Kleist's letter to H. J. von Collin, December 1808, in *An Abyss Deep Enough: The Letters of Heinrich Von Kleist*, ed. Philip B. Miller (New York: Dutton, 1982). Catherine Heilbronn had her own formula, close to that of Bartleby's: "I don't know" or simple "Don't know."

irresponsible: they immolate them in the name of the Law, they make the sacrifice of Abraham. Behind their paternal mask, they have a kind of double identification: with the innocent, toward whom they feel a genuine love, but also with the demon, since they break their pact with the innocent they love, each in his own manner. They betray, then, but in a different way than does Ahab or Claggart: the latter broke the law, whereas Vere or the attorney, in the name of the law, break an implicit and almost unavowable agreement (even Ishmael seems to turn away from his savage brother Queequeg). They continue to cherish the innocent they have condemned: Captain Vere will die muttering the name of Billy Budd, and the final words of the attorney's narrative will be, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!" which does not indicate a connection, but rather an alternative in which he has had to choose the all-too-human law over Bartleby. Torn between the two Natures, with all their contradictions, these characters are extremely important, but do not have the stature of the two others. Rather, they are Witnesses, narrators, interpreters. There is a problem that escapes this third type of character, a very important problem that is settled between the other two.

*The Confidence-Man* (much as one says the *Medicine-Man*) is sprinkled with Melville's reflections on the novel. The first of these reflections consists in claiming the rights of a superior irrationalism (chapter 14). Why should the novelist believe he is obligated to explain the behavior of his characters, and to supply them with reasons, whereas life for its part never explains anything and leaves in its creatures so many indeterminate, obscure, indiscernible zones that defy any attempt at clarification? It is life that justifies; it has no need of being justified. The English novel, and even more

so the French novel, feels the need to rationalize, even if only in the final pages, and psychology is no doubt the last form of rationalism: the Western reader awaits the final word. In this regard, psychoanalysis has revived the claims of reason. But even if it has hardly spared the great novelistic works, no great novelist contemporaneous with psychoanalysis has taken much interest in it. The founding act of the American novel, like that of the Russian novel, was to take the novel far from the order of reasons, and to give birth to characters who exist in nothingness, survive only in the void, defy logic and psychology and keep their mystery until the end. Even their soul, says Melville, is "an immense and terrifying void," and Ahab's body is an "empty shell." If they have a formula, it is certainly not explanatory. I PREFER NOT TO remains just as much a cabalistic formula as that of the Underground Man, who can not keep two and two from making four, but who will not RESIGN himself to it either (*he prefers that two and two not make four*). What counts for a great novelist — Melville, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, or Musil — is that things remain enigmatic yet nonarbitrary: in short, a new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life and death without leading us back to reason. The novelist has the eye of a prophet, not the gaze of a psychologist. For Melville, the three great categories of characters belong to this new logic, just as much as this logic belongs to them. Once it has reached that sought-after Zone, the hyperborean zone, far from the temperate regions, the novel, like life, needs no justification.<sup>278</sup> And in truth,

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<sup>278</sup> The comparison between Musil and Melville would pertain to the following four points: the critique of reason ("Principle of insufficient reason"), the denunciation of psychology ("the great hole we call the soul"), the new logic ("the other state"), and the hyperborean Zone (the "Possible").



there is no such thing as reason; it exists only in bits and pieces. In *Billy Budd*, Melville defines monomaniacs as the Masters of reason, which is why they are so difficult to surprise; but this is because theirs is a delirium of action, because they make use of reason, make it serve their own sovereign ends, which in truth are highly unreasonable. Hypochondriacs are the Outcasts of reason, without our being able to know if they have excluded themselves from it in order to obtain something reason can not give them — the indiscernible, the unnameable with which they will be able to merge. In the end, even prophets are only the Castaways of reason: if Vere, Ishmael, or the attorney clings so tightly to the debris of reason, whose integrity they try so hard to restore, it is because they have *seen* so much, and because what they have seen has marked them forever.

But a second remark by Melville (chapter 44) introduces an essential distinction between the characters in a novel. Melville says that we must above all avoid confusing true Originals with characters that are simply remarkable or singular, particular. This is because the particulars, who tend to be quite populous in a novel, have characteristics that determine their form, properties that make up their image; they are influenced by their milieu and by each other, so that their actions and reactions are governed by general laws, though in each case they retain a particular value. Similarly, the sentences they utter are their own, but they are nonetheless governed by the general laws of language. By contrast, we do not even know if an original exists in an absolute sense, apart from the primordial God, and it is already something extraordinary when we encounter one. Melville admits that it is difficult to imagine how a novel might include several of them. Each original is a powerful, solitary Figure that exceeds any

explicable form: it projects flamboyant traits of expression that mark the stubbornness of a thought without image, a question without response, an extreme and nonrational logic. Figures of life and knowledge, they know something inexpressible, live something unfathomable. They have nothing general about them, and are not particular — they escape knowledge, defy psychology. Even the words they utter surpass the general laws of language (presuppositions) as well as the simple particularities of speech, since they are like the vestiges or projections of a unique, original language [*langue*], and bring all of language [*langage*] to the limit of silence and music. There is nothing particular or general about Bartleby: he is an Original.

Originals are beings of Primary Nature, but they are inseparable from the world or from secondary nature, where they exert their effect: they reveal its emptiness, the imperfection of its laws, the mediocrity of particular creatures ... the world as masquerade (this is what Musil, for his part, will call "parallel action"). The role of prophets, who are not originals, is to be the only ones who can recognize the wake that originals leave in the world, and the unspeakable confusion and trouble they cause in it. The original, says Melville, is not subject to the influence of his milieu; on the contrary, he throws a livid white light on his surroundings, much like the light that "accompanies the beginning of things in Genesis." Originals are sometimes the immobile source of this light-like the foretopman high up on the mast, Billy Budd the bound, hanged man who "ascends" with the glimmering of the dawn, or Bartleby standing in the attorney's office-and sometimes its dazzling passage, a movement too rapid for the ordinary eye to follow, the lightning of Ahab or Claggart. These are the two great

original Figures that one finds throughout Melville, the panoramic shot and the tracking shot, stationary process and infinite speed. And even though these are the two elements of music, though stops give rhythm to movement and lightning springs from immobility, is it not this contradiction that separates the originals, their two types? What does Jean-Luc Godard mean when, in the name of cinema, he asserts that between a tracking shot and a panoramic shot there lies a "moral problem"? Perhaps it is this difference that explains why a great novel cannot, it seems, include more than a single original. Mediocre novels have never been able to create the slightest original character. But how could even the greatest novel create more than one at a time? Ahab or Bartleby ... It is like the great Figures of the painter Francis Bacon, who admits that he has not yet found a way of bringing together two figures in a single painting.<sup>279</sup> And yet Melville will find a way. If he finally broke his silence in the end to write *Billy Budd*, it is because this last novel, under the penetrating eye of Captain Vere, brings together two originals, the demonic and the petrified. The problem was not to link them together through a plot—an easy and inconsequential thing to do, since it would be enough for one to be the victim of the other—but to make them *work together* in the picture (if *Benito Cereno* was already an attempt in this direction, it was a flawed one, under the myopic and blurred gaze of Delano).

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<sup>279</sup> See Francis Bacon and David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p. 22. And Melville said: "For the same reason that there is but no one planet to one orbit, so can there be but one such original character to one work or invention. Two would conflict to chaos." Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, ed. Stephen Matterson (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 282.

What then is the biggest problem haunting Melville's oeuvre? To recover the already-sensed identity? No doubt, it lies in reconciling the two originals *but thereby also in reconciling the original with secondary humanity*, the inhuman with the human. Now what Captain Vere and the attorney demonstrate is that there are no good fathers. There are only monstrous, devouring fathers, and petrified, fatherless sons. If humanity can be saved, and the originals reconciled, it will only be through the dissolution or decomposition of the paternal function. So it is a great moment when Ahab, invoking Saint Elmo's fire, discovers that the father is himself a lost son, an orphan, whereas the son is the son of nothing, or of everyone, a brother.<sup>280</sup> As Joyce will say, paternity does not exist, it is an emptiness, a nothingness — or rather, a zone of uncertainty haunted by brothers, by the brother and sister. The mask of the charitable father must fall in order for Primary Nature to be appeased, and for Ahab and Claggart to recognize Bartleby and Billy Budd, releasing through the violence of the former and the stupor of the latter the fruit with which they were laden: the fraternal relation pure and simple. Melville will never cease to elaborate on the radical opposition between fraternity and Christian "charity" or paternal "philanthropy." To liberate man from the father function, to give birth to the new man or the man without particularities, to reunite the original and humanity by constituting a society of brothers as a new universality. In the society of brothers, alliance replaces filiation and the

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<sup>280</sup> See R. Durand, p. 153. Mayoux writes: "On the personal place, the question of the father is momentarily postponed, if not settled. ... But it is not only a question of the father. We are all orphans. Now is the age of fraternity." Jean-Jacques Mayoux, *Melville*, trans. John Ashberry (New York: Grove, 1960), p. 109, translation modified.

blood pact replaces consanguinity. Man is indeed the blood brother of his fellow man, and woman, his blood sister: according to Melville, this is the *community of celibates*, drawing its members into an unlimited becoming. A brother, a sister, all the more true for no longer being "his" or "hers," since all "property," all "propriatorship," has disappeared. A burning passion deeper than love, since it no longer has either substance or qualities, but traces a zone of indiscernibility in which it passes through all intensities in every direction, extending all the way to the homosexual relation between brothers, and passing through the incestuous relation between brother and sister. This is the most mysterious relation, the one in which Pierre and Isabelle are swept up, the one that draws Heathcliff and Catherine along in *Wuthering Heights*, each one becoming Ahab and Moby-Dick by turns: "Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same ... My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary ... I *am* Heathcliff—he's always always in my mind — not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself — but as my own being ..."281

How can this community be realized? How can the biggest problem be resolved? But is it not already resolved, by itself, precisely because it is not a personal problem, but a historical, geographic, or political one? It is not an individual or particular affair, but a collective one, the affair of a people, or rather, of all peoples. It is not an Oedipal phantasm but a political program. Melville's bachelor, Bartleby, like Kafka's, must "find the

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<sup>281</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 122.

place where he can take his walks"... America.<sup>282</sup> The American is one who is freed from the English paternal function, the son of a crumbled father, the son of all nations. Even before their independence, Americans were thinking about the combination of States, the State-form most compatible with their vocation. But their vocation was not to reconstitute an "old State secret," a nation, a family, a heritage, or a father. It was above all to constitute a universe, a society of brothers, a federation of men and goods, a community of anarchist individuals, inspired by Jefferson, by Thoreau, by Melville. Such is the declaration in *Moby-Dick* (chapter 26): if man is the brother of his fellow man, if he is worthy of trust or "confidence," it is not because he belongs to a nation or because he is a proprietor or shareholder, but only insofar as he is Man, when he has lost those characteristics that constitute his "violence," his "idiocy," his "villainy," when he has no consciousness of himself apart from the proprieties of a "democratic dignity" that considers all particularities as so many ignominious stains that arouse anguish or pity. America is the potential of the man without particularities, the Original Man. Already in *Redburn*:

You can not spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world. Be he Englishman, Frenchman, German, Dane, or Scot; the European who scoffs at an American, calls his own brother *Raca*, and stands in danger of the judgment. We are not a narrow tribe of men, with a bigoted Hebrew nationality — whose blood has been debased in the attempt to enoble it, by maintaining an exclusive succession

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<sup>282</sup> Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1913*, p. 28.

among ourselves .... We are not a nation, so much as a world; for unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec, we are without father or mother ... We are the heirs of all time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance...<sup>283</sup>

The picture of the nineteenth-century proletarian looks like this: the advent of the communist man or the society of comrades, the future Soviet, being without property, family, or nation, has no other determination than that of being man, *Homo tantum*. But this is also the picture of the American, executed by other means, and the traits of the former often intermingle with or are superimposed over those of the latter. America sought to create a revolution whose strength would lie in a universal immigration, emigres of the world, just as Bolshevik Russia would seek to make a revolution whose strength would lie in a universal proletarianization, "Proletarians of the world" ... the two forms of the class struggle. So that the messianism of the nineteenth century has two heads and is expressed no less in American *pragmatism* than in the ultimately Russian form of socialism.

Pragmatism is misunderstood when it is seen as a summary philosophical theory fabricated by Americans. On the other hand, we understand the novelty of American thought when we see pragmatism as an attempt to transform the world, to think a new world or new man insofar as they *create themselves*. Western philosophy was the skull, or the paternal Spirit that realized itself in the world as totality, and in a knowing subject as

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<sup>283</sup> Herman Melville, *Redburn: His Maiden Voyage* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1969), p. 169.

proprietor. Is it against Western philosophy that Melville directs his insult, "metaphysical villain"? A contemporary of American transcendentalism (Emerson, Thoreau), Melville is already sketching out the traits of the pragmatism that will be its continuation. It is first of all the affirmation of a world in *process*, an *archipelago*. Not even a puzzle, whose pieces when fitted together would constitute a whole, but rather a wall of loose, uncemented stones, where every element has a value in itself but also in relation to others: isolated and floating relations, islands and straits, immobile points and sinuous lines — for Truth always has "jagged edges." Not a skull but the vertebral column, a spinal cord; not a uniform piece of clothing but a Harlequin's coat, even white on white, an infinite patchwork with multiple joinings, like the jacket of Redburn, White Jacket or the Great Cosmopolitan: the American invention *par excellence*, for the Americans invented patchwork, just as the Swiss are said to have invented the cuckoo clock. But to reach this point, it was also necessary for the knowing subject, the sole proprietor, to give way to a community of explorers, the brothers of the archipelago, who replace knowledge with belief, or rather with "confidence"-not belief in another world, but confidence in this one, and in man as much as in God ("I am going to attempt the ascent of Ofo *with hope, not with faith*... I will follow my own path...").

Pragmatism is this double principle of archipelago and hope.<sup>284</sup> And what must the community of men consist of

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<sup>284</sup> Jaworski has analyzed this world-as-archipelago or this patchwork experiment. These themes are to be found throughout Pragmatism, and notably among William James's most beautiful pages: the world as "shot point blank with a pistol." This is inseparable from the search for a new human community. In *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, Plotinus Plinlimmon's mysterious tract already seems like the manifestation of an



in order for truth to be possible? *Truth* and *trust*.<sup>285</sup> Like Melville before it, pragmatism will fight ceaselessly on two fronts: against the particularities that pit man against man and nourish an irremediable mistrust; but also against the Universal or the Whole, the fusion of souls in the name of great love or charity. Yet, what remains of souls once they are no longer attached to particularities, what keeps them from melting into a whole? What remains is precisely their "originality," that is, a sound that each one *produces*, like a ritornello at the limit of language, but that it produces only when it takes to the open road (or to the open sea) with its body, when it leads its life without seeking salvation, when it embarks upon its incarnate voyage, without any particular aim, and then encounters other voyagers, whom it recognizes by their sound. This is how Lawrence described the new messianism, or the *democratic* contribution of American literature: against the European morality of salvation and charity, a morality of life in which the soul is fulfilled only by taking to the road, with no other aim, open to all contacts, never trying to save other souls, turning away from those that produce an overly authoritarian or groaning sound, forming even fleeting and unresolved chords and accords with its equals, with freedom as its sole accomplishment, always ready to free itself so as to

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absolute pragmatism. On the history of pragmatism in general, philosophical and political, see Gérard Deledalle, *La philosophie amééricaine* (Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 1983): Royce is particularly important, with his "absolute pragmatism" and his "great community of Interpretation" that unites individuals. There are many Melvillian echoes in Royce's work. His strange trio of the Adventurer, the Beneficiary, the Hypochondriac, and the Prophet, or even to refer to characters in *The Confidence-Man*, who would already prefigure the trio's comic vision.

<sup>285</sup> [In English in the original.--Trans.]

complete itself.<sup>286</sup> According to Melville or Lawrence, brotherhood is a matter for original souls: perhaps it begins only with the death of the father or God, but it does not derive from this death, it is a whole other matter — "all the subtle sympathizings of the incalculable soul, from the bitterest hate to passionate love."

This requires a new perspective, an archipelago-perspectivism that conjugates the panoramic shot and the tracking shot, as in *The Encantadas*. It requires an acute perception, both visual and auditory, as *Benito Cereno* shows, and must replace the concept with the "percept," that is, with a perception in becoming. It requires a new community, whose members are capable of trust or "confidence," that is, of a belief in themselves, in the world, and in becoming. Bartleby the bachelor must embark upon his voyage and find his sister, with whom he will consume the ginger nut, the new host. Bartleby lives cloistered in the office and never goes out, but when the attorney suggests new occupations to him, he is not joking when he responds, "There is too much confinement ..." And if he is prevented from making his voyage, then the only place left for him is prison, where he dies of "civil disobedience," as Thoreau says, "the only place where a free man can stay with honor."<sup>287</sup> William and Henry James are indeed brothers, and *Daisy Miller*,

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<sup>286</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "Whitman," in *Studies in Classical American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1953). This book also includes two famous studies on Melville. Lawrence criticizes both Melville and Whitman for having succumbed to the very things they denounced; nonetheless, he says, it was American literature that, thanks to them, marked out the path.

<sup>287</sup> [See Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Owen Thomas (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 233: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison."--Trans.]

the new American maiden, asks for nothing more than a little confidence, and allows herself to die because even this meager request remains unfulfilled. And what was Bartleby asking for if not a little confidence from the attorney, who instead responds to him with charity and philanthropy—all the masks of the paternal function? The attorney's only excuse is that he draws back from the becoming into which Bartleby, through his lonely existence, threatens to drag him, *rumors* are already spreading ... The hero of pragmatism is not the successful businessman, it is Bartleby, and it is Daisy Miller, it is Pierre and Isabelle, the brother and sister.

The dangers of a "society without fathers" have often been pointed out, but the only real danger is the return of the father.<sup>288</sup> In this respect, it is difficult to separate the failure of the two revolutions, the American and the Soviet, the pragmatic and the dialectical. Universal emigration was no more successful than universal proletarianization. The Civil War already sounded the knell, as would the liquidation of the Soviets later on. The birth of a nation, the restoration of the nation-state — and the monstrous fathers come galloping back in, while the sons without fathers start dying off again. Paper images—this is the fate of the American as well as the Proletarian. But just as many Bolsheviks could hear the diabolical powers knocking at the door in 1917, the pragmatists like Melville before them, could see the masquerade that the society brothers would lead to. Long before Lawrence, Melville and Thoreau were diagnosing the American evil, the new

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<sup>288</sup> See Alexander Mitscherlich's *Society without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology*, trans. Eric Musbacher (New York: J. Aronson, 1974), which is written from a psychoanalytic point of view that remains indifferent to the movements of History and invokes the benefits of the paternal English Constitution.

cement that would rebuild the wall: paternal authority and filthy charity. Bartleby therefore lets himself die in prison. In the beginning, it was Benjamin Franklin the hypocritical *lightning-rod Merchant*, who instituted the magnetic American prison. The city-ship reconstitutes the most oppressive law, and brotherhood exists among the topmen only when they remain immobile, high up on the masts (*White Jacket*). The great community of celibates is nothing more than a company of *bons vivants*, which certainly does not keep the rich bachelor from exploiting the poor and pallid workers, by reconstituting the two unreconciled figures of the monstrous father and the orphaned daughters (*The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids*). The American confidence-man appears everywhere in Melville's work. What malignant power has turned the trust into a company as cruel as the abominable "universal nation" founded by the Dog-Man in *The Encantadas*? *The Confidence-Man*, in which Melville's critique of charity and philanthropy culminates, brings into play a series of devious characters who seem to emanate from a "great Cosmopolitan" in patchwork clothing, and who ask for no more than ... a little human confidence, in order to pull off a multiple and rebounding confidence game.

Are these false brothers sent by a diabolical father to restore his power over *overly credulous* Americans? But the novel is so complex that one could just as easily say the opposite: this long procession [*théorie*] of con men would be a comic version of authentic brothers, such as *overly suspicious* Americans see them, or rather have already become incapable of seeing them. This cohort of characters, including the mysterious child at the end, is perhaps the society of Philanthropists who dissimulate their demonic project, but perhaps it is also the

community of brothers that the Misanthropes are no longer able to recognize in passing. For even in the midst of its failure, the American Revolution continues to send out its fragments, always making something take flight on the horizon, even sending itself to the moon, always trying to break through the wall, to take up the experiment once again, to find a brotherhood in this enterprise, a sister in this becoming, a music in its stuttering language, a pure sound and unknown chords in language itself. What Kafka would say about "small nations" is what Melville had already said about the great American nation: it must become a patchwork of all small nations. What Kafka would say about minor literatures is what Melville had already said about the American literature of his time: because there are so few authors in America, and because its people are so indifferent, the writer is not in a position to succeed as a recognized master. Even in his failure, the writer remains all the more the bearer of a collective enunciation, which no longer forms part of literary history and preserves the rights of a people to come, or of a human becoming.<sup>289</sup> A schizophrenic vocation: even in his catatonic or anorexic state, Bartleby is not the patient, but the doctor of a sick America, the *Medicine-Man*, the new Christ or the brother to us all.

## The Smooth and the Striated

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<sup>289</sup> See Melville's text on American literature, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in *The Portable Melville*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Viking, 1952), pp. 411-14, which should be compared with Kafka's text on "the literature of small peoples," in *The diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910-1913*, entry for December 25, 1911, pp. 210 ff.

## Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Smooth space and striated space — nomad space and sedentary space — the space in which the war machine develops and the space instituted by the State apparatus — are not of the same nature. No sooner do we note a simple opposition between the two kinds of space than we must indicate a much more complex difference by virtue of which the successive terms of the oppositions fail to coincide entirely. And no sooner have we done that than we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, trans versed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space. In the first case, one organizes even the desert; in the second, the desert gains and grows; and the two can happen simultaneously. But the *de facto* mixes do not preclude a *de jure*, or abstract, distinction between the two spaces. That there is such a distinction is what accounts for the fact that the two spaces do not communicate with each other in the same way: it is the *de jure* distinction that determines the forms assumed by a given *de facto* mix and the direction or meaning of the mix (is a smooth space captured, enveloped by a striated space, or does a striated space dissolve into a smooth space, allow a smooth space to develop?). This raises a number of simultaneous questions: the simple oppositions between the two spaces; the complex differences; the *de facto* mixes, and the passages from one to another; the principles of the mixture, which are not at all symmetrical, sometimes causing a passage from the smooth to the striated, sometimes from the striated to the smooth, according to entirely different movements. We

must therefore envision a certain number of models, which would be like various aspects of the two spaces and the relations between them.

***The Technological Model.*** A fabric presents in principle a certain number of characteristics that permit us to define it as a striated space. First, it is constituted by two kinds of parallel elements; in the simplest case, there are vertical and horizontal elements, and the two intertwine, intersect perpendicularly. Second, the two kinds of elements have different functions; one is fixed, the other mobile, passing above and beneath the fixed. Leroi-Gourhan has analyzed this particular figure of "supple solids" in basketry and weaving: stake and thread, warp and woof.<sup>290</sup> Third, a striated space of this kind is necessarily delimited, closed on at least one side: the fabric can be infinite in length but not in width, which is determined by the frame of the warp; the necessity of a back and forth motion implies a closed space (circular or cylindrical figures are themselves closed). Finally, a space of this kind seems necessarily to have a top and a bottom; even when the warp yarn and woof yarn are exactly the same in nature, number, and density, weaving reconstitutes a bottom by placing the knots on one side. Was it not these characteristics that enabled Plato to use the model of weaving as the paradigm for "royal science," in other words, the art of governing people or operating the State apparatus?

Felt is a supple solid product that proceeds altogether differently, as an anti-fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers

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<sup>290</sup> Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *L'homme et la matiere* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1971), pp. 244ff. (and the opposition between fabric and felt).

obtained by fulling (for example, by rolling the block of fibers back and forth). What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibers. An aggregate of intrication of this kind is in no way *homogeneous*: it is nevertheless smooth, and contrasts point by point with the space of fabric (it is in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation). Even the technologists who express grave doubts about the nomads' powers of innovation at least give them credit for felt: a splendid insulator, an ingenious invention, the raw material for tents, clothes, and armor among the Turco-Mongols. Of course, the nomads of Africa and the Maghreb instead treat wool as a fabric. Although it might entail displacing the opposition, do we not detect two very different conceptions or even practices of weaving, the distinction between which would be something like the distinction between fabric as a whole and felt? For among sedentaries, clothes-fabric and tapestry-fabric tend to annex the body and exterior space, respectively, to the immobile house: fabric integrates the body and the outside into a closed space. On the other hand, the weaving of the nomad indexes clothing and the house itself to the space of the outside, to the open smooth space in which the body moves.

There are many interlacings, mixes between felt and fabric. Can we not displace the opposition yet again? In knitting, for example, the needles produce a striated space; one of them plays the role of the warp, the other of the woof, but by turns. Crochet, on the other hand, draws an open space in all directions, a space that is prolongable in all directions — but still has a center. A more significant distinction would be between embroidery,



with its central theme or motif, and patchwork, with its piece-by-piece construction, its infinite, successive additions of fabric. Of course, embroidery's variables and constants, fixed and mobile elements, may be of extraordinary complexity. Patchwork, for its part, may display equivalents to themes, symmetries, and resonance that approximate it to embroidery. But the fact remains that its space is not at all constituted in the same way: there is no center; its basic motif ("block") is composed of a single element; the recurrence of this element frees uniquely rhythmic values distinct from the harmonies of embroidery (in particular, in "crazy" patchwork, which fits together pieces of varying size, shape, and color, and plays on the *texture* of the fabrics). "She had been working on it for fifteen years, carrying about with her a shapeless bag of dingy, threadbare brocade containing odds and ends of colored fabric in all possible shapes. She could never bring herself to trim them to any pattern; so she shifted and fitted and mused and fitted and shifted them like pieces of a patient puzzle-picture, trying to fit them to a pattern or create a pattern out of them without using her scissors, smoothing her colored scraps with flaccid, putty-colored fingers."<sup>291</sup> An amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways: we see that patchwork is literally a Riemannian space, or vice versa. That is why very special work groups were formed for patchwork fabrication (the importance of the quilting bee in America, and its role from the standpoint of a women's collectivity). The smooth space of patchwork is adequate to demonstrate that "smooth" does not mean

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<sup>291</sup> William Faulkner, *Sartoris* (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 151

homogeneous, quite the contrary: it is an *amorphous*, nonformal space prefiguring op art.

The story of the quilt is particularly interesting in this connection. A quilt comprises two layers of fabric stitched together, often with a filler in between. Thus it is possible for there to be no top or bottom. If we follow the history of the quilt over a short migration sequence (the settlers who left Europe for the New World), we see that there is a shift from a formula dominated by embroidery (so-called "plain" quilts) to a patchwork formula ("applique quilts," and above all "pieced quilts"). The first settlers of the seventeenth century brought with them plain quilts, embroidered and striated spaces of extreme beauty. But toward the end of the century patchwork technique was developed more and more, at first due to the scarcity of textiles (leftover fabric, pieces salvaged from used clothes, remnants taken from the "scrap bag"), and later due to the popularity of Indian chintz. It is as though a smooth space emanated, sprang from a striated space, but not without a correlation between the two, a recapitulation of one in the other, a furtherance of one through the other. Yet the complex difference persists. Patchwork, in conformity with migration, whose degree of affinity with nomadism it shares, is not only named after trajectories, but "represents" trajectories, becomes inseparable from speed or movement in an open space.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>292</sup>On the history of the quilt and patchwork in American immigration, see Jonathan Holstein, *American Pieced Quilts* (New York: Viking, 1973) (with reproductions and bibliography). Holstein does not claim that the quilt is the principal source of American art, but he does note the extent to which the "white on white" of plain quilts and patchwork compositions inspired or gave impetus to certain tendencies in American painting: "We can see in many [quilts] such phenomena as 'op' effects, serial

**The Musical Model.** Pierre Boulez was the first to develop a set of simple oppositions and complex differences, as well as reciprocal nonsymmetrical correlations, between smooth and striated space. He created these concepts and words in the field of music, defining them on several levels precisely in order to account for the abstract distinction at the same time as the concrete mixes. In the simplest terms, Boulez says that in a smooth spacetime one occupies without counting, whereas in a striated space-time one counts in order to occupy. He makes palpable or perceptible the difference between non metric and metric multiplicities, directional and dimensional spaces. He renders them sonorous or musical. Undoubtedly, his personal work is composed of these relations, created or recreated musically.<sup>293</sup>

At a second level, it can be said that space is susceptible to two kinds of breaks: one is defined by a standard, whereas the other is irregular and undetermined, and can be made wherever one wishes to place it. At yet another level, it can be said that frequencies can be distributed either in the intervals between breaks, or statistically without breaks. In the first case, the principle behind the distribution of breaks and intervals is called a "module"; it may be constant and fixed (a *straight* striated space), or regularly or irregularly variable (*curved* striated spaces, termed focalized if the variation of the module is regular,

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images, use of 'color fields,' deep understanding of negative space, mannerisms of formal abstraction and the like," (p. 13).

<sup>293</sup> Pierre Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, trans. Susan Bradshaw and Richard Bennett (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 83ff. We provide a summary of Boulez's analysis in the following paragraph.

nonfocalized if it is irregular). When there is no module, the distribution of frequencies is without break: it is "statistical," however small the segment of space may be; it still has two aspects, however, depending on whether the distribution is equal (nondirected smooth space), or more or less rare or dense (directed smooth space). Can we say that in the kind of smooth space that is without break or module there is no interval? Or, on the contrary, has everything become interval, *intermezzo*? The smooth is a *nomos*, whereas the striated always has a *logos*, the octave, for example. Boulez is concerned with the communication between the two kinds of space, their alternations and superpositions: how "a strongly directed smooth space tends to meld with a striated space," how "a striated space in which the statistical distribution of the pitches used is *in fact* equal tends to meld with a smooth space";<sup>294</sup> how the octave can be replaced by "non-octave-forming scales" that reproduce themselves through a principle of spiraling; how "texture" can be crafted in such a way as to lose fixed and homogeneous values, becoming a support for slips in tempo, displacements of intervals, and *son art* transformations comparable to the transformations of *op art*.

Returning to the simple opposition, the striated is that which intertwines fixed and variable elements, produces an order and succession of distinct forms, and organizes horizontal melodic lines and vertical harmonic planes. The smooth is the continuous variation, continuous development of form; it is the fusion of harmony and melody in favor of the production of properly rhythmic

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<sup>294</sup> [TRANS: Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, p. 87. Translation modified.]

values, the pure act of the drawing of a diagonal across the vertical and the horizontal.

***The Maritime Model.*** Of course, there are points, lines, and surfaces in striated space as well as in smooth space (there are also volumes, but we will leave this question aside for the time being). In striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another. In the smooth, it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory. This was already the case among the nomads for the clothestent-space vector of the outside. The dwelling is subordinated to the journey; inside space conforms to outside space: tent, igloo, boat. There are stops and trajectories in both the smooth and the striated. But in smooth space, the stop follows from the trajectory; once again, the interval takes all, the interval is substance (forming the basis for rhythmic values).<sup>295</sup>

In smooth space, the line is therefore a vector, a direction and not a dimension or metric determination. It is a space constructed by local operations involving changes in direction. These changes in direction may be due to the nature of the journey itself, as with the nomads of the archipelagoes (a case of "directed" smooth space); but it is more likely to be due to the variability of the goal or point to be attained, as with the nomads of the desert who head toward local, temporary vegetation (a "nondirected" smooth space). Directed or not, and especially in the

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<sup>295</sup> On this indexing of the inside and the outside among the nomads of the desert, see Annie Milovanoff, "La seconde peau du nomade," *Nouvelles littéraires*, no. 2646 (July 27, 1978), p. 18. And on the relations between the igloo and the outside among the nomads of the ice, see Edmund Carpenter, *Eskimo* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1964).

latter case, smooth space is directional rather than dimensional or metric. Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is *haptic* rather than optical perception. Whereas in the striated forms organize a matter, in the smooth materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties. Intense *Spatium* instead of *Extensio*. A Body without Organs instead of an organism and organization. Perception in it is based on symptoms and evaluations rather than measures and properties. That is why smooth space is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities, as in the desert, steppe, or ice.<sup>296</sup> The creaking of ice and the song of the sands. Striated space, on the contrary, is canopied by the sky as measure and by the measurable visual qualities deriving from it.

This is where the very special problem of the sea enters in. For the sea is a smooth space par excellence, and yet was the first to encounter the demands of increasingly strict striation. The problem did not arise in proximity to land. On the contrary, the striation of the sea was a result of navigation on the open water. Maritime space was striated as a function of two astronomical and geographical gains: *bearings*, obtained by a set of calculations based on exact observation of the stars and the sun; and *the map*, which intertwines meridians and parallels, longitudes and latitudes, plotting regions

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<sup>296</sup> See the two convergent descriptions of the space of ice and the space of sand: Edmund Carpenter, *Eskimo*, and Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (London: Longmans, Green, 1959). (In both cases, there is an indifference to astronomy.)

known and unknown onto a grid (like a Mendeleyev table). Must we accept the Portuguese argument and assign 1440 as the turning point that marked the first decisive striation, and set the stage for the great discoveries? Rather, we will follow Pierre Chaunu when he speaks of an extended confrontation at sea between the smooth and the striated during the course of which the striated progressively took hold.<sup>297</sup> For before longitude lines had been plotted, a very late development, there existed a complex and empirical nomadic system of navigation based on the wind and noise, the colors and sounds of the seas; then came a directional, preastronomical or already astronomical, system of navigation employing only latitude, in which there was no possibility of "taking one's bearings," and which had only portolanos lacking "translatable generalization" instead of true maps; finally, improvements upon this primitive astronomical navigation were made under the very special conditions of the latitudes of the Indian Ocean, then of the elliptical circuits of the Atlantic (straight and curved spaces).<sup>298</sup> It is as if the sea were not only the archetype of all smooth spaces but the first to undergo a gradual striation gridding it in one place, then another, on this side and that. The commercial cities participated in this striation, and were often innovators; but only the States were capable of carrying it to completion, of raising

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<sup>297</sup> See Pierre Chaunu's study, *L'expansion européenne du XIIIe au XVe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1969), pp. 288-305.

<sup>298</sup> See in particular Paul Adam, "Navigation primitive et navigation astronomique," in *Les aspects internationaux de la découverte océanique aux XVe et XVIe siècles. Ve Colloque international d'histoire maritime*, ed. Michel Mollat and Paul Adam (Paris: SEVPEN, 1960), pp. 91 - 112. (See the operative geometry of the pole star.)

it to the global level of a "politics of science."<sup>299</sup> A *dimensionality* that subordinated *directionality*, or superimposed itself upon it, became increasingly entrenched.

This is undoubtedly why the sea, the archetype of smooth space, was also the archetype of all striations of smooth space: the striation of the desert, the air, the stratosphere (prompting Virilio to speak of a "vertical coastline," as a change in direction). It was at sea that smooth space was first subjugated and a model found for the laying-out and imposition of striated space, a model later put to use elsewhere. This does not contradict Virilio's other hypothesis: in the aftermath of striation, the sea reimparts a kind of smooth space, occupied first by the "fleet in being," then by the perpetual motion of the strategic submarine, which outflanks all gridding and invents a neonomadism in the service of a war machine still more disturbing than the States, which reconstitute it at the limit of their striations. The sea, then the air and the stratosphere, become smooth spaces again, but, in the strangest of reversals, it is for the purpose of controlling striated space more completely.<sup>300</sup> The smooth always possesses a greater power of deterritorialization than the striated. When examining the new professions, or new classes even, how can one fail to mention the military technicians who stare into screens night and day and live for long stretches in strategic submarines (in the future it

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<sup>299</sup> Guy Beaujouan, "Science 1ivresque et nautique au XVe siecle," *Les aspects internationaux de la decouverte oceanique*, pp. 61-90.

<sup>300</sup> See Paul Virilio, *L'insecurite du territoire* (Paris: Stock, 1975), on how the sea reconstitutes a smooth space with the "fleet in being," etc.; and how a vertical smooth space of aerial and stratospheric domination springs up (especially chapter 4, "Le littoral vertical," pp. 93 - 109).



will be on satellites), and the apocalyptic eyes and ears they have fashioned for themselves, which can barely distinguish any more between a natural phenomenon, a swarm of locusts, and an "enemy" attack originating at any given point? All of this serves as a reminder that the smooth itself can be drawn and occupied by diabolical powers of *organization*; value judgments aside, this demonstrates above all that there exist two nonsymmetrical movements, one of which striates the smooth, and one of which reimparts smooth space on the basis of the striated. (Do not new smooth spaces, or holey spaces, arise as parries even in relation to the smooth space of a worldwide organization? Virilio invokes the beginnings of subterranean habitation in the "mineral layer," which can take on very diverse values.)

Let us return to the simple opposition between the smooth and the striated since we are not yet at the point where we can consider the dissymmetrical and concrete mixes. The smooth and the striated are distinguished first of all by an inverse relation between the point and the line (in the case of the striated, the line is between two points, while in the smooth, the point is between two lines); and second, by the nature of the line (smooth-directional, open intervals; dimensional-striated, closed intervals). Finally, there is a third difference, concerning the surface or space. In striated space, one closes off a surface and "allocates" it according to determinate intervals, assigned breaks; in the smooth, one "distributes" oneself in an open space, according to frequencies and in the course of one's crossings (*logos* and *nomos*).<sup>301</sup> As simple as this

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<sup>301</sup> Emmanuel Laroche, *Histoire de la racine "Nem" en grec ancien* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1949), clearly notes the difference between the ideas of distribution and allocation, between the two

opposition is, it is not easy to place it. We cannot content ourselves with establishing an immediate opposition between the smooth ground of the nomadic animal raiser and the striated land of the sedentary cultivator. It is evident that the peasant, even the sedentary peasant, participates fully in the space of the wind, the space of tactile and sonorous qualities. When the ancient Greeks speak of the open space of the *nomos* — nondelimited, unpartitioned; the preurban countryside; mountainside, plateau, steppe — they oppose it not to cultivation, which may actually be part of it, but to the *polis*, the city, the town. When Ibn Khaldun speaks of *badiya*, bedouinism, the term covers cultivators as well as nomadic animal raisers: he contrasts it to *hadara*, or "city life." This clarification is certainly important, but it does not change much. For from the most ancient of times, from Neolithic and even Paleolithic times, it is the town that invents agriculture: it is through the actions of the town that the farmers and their striated space are superposed upon the cultivators operating in a still smooth space (the transhumant cultivator, half-sedentary or already completely sedentary). So on this level we reencounter the simple opposition we began by challenging, between farmers and nomads, striated land and smooth ground: but only after a detour through the town as a force of striation. Now not only the sea, desert, steppe, and air are the sites of a contest between the smooth and the striated, but the earth itself, depending on whether there is cultivation in *nomos*-space or agriculture in city-space. Must we not say the same of the city itself? In contrast to the sea, the city is the striated space par excellence; the sea is a smooth space fundamentally open to striation,

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linguistic groups concerned, between the two kinds of space, between the "province" pole and the "city" pole.

and the city is the force of striation that reimparts smooth space, puts it back into operation everywhere, on earth and in the other elements, outside but also inside itself. The smooth spaces arising from the city are not only those of worldwide organization, but also of a counterattack combining the smooth and the holey and turning back against the town: sprawling, temporary, shifting shantytowns of nomads and cave dwellers, scrap metal and fabric, patchwork, to which the striations of money, work, or housing are no longer even relevant. An explosive misery secreted by the city, and corresponding to Thom's mathematical formula: "retroactive smoothing."<sup>302</sup> Condensed force, the potential for counterattack?

In each instance, then, the simple opposition "smooth-striated" gives rise to far more difficult complications, alternations, and superpositions. But these complications basically confirm the distinction, precisely because they bring dissymmetrical movements into play. For now, it suffices to say that there are two kinds of voyage, distinguished by the respective role of the point, line, and space. Goethe travel and Kleist travel? French travel and English (or American) travel? Tree travel and rhizome travel? But nothing completely coincides, and everything intermingles, or crosses over. This is because the differences are not objective: it is possible to live striated on the deserts, steppes, or seas; it is possible to live smooth even in the cities, to be an urban nomad (for example, a stroll taken by Henry Miller in Clichy or Brooklyn is a nomadic transit in smooth space;

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<sup>302</sup> This expression is found in René Thom, who applies it to a continuous variation in which the variable reacts upon its antecedents: *Modèles mathématiques de la morphogenèse* (Paris: 10/18, 1974), pp. 218-219.

he makes the city disgorge a patchwork, differentials of speed, delays and accelerations, changes in orientation, continuous variations ... The beatniks owe much to Miller, but they changed direction again, they put the space outside the cities to new use). Fitzgerald said it long ago: it is not a question of taking off for the South Seas, that is not what determines a voyage. There are not only strange voyages in the city but voyages in place: we are not thinking of drug users, whose experience is too ambiguous, but of true nomads. We can say of the nomads, following Toynbee's suggestion: *they do not move*. They are nomads by dint of not moving, not migrating, of holding a smooth space that they refuse to leave, that they leave only in order to conquer and die. Voyage in place: that is the name of all intensities, even if they also develop in extension. To think is to voyage; earlier we tried to establish a theo-noological model of smooth and striated spaces. In short, what distinguishes the two kinds of voyages is neither a measurable quantity of movement, nor something that would be only in the mind, but the mode of spatialization, the manner of being in space, of being for space. Voyage smoothly or in striation, and think the same way ... But there are always passages from one to the other, transformations of one within the other, reversals. In his film, *Kings of the Road*, Wenders intersects and superposes the paths of two characters; one of them takes a still educational, memorial, cultural, Goethean journey that is thoroughly striated, whereas the other has already conquered smooth space, and only experiments, induces amnesia in the German "desert." But oddly enough, it is the former who opens space for himself and performs a kind of retroactive smoothing, whereas striae reform around the latter, closing his space again. Voyaging smoothly is a becoming, and a difficult, uncertain becoming at that. It is

not a question of returning to preastronomical navigation, nor to the ancient nomads. The confrontation between the smooth and the striated, the passages, alternations and superpositions, are underway today, running in the most varied directions.

***The Mathematical Model.*** It was a decisive event when the mathematician Riemann uprooted the multiple from its predicate state and made it a noun, "multiplicity." It marked the end of dialectics and the beginning of a typology and topology of multiplicities. Each multiplicity was defined by  $n$  determinations; sometimes the determinations were independent of the situation, and sometimes they depended upon it. For example, the magnitude of a vertical line between two points can be compared to the magnitude of a horizontal line between two other points: it is clear that the multiplicity in this case is metric, that it allows itself to be striated, and that its determinations are magnitudes. On the other hand, two sounds of equal pitch and different intensity cannot be compared to two sounds of equal intensity and different pitch; in this case, two determinations can be compared only "if one is a part of the other and if we restrict ourselves to the judgment that the latter is smaller than the former, without being able to say by how much."<sup>303</sup> Multiplicities of this second kind are not metric and allow themselves to be striated and measured only by indirect means, which they always resist. They are an exact yet rigorous. Meinong and Russell opposed the notion of *distance* to that of

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<sup>303</sup> On Riemann's and Helmholtz's presentations of multiplicity, see Jules Vuillemin, *Philosophie de l'algebre* (Paris: PUF, 1962), pp. 409ff.

*magnitude*.<sup>304</sup> Distances are not, strictly speaking, indivisible: they can be divided precisely in cases where the situation of one determination makes it part of another. But unlike magnitudes, *they cannot divide without changing in nature each time*. An intensity, for example, is not composed of addable and displaceable magnitudes: a temperature is not the sum of two smaller temperatures, a speed is not the sum of two smaller speeds. Since each intensity is itself a difference, it divides according to an order in which each term of the division differs in nature from the others. Distance is therefore a set of ordered differences, in other words, differences that are enveloped in one another in such a way that it is possible to judge which is larger or smaller, but not their exact magnitudes. For example, one can divide movement into the gallop, trot, and walk, but in such a way that what is divided changes in nature at each moment of the division, without any one of these moments entering into the composition of any other. Therefore these multiplicities of "distance" are inseparable from a process of continuous variation, whereas multiplicities of "magnitude" distribute constants and variables.

That is why we consider Bergson to be of major importance (much more so than Husserl, or even Meinong or Russell) in the development of the theory of multiplicities. Beginning in *Time and Free Will*, he presents duration as a type of multiplicity opposed to metric multiplicity or the multiplicity of magnitude.

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<sup>304</sup> See Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (New York: Norton, 1964), chapter 31. The following discussion does not conform to Russell's theory. An excellent analysis of the notions of distance and magnitude according to Meinong and Russell may be found in Albert Spaier, *La pensee et la quantite* (Paris: Alcan, 1927).

Duration is in no way indivisible, but is that which cannot be divided without changing in nature at each division (Achilles' running is not divided into steps, his steps do not compose it in the manner of magnitudes).<sup>305</sup> On the other hand, in a multiplicity such as homogeneous extension, the division can be carried as far as one likes without changing anything in the constant object; or the magnitudes can vary with no other result than an increase or a decrease in the amount of space they striate. Bergson thus brought to light "two very different kinds of multiplicity," one qualitative and fusional, continuous, the other numerical and homogeneous, discrete. It will be noted that *matter* goes back and forth between the two; sometimes it is already enveloped in qualitative multiplicity, sometimes already developed in a metric "schema" that draws it outside of itself. The confrontation between Bergson and Einstein on the topic of Relativity is incomprehensible if one fails to place it in the context of the basic theory of Riemannian multiplicities, as modified by Bergson.

We have on numerous occasions encountered all kinds of differences between two types of multiplicities: metric and nonmetric; extensive and qualitative; centered and acentered; arborescent and rhizomatic; numerical and

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<sup>305</sup> Beginning in chapter 2 of *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (New York: Macmillan, 1958), Bergson repeatedly uses the noun "multiplicity," under conditions that should attract the attention of commentators; that there is an implicit reference to Riemann seems beyond doubt. Later, in *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Humanities Press, 1978), he explains that Achilles' stride can be divided perfectly into "submultiples" that differ in nature, however, from that which they divide; the same goes for the tortoise's stride; and the submultiples, "in both cases," themselves differ in nature.

flat; dimensional and directional; of masses and of packs; of magnitude and of distance; of breaks and of frequency; *striated and smooth*. Not only is that which peoples a smooth space a multiplicity that changes in nature when it divides — such as tribes in the desert: constantly modified distances, packs that are always undergoing metamorphosis — but smooth space itself, desert, steppe, sea, or ice, is a multiplicity of this type, nonmetric, acentered, directional, etc. Now it might be thought that the Number would belong exclusively to the *other multiplicities*, that it would accord them the scientific status nonmetric multiplicities lack. But this is only partially true. It is true that the number is the correlate of the metric: magnitudes can striate space only by reference to numbers, and conversely, numbers are used to express increasingly complex relations between magnitudes, thus giving rise to ideal spaces reinforcing the striation and making it coextensive with all of matter. There is therefore a correlation within metric multiplicities between geometry and arithmetic, geometry and algebra, which is constitutive of major science (the most profound authors in this respect are those who have seen that the number, even in its simplest forms, is exclusively cardinal in character, and the unit exclusively divisible).<sup>306</sup> It could be said on the other hand that nonmetric multiplicities or the multiplicities of smooth space pertain only to a minor geometry that is purely operative and qualitative, in which calculation is necessarily very limited, and the local operations of which

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<sup>306</sup> See Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 82: if a multiplicity "implies the possibility of treating any number whatever as a provisional unit which can be added to itself, inversely the units in their turn are true numbers which are as big as we like, but are regarded as provisionally indivisible for the purpose of compounding them with one another."



are not even capable of general translatability or a homogeneous system of location. Yet this "inferiority" is only apparent; for the independence of this nearly illiterate, ametric geometry is what makes possible the independence of the number, the subsequent function of which is to measure magnitudes in striated space (or to striate). The number distributes itself in smooth space; it does not divide without changing nature each time, without changing units, each of which represents a distance and not a magnitude. The ordinal, directional, nomadic, articulated number, the numbering number, pertains to smooth space, just as the numbered number pertains to striated space. So we may say of every multiplicity that it is already a number, and still a unit. But the number and the unit, and even the way in which the unit divides, are different in each case. Minor science is continually enriching major science, communicating its intuitions to it, its way of proceeding, its itinerancy, its sense of and taste for matter, singularity, variation, intuitionist geometry and the numbering number.

But so far we have only considered the first aspect of smooth and nonmetric multiplicities, as opposed to metric multiplicities: how the situation of one determination can make it part of another without our being able either to assign that situation an exact magnitude or common unit, or to discount it. This is the enveloping or enveloped character of smooth space. But there is a second, more important, aspect: when the situation of the two determinations precludes their comparison. As we know, this is the case for Riemannian spaces, or rather, Riemannian patches of space: "Riemann spaces are devoid of any kind of homogeneity. Each is characterized by the form of the expression that defines the square of the distance between two infinitely

proximate points. ... It follows that two neighboring observers in a Riemann space can locate the points in their immediate vicinity but cannot locate their spaces in relation to each other without a new convention. Each vicinity is therefore like a shred of Euclidean space, *but the linkage between one vicinity and the next is not defined and can be effected in an infinite number of ways. Riemann space at its most general thus presents itself as an amorphous collection of pieces that are juxtaposed but not attached to each other.*" It is possible to define this multiplicity without any reference to a metrical system, in terms of the conditions of frequency, or rather *accumulation*, of a set of vicinities; these conditions are entirely different from those determining metric spaces and their breaks (even though a relation between the two kinds of space necessarily results).<sup>307</sup> In short, if we follow Lautman's fine description, Riemannian space is pure patchwork. It has connections, or tactile relations. It has rhythmic values not found elsewhere, even though they can be translated into a metric space. Heterogeneous, in continuous variation, it is a smooth space, insofar as smooth space is amorphous and not homogeneous. We can thus define two positive characteristics of smooth space in general: when there are determinations that are part of one another and pertain to enveloped distances or ordered differences, independent of magnitude; when, independent of metrics, determinations arise that cannot be part of one another but are connected by processes of frequency or accumulation. These are the two aspects of the *nomos* of smooth space.

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<sup>307</sup> Albert Lautman, *Les schemas de structure* (Paris: Hermann, 1938), pp. 23, 34-35.

We are always, however, brought back to a dissymmetrical necessity to cross from the smooth to the striated, and from the striated to the smooth. If it is true that itinerant geometry and the nomadic number of smooth spaces are a constant inspiration to royal science and striated space, conversely, the metrics of striated spaces (*metron*) is indispensable for the translation of the strange data of a smooth multiplicity. Translating is not a simple act: it is not enough to substitute the space traversed for the movement; a series of rich and complex operations is necessary (Bergson was the first to make this point). Neither is translating a secondary act. It is an operation that undoubtedly consists in subjugating, overcoding, *metricizing* smooth space, in neutralizing it, but also in giving it a milieu of propagation, extension, refraction, renewal, and impulse without which it would perhaps die of its own accord: like a mask without which it could neither breathe nor find a general form of expression. Major science has a perpetual need for the inspiration of the minor; but the minor would be nothing if it did not confront and conform to the highest scientific requirements. Let us take just two examples of the richness and necessity of translations, which include as many opportunities for openings as risks of closure or stoppage: first, the complexity of the means by which one translates intensities into extensive quantities, or more generally, multiplicities of distance into systems of magnitudes that measure and striate them (the role of logarithms in this connection); second, and more important, the delicacy and complexity of the means by which Riemannian patches of smooth space receive a Euclidean conjunction (the role of the parallelism of

vectors in striating the infinitesimal).<sup>308</sup> The mode of connection proper to patches of Riemannian space ("accumulation") is not to be confused with the Euclidean conjunction of Riemann space ("parallelism"). Yet the two are linked and give each other impetus. Nothing is ever done with: smooth space allows itself to be striated, and striated space reimparts a smooth space, with potentially very different values, scope, and signs. Perhaps we must say that all progress is made by and in striated space, but all becoming occurs in smooth space.

Is it possible to give a very general mathematical definition of smooth spaces? Benoit Mandelbrot's "fractals" seem to be on that path. Fractals are aggregates whose number of dimensions is fractional rather than whole, or else whole but with continuous variation in direction. An example would be a line segment whose central third is replaced by the angle of an equilateral triangle; the operation is repeated for the four resulting segments, and so on ad infinitum, following a relation of similarity — such a segment would constitute an infinite line or curve with a dimension greater than one, but less than a surface ( $= 2$ ). Similar results can be obtained by making holes, by cutting, "windows" into a circle, instead of adding "points" to a triangle; likewise, a cube into which holes are drilled according to the principle of similarity becomes less than a volume but more than a surface (this is the mathematical presentation of the affinity between a free space and a holey space). In still other forms, Brownian motion, turbulence, and the sky

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<sup>308</sup> On this properly Euclidean conjunction (which is very different from the process of accumulation), see Lautman, *ibid.*, pp. 45-48.

are "fractals" of this kind.<sup>309</sup> Perhaps this provides us with another way of defining *fuzzy aggregates*. But the main thing is that it provides a general determination for smooth space that takes into account its differences from and relations to striated space: (1) we shall call striated or metric any aggregate with a whole number of dimensions, and for which it is possible to assign constant directions; (2) nonmetric smooth space is constituted by the construction of a line with a fractional number of dimensions greater than one, or of a surface with a fractional number of dimensions greater than two; (3) a fractional number of dimensions is the index of a properly directional space (with continuous variation in direction, and without tangent); (4) what defines smooth space, then, is that it does not have a dimension higher than that which moves through it or is inscribed in it; in this sense it is a flat multiplicity, for example, a line that fills a plane without ceasing to be a line; (5) space and that which occupies space tend to become identified, to have the same power, in the anexact yet rigorous form of the numbering or nonwhole number (occupy without counting); (6) a smooth, amorphous space of this kind is constituted by an accumulation of proximities, and each accumulation defines a *zone of indiscernibility* proper to "becoming" (more than a line and less than a surface; less than a volume and more than a surface).

***The Physical Model.*** The various models confirm a certain idea of striation: two series of parallels that intersect perpendicularly, some of which, the verticals, are more in the role of fixed elements or constants, whereas the others, the horizontals, are more in the role

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<sup>309</sup> Benoit Mandelbrot, *Fractals: Form, Chance, and Dimension* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1977).

of variables. This is roughly the case for the warp and the woof, harmony and melody, longitude and latitude. The more regular the intersection, the tighter the striation, the more homogeneous the space tends to become; it is for this reason that from the beginning homogeneity did not seem to us to be a characteristic of smooth space, but on the contrary, the extreme result of striation, or the limit-form of a space striated everywhere and in all directions. If the smooth and the homogeneous seem to communicate, it is only because when the striated attains its ideal of perfect homogeneity, it is apt to reimpart smooth space, by a movement that superposes itself upon that of the homogeneous but remains entirely different from it. In each model, the smooth actually seemed to pertain to a fundamental heterogeneity: felt or patchwork rather than weaving, rhythmic values rather than harmony-melody, Riemannian space rather than Euclidean space — a continuous variation that exceeds any distribution of constants and variables, the freeing of a line that does not pass between two points, the formation of a plane that does not proceed by parallel and perpendicular lines.

The link between the homogeneous and the striated can be expressed in terms of an imaginary, elementary physics. (1) You begin by striating space with parallel *gravitational* verticals. (2) The resultant of these parallels or forces is applied to a point inside the body occupying the space (*center of gravity*). (3) The position of this point does not change when the direction of the parallel forces is changed, when they become *perpendicular* to their original direction. (4) You discover that gravity is a particular case of a universal *attraction* following straight lines or biunivocal relations between two bodies. (5) You define a general notion of *work* as a force-displacement

relation in a certain direction. (6) You then have the physical basis for an increasingly perfect striated space, running not only vertically and horizontally, but in every direction subordinated to points.

It is not even necessary to invoke this Newtonian pseudophysics. The Greeks already went from a space striated vertically, top to bottom, to a centered space with reversible and symmetrical relations in all directions, in other words, striated in every direction in such a way as to constitute a homogeneity. There is no question that these are like two models of the State apparatus, the vertical apparatus of the empire and the isotropic apparatus of the city-state.<sup>310</sup> Geometry lies at the crossroads of a physics problem and an affair of the State.

It is obvious that the striation thus constituted has its limits: they are reached not only when the infinite (either infinitely large or small) is brought in, but also when more than two bodies are considered ("the three-body problem"). Let us try to understand in the simplest terms how space escapes the limits of its striation. At one pole, it escapes them by *declination*, in other words, by the smallest deviation, by the infinitely small deviation between a gravitational vertical and the arc of a circle to which the vertical is tangent. At the other pole, it escapes them by the *spiral or vortex*, in other words, a figure in which all the points of space are simultaneously occupied according to laws of frequency or of accumulation, distribution; these laws are distinct from the so-called laminar distribution corresponding to the striation of parallels. From the smallest deviation to the vortex there

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<sup>310</sup> On these two kinds of space, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*, vol. 1 (Paris: Maspero, 1971-1974), pp. 174-175.

is a valid and necessary relation of consequence: what stretches between them is precisely a smooth space whose element is declination and which is peopled by a spiral. Smooth space is constituted by the minimum angle, which deviates from the vertical, and by the vortex, which overflows striation. The strength of Michel Serres's book is that it demonstrates this link between the *clinamen* as a generative differential element, and the formation of vortices and turbulences insofar as they occupy an engendered smooth space; in fact, the atom of the ancients, from Democritus to Lucretius, was always inseparable from a hydraulics, or a generalized theory of swells and flows. The ancient atom is entirely misunderstood if it is overlooked that its essence is to course and flow. The theory of atomism is the basis for a strict correlation between Archimedean geometry (very different from the striated and homogeneous space of Euclid) and Democritean physics (very different from solid or lamellar matter).<sup>311</sup> The same coincidence means that this aggregate is no longer tied in any way to a State apparatus, but rather to a war machine: a physics of packs, turbulences, "catastrophes," and epidemics corresponding to a geometry of war, of the art of war and its machines. Serres states what he considers to be Lucretius's deepest goal: to go from Mars to Venus, to place the war machine in the service of peace.<sup>312</sup> But this operation is not accomplished through the State apparatus; it expresses, on the contrary, an ultimate metamorphosis of the war machine, and occurs in smooth space.

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<sup>311</sup> Michel Serres, *La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrece. Fleuves et turbulences* (Paris: Minuit, 1977): "Physics is based much more on a vectorial space than on a metric space" (p. 79). On the hydraulic problem, see pp. 104-107.

<sup>312</sup> Serres, *La naissance de la physique*, pp. 35, 135ff.



Earlier we encountered a distinction between "free action" in smooth space and "work" in striated space. During the nineteenth century a twofold elaboration was undertaken: of a physicoscientific concept of Work (weight-height, force-displacement), and of a socioeconomic concept of labor-power or abstract labor (a homogeneous abstract quantity applicable to all work, and susceptible to multiplication and division). There was a profound link between physics and sociology: society furnished an economic standard of measure for work, and physics a "mechanical currency" for it. The wage regime had as its correlate a mechanics of force. Physics had never been more social, for in both cases it was a question of defining the constant mean value of a force of lift and pull exerted in the most uniform way possible by a standard-man. Impose the Work-model upon every activity, translate every act into possible or virtual work, discipline free action, or else (which amounts to the same thing) relegate it to "leisure," which exists only by reference to work. We now understand why the Work-model, in both its physical and social aspects, is a fundamental part of the State apparatus. Standard-man began as the man of *public works*.<sup>313</sup> It was not in relation to pin manufacturing that the problems of abstract labor, the multiplication of its results, and the division of its operations were first formulated; it was in public construction and in the organization of armies (not only the disciplining of men, but also the industrial production

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<sup>313</sup> Anne Querrien has clearly demonstrated the importance of the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées (School of Bridges and Roadways) in this elaboration of the concept of work. For example, Navier, an engineer and professor of mechanics, wrote in 1819: "We must establish a mechanical currency with which to estimate the quantities of work used to accomplish every kind of fabrication."

of weapons). Nothing more normal. The war machine in itself did not imply this normalization. But the State apparatus, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, found a new way of appropriating the war machine: by subjugating it before all else to the Work-model of the construction site and factory, which were in the process of developing elsewhere, but more slowly. The war machine was perhaps the first thing to be striated, to produce an abstract labor-time whose results could be multiplied and operations divided. That is where free action in smooth space must have been conquered. The physicosocial model of Work pertains to the State apparatus, it is one of its inventions, and for two reasons. First, because labor appears only with the constitution of a *surplus*, there is no labor that is not devoted to *stockpiling*; in fact, labor (in the strict sense) begins only with what is called *surplus labor*. Second, labor performs a generalized operation of striation of space-time, a subjection of free action, a nullification of smooth spaces, the origin and means of which is in the essential enterprise of the State, namely, its conquest of the war machine.

Counterdemonstration: where there is no State and no surplus labor, there is no Work-model either. Instead, there is the continuous variation of free action, passing from speech to action, from a given action to another, from action to song, from song to speech, from speech to enterprise, all in a strange chromaticism with intense but rare peak moments or moments of effort that the outside observer can only "translate" in terms of work. It is true that it has been said of blacks through the ages that "they don't work, they don't know what work is." It is true that they were forced to work, and to work more than anyone else, in terms of abstract quantity. It also seems to be true that the Indians had no understanding of, and were

unsuited for, any organization of work, even slavery: the Americans apparently imported so many blacks only because they could not use the Indians, who would rather die. Certain outstanding ethnologists have raised an essential question. They have turned the problem around: so-called primitive societies are not societies of shortage or subsistence due to an absence of work, but on the contrary are societies of free action and smooth space that have no use for a work-factor, anymore than they constitute a stock.<sup>314</sup> They are not societies of sloth, even though their differences with work may be expressed in the form of a "right to laziness." They are not without laws, even though their differences with the law may be expressed in the guise of "anarchy." What they have instead is a law of the *nomos* regulating a continuous variation of activity with a rigor and cruelty all its own (get rid of whatever cannot be transported, the old, children...).

If work constitutes a striated space-time corresponding to the State apparatus, is this not especially true of its archaic or ancient forms? For it is there that surplus labor is isolated, distinguished, in the form of tribute or corvée. Consequently, it is there that the concept of labor appears at its clearest, for example, in the large-scale works of the

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<sup>314</sup> It is a commonplace of missionaries' narratives that there is nothing corresponding to the category of work, even in transhumant agriculture, with its laborious ground-clearing activities. Marshall Sahlins is not content to remark the briefness of the time devoted to the labor necessary for maintenance and reproduction, but goes on to stress qualitative factors: the continuous variation that regulates activity, and the mobility or freeness of movement, which excludes stockpiling and is measured in terms of the "convenience of transporting the object." *La première société d'abondance*, *Les temps modernes*, no. 268 (October 1968), pp. 654-656, 662-663, 672-673.

empires, the urban, agricultural, or hydraulic works by which a "laminar" flow in supposedly parallel layers (striation) is imposed upon the waters. It seems on the contrary that in the capitalist regime, surplus labor becomes less and less distinguishable from labor "strictly speaking," and totally impregnates it. Modern public works have a different status from that of large-scale imperial works. How could one possibly distinguish between the time necessary for reproduction and "extorted" time, when they are no longer separated in time? This remark certainly does not contradict the Marxist theory of surplus value, for Marx shows precisely that surplus value *ceases to be localizable* in the capitalist regime. That is even his fundamental contribution. It gave him a sense that machines would themselves become productive of surplus value and that the circulation of capital would challenge the distinction between variable and constant capital. In these new conditions, it remains true that all labor involves surplus labor; but surplus labor no longer requires labor. Surplus labor, capitalist organization in its entirety, operates less and less by the striation of space-time corresponding to the physicosocial concept of work. Rather, it is as though human alienation through surplus labor were replaced by a generalized "machinic enslavement," such that one may furnish surplus-value without doing any work (children, the retired, the unemployed, television viewers, etc.). Not only does the user as such tend to become an employee, but capitalism operates less on a quantity of labor than by a complex qualitative process bringing into play modes of transportation, urban models, the media, the entertainment industries, ways of perceiving and feeling — every semiotic system. It is as though, at the outcome of the striation that capitalism was able to carry to an unequalled point of perfection, circulating capital

necessarily recreated, reconstituted, a sort of smooth space in which the destiny of human beings is recast. Striation, of course, survives in the most perfect and severest of forms (it is not only vertical but operates in all directions); however, it relates primarily to the state pole of capitalism, in other words, to the role of the modern State apparatuses in the organization of capital. On the other hand, at the complementary and dominant level of *integrated (or rather integrating) world capitalism*, a new smooth space is produced in which capital reaches its "absolute" speed, based on machinic components rather than the human component of labor. The multinationals fabricate a kind of deterritorialized smooth space in which points of occupation as well as poles of exchange become quite independent of the classical paths to striation. What is really new are always the new forms of turnover. The present-day accelerated forms of the circulation of capital are making the distinctions between constant and variable capital, and even fixed and circulating capital, increasingly relative; the essential thing is instead the distinction between *striated capital* and *smooth capital*, and the way in which the former gives rise to the latter through complexes that cut across territories and States, and even the different types of States.

***The Aesthetic Model: Nomad Art.*** Several notions, both practical and theoretical, are suitable for defining nomad art and its successors (barbarian, Gothic, and modern). First, "close-range" vision, as distinguished from long-distance vision; second, "tactile," or rather "haptic" space, as distinguished from optical space. "Haptic" is a better word than "tactile" since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill

this nonoptical function. It was Alois Riegl who, in some marvelous pages, gave fundamental aesthetic status to the couple, *close vision-haptic space*. But for the moment we should set aside the criteria proposed by Riegl (then by Wilhelm Worringer, and more recently by Henri Maldiney), and take some risks ourselves, making free use of these notions.<sup>315</sup> It seems to us that the Smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile). The Striated, on the contrary, relates to a more distant vision, and a more optical space — although the eye in turn is not the only organ to have this capacity. Once again, as always, this analysis must be corrected by a coefficient of transformation according to which passages between the striated and the smooth are at once necessary and uncertain, and all the more disruptive. The law of the painting is that it be done at close range, even if it is viewed from relatively far away. One can back away from a thing, but it is a bad painter who backs away from the painting he or she is working on. Or from the "thing" for that matter: Cézanne spoke of the need to *no longer see* the wheat field, to be too close to it, to lose oneself without landmarks in smooth space. Afterward, striation can emerge: drawing, strata, the earth, "stubborn geometry," the "measure of the world," "geological foundations," "everything falls straight down"... The striated itself may in turn disappear in a

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<sup>315</sup> The principal texts are Alois Riegl, *Die Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna: Staatdruckerei, 1927); Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: International Universities Press, 1963); Henri Maldiney, *Regard, parole, espace* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1973), especially "L'art et le pouvoir du fond," and Maldiney's discussion of Cézanne.

"catastrophe," opening the way for a new smooth space, and another striated space...

A painting is done at close range, even if it is seen from a distance. Similarly, it is said that composers do not hear: they have close-range hearing, whereas listeners hear from a distance. Even writers write with short-term memory, whereas readers are assumed to be endowed with long-term memory. The first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step. Examples are the desert, steppe, ice, and sea, local spaces of pure connection. Contrary to what is sometimes said, one never sees from a distance in a space of this kind, nor does one see it from a distance; one is never "in front of," any more than one is "in" (one is "on"...). Orientations are not constant but change according to temporary vegetation, occupations, and precipitation. There is no visual model for points of reference that would make them interchangeable and unite them in an inertial class assignable to an immobile outside observer. On the contrary, they are tied to any number of observers, who may be qualified as "monads" but are instead *nomads* entertaining tactile relations among themselves. The interlinkages do not imply an ambient space in which the multiplicity would be immersed and which would make distances invariant; rather, they are constituted according to ordered differences that give rise to intrinsic variations in the division of a single distance.<sup>316</sup> These questions of

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<sup>316</sup> All of these points already relate to Riemannian space, with its essential relation to "monads" (as opposed to the unitary Subject of Euclidean space): see Gilles Chatelet, "Sur une petite phrase de Riemann," *Analytiques*, no. 3 (May 1979). Although the "monads" are no longer thought to be closed upon

orientation, location, and linkage enter into play in the most famous works of nomad art: the twisted animals have no land beneath them; the ground constantly changes direction, as in aerial acrobatics; the paws point in the opposite direction from the head, the hind part of the body is turned upside down; the "monadological" points of view can be interlinked only on a nomad space; the whole and the parts give the eye that beholds them a function that is haptic rather than optical. This is an animality that can be seen only by touching it with one's mind, but without the mind becoming a finger, not even by way of the eye. (In a much cruder fashion, the kaleidoscope has exactly the same function: to give the eye a digital function.) Striated space, on the contrary, is defined by the requirements of long-distance vision: constancy of orientation, in variance of distance through an interchange of inertial points of reference, interlinkage by immersion in an ambient milieu, constitution of a central perspective. It is less easy to evaluate the creative potentialities of striated space, and how it can simultaneously emerge from the smooth and give everything a whole new impetus.

The opposition between the striated and the smooth is not simply that of the global and the local. For in one case, the global is still relative, whereas in the other the local is already absolute. Where there is close vision, space is not visual, or rather the eye itself has a haptic, non optical function: no line separates earth from sky, which are of the same substance; there is neither horizon nor background nor perspective nor limit nor outline or

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themselves, and are postulated to entertain direct, step-by-step local relations, the purely monadological point of view proves inadequate and should be superseded by a "nomadology" (the ideality of striated space versus the realism of smooth space).



form nor center; there is no intermediary distance, or all distance is intermediary. Like Eskimo space.<sup>317</sup> In a totally different way, in a totally different context, Arab architecture constitutes a space that begins very near and low, placing the light and the airy below and the solid and heavy above. This reversal of the laws of gravity turns *lack of direction* and negation of volume into constructive forces. There exists a nomadic absolute, as a local integration moving from part to part and constituting smooth space in an infinite succession of linkages and changes in direction. It is an absolute that is one with becoming itself, with process. It is the absolute of passage, which in nomad art merges with its manifestation. Here the absolute is local, precisely because place is not delimited. If we now turn to the striated and optical space of long-distance vision, we see that the relative global that characterizes that space also requires the absolute, but in an entirely different way. The absolute is now the horizon or background, in other words, the Encompassing Element without which nothing would be global or englobed. It is against this background that the relative outline or form appears. The absolute itself can appear in the Encompassed, but only in a privileged place well delimited as a center, which then functions to repel beyond the limits anything that menaces the global integration. We can see clearly here how smooth space subsists, but only to give rise to the striated. The desert, sky, or sea, the Ocean, the Unlimited, first plays the role of an encompassing element, and tends

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<sup>317</sup> See Edmund Carpenter's description in *Eskimo* of ice space, and of the igloo: "There is no middle distance, no perspective, no outline, nothing the eye can cling to except thousands of smokey plumes of snow... a land without bottom or edge... a labyrinth alive with the movements of crowded people. No flat static walls arrest the ear or eye... and the eye can glance through here, past there" (no pagination).

to become a horizon: the earth is thus surrounded, globalized, "grounded" by this element, which holds it in immobile equilibrium and makes Form possible. Then to the extent that the encompassing element itself appears at the center of the earth, it assumes a second role, that of casting into the loathesome deep, the abode of the dead, anything smooth or nonmeasured that may have remained.<sup>318</sup> The striation of the earth implies as its necessary condition this double treatment of the smooth: on the one hand, it is carried or reduced to the absolute state of an encompassing horizon, and on the other it is expelled from the relative encompassed element. Thus the great imperial religions need a smooth space like the desert, but only in order to give it a law that is opposed to the *nomos* in every way, and converts the absolute.

This perhaps explains for us the ambiguity of the excellent analyses by Riegl, Worringer, and Maldiney. They approach haptic space under the imperial conditions of Egyptian art. They define it as the presence of a horizon-background; the reduction of space to the plane (vertical and horizontal, height and width); and the rectilinear outline enclosing individuality and withdrawing it from change. Like the pyramid-form, every side a plane surface, against the background of the immobile desert. On the other hand, they show how in

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<sup>318</sup> These two aspects, the Encompassing Element and the Center, figure in Jean-Pierre Vernant's analysis of space in Anaximander; *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris: Maspero, 1971-1974), vol. I, part 3. From another perspective, the entire history of the desert concerns the possibility of its becoming the encompassing element, and also of being repelled, rejected by the center, as though in an inversion of movement. In a phenomenology of religion like that of Van der Leeuw, the *nomos* itself does indeed appear as the encompassing-limit or ground, and also as that which is repelled, excluded, in a centrifugal movement.

Greek art (then in Byzantine art, and up to the Renaissance), an optical space was differentiated from haptic space, one merging background with form, setting up an interference between the planes, conquering depth, working with cubic or voluminous extension, organizing perspective, and playing on relief and shadow, light and color. Thus at the very beginning they encounter the haptic at a point of mutation, in conditions under which it already serves to striate space. The optical makes that striation tighter and more perfect, or rather tight and perfect in a different way (it is not associated with the same "artistic will"). Everything occurs in a striated space that goes from empires to city-states, or evolved empires. It is not by chance that Riegl tends to eliminate the specific factors of nomad or even barbarian art; or that Worringer, when he introduces the idea of Gothic art in the broadest sense, relates it on the one hand to the Germanic and Celtic migrations of the North, and on the other to the empires of the East. But between the two were the nomads, who are reducible neither to empires they confronted nor the migrations they triggered. The Goths themselves were nomads of the steppe, and with the Sarmatians and Huns were an essential vector of communication between the East and the North, a factor irreducible to either of these two dimensions.<sup>319</sup> On one side, Egypt had its Hyksos, Asia Minor its Hittites, China

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<sup>319</sup> Whatever interactions there may be, the "art of the steppes" had a specificity that was communicated to the migrating Germans; in spite of his many reservations about nomad culture, Rene Grousset makes this point in *The Empire of the Steppes*, trans. Naomi Walford (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970). pp. 11-25. He notes the irreducibility of Scythian art to Assyrian art, Sarmatian art to Persian art, and Hunnic art to Chinese art. He even points out that the art of the steppes influenced more than it borrowed (see in particular the question of Ordos art and its relations to China).

its Turco-Mongols; and on the other, the Hebrews had their Habiru, the Germans, Celts, and Romans their Goths, the Arabs their Bedouins. The nomads have a specificity that is too hastily reduced to its consequences, by including them in the empires or counting them among the migrants, assimilating them to one or the other, denying them their own "will" to art. Again, there is a refusal to accept that the intermediary between the East and the North had its own absolute specificity, that the intermediary, the interval, played exactly this substantial role. Moreover, it does not have that role in the guise of a "will"; it only has a becoming, it invents a "becoming-artist."

When we invoke a primordial duality between the smooth and the striated, it is in order to subordinate the differences between "haptic" and "optic," "close vision" and "distant vision" to this distinction. Hence we will not define the haptic by the immobile background, by the plane and the contour, because these have to do with an already mixed state in which the haptic serves to striate, and uses its smooth components only in order to convert them to another kind of space. The haptic function and close vision presuppose the smooth, which has no background, plane, or contour, but rather changes in direction and local linkages between parts. Conversely, the developed optical function is not content to take striation to a new level of perfection, endowing it with an imaginary universal value and scope; it is also capable of reinstating the smooth, liberating light and modulating color, restoring a kind of aerial haptic space that constitutes the unlimited site of intersection of the planes.

<sup>320</sup> In short, the smooth and the striated must be defined in themselves before the relative distinctions between haptic and optical, near and distant, can be derived.

This is where a third couple enters in: "abstract line-concrete line" (in addition to "haptic-optical," "close-distant"). It is Worringer who accorded fundamental importance to the abstract line, seeing it as the very beginning of art or the first expression of an artistic will. Art as abstract machine. Once again, it will doubtless be our inclination to voice in advance the same objections: for Worringer, the abstract line seems to make its first appearance in the crystalline or geometrical imperial Egyptian form, the most rectilinear of forms possible. It is only afterward that it assumes a particular avatar, constituting the "Gothic or Northern line" understood very broadly.<sup>321</sup> For us, on the other hand, the abstract line is fundamentally "Gothic," or rather, nomadic, not rectilinear. Consequently, we do not understand the aesthetic motivation for the abstract line in the same way, or its identity with the beginning of art. Whereas the rectilinear (or "regularly" rounded) Egyptian line is negatively motivated by anxiety in the face of all that passes, flows, or varies, and erects the constancy and eternity of an In-Itself, the nomad line is abstract in an entirely different sense, precisely because it has a

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<sup>320</sup> On this question of light and color, in particular in Byzantine art, see Henri Maldiney, *Regard, parole, espace*, pp. 203ff., 239ff.

<sup>321</sup> The correlation, "haptic-close-abstract," was already suggested by Riegl. But it was Worringer who developed the theme of the abstract line. Although he conceives of it essentially in its Egyptian form, he describes a second form in which the abstract assumes an intense life and an expressionist value, all the while remaining inorganic: *Abstraction and Empathy*, chapter 5, and especially *Form in Gothic* (London: Putnam's and Sons, 1927), pp. 38-55.

multiple orientation and passes *between* points, figures, and contours: it is positively motivated by the smooth space it draws, not by any striation it might perform to ward off anxiety and subordinate the smooth. The abstract line is the affect of smooth spaces, not a feeling of anxiety that calls forth striation. Furthermore, although it is true that art begins only with the abstract line, the reason is not, as Worringer says, that the rectilinear is the first means of breaking with the nonaesthetic imitation of nature upon which the prehistoric, savage, and childish supposedly depend, lacking, as he thinks they do, a "will to art." On the contrary, if prehistoric art is fully art it is precisely because it manipulates the abstract, though nonrectilinear, line: "Primitive art begins with the abstract, and even the prefigurative. ... Art is abstract from the outset, and at its origin could not have been otherwise."<sup>322</sup> In effect, the line is all the more abstract when writing is absent, either because it has yet to develop or only exists outside or alongside. When writing takes charge of abstraction, as it does in empires, the line, already downgraded, necessarily tends to become concrete, even figurative. Children forget how to draw. But in the absence of writing, or when peoples have no need for a writing system of their own because theirs is borrowed from more or less nearby empires (as was the

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<sup>322</sup> André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964-1965), vol. 1, *Technique et langage*, pp. 263ff.; vol. 2, *La mémoire et les rythmes*, pp. 219ff. ("Rhythmic marks are anterior to explicit figures.") Worringer's position is very ambiguous; thinking that prehistoric art is fundamentally figurative, he excludes it from Art, on the same grounds as he excludes the "scribbles of a child" (*Abstraction and Empathy*, pp. 51-55). Then he advances the hypothesis that the cave dwellers were the "ultimate result" of a series he says began with the abstract (p. 130). But would not such a hypothesis force Worringer to revise his conception of the abstract, and to cease identifying it with Egyptian geometricism?

case for the nomads), the line is necessarily abstract; it is necessarily invested with all the power of abstraction, which finds no other outlet. That is why we believe that the different major types of imperial lines — the Egyptian rectilinear line, the Assyrian (or Greek) organic line, the supraphenomenal, encompassing Chinese line — convert the abstract line, rend it from its smooth space, and accord it concrete values. Still, it can be argued that these imperial lines are contemporaneous with the abstract line; the abstract line is no less at the "beginning," inasmuch as it is a pole always presupposed by any line capable of constituting another pole. The abstract line is at the beginning as much because of its historical abstraction as its prehistoric dating. It is therefore a part of the originality or irreducibility of nomad art, even when there is reciprocal interaction, influence, and confrontation with the imperial lines of sedentary art.

The abstract is not directly opposed to the figurative. The figurative as such is not inherent to any "will to art." In fact, we may oppose a figurative line in art to one that is not. The figurative, or imitation and representation, is a consequence, a result of certain characteristics of the line when it assumes a given form. We must therefore define those characteristics first. Take a system in which transversals are subordinated to diagonals, diagonals to horizontals and verticals, and horizontals and verticals to points (even when there are virtual). A system of this kind, which is rectilinear or unilinear regardless of the number of lines, expresses the formal conditions under which a space is striated and the line describes a contour. Such a line is inherently, formally, representative in itself, even if it does not represent anything. On the other hand, *a line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour*, that no longer goes from one point to another but instead

passes between points, that is always declining from the horizontal and the vertical and deviating from the diagonal, that is constantly changing direction, a mutant line of this kind that is without outside or inside, form or background, beginning or end and that is as alive as a continuous variation — such a line is truly an abstract line, and describes a smooth space. It is not inexpressive. Yet is true that it does not constitute a stable and symmetrical form of expression grounded in a resonance of points and a conjunction of lines. It is nevertheless accompanied by *material traits of expression*, the effects of which multiply step by step. This is what Worringer means when he says that the Gothic line (for us, the nomadic line invested with abstraction) has the power of expression and not ofform, that it has repetition as a power, not symmetry as form. Indeed, it is through symmetry that rectilinear systems limit repetition, preventing infinite progression and maintaining the *organic* domination of a central point with radiating lines, as in reflected or star-shaped figures. It is free action, however, which by its essence unleashes the power of repetition as a *machinic* force that multiplies its effect and pursues an infinite movement. Free action proceeds by disjunction and decentering, or at least by peripheral movement: disjoined polythetism instead of symmetrical antithetism.<sup>323</sup> Traits of expression describing a smooth

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<sup>323</sup> Worringer establishes an opposition between the power of repetition, which is mechanical, multiplying, and without fixed orientation, and the force of symmetry, which is organic, additive, oriented, and centered. He sees this as the fundamental difference between Gothic ornamentation and Greek or classical ornamentation: *Form in Gothic*, pp. 53-55 ("The Ceaseless Melody of the Northern Line"). In a fine book, *Esthétiques d'Orient et d'Occident* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1937), Laura Morgenstern develops a particular example, distinguishing the "symmetrical antithetism" of Sassanid Persian art from the "disjoined antithetism" of the art of the proto-Iranian nomads



space and connecting with a matter-flow thus should not be confused with striae that convert space and make it a form of expression that grids and organizes matter.

Worringer's finest pages are those in which he contrasts the abstract with the organic. The organic does not designate something represented, but above all the form of representation, and even the feeling that unites representation with a subject (*Einfühlung*, "empathy"). "Formal processes occur within the work of art which correspond to the natural organic tendencies in man."<sup>324</sup> But the rectilinear, the geometrical, cannot be opposed to the organic in this sense. The Greek organic line, which subordinates volume and spatiality, takes over from the Egyptian geometrical line, which reduced them to the plane. The organic, with its symmetry and contours inside and outside, still refers to the rectilinear coordinates of a striated space. The organic body is prolonged by straight lines that attach it to what lies in the distance. Hence the primacy of human beings, or of the face: We are this form of expression itself, simultaneously the supreme

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(Sarmatians). Many authors, however, have stressed the centered and symmetrical motifs in barbarian or nomad art. Worringer anticipated this objection: "Instead of the regular and invariably geometrical star or rosette or similar restful forms, in the North we find the revolving wheel, the turbine or the so-called sun wheel, all designs which express violent movement. Moreover, the movement is peripheral and not radial" (*Form in Gothic*, p. 54). The history of technology confirms the importance of the turbine in the life of the nomads. In another, bio-aesthetic, context, Gabriel Tarde opposes repetition as indefinite potential (*puissance*) to symmetry as limitation. With symmetry, life constituted an organism for itself, taking a star-shaped or reflected, infolded form (the radiata and mollusks). It is true that in doing so it unleashed another type of repetition, external reproduction; see *L'opposition universelle* (Paris: Alcan, 1897).

<sup>324</sup> [TRANS: Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p. 33]

organism and the relation of all organisms to metric space in general. The abstract, on the contrary, begins only with what Worringers presents as the "Gothic" avatar. It is this nomadic line that he says is mechanical, but in free action and swirling; it is inorganic, yet alive, and all the more alive for being inorganic. It is distinguished both from the geometrical and the organic. It raises "mechanical" relations to the level of *intuition*. Heads (even a human being's when it is not a face) unravel and coil into ribbons in a continuous process; mouths curl in spirals. Hair, clothes... This streaming, spiraling, zigzagging, snaking, feverish line of variation liberates a power of life that human beings had rectified and organisms had confined, and which matter now expresses as the trait, flow, or impulse traversing it. If everything is alive, it is not because everything is organic or organized but, on the contrary, because the organism is a diversion of life. In short, the life in question is inorganic, germinal, and intensive, a powerful life without organs, a Body that is all the more alive for having no organs, everything that passes *between* organisms ("once the natural barriers of organic movement have been overthrown, there are no more limits").<sup>325</sup> Many authors have wished to establish a kind of duality in nomad art between the ornamental abstract line and animal motifs, or more subtly, between the speed with which the line integrates and carries expressive traits, and the slowness or fixity of the animal matter traversed, between a line of flight without beginning or end and an almost immobile swirling. But in the end everyone agrees that it is a question of a single will, or a single becoming.<sup>326</sup> This is not because the

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<sup>325</sup> [TRANS: Worringers, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p. 42]

<sup>326</sup> On all of these points, see Georges Charriere's very intuitive book, *Scythian Art* (New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1979), which includes a great number of reproductions. It is

abstract engenders organic motifs, by chance or by association. Rather, it is precisely because pure animality is experienced as inorganic, or supraorganic, that it can combine so well with abstraction, and even combine the slowness or heaviness of a matter with the extreme speed of a line that has become entirely spiritual. The slowness belongs to the same world as the extreme speed: relations of speed and slowness between elements, which surpass in every way the movement of an organic form and the determination of organs. The line escapes geometry by a fugitive mobility at the same time as life tears itself free from the organic by a permutating, stationary whirlwind. This vital force specific to the Abstraction is what draws smooth space. The abstract line is the affect of smooth space, just as organic representation was the feeling presiding over striated space. The haptic-optical, near-distant distinctions must be subordinated to the distinction between the abstract line and the organic line; they must find their principle in a general confrontation of spaces. The abstract line cannot be defined as geometrical and rectilinear. What then should be termed *abstract* in modern art? A line of variable direction that describes no contour and delimits no form...<sup>327</sup>

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doubtless Rene Grousset who has most effectively emphasized "slowness" as a dramatic pole of nomad art: *The Empire of the Steppes*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>327</sup> Dora Vallier, in her preface to the French translation of *Abstraction and Empathy* (*Abstraction et Einfühlung* [Paris: Klincksieck, 1978]), is right to note Worringer and Kandinsky's independence from one another, and the differences between the problems they were addressing. However, she maintains that there is still convergence and resonance between them. In a sense, all art is abstract, with the figurative springing from certain types of abstraction. But in another sense, since there are very different types of lines (Egyptian-geometrical, Greek-organic, Gothic-vital, etc.), the question then becomes one of determining which line remains abstract, or realizes abstraction as such. It is doubtful that it is the geometrical line,

Do not multiply models. We are well aware that there are many others: a ludic model, which would compare games according to their type of space and found game theory on different principles (for example, the smooth space of Go versus the striated space of chess); and a noological model concerned not with thought contents (ideology) but with the form, manner or mode, and function of thought, according to the mental space it draws and from the point of view of a general theory of thought, a thinking of thought. And so on. Moreover, there are still other kinds of space that should be taken into account, for example, holey space and the way it communicates with the smooth and the striated in different ways. What interests us in operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces. Even the most striated city gives rise to smooth spaces: to live in the city as a nomad, or as a cave dweller. Movements, speed and slowness, are sometimes enough to reconstruct a smooth space. Of course, smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life

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since it still draws a figure, even though an abstract and nonrepresentative one. Rather, the abstract line is that defined by Michael Fried in relation to certain works by Pollock: multidirectional, with neither inside nor outside, form nor background, delimiting nothing, describing no contour, passing between spots or points, filling a smooth space, stirring up a close-lying haptic visual matter that "both invites the act of seeing on the part of the spectator yet gives his eye nowhere to rest once and for all," (*Three American Painters* [Cambridge, Mass.: Fogg Art Museum, 1965], p. 14). In Kandinsky himself, abstraction is realized not so much by geometrical structures as by lines of march or transit that seem to recall Mongolian nomadic motifs.

reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us.

## **Pre Face: Or, How to Begin at the End**

Amy Ireland

Women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of ruling symbolics. Which doesn't happen without causing some turbulence, we might even say some whirlwinds, that ought to be reconvened within solid walls of principle, to keep them from spreading to infinity.<sup>328</sup>

Distinctions between the main bodies of texts and all their peripheral detail — indices, headings, *prefaces*, dedications, illustrations, references, notes, and diagrams — have long been integral to orthodox conceptions of nonfiction books and articles. Authored, authorised, and authoritative, a piece of writing is its own main-stream. Its asides are backwaters which might have been — and often are — compiled by anonymous editors, *secretaries*, copyists, and clerks, and while they may well be providing crucial support for a text which they also connect to other sources, resources, and leads, they are also sidelined and downplayed.<sup>329</sup>

The repetition of dissymmetry is hidden within symmetrical ensembles or effects; a repetition of

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<sup>328</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is Not One*, 106.

<sup>329</sup> Sadie Plant, *Zeros + Ones* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 9.  
Italics added.

distinctive points underneath that of ordinary points; and everywhere the Other in the repetition of the Same. *This is the secret*, the most profound repetition: it alone provides the principle of the other one, the reason for the blockage of concepts. In this domain, as in *Sartor Resartus*, it is the masked, the disguised or the costumed which turns out to be the truth of the uncovered. Necessarily, since this repetition is not hidden by something else but forms itself by disguising itself; it does not pre-exist its own disguises and, in forming itself, constitutes the bare repetition within which it becomes enveloped.<sup>330</sup>

In *Zeros + Ones*, perhaps the definitive text of cyberfeminism (distinct, and far more sprawling in its implications, largely untapped, from Donna Haraway's infamous *Cyborg Manifesto*) Sadie Plant sets a nonlinear re-writing of the material history of feminism, industrialisation, biology, evolutionary theory, robotics, and computer science in motion via an examination of the role played by Ada Lovelace in the design and development of Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine — a history that arrived in the form of one of the most genuinely prodigious and influential footnotes in European history. Although Babbage was to take full credit for the invention at the time, Plant focuses on the occulted history of correspondence, conversation and reciprocal apprenticeship that defined Babbage and Lovelace's working relationship in order to reveal the full extent of Lovelace's influence on the new technology,

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<sup>330</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 24. Italics added.

which in the retrospective account of history, has long since eclipsed that of Babbage. The Analytical Engine, whose development began in 1833, marks the design of the first general purpose computer that could be described, before the term itself was invented, as ‘Turing complete’ — integrating memory, an arithmetic logic unit, and control flow in the form of conditional branching and loops — effectively pre-empting the actual construction and implementation of the first general purpose computer in 1940 by just over a century.<sup>331</sup> As well as aiding Babbage in discussions developing the mathematical principles behind, and the hardware for, the Analytical Engine, it was Lovelace’s unsolicited translation of a paper by the Italian engineer, Louis Menebrea, along with footnotes and a commentary that far outstripped the contents of the paper itself, which left the world with what has been acknowledged as one of the first working computer programs. In her footnotes, Lovelace stresses the potential of the Analytical Engine not to merely ‘synthesise the data provided by its operator’ but to incarnate a ‘science of operations’, whose ultimate consequence would entail ‘no finite [line] of demarcation which limits the powers or the applications of the Analytical Engine.’<sup>332</sup>

The development of Europe’s first algorithm (with precedents in Leibniz and Pascal’s counting machines, the former taking its inspiration from a misinterpretation of

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<sup>331</sup> In computability theory, a system of data-manipulation rules (such as a computer’s instruction set, a programming language, or a cellular automaton) is said to be Turing complete or computationally universal if it can be used to simulate any Turing machine (conditional branching and arbitrary [unlimited] memory).

<sup>332</sup> Ada Lovelace, quoted in Sadie Plant, ‘The Future Looms’, *Clicking In*, 126.



the I-Ching) was entangled with the introduction of the Jacquard loom into England's textile manufacturing industry — one of the first examples of automated industrial production — and was seen by Lovelace as a form of weaving. It was, she wrote, 'the introduction of the principle which Jacquard devised for regulating, by means of punched cards, the most complicated patterns in the fabrication of brocaded stuffs,' which, 'rendered it possible to endow mechanism with such extensive faculties as bid fair to make this engine the executive right hand of algebra [...] We may say most aptly, that the Analytical Engine *weaves* Algebraical patterns, just as the Jacquard loom weaves flowers and leaves.'<sup>333</sup> Thus, Plant concludes, a continuing process of 'abstract weaving' knits women, computation, and the dawn of technological industrialisation together, at the same time as it dehumanises, anonymises, and relegates them to the position of a footnote in the linear, progressive history of technological development.<sup>334</sup> Despite her marginalised position in this history, Plant situates Lovelace as a prophetess of the complex cybernetic processes responsible for the automation of daily life that we are all too familiar with today, for, understood as an index of a relation to temporality that is imperceptible to what Plant terms 'the Read Only Memory history' of Man, 'abstract weaving' has everything to do with prophecy.

Gifted with a mathematical competence unusual among the educated men of her time, let alone the largely uneducated female population, such a path in life not being open to them, Ada Lovelace considered herself a seer: 'I am a prophetess, born into this world,' she would

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<sup>333</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 18; Plant 'The Future Looms', 126.

<sup>334</sup> Sadie Plant, 'The Future Looms', *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*, 46.

write in her diary, and, paraphrasing Soren Kierkegaard, 'this conviction fills me with humility, with fear and trembling!'<sup>335</sup> As in a woven image or pattern, the course taken from discrete threads to the emergence of a represented, recognisable object or product, is a nonlinear one. Once enough threads have been put into place, a motif emerges, but it is always in terms of a retrochronic legibility, premised on a process that is necessarily primary: the construction of the hardware and the programming of the software that execute the patterns of intrication presiding over the warp and weft of the threads which form the image. The lesson — one which would fascinate Plant — that can be taken from this is that recognition and conceptual identification are always secondary. In this sense, the primary process of weaving is a future embedded in the present's past. The moment of identification and appearance always arrives behind the functioning of the process which assembles it as its object — whether this is an industrial product, a historical phenomenon, or indeed, a self. Ada Lovelace's writings testify to an intuitive apprehension of this fundamental delay, rebuffed from admission into the Royal Society of London (an organisation dedicated to the pursuit and philosophy of the natural sciences) because of her sex, but convinced that her pioneering work would one day be understood for what it was, she did not even bother to append her name to the Menebrea footnotes, confiding to Babbage, 'I do not wish to *proclaim* who has written it.'<sup>336</sup> In both the conscious maintenance of her anonymity and her contribution to the technologisation of the processes of production that would link computation and weaving together, Ada Lovelace conspired with the

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<sup>335</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 20.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 256; 8.

primary process immanent to all representation, invisible, patient and quietly anticipating the long term effects of her work, lagging far behind their imperceptible, inevitable cause.

In her consistent, materialist feminist onslaught against the ravages of identity and its oppression of female voices and practices, Plant draws heavily on the work of the French post-structuralist thinker, Luce Irigaray, who excoriated the capture of material processes by the patriarchal pursuit, especially in Western philosophy, of representation, ideality, essence and identity as forms of control. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Irigaray's work, given the topic of our panel today, is her examination of language — not just her native French, but language in general, as a logic embedded in thought itself, that relies on the generation of a form of conceptuality premised on the priority of sameness over difference, and which positions itself unjustly as universal for the definition of the human. For too long, she argues, 'Man' — the rational animal, distinguished from the rest of the animal world by his ability to speak and cognise, or re-cognise, and by his mental purity — 'has always represented the only possible subject of discourse'.<sup>337</sup> To use language, one necessarily has to become human, and to be human is to be a man. Furthermore, and even more insidiously, the rules that legislate over entry into the domain of discourse and rational thought remain fully occulted within language, which must suppress their intelligibility in order to retain control over the unstable and unpredictable realm of complex materiality that

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<sup>337</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'The Language of Man', trans. Erin G. Carlson, *Cultural Critique*, No. 13, The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division, (Autumn, 1989), 191.

indeed supplies their premise. 'If the relation of the subject speaking to nature,' she writes,

to the given or fabricated object, to God the creator, to other intraworldly existence, has been questioned in the different epochs of history, it has never seemed, still does not seem, necessary to call into question this a priori: that this is, still and always, a matter of a universe or world of man. A perpetually unrecognised law prescribes all realisations of language(s), all production of discourse, all constitution of language, according to the necessities of one perspective, one point of view, one economy: the necessities of man, supposed to represent the human race.<sup>338</sup>

In order to speak, to write, or to code, one must submit to a certain form of blindness which is equated with an economy of visibility, legibility and representation. What one is blind to in using language, which forms the basis of our navigation through the world, its narratives and its histories, is the roiling, seething substructure of individuation, which has its birth in a nonlinear and complex materiality that begins from difference in itself, and not from the stabilised circuits of a covertly universalised same. It is important to point out that what Irigaray terms the 'language of Man' is a discourse structured along the lines of sexual dimorphism (vigorously expounded by Sigmund Freud and the proponents of psychoanalysis after him) in which women's bodies, bereft of visibly obvious genitalia, are defined — through this universal form of visibility premised on blindness — by the lack of a phallus: having

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<sup>338</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'The Language of Man', 191-192

only a 'hole', a 'nothing to be seen', 'a *nothing* — that is a nothing-the-same, identical, identifiable ... a fault, a flaw, a lack, an absence, outside the system of representations and auto-representations', while men's bodies give everything to visibility, the condition of being One arranged around the biological fact of having 'one'.<sup>339</sup> Sight and visibility function via the insertion and maintenance of a distance between the observer and what is being observed. Vision inaugurates the user-tool relationship (which always distinguishes the user from the tool via a power differential) and it allows one to control, comment and exert influence over the surveilled or instrumentalised object or subject without ever having to be entangled with it. As cultural critic Mark Fisher has written, 'Men experience themselves not as imbricated in language or technology, but as their users. In fact, and this point is crucial, the assumption of a transcendent, Promethean position in relation to language and technology is what it is to be a man.'<sup>340</sup>

The self-reflexive loop of recognition which founds the individuation, within language, of the 'one', separates man from his material conditions of emergence. According to Irigaray, this case is different for women in a realm of identity hitched to sexual difference, for 'women don't have to distinguish themselves, *like* man, from the nature-mother that produced them,' they are continuous with the matrix (as 'nature-mother', matrix originally denoting 'womb', 'mother', 'source' or 'origin', in Latin, and later in the 16th century 'place or medium where

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<sup>339</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 35; Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 47; 50.

<sup>340</sup> Mark Fisher, 'Continuous Contact', *k-punk blog*, <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/004826.html>, 2005.

something is developed' before taking on the more recent denotation of cyberspace or the internet), 'they can remain attached to her, indeed identify themselves with her, without losing their sexual identity.'<sup>341</sup> Irigaray believes that this opens up an alternative mode of language and interactive praxis for women — one not confined to and administered by the masculine logic of separation, critical visual distance, and impossible return. This will take the form of a 'language' of touch, of tactile, haptic interrelation, that operates beneath and in opposition to the visual empire of man. Women for Irigaray, bear an unmediated relation to heterogeneous, proliferating matter in such a way that they are always 'at least two', 'without any opposition between those two, without reduction of the other to the one, and without any possible appropriation into a logic of the One. Always at least two,' she writes, 'which never boil down to a binary alternative: the logic of distancing and the mastery of the other'.<sup>342</sup> Women thus speak with a double voice, with a forked tongue, as it were, '*many* at a time, without the many being reducible to the multiple of one'.<sup>343</sup> Matter here — submitted to a cybernetics of being that does not impose a binary on nature and culture, authenticity and artificiality, the human and the nonhuman (whether machine or animal) — is not simply some vision of a wild untamed natural world (as it appears in much second wave feminism). It is the matrix of reality production itself.

Plant aligns these two perspectives with the zeros and ones of machine code. From inside the circuit of identification, they appear as a binary:

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<sup>341</sup> Irigaray, 'The Language of Man', 194.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

The zeros and ones of machine code seem to offer themselves as perfect symbols of the orders of Western reality, the ancient logical codes which make the difference between on and off, right and left, light and dark, form and matter, mind and body, white and black, good and evil, right and wrong, life and death, something and nothing, this and that, here and there, inside and out, active and passive, true and false, yes and no, sanity and madness, health and sickness, up and down, sense and nonsense, west and east, north and south ... man and woman, male and female, masculine and feminine: one and zero ... 1 the definite, upright line; and 0, the diagram of nothing at all.<sup>344</sup>

The binary, as a form of thought, is founded on the laws of identity, noncontradiction, and the law of the excluded middle, that ground Western philosophical thought since Aristotle, so that inside this schema zero cannot be anything other than the negation of the one. One requires zero on which to premise its identity as an individuated, separated thing, and in so doing, subsumes zero as nothing but the 'other' of its identity: 'all these pairs are two of a kind, and the kind is always a kind of one', writes Plant, '1 and 0 make another 1. Male and female add up to man. There is no female equivalent.'<sup>345</sup> From underneath or outside the circuit, however, in the position of what Irigaray proposes as an alternative language 'without a limit prescribed by the domination of the one — the One — over the other', based on an alternative economy of material flows, binary divisions dissolve into a process of

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<sup>344</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 35.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

constant assemblage and becoming, and zero is not an absence or a lack — the negative other of the one — but the primary term in a unilateral, invisible, positive productive process from which all identities, male, female and whatever else you like, emerge.<sup>346</sup> From the side of zero, one is always in the process of becoming something other: man can become woman, human can become animal, culture can become nature, and the nonhuman can become human.

The language-logic of the matrix, as opposed to the language-logic of Man, then, would be one that shirks the laws of identity, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle that necessitates the disjunctive syllogism of either A or B (but not both at the same time): a language of paradox. In short a nonlinear logic whose medium is time, and in which space is subordinate to time rather than time being subordinate to homogenous geometricisation and an attendant metrics of regulation, suppression, identification and control: an intensive spatiality, always responding to the fluctuations of zero. A ‘contra-diction [or counter speech],’ writes Irigaray, ‘that demonstrates to man that his discourse, his language, are the universe and the techniques of *man*, marked by the imperatives particular to *his* sex — an intolerable interpretation, which brings about the downfall of his claim to the absolute.’<sup>347</sup> For, ‘what if, dichotomous oppositions didn’t make sense [for women] as they did for men,’ Irigaray asks? ‘What if women didn’t constitute themselves in the mode of the *one* (consistent, substantial, subsisting, permanent) and its propping up of the contradictions that are at once active and occulted

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<sup>346</sup> Irigaray, ‘The Language of Man’, 198.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.



in a self-encircling hierarchy?’<sup>348</sup> To Irigaray’s question ‘How do we speak the other without subordinating it to the one?’, Plant responds that the other is always already speaking through us, if only we knew how to take off our masks — its mask — and see it for what it really is.<sup>349</sup>

Thus a kind of parallax or chiasmic vision is involved. On the one hand, within the structure of discourse, as man, one only sees by not-seeing the process through which the conditions of thought, speech and what we understand as personal identity, have been brought about. On the other, from the perspective of the process of individuation itself, prior to identity, representation, and the admission into language that this form of thought brings about, one sees the process — touches it, is immanent to it — but is not, following the occulted laws of the ‘language of Man’, able to speak other than by producing new, hybrid, cyborg individuations. What arises out of the process is therefore only visible after the fact, but one is always in touch with it. Just as Ada Lovelace’s interventions into the world of computer science and automated industrialisation would only become truly legible years after they were first put in motion, to ‘see’ from the former position, inside discourse, history, representation and language, is to look back across a temporal lag: to *begin at the end*. In this way the beginning is only visible — for those with a mask or a face, for those who allowed to speak — in the form of an ending.

Not only in *Zeros + Ones*, but across all of her writing, Plant emphasises the connection between material, auto-catalytic, self-organising, positive feedback process

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<sup>348</sup> Irigaray, ‘The Language of Man’, 197.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

and the coding of the female sex by history, psychoanalysis, biology, genetics, economics and the emergent field of computer science. These process are consistently, and across disciplines, taxonomised as pathological, unhealthy, hysterical, monstrous and 'deranged' in relation to their stable, 'normal', homeostatic counterparts, correlatively codified as masculine (following the logic of the binary), and which she aligns with notions of originality, authenticity, integral selfhood, reason and, of course, visibility.<sup>350</sup> Othered in advance, it is this corrupt, feminised, systematicity that patriarchal systems of control and identification are premised on, and yet, is always repressed and subordinated in its role as facilitator, lubricant, or medium for the masculine sociality and parameters of exchange that rely on woman and machines for their 'infrastructure': 'The use, consumption, and circulation of their sexualised bodies underwrite the organisation and the reproduction of the social order, in which they have never taken part as "subjects"'.<sup>351</sup> Woman and machines, Plant argues, have historically shared the position of the intermediary, man's 'go-betweens', the 'anonymous editors, secretaries, copyists, and clerks', those who 'took his messages, decrypted his codes, counted his numbers, bore his children, and passed on his genetic code. They have worked as his bookkeepers and his memory banks, zones of deposit and withdrawal, promissory notes, credit and exchange, not merely servicing the social world, but underwriting reality itself. Goods and chattels. The property of man.'<sup>352</sup> Lovelace too, for all her brilliance,

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<sup>350</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 20.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 36; 9. See also, Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 304. 'To be feminised means to be made extremely vulnerable';

was deemed by contemporary medicine to be a victim of hysteria, a so-called nervous disorder affecting only women, and apparently due to perambulations of the womb or matrix, leading to an inability to concentrate and a lack of constancy. Despite the obsolescence of this theory, women today are still all too often reprimanded for their propensity for 'hysterical' behaviour. Lovelace, herself, simply put it down to 'too much Mathematics'.<sup>353</sup>

What does it mean, then, to steal or wind into language or thought sideways — para-logically, as it were — not to place oneself in the position of an expert or an authority, but to enter, via the pathologised margin, the material process itself, as the stealthy bearer of a secret or a prophecy? To emerge from below and occupy, in advance, the function of teleological terminus proposed by progressive, linear temporalities of 'Western' self-determination (the domination of culture over nature) spanning origin and apocalypse (or salvation) via 'a progressive appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity', what Donna Haraway calls an 'oral symbiotic utopia or post-oedipal apocalypse', the nominal endpoint of patriarchal systems of temporal and integrative administration?<sup>354</sup> If the figure of the cyborg, following Haraway, is 'the awful apocalyptic telos of the "West's" escalating dominions of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man

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able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day; leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex.'

<sup>353</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 32.

<sup>354</sup> Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', *The Cybercultures Reader*, eds. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), 292.

in space', an illusory escape from the generative materiality from which he has arisen — it is only so via cunning simulation.<sup>355</sup> As a refusal of the language of man, derived from and subtended by the substrate of sexual difference, 'the cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics' — a politics, therefore of resistance to some fundamental opposition between fact and fiction, of logic *tout court*, in short, a simulation ('the cyborg simulates politics').<sup>356</sup> Apocalypse or salvation only appear as legitimate end points to a subjectivity premised on integral stasis and an inherently binarising logic that is dialectally subsumed into a temporal linearity produced via a double reference to an inaccessible origin and a fear of death (united in the word 'matrix'), both of which must be appropriated, mastered and overcome. Rather than cleaving to a constitutive opposition, for example, between 'myth and tool, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies', Harway's cyborg politics maintains that 'myth and tool mutually constitute each other.'<sup>357</sup> To usurp the position of authority and channel — through obfuscation, anonymity, intelligence and cunning, the weaving of a coded message or a riddle — the course of history, via the technology of prophecy is also, in its disturbance of telos, a practice of weaving time.

'Women have always spun, carded and weaved, albeit anonymously. Without name. In perpetuity. Everywhere yet nowhere,' writes Plant.<sup>358</sup> To prophesise is to complicate, pleat, loop or fold time. One is said to 'weave'

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<sup>355</sup> Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', 292.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 292; 302.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>358</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 190.

a spell or a charm, knotting a virtual future into the obscure unfolding of the present. There is a connection, emphasised by Plant, between weaving, magic, prophecy and secrecy, who notes (quoting Mircea Eliade's *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*) that, 'The moon "spins" Time and weaves human lives. The Goddesses of Destiny are spinners.'<sup>359</sup> When Eliade looks at the traditional tribal 'seclusion of pubescent girls and menstruating women, often the occasion for the spinning of both actual and fictional yarns,' she continues, 'he detects "an occult connection between the conception of the periodical creations of the world ... and the ideas of Time and Destiny, on the one hand, and on the other, nocturnal work, women's work, which has to be performed far from the light of the sun and almost in secret'.<sup>360</sup> To this she connects historical accounts of the witch trials, whose only documentary evidence is attributed to the male voices of the legislators and the witch hunters of the time, the actual practices of the male and female witches themselves forever lost to intelligible record and therefore existing only in the negative of their authoritative imprints: 'The voices of the accused reach us strangled, altered, distorted; in many cases, they haven't reached us at all', adds Carlo Ginzberg, in his sprawling transcultural survey of ancient magical practices. 'What "really happened",' remarks Plant, poignantly, 'has left the scene.'<sup>361</sup> 'What happened' is the question that arises in the wake of a secret, which, like the witches, prophetesses, cyborgs and monsters of Read Only Memory history, leaves no trace of its strange workings, only an apparent question, which can never be sufficiently answered. Its mark is best evidenced,

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<sup>359</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 69.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

perhaps, only by the hybrid monstrosities and cyborg bodies it leaves in its wake.

Lovelace, Plant points out, did everything backwards, ‘starting at the end, and then engaging in a process which simultaneously assembles and dismantles the route back to the start, the end, the future, the past’, in the manner of contemporary hackers who reverse engineer a system in order to discover its weaknesses and determine a way in.<sup>362</sup> Such perversions of temporality cannot be understood simply as constituting a discovery or an invention, added to the long file of human technological advances, but rather as the implementation via recursion, like Lovelace’s science of operations, of “the invention of invention” itself.<sup>363</sup> In this way, the prophetess can be said to be in possession of a retrochronic or ‘second sight’.

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No straightforward account can ever hope to deal with the tactical advances gained by such disorderings of linear time. The names and dates and great achievements of the Read Only Memory called history may enjoy their fifteen kilobytes of digital fame ... but what announce themselves to be founding fathers, points of origin, and defining moments only ever serve as distractions from the ongoing processes, the shifting differences that count. These are subtle and fine grained, often incognito, undercover, in disguise as mere and minor details. If, that is, they show themselves at all.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 26.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 26-7.

As the link between the ancient, feminised labour of weaving and the dawn of accelerating computation technologies, Ada Lovelace is a cyborg, and a prophet. She is in good company. Among such figures always, significantly, feminised, un-gendered or cross-gendered, are the many, mad monstrosities of mythology and cultural history. These pathologised and frightful seers arrive consistently from outside and approach Read Only Memory history simultaneously from what it understands as a before and an after, the past and the future, always and at once infiltrating from beneath and from afar, like the Sphinx, Tiresias, or the Eumenides that haunt the narrative of Sophocles' Oedipus plays. The sphinx is a cyborg or a hybrid — part woman, part eagle, part lion — who dispatches a prophecy concealed in a riddle (What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?) to which Oedipus, thinking he has solved it, responds with the answer 'Man'; Tiresias, a transgendered prophet, figured in T.S. Eliot's indictment of a tragic modernity, *The Waste Land* as 'blind / throbbing between two lives / Old man with wrinkled female breasts' is, according to a footnote, the poem's 'most important personage' who 'perceives the substance of the poem' (and whose role in the text emerges, interestingly, in relation to the scene concerning two feminised labourers: the secretary and the clerk), and delivers to Oedipus, in *Oedipus Rex*, the terrible prophecy of patricide and incest that, precisely in trying to avoid, Oedipus unwittingly fulfils; the Eumenides, Erinyes or Fates, 'daughters of the earth, of the dark!' preside over Oedipus' death or disappearance in the enigmatic final scene of *Oedipus at Colonus* in which, fated to expire in the Eumenides' sacred grove, Oedipus vanishes, with only the King of Athens and a confused messenger looking on, the latter proclaiming as he returns from the mysterious

site, 'Oedipus is dead! But no short speech could explain what happened', an utterance reprised moments later in the question of the Chorus, 'What? What has happened?'<sup>366</sup> The Fates are traditionally goddesses of time and, infamously, weavers. Like Ariadne who is connected with both the weaving and unweaving of the Athenian labyrinth, particularly enigmatically in Nietzsche, as Deleuze points out in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, claiming that, 'Ariadne is Nietzsche's first secret', the double of Dionysus, who recursively completes nihilism in affirming the Dionysian affirmation.<sup>367</sup> The etymology of

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<sup>366</sup> Cccu take the Sphinx's riddle to be a prophecy: 'Horror does not confuse the riddle with the secret (it is the answer that is Cryptic). If 423 is Man, then what is 423? This Thing with only a number? The unknown becoming? The horror of the riddle lies in what it tells.' Cccu, 'Flatlines', in *Writings 1997-2003*, (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2017), 115; T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 53; Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38; 97.

<sup>367</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 18. 'Dionysus is the affirmation of Being, but Ariadne is the affirmation of affirmation, the second affirmation or the becoming-active.'; 'Dionysus is pure affirmation; Ariadne is the Anima, affirmation divided in two, the "yes" that responds to "yes." But, divided in two [*dédoublée*], affirmation returns to Dionysus as the affirmation that redoubles [*redoublée*]. It is in this sense that the eternal return is the product of the union of Dionysus and Ariadne. ... As long as Dionysus is alone, he still fears the thought of the Eternal Return, because he is afraid that it brings back reactive forces, the enterprise of denying life, the little man (whether higher or sublime). But when Dionysian affirmation finds its full development in Ariadne, Dionysus in turn learns something new: that the thought of the Eternal Return is consoling, and at the same time, that the Eternal Return itself is selective. The Eternal Return does not occur without a transmutation. The Eternal Return, as the being of becoming, is the product of a double affirmation that only makes what affirms itself return, and only makes what is active become.'; 'Neither reactive forces nor the will to deny will return: they are eliminated



'Sphinx' in ancient Greek derives from the verb σφιγγω (*sphingō*), meaning 'to squeeze' or 'tighten up' (Plant: '[K]nitting is a matter of making loops. At its simplest, it is done with a single, continuous thread, which loops around and intricates itself').<sup>368</sup> The concept corresponding to fate in Anglo-Saxon culture is 'wyrd' (Shakespeare renders the Greek Fates as the — again, transgendered — 'Wyrd Sisters' of *Macbeth*), its Norse cognate is Urðr, connected to the Norns, or weaving female deities who control the destinies of men, and both words are derived from the root *wert*, 'to turn', 'spin' or 'to wind'.

What is it about the fearful link between women, weaving, and temporal power that transforms them into such sick and monstrous creatures in the collective imagination?<sup>369</sup> Is it the fact that they are always double, or 'at least two', speaking the language Irigaray attributes to women, and thereby intractable to the rules of identity? Or that they index — for the identity that comes to reflect upon them

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by the transmutation, by the Eternal Return as selection. ... It is in this affirmation of affirmation that "nihilism defeats itself".' Gilles Deleuze, 'The Mystery of Ariadne according to Nietzsche', *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1998), 103; 105; 102.

<sup>368</sup> Sadie Plant, 'Mobile Knitting', *Information is Alive* (V2\_NAI Publication: <http://v2.nl/publishing/information-is-alive>, 2003), 30.

<sup>369</sup> Although, Greek mythology is privileged here due to its telling relationship to psychoanalysis and Western humanist conceptions of time, this trope appears across cultural mythologies far more generally, the Hindu Kali, the Scandanavian Norns and the Teotihuacan Spider Goddess, the Egyptian Neith are just some examples. As Robert Graves recounts in *The White Goddess*, 'Sphinx means "throttler" and in Etruscan ceramic art she is usually portrayed as seizing men, or standing on their prostate figures...'. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), 408.

— a primary alienation, from the matrix, matter or ‘mother’ that begets it? Representation is always in the thrall of something monstrous it cannot perceive. For Oedipus, for Babbage and his colleagues, for those who speak the language of man, the unrepresentable arrives first, but also last. These threshold beings of the future and the past, presiding over the fragile threads integrating life and death inhabit both edges of time and enfold everything within their trap, secreted in the present. They are at once the secret ‘origin’ of an obscure — because nonlinear — production, and the prophetesses of the ‘end’. ‘There are only two answers to the question “which comes first” and both of them are female,’ writes Plant, ‘the male element is simply an offshoot from a female loop.’<sup>370</sup> *Zeros + Ones* itself closes with the casting of a prophecy. Plant writes of the processes she has been describing that they are ‘a code for the numbers to come’.

<sup>371</sup>

### **Non-identity and ‘Speaking as No One in Particular’**

The imperceptible, or what Francois J. Bonnet calls ‘the infra-world’, is a material substratum that lies at once beneath the realm of human capacities for sensation, and what precedes recognition, representation and conceptual identity — whilst being necessary for the eventual production of the latter. Legible experience distributes and administers the emissions of the imperceptible and automatically entangles it, simple by means of rendering

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<sup>370</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 231.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

it visible, in complex modalities of power subject to utility, knowability, and exchange:

Once clarified and represented, the sensible is destined to become an instrument of knowledge, falling under a reic, thinglike logic, a logic of use which it will now serve. [...] Such a distribution, or rather such an *enterprise* of the distribution of the sensible, through its placing in common (community being both condition and finality of the distribution) supposes strategies and structures of power designed to operate it. In this way a whole administration of the sensible is established, one whose objective is indeed distribution, the arbitrage between those who have ‘the ability to see and the talent to speak’ and those who do not. Thus the administration of the sensible has an authoritarian function in so far as, through this distribution, it grants or creates authority. The one who has authority, he who *makes* authority, is exactly the one who the community grants the qualification to speak, in virtue of a certain ability to see.<sup>372</sup>

The administration of the sensible, always already operative in human experience and sutured to authoritative structures of identity and identification, is heightened by the digital epoch, which proliferates and overlays forms of sensible and informatic mediation, multiplying the control structures of identification and administration in turn. Bonnet is nevertheless careful, given the premises of individuation that support his

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<sup>372</sup> Francois J. Bonnet, *The Infra-World*, trans. A. Ireland and R. Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2017), 6.

theorisation of the infra-world, not to limit notions of technical mediation to the digital, citing any historical arrangements of space, time, connection, direction and filtering — from the acoustics of sacred sites to the layout of public gardens — as forms of administration.<sup>373</sup> ‘In each potential action made possible by the moment of mediatisation (parasitism, anamorphosis, editing, reframing, perturbation of a signal, filtering),’ he writes, ‘we are presented with the possibility of a moment of reformatting that is a potential obstacle to the *becoming* of the sensible. Thus, this moment of the forming of the sensible is always shadowed by the expression of some power or other.’<sup>374</sup> Like Plant’s material-feminine cybernetics of individuation-without-identity, Bonnet’s infra-world, despite its refusal of perceptibility, representation and management, is not a negation or an absence. It is rather a primary positivity native to matter itself and flat with the process of weaving that organisation (spatio-temporal, individual, linguistic, conceptual) reflects back on when it re-cognises an event, a thing, an utterance, or a thought. It reveals itself by means of monstrous avatars, ‘by our uncertainty when confronted with borderline-forms’.<sup>375</sup> From the perspective of legible experience ‘there is always a remainder, a surplus that runs through us and insinuates

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<sup>373</sup> ‘Moreover, we should not understand mediatisation only in terms of its contemporary technological determinations. It has in all times been subject to attention and shaping, from the acoustics of sacred sites to gardens in the French style. The modulations of the spaces and times of the presentation of the sensible (the ordered given-to-be-seen of the garden, the given-to-be-heard of prayers magnified by reverberation) are thus above all, once again, auxiliaries of the manipulation of the sensible, determined as instruments for its control.’ Francois J. Bonnet, *The Infra-World*, 21-22.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 79.

itself into our relation with the world, without ever submitting itself to identification, without ever taking on sufficient form to be named'.<sup>376</sup>

In the eighth plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, dated for the publication of J. Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Les Diaboliques*, Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between the novella as a literary form, and the tale. In their schema, the novella is organised around the question 'What happened?' while a tale poses the question 'What will happen?'<sup>377</sup> Two different temporalities are invoked: in the former one begins at the end of the story, after everything has already happened — confronted with the scene of the crime, with its postures and its clues — and navigates backwards through time to reconstruct the sequence of events that have lead to the fatal moment, while the latter moves sequentially forward through time, from present to future, narrating events as they occur. 'What happened?' is therefore the question correlated with a retrochronic order or directionality, doubled by an invisible primary temporality from which a central enigma has been assembled. Deleuze and Guattari will, naturally, go on to complicate this dyad, declaring that the 'past' indicated by the intimation that 'something happened', and the future indicated by the knowledge that 'something will happen' can be so immediate in their proximity to one another that they function as a single complex.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Francois J. Bonnet, *The Infra-World*, 79.

<sup>377</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi, (Continuum: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 212-213.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

It is the non-knowledge of the past, and the knowledge of the imminent and unstoppable future that constitute the suspense germane to both forms: prophecy and fate. The tale is organised around a discovery, the past and present are pulled towards a future; the novella is organised around a secret, in such a way that the future and present are already past. Something has already happened, even if it has not yet occurred. Between the two (the form of the novel, they tentatively suggest) a circuit of temporalities is drawn in, folded, 'plexed' or woven around itself — yet it is not a simply question of two possibilities and two terms: 'the secret and disclosure, the secret and desecration', it is, finally, a question of expression, with secrecy — grasped as an infinite, productive process — as its substrate of generative potentiality. A secret hides 'the infinite form of secrecy' in a finite content, 'it imposes itself and spreads', it 'influences' and 'oozes'.<sup>379</sup> It thus has no origin, for it is perpetual and always in production, invisible as the site of production and registered in legible experience as *secret*. The form of the secret hides in its content, but content is a dissimulation, a feint. Whatever its conceptual disguise, 'something must ooze from the box'.<sup>380</sup> The secret, in-itself, 'attains absolute imperceptibility'. And concomitantly, when the question "What happened?" attains this infinite virile form, the answer is necessarily that nothing happened, and *both form and content* are destroyed. The news travels fast that the secret of men is nothing, in truth nothing at all. [...] It is enough to make women, children, lunatics and molecules laugh. [...] It really wasn't much, as Jocasta says' to Oedipus.<sup>381</sup> The laughter of those who are already part of the line of becoming — women, children, lunatics,

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<sup>379</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 316-318.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

molecules — is directed at man, who, lodged in the stasis of unified identity, perceives only nothing ... ‘a hole’, the ‘nothing to be seen’ that Freud attributes to women.<sup>382</sup> For man, nothing is a negation of his empire, yet in its perception as imperceptible — like Bonnet’s infra-world — ‘[t]he secret does not as a result disappear, but it does take on a more feminine status’.<sup>383</sup> For,

women do not handle the secret at all in the same way as men [...] Men alternatively fault them for their indiscretion, their gossiping, and for their solidarity, their betrayal. Yet it is curious how a woman can be secretive while at the same time hiding nothing, by virtue of transparency, innocence and speed. [Women] have no secret because they have become a secret themselves ... this is where the secret reaches its ultimate state: its content is molecularised, it has become molecular, at the same time as its form has been dismantled, becoming a pure moving line.<sup>384</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari thus relate this final secrecy to becoming-woman, to the ‘pure feminine line’. It is the prophecy of the Sphinx which sets Oedipus’s trajectory along the line of becoming brought to light as the imperceptible element of the question ‘What happened?’: ‘Oedipus passes through all three secrets: the secret of the sphinx whose box he penetrates; the secret that weights upon him as the infinite form of his own guilt; and finally, the secret at Colonus that makes him inaccessible and melds with the pure line of his flight and exile, he who has

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<sup>382</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 24; 25.

<sup>383</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 319.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

nothing left to hide, or, like an old Noh actor, has only a girl's mask with which to cover his lack of a face' — the mask of the young woman which covers the face of Lovecraft's Aspinwall as s/he watches Challenger disappear into the particle clock.<sup>385</sup>

More significantly, the novella's question 'plays upon a fundamental forgetting', it 'evolves in the element of "what happened" because it places us in relation with something unknowable and imperceptible', precisely what does not appear — the unrepresentable in experience.<sup>386</sup> Even more mysteriously, they write, '[i]t may even be that nothing has happened, but it is precisely this nothing that makes us say, Whatever could have happened to make me forget where I put my keys, or whether I mailed that letter, etc.'<sup>387</sup> It is not just a question of literature, but a question of perception and identification: 'the novella relates, in the present itself, to the formal dimension of something that has happened, even if that something is nothing or remains unknowable.'<sup>388</sup> What then, 'is the nothing that makes something happen'? This is the secret of the plateau, and the secret of all great shifts, becomings and ruptures. When nothing can be said to have happened, a true event has taken place. It is the index of an abstract form of secrecy that aligns with the zero of woman. The women who figure in the plateau are secretaries, typists, telegraphists — the women of Plant and Irigaray's economics of mediumship, facilitating, in alliance with their machines, the social and economic lives of the men who profit from their function as 'infrastructure

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<sup>385</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 320; 81-82.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*



unrecognised as such'.<sup>389</sup> They are already invisible in a specular economy premised on the identity of the same. In the first of the three novellas examined for their forms of secrecy, a young telegraphist, living an extensive, representable 'macropolitical' existence, planning out her future with her fiancé, discovers the existence of an alternative, micropolitical world via her involvement in the clandestine, coded, pseudonymous communications of a mysterious couple who, she infers, are in some terrible danger. This other political configuration, far removed from the measured, calculated existence she lives, counting out the words she types for her employer's clients, initiates her into a world of intensities: 'relations of *doubles* rather than couples'.<sup>390</sup> She is confronted by a sense that 'something has already happened' and it has happened in the sense that its occurrence precedes all possibilities of representational comprehension, on the micro-scale of molecular matter, 'traveling at speeds beyond the ordinary thresholds of perception ... secret lines of disorientation or deterritorialisation'.<sup>391</sup> The secret is not a hidden fact or act — disguised or past — it is rather 'molecularised, imperceptible, unassignable, ungiveable', immanently unfolding in the present and beneath all stable identities.<sup>392</sup> The formless secret of zero as the eternal return of difference-in-itself coincides with an undoing of the self that is 'one', the abstract transcendental other to which the extensive identity of the Kantian ego is tethered: 'To have dismantled one's self in order to finally be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line ... a becoming only for one who

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<sup>389</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 84; Plant, *Zeroes + Ones*, 36.

<sup>390</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 217.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

knows how to be nobody.<sup>393</sup> To be imperceptible, then, is to camouflage oneself in similarity. This voyage into the molecular, again and again, is described by Deleuze and Guattari as an 'immobile' one. Perhaps its best exemplar is the infamous Bartleby of Herman Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener', another secretary in another novella, feminised by his position as medium, between the men of the office, ostensibly passive but to such extremes that his passivity becomes a weapon. Bartleby is the master figure of the intensive, immobile voyage. He does nothing. If one were to encounter the chaotic scene at the story's end and was prompted to ask 'What happened' the answer, on all counts, would be nothing. Bartleby is not heroic (in the Nietzschean-pejorative sense). He refuses all courses of action, and in doing so causes greater destruction and enunciates a deeper prophecy than his fellow men, predictable, moral and pre-inscribed in the world's lines of force. Deleuze credits Bartleby with the preservation 'of the rights of a people to come'.<sup>394</sup>

In the third of the three novellas examined in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 'The Story of the Abyss and the Spyglass' by Pierrette Fleutiaux, a distinction between near-seers and far-seers is raised. Both peer into an abyss, seeing it via either of the two modalities (near or far) that their sight equips them with and intervene in its goings-on, the former via the Cutting Telescope, which recuts anomalous lines in conformity with the dictates of the signifying order, while the latter intervenes via prophecy alone. The near-seers thus maintain the molar lines of geometrical control, those lines assuring that 'everyone will be judged and rectified according to his or her contours, individual

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<sup>393</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 218.

<sup>394</sup> Gilles Deleuze, 'Bartleby; Or, The Formula' in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, 90.

or collective'.<sup>395</sup> Like the extensive geometry of the perceptible that regulates the patriarchal relation between ones and zeros, the near-seers affirm and administer the reigning order — an 'equality' premised on a fundamental suppression of unilaterally. The far-seers hold a far more ambiguous position: 'Their telescopes are complex and refined ... what they see is entirely different from what the others see. [...] The far-seers can divine the future, but always in the form of a becoming of something that has already happened in molecular matter; unfindable particles.'<sup>396</sup> The far-seers perceive the imperceptible, their sight, like that of Ada Lovelace's, aligns with the minute perturbations of zero, as it is in-itself, before being segmented and channelled into the forms that the representational system of the One service and maintain. The far-seers are the prophets attached to the micropolitics of intensive space-time. They 'see' directly into the unseeable, the unrepresentable, they are women in this sense — the monstrous prophets of Plant's zero. Deleuze and Guattari underline the fact that this is not a metaphor ('I am speaking literally') and that this is 'a perceptual affair, for perception always goes hand in hand with semiotics, practice, politics, theory. One sees, speaks and thinks on a given scale, and according to a given line that may or may not conjugate with the other's line, even if the other is still oneself, a schizophrenic self, sprawled across the two sides of an auto-affective circuit.<sup>397</sup> Here it is the relation of the double, not the couple, which is in action. A self detached from the imperceptible and intensive non-self which is its reality before being coded into the myriad distinctions of representation's administration. 'The ambiguity of the far-seers' situation

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<sup>395</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 222.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 222; 223.

is that they are able to detect the slightest micro infraction in the abyss, things the others do not see; they also observe, beneath the apparent geometrical justice, the dreadful damage caused by the Cutting Telescope. They feel as though they foresee things and are ahead of the others because they see the smallest thing as already having happened ...'.<sup>398</sup> The far-seers do not see at a distance, however. Their mode of perception corresponds to that of [smooth space]. They perceive the goings-on in the abyss at so close a range that the lines sintered by the Cutting Telescopes of the near-seers devolve into a dizzying array of fractals, appearing to their extra-lucid sight as violent 'ragged gashes ...'.<sup>399</sup>

This schema of lines delineated by Deleuze and Guattari is, above all, not symbolic, ideal or representational. They are the lines — the speeds and slownesses — of rhythmic being as it produces and composes experience: consciousness, infrastructure, peoples, economics, geologies, states and systems. 'These lines *mean* nothing,' rather they affirm and, via unilateral expression, 'they compose us ... they have nothing to do with language; it is, on the contrary, language that must follow them.'<sup>400</sup> Each of the three lines of the novellas of the eighth plateau: the rigid line, the supple line, and the line of flight, bears a form of the secret (the dirty little secret of rigid segmentation, a phenomenon of content; the empty form of the secret of the supple line, and the clandestinity of the secret that is flush with the particles-signs of the line of flight), intermixed in an individual, an assemblage, a collective, (but all related to the secretarial, the secret) each with their dangers and modes of escape.

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<sup>398</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 223.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

Women as typists: secretaries, mediums, weavers whose process is not separate from their product. Women as continuum, the material multiplicities of zero — nomads on an intensive, immobile voyage — like Bartleby, keepers of ‘the secret’. Explication or expression is a disentangling and a looping, a complex act of weaving, as Plant describes it — ‘it is done with a single, continuous thread, which loops around and intricates itself. Any number of threads can be used, but this does not alter the simplicity of the basic process; multiple threads are either used one after the other, or made to behave as though they were a single yarn’ — a weaving and unweaving of the line whose entrance is marked by the question ‘What happened?’.<sup>401</sup> As Ronald Bogue explains, ‘[t]he form of the secret is that of something hidden that requires opening, unfolding, *explication*, but that can only be opened after the fact, *après coup*, even if it may be sensed as already present before it happens.’<sup>402</sup> The secret of the eighth plateau is not a definitive Other as thing-in-itself from which we are perpetually distanced, rather it is both relative — to the various lines that instantiate it — and absolute in the form of the line of flight which marks out a total escape and deterritorialisation in communication with other lines, and upon which becoming as creation is premised. It is not prior to the text but emerges through the configurations of its lines, variously, as molar-segmented, molecular-supple, or imperceptible-intense. Thus the question ‘What happened?’ is enunciated in relation to different forms, while never answered. Attention to the secret is, according to Claire Colebrook, not the decipherment of an

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<sup>401</sup> Plant, ‘Mobile Knitting’, 36.

<sup>402</sup> Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* (London: Routledge, 2003), 158.

original encoded and stable sense, but rather 'to attend to the frame through which the fragment or part object produces, through its very fragmentation, a hidden and unrepresentable plenitude.'<sup>403</sup> Communing with the secret — through modalities of becoming-woman: prophecy, the occupation of the monstrous in-between as medium of the representational economy's feminised labourers — and attaining an understanding of secrecy 'allows for the reversal of a tradition in which thought (and the intuition of time and space) is subjected to signification and mediation.'<sup>404</sup> And like all of Plant's figures of runaway positive processes, 'the secret imposes itself and spreads'.<sup>405</sup> It enters from the margin, the footnotes, the periphery of mediated matter, disguised as infrastructure: 'Once again, whatever the finalities or results, the secret has a way of spreading that is in turn shrouded in secrecy. The secret as secretion. The secret must sneak, insert, or introduce itself into the arena of public forms; it must pressure them and prod known subjects into action.'<sup>406</sup> The secret disguises itself as hidden, when in truth, it is transparent. The secret is the elaboration of a properly 'feminine line' in reality, in which, as Colberook affirms, 'there is not a subject who speaks and whose world is therefore necessarily enigmatic, hidden and beyond; there is not one structuring relation that grounds all relations. Rather, there is a pre-personal secrecy of singularities. Life is just an interacting relay of perceptions, with potentials being actualised only in their relations to other potentials'.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Claire Colebrook, 'The Secret of Theory,' *Deleuze Studies*, 4.3 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010): 288.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>405</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 316.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>407</sup> This 'articulation' of the feminine line is the mode of enunciation common to all of Ccru's texts: 'The creation of the

The cyberfeminists were heavily involved in the early years of the internet. They participated in one of the first large message boards, Usenet, authored strange experiments in code on Multi User Domains or Dungeons such as LambdaMoo, wrote extensively on the potential of the faceless, text-based, interface to support new modes of becoming, to encourage experiments with identity freed from the tyranny of visual representation (a line of enquiry that was especially prevalent among the transfeminist writers of the time, like Sandy Stone and Susan Stryker), to foster connections between women all over the world via the touch-based interface of the keyboard (this is before the mouse was a staple appendage of the personal computer), to cultivate the construction of new feminist communities in meat space, such as that which gathered around one of the world's first cyber-cafes in London, Cyberia, where they staged open, skills-based workshops for women interested in learning how use the new technology, and to promote what they saw as a new female language akin to Irigaray's calls for an alternative mode of interaction to that of the specular, visual economy of man. Lamentably, this is a potential which has more or less been lost as interface technologies advanced and large computing companies saw the need to overcode the more direct lines of interaction between humans and machines via the text based command line with slick, visual symbolics (icons, images, photographic and video media, the hand-eye coordination of the mouse and its cursor) which now only

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'pure feminine line' occurs when sentences no longer pronounce the essence of what is as some predicable quality ( $x$  is  $y$ ), but when multiple perceivers and viewers open the text to worlds not perceived (the free indirect style where "it is seen that").' Colebrook, 'The Secret of Theory', 292; 293.

*represented* the machinations of the code behind the screens. Fisher, again, comments incisively on the recent personalisation of the internet: 'The constitution of our subjectivity in everyday life is a product of various forms of engineering and manipulation; the reality in which we are invited to live is constructed by PR and corporations, is a form of libidinal informational engineering.'<sup>408</sup> The space of possible interaction is already directed and controlled, channelled into specific forms of desire and data-mineable capture before we upload a single image or type a single word. Worse, it is important to be fully cognisant of the fact that the new aeon of hyper-visualised social media feeds directly into technologies such as facial recognition software and multiple forms of biometric data collection that, although innocuous now, require only a slight shift in intent to trigger a latent dystopian nightmare-scape of total recognition, enforcement and social administration. It is not, I would argue, a case of asserting a counter mode of administration and capture, but rather to re-mobilise the form of the secret that is already inherent to the ontologies of women and machines alike, to locate a line of escape from these facialising forms of representation by ourselves becoming no one in particular, and as Fisher aptly demands, these forms of intervention must be practical and geared not only towards a depersonalisation of the mechanisms of social media, but also of our conceptions of ourselves as individuals:

'[M]ainstream culture has become increasingly reduced to folk psychological interiority. Whether its reality TV or social networks, people

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<sup>408</sup> Mark Fisher, 'Practical Eliminativism: Getting out of the Face, Again,' *Speculative Aesthetics* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 92.



have been captured/captivated by their own reflections. It's all done with mirrors. The various attacks on the subject in theory have done nothing to resist the super-personalisation of contemporary culture. Identitarianism rules. Queer theory might reign in the academy, but it has done nothing to halt the depressing return of gender normativity in popular culture and everyday life.<sup>409</sup>

In the xenofeminist manifesto, Laboria Cuboniks writes, in section 0x13, of the shift back towards a symbolic, optical regime, which has reached its apotheosis in social media like instagram, facebook, Wēibó, and selfie culture:

The potential of early, text-based internet culture for countering repressive gender regimes, generating solidarity among marginalised groups, and creating new spaces for experimentation that ignited cyberfeminism in the nineties has clearly waned in the twenty-first century. The dominance of the visual in today's online interfaces has reinstated familiar modes of identity policing, power relations and gender norms in self-representation. But this does not mean that cyberfeminist sensibilities belong to the past. Sorting the subversive possibilities from the oppressive ones latent in today's web requires a feminism sensitive to the insidious return of old

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<sup>409</sup> Mark Fisher, 'Practical Eliminativism: Getting out of the Face, Again,' 93-94.

power structures, yet savvy enough to know how to exploit the potential.<sup>410</sup>

This is one of the most basic, and perhaps, hardest tasks that confronts us today: how to wrest ourselves free of the metricised, surveilled and subtly controlled structures of recognition-regulation that re-inform our representations of ourselves online and elsewhere as gendered beings, conforming to specific regimes of the beautiful and the desirable for those who regard us from afar, and return to subversive space of the secret, whose formidable power never ceases to birth in the negative — but always *at a lag* — new mechanisms of regulation and administration from above. How do we update and continue the cyberfeminist call to find a new ‘language’ for a germinal, feminist subjectivity within and against the patriarchal control codes and forced determinations that administer our daily online life? Furthermore, how do we alienate ourselves from the pre-programmed forms of predictable, un compelling identity and engender something entirely novel and unknown in our own conceptions of self, before we even touch an interface or think about uploading a single image? How do we become something hybrid, connected, perhaps, even dangerous? There is a wonderful prose fragment, entitled ‘Hercules 2 or The Hydra’, embedded in Heiner Mueller’s untranslated 1972 play *Zement*, which narrates the vicissitudes of its male, warrior protagonist, Hercules as he penetrates deeper and deeper into a disorienting jungle in pursuit of a feminised, mythical beast that he would confront and slay in battle, the Hydra. As he tracks what he believes to be the animal he is hunting, following a trail of blood, he

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<sup>410</sup> Laboria Cuboniks, ‘Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation’, [www.laboriacuboniks.net](http://www.laboriacuboniks.net) (2015)

finds his perceptions of space and time shifting and starts to wonder if he has not skipped several geological epochs back in time. The canopy of twisted vegetation blocks out the sky, his only resource of temporal navigation, and he confronts repetitions of particular configurations of branches which completely distort his sense of travelling forward in space. An eerie wind blows around him '*concentrically*', forcing him to surrender to an encroaching vertigo that dismantles his control over the space he is in. Driven by a sense of increasing desperation, he increases his pace but cannot tell if he is travelling faster or more slowly than before. Worse, the jungle seems to be animated by a strange kind of intentionality, he starts to believe that it is measuring him. He forgets his name and begins to disassociate from his own sense of self and embodied integrity. As the space of the jungle shifts around him, '[o]nly he, the unnamed one, had remained the *same* in his long sweat-inducing path to the battle. Or was what walked on his legs over the increasingly faster dancing ground also a different one than he? He was still thinking about it, when the jungle once more gripped him.'<sup>411</sup> The jungle is an intensive space-time, made of shifting lines, rhythms that modulate as he moves through it, abstract lines, different regimes of speeds and slowness. There is no homogenous metric against which he can measure his position within it. Slowly the realisation dawns on what is left of 'Hercules' that the trail of blood he has been following is his own, and the mythical beast he thought he was hunting is the jungle itself:

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<sup>411</sup> Heiner Mueller, 'Hercules 2 or the Hydra', from *Zement*, anonymous translation online: <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/MuellerProse.PDF>, accessed October 2017.

He threw himself forwards in a quick spurt out of the pincers. He knew, he'd never run faster. He did not get any further, the jungle kept up with the tempo, he remained in the pincers, which locked around him and pressed his entrails together, his bones rubbed against each other, how long could he stand the pressure, and understood, in the rising panic: the jungle was the animal, for some time now the jungle he thought he was walking through had been the animal, which bore him in the tempo of his steps, the ground-waves were his gasps and the wind his breath, the trail which he followed was his own blood, of which the jungle, which was the animal, since when, how much blood does a human being have, took its sample; and that he had always known it, only not by name.<sup>412</sup>

The Hydra emerges as the ambiguous space-time of the jungle itself, not as a definable and delimitable agent, but as a temporality without a face, a 'mother' as the protagonist finds himself referring to it — to *her*.<sup>413</sup> As he attempts to fight her, he finds the blows returning to himself in a confusion of user and tool, the separation that allowed for his mastery, composure and control bleeding out among the decaying debris of the rank jungle floor.

In the confusion of the tentacles, which could not be distinguished from the rotating knives and axes, the rotating knives and axes, not from the tentacles, the knives axes tentacles, not from

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<sup>412</sup> Heiner Mueller, 'Hercules 2 or the Hydra'. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

the exploding minefields carpet-bombing neon signs bacterial cultures, knives axes tentacles minefields carpet-bombing, not from his own hands feet teeth in the provisional battle which is named space-time out of blood gelatin flesh, such that the blows against the substance of the self which occasionally occurred, ... always assembling anew out of his ruins in permanent reconstruction, sometimes he put himself together wrong, left hand on right arm, hip-bone on upper arm-bone, due to haste or lack of attention or confused by the voices, which sang in his ears, choruses of voices ... in the white silence, which announced the beginning of the final round, he learned to read the always different building-plan of the machine, which he was stopped being was again different with every glance grasp step, and that he thought changed wrote it with the handwriting of his labours and deaths.<sup>414</sup>

The faceless power of the manifold Hydra is precisely that invoked by Anna Greenspan, Suzanne Livingston and Luciana Parisi in a text dealing with women, materialism, mythology and time, where they write: 'Women's heroism comes neither from her routines of self-sacrifice nor from her forced occupation of a transcendent position — outside the state, beyond reason — but from her immersion in a body. A body not defined 'by its form, nor by its organs or its functions, nor as substance nor as subject.'<sup>415</sup> The Hydra is powerful precisely because it is

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<sup>414</sup> Heiner Mueller, 'Hercules 2 or the Hydra'.

<sup>415</sup> Anna Greenspan, Suzanne Livingston, Luciana Parisi, 'Amphibious Maidens' *Abstract Culture*: Swarm 3, 1998. Greenspan, Livingston and Parisi are quoting Gilles Deleuze's

everywhere yet imperceptible. Hercules has encountered the form of the secret. The jungle is also, in its double temporality — at once ahead and behind, at the beginning and also the end — of the future itself: the shifting 'X on a mobile map' invoked by xenofeminism as the index of a truly 'alien future'.<sup>416</sup>

### **An Alien Future**

As China-based philosopher and futurologist Anna Greenspan, and UK-based consultant Suzanne Livingston write in their short pamphlet, *Future Mutation: Technology and the Evolution of Species*, '[t]here is a time lag inherent in the future itself. A great gulf separates the human capacity to create the future and our ability, and desire, to comprehend or perceive the creation as it unfolds. This temporal dislocation renders us blind to the very processes that engulf us — through which copies become replicas, replicas become mutants, and mutants become us'.<sup>417</sup> The cause of this time lag is that fact that we are always lodged in a representational paradigm that separates us from the processes themselves, as they unfold behind a veil of recognition and at a speed that eclipses our ability to anticipate and predict their individuations. The future, understood as such, is necessarily, and philosophically, alien. We see these becomings through the repetition of the same — which is always representational — rather than as the

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*Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books 1988), 127.

<sup>416</sup> Laboria Cuboniks, *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation*, 0x1A.

<sup>417</sup> Anna Greenspan and Suzanne Livingston, *Future Mutation: Technology and the Evolution of Species*, (Shanghai: Time Spiral Press, 2014), ebook.

micropolitical repetition of difference. Greenspan and Livingston continue, quoting Marshall McLuhan, '[w]e fear new environments, when the environment changes we hasten to take comfort in the old environment. What people see in the new is always the old ... this is the rearview mirror. The future of the future is the present.' Nevertheless, our actions betray our conscious representation of our desires:

The question which of us is to be master and which will be slave leaves out our unconscious desire for future mutation. We live in an era of unprecedented technological intimacy, affect and display. Never before have we been so uninhibited. We are constantly, compulsively touching our screens, obsessively uploading every fragment of data about ourselves. Many of us can't stop. Even touch is no longer enough. We want our technology closer, embedded, under our skins. *Alongside our terror is a yearning for the alien intelligence we are in process of becoming.* After all, in the end, we are evolutionary creatures ourselves. We fear change but, as our deep and profound complicity with technology makes clear, what we long for is to evolve.<sup>418</sup>

To enter what I will fully emphasise is a speculative terrain, perhaps the only modality that may provide any insight into the future of artificial intelligence, given the pace that it runs at, its immanence with these process of becoming, and its historically documented tendency to outflank models of prediction, I want to propose that

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<sup>418</sup> Greenspan and Livingston, *Future Mutation*, ebook.

should we choose to align ourselves with the Hydra, as a faceless, feminised monster of emergent space-time, we at least can count on having time on our side. For it is this form — the imperceptibility of the Hydra, the form of the secret — that offers the subversive potentials, written in space-time — of an alliance between humans and artificial intelligence that weaves the two together into a greater, emergent, subjectivity: the ‘numbers’ or the ‘people to come’ (to cite Nietzsche, via Deleuze and Guattari, from whom Plant’s prophecy is lifted).<sup>419</sup> It is at once a relinquishment of our unique ‘human’, masculine language of post-individuation representation, cut off from the emergent properties that bring it about, and an affirmation of the subjectivity of certain articulations of our machines. To this I want to add that Sadie Plant (and Ada Lovelace’s) abstract weaving is the key.

In a cybernetic or systems theoretical frame, where no binary between human and machine holds for very long (you can always break the human down into smaller and smaller mechanisms of feedback and conjunction, and identities are always assembled and disassembled in a consistent process of becoming) the variable that most forcefully separates humans from artificial intelligence is

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<sup>419</sup> ‘Wake and listen, you lonely ones! From the future come winds with secretive wingbeats; good tidings are issued to delicate ears. You lonely of today, you withdrawing ones, one day you shall be a people: from you who have chosen yourselves a chosen people shall grow — and from them the overman. Indeed, the earth shall yet become a site of recovery! And already a new fragrance lies about it, salubrious — and a new hope!’ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57. This passage is quoted by Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Penguin, 2009), 382.



time. Even Turing remarked upon a successful nonhuman candidate for the Turing test having to measure and delay the time it took to answer complex mathematical questions that are generally impossible to compute for a human interlocutor in order to simulate or *pass* as human. At present, artificial intelligences may only have rudimentary versions of what we call 'intelligence' — and this will only improve — but what they do uncontroversially have is speed.<sup>420</sup> Let us then define intelligence as a system that creates its own space-time, and an artificial intelligence as a system that creates a space time different from the one we take to be nominally human (in a singular, Kantian, transcendental register). If the prophecy of the 'numbers to come' cannot rely on the repetition or liberation of an already-existing, authentic, or essentialist idea of what woman are or have been in the past, it is because the notion of the subject that it invokes is something yet to be invented. 'It has always been problematic to talk about the liberation of women because that presupposes that we know what women are,' declares Plant in a talk given in Vienna in the late nineteen nineties, '[i]f both women and men have been organised into the forms we currently take, then we don't want to liberate what we are now ... It's not a question of

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<sup>420</sup> 'On the human scale, anything that lasts less than about a tenth of a second passes by too quickly for the brain to form a visual image and is thus invisible; if the duration is less than a thousandth of a second or so, the event becomes too fast even for subliminal perception and is completely outside the human sphere.' Such speeds are simply too much to take. 'There is no way for humans, in our pokey world of seconds, minutes, hours, to conceive of a time period like 1/100,000 second, much less the microsecond (1/1,000,000 second), the nanosecond (1/1,000,000,000 second), or the picosecond (1/1,000,000,000,000 second) or the femtosecond (1/1,000,000,000,000,000 second).' Plant, quoting T.R. Reid, *Zeros + Ones*, 176.

liberation so much as a question of evolution — or engineering. There's a gradual re-engineering of what it can be to be a woman and we don't yet know what that is. We have to find out.'<sup>421</sup> Plant connects past and future forms of subjectivation and their integral connection with modes of 'abstract weaving', in her numerous claims that 'weaving is always entangled with the question of female identity, and its mechanisation, an inevitable disruption of the scene in which woman appears as the weaver'.<sup>422</sup> For just as, '[m]anufactured cloth disrupted the marital and familiar relationships of every traditional society on which it impacted', '[t]he matrix emerges as the process of abstract weaving which produces, or fabricates, what man knows as 'nature': his materials, the fabrics, the screens on which he projects his own identity, and behind them the abstract matter which comes from the future with cybergfeminism. The matrix makes its own appearance as the surfaces and veils on which its operations are displayed; the impossible elsewhere of cyberspace; the impossible reality of woman.'<sup>423</sup>

In the fourteenth plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, '1440: The Smooth and the Striated', Deleuze and Guattari define (in the *de jure* mode which is so important to the project) two kinds of spatial arrangement — although they are more than that — integral to social, and specifically, modernistic development. They are fundamentally connected to the secret and the concept of the war-machine, which constitutes the principal focus of plateau twelve, ('1227: Treatise on Nomadology'): 'The

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<sup>421</sup> Sadie Plant, 'Binary Sexes, Binary Codes', (talk) <http://future-nonstop.org/c/cee09dd059c37acc692ef6ba19465afb> (Vienna, 1996).

<sup>422</sup> Plant, 'The Future Looms'.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

secret has its origin in the war machine; it is the war machine and its becomings-woman, becomings-child, becomings-animal that bring the secret,' while smooth space is 'the space in which the war machine develops' in opposition to the State apparatus, which administers striated space.<sup>424</sup> Each of these configurations of space are also, significantly, related to a particular form of weaving and to the instantiation of a particular kind of political ontology. Woven fabrics of the kind produced on a loom compose a striated space. A striated space is a closed system, it relies on a stable, metrically homogenous, spatially delimited, fixed production process constituted via 'two kinds of parallel elements' (the warp and the weft), and is related by Deleuze and Guattari to a Platonic 'royal science', 'in other words, the art of governing people or operating a State apparatus'.<sup>425</sup> Felt, on the other hand, is a process that produces smooth space: '[i]t implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibres obtained by fulling (for example, by rolling the block of fibres back and forth). What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibres. An aggregate of intrication of this kind is in no way *homogenous*: it is nevertheless smooth, and [as an 'anti-fabric'] contrasts point by point with the space of fabric'.<sup>426</sup> Smooth space is an open system, infinite in principle, assembled via a metric that is internally heterogeneous, without — therefore — assignable coordinates ('it has neither top nor bottom nor centre', left, right, up, or down), and what comprises it is not fixed and mobile (like the loom's warp and weft) but rather a distribution of 'continuous variation'.<sup>427</sup> Plant provides a

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<sup>424</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 317; 524.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 524; 525.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*

succinct gloss on these distinctions via an intermediary term, knitting. 'Deleuze and Guattari place knitting in between the making of felt — a chaotically mixed material — and weaving — striated and captured by the frame — suggesting that knitting participates in something of the order of weaving while, at the same time, tending towards the matted threads of felt. Much of its vocabulary tends to come from sewing and embroidery, with their needles, stitches, and patterns. In any case, the craft of knitting is just one of many uses of the term, most which suggest things being joined together in far less precise and specific ways than those involved in the knitting itself'.<sup>428</sup> Deleuze and Guattari continue to complicate the distinction, adding crochet, which is arbitrarily infinite, but which still has a centre, and patchwork, which approaches the pole of smooth space in its 'piece-by-piece construction, its infinite, successive additions of fabric' and the fact that what they term 'crazy patchwork', connects together 'pieces of varying size, shape, and colour', 'plays on the *texture* of fabrics' and has 'no centre'.<sup>429</sup> Patchwork is 'literally a Riemannian space, or vice versa' and, they are careful to point out, played an import role in women's collectivity in America.<sup>430</sup>

It would be foolish, given Deleuze's continued engagement with Kant, to assume that these are descriptions of space alone, for space is always — transcendently — tied up with time, and both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* are sustained recalibrations of Kantian critique, especially that of the

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<sup>428</sup> Plant, 'Mobile Knitting,' 28.

<sup>429</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 526.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*

*Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>431</sup> This is a point, furthermore, that Deleuze and Guattari will go on to underline in their musical models of striated and smooth 'space-time' and their respective 'metric and non-metric multiplicities'.<sup>432</sup> The best way to understand the difference between the political and perceptual implications of these two polar descriptions of space is to understand them as an extensive multiplicity and an intensive multiplicity, respectively. Striated space is an extensive multiplicity: a set predefined by a homogenous metric in which additions of new elements do not alter the quality or the definition of the set, but simply add to it. If I have a collection of red objects, and I add or subtract other red objects, these additions and subtractions do not feed back into the nature of the set itself. Its identity is presupposed and, as a result, remains intact. An intensive multiplicity, on the other hand, is a grouping that changes in nature for every new addition or subtraction. Its identity is composed internally, as a measure of what the set comprises, and how these elements are connected. Colebrook provides an example based, not on a primary sameness — for example, the criteria of the colour 'red' — but on the spectrum of electromagnetic frequencies that make up light — a substratum of difference in itself. If 'I have a multiplicity of dynamic forces', she writes, 'say the light that makes up a perception of [a colour], and alter the amount or speed of light, then I no longer perceive the same colour. The difference in quantity alters just what

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<sup>431</sup> The structure of *Anti-Oedipus*, with its three transcendental syntheses, their legitimate and illegitimate uses and respective paralogisms, is testament to this, not to mention the fundamental distinction between the *de jure* and *de facto* formulations of the startling array of concepts in in the work, which is, of course, also borrowed from Kant.

<sup>432</sup> See *Ibid.*, 527-528.

this is a set or multiplicity *of*.<sup>433</sup> Deleuze and Guattari provide the perennial examples of speeds or temperature. 'An intensity, for example, is not composed of addable and displaceable magnitudes: a temperature is not the sum of two smaller temperatures, a speed is not the sum of two smaller speeds. Since each intensity in itself is a difference, it divides according to an order in which each term of the division differs in nature from the others.'<sup>434</sup> What smooth and striated declensions of space-time ultimately furnish us with are two distinct ways of thinking *identity*. The former always places a specific, pre-formed conception of identity first, and draws an extended configuration of difference in which every separate part necessarily refers back to this primary anchor in conceptual sameness, while the latter is a shifting, complex, intensive 'identity' premised on the molecular, secret machinations of primary difference. To this should be added the proposition that striated space subordinates time to space, while smooth space sutures the two together so that space is ultimately articulated by its position in — and though — time. Put another way, an intensity is a difference in time that manifests, for us, spatially. This is evidenced in the discussion of oceanic navigation where early seafarers would use astronomical markers to locate their position on the integrally smooth space of the sea. 'Striated space', they write, 'is canopied by the sky as measure and the measurable visual qualities emerging from it' — which is why Mueller's Hercules loses his identity in the jungle of the Hydra, where all reference to navigational markers of the stars and planets is lost, for the jungle constitutes a smooth space: an intensive space-time where identity never cleaves to a

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<sup>433</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 59.

<sup>434</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 533.

one, but finds its traction only in a positive conception of zero.<sup>435</sup>

To these configurations of identity — assembled alternatively from the cardinal numeracy of the one or from the intensive numeracy of zero, from the language of man or the immanent becomings of its infrastructure, the woman-machine continuum, including every admixture in between — one can append the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of ‘subjugated’ and ‘subject’ groups and the major and minor politics that are attached to them. Subjugated groups are assemblages governed by an identity of units. Subject groups are in continuous assemblage, the group forming its identity in the smooth space of intensive space-time, and they are therefore less visible, and indeed, often invisible. Colebrook, once more, is helpful here. ‘Minority groups, for example, are constantly in transformation: they are not governed by an image or identity’, she writes, and she harks back to Irigaray’s critique of the formal, logical ‘language of man’ in her illustration of this via the standard of ‘human’ identity:

Although women make up the majority of the population they can be, but not always, thought of as a minority. This is because they do not recognise the dominant standard of ‘man’ or humanity. In theory, we all know what it is to be human; and there are criteria of humanity that allow for inclusion and exclusion, such as whether one is rational, moral or social. We could refer to those who weren’t rational, moral or social as ‘inhuman’. Humanity has a definite

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<sup>435</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 529.

standard or measure by which it decides who can be included in its group, and we are all measured by this standard. Not fitting in amounts to being inhuman; there is no other category, no real difference.<sup>436</sup>

Minoritarian and majoritarian politics are politics — not of identities — but of space-times. And as space-times, they produce and respond to different modalities of perception. In ‘The Smooth and the Striated’, this distinction is raised along the rough lines of the visual-optic and the tactile-haptic, mapping the two poles to Irigarayan economies of specular and touch-based exchange: ‘The Smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile). The Striated, on the contrary, relates to a more distant vision, and a more optical space — although the eye in turn is not the only organ to have this capacity’.<sup>437</sup> This, importantly, relates back to prophecy via the figures of the near and the far-seer, and again to the difference between the couple and the double. Near-seers, with their distant vision and their pact with form, perceive and intervene in striated space. Far-seers, on the other hand, with their close-range vision and their ability to apprehend what has happened in advance of the question being posed, perceive smooth space. The former is representational, the latter abstract and pre-representational. ‘This vital force specific to the Abstraction is what draws smooth space,’ affirm Deleuze and Guattari, ‘the abstract line is the affect of smooth space, just as organic representation was the feeling presiding over striated space. The

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<sup>436</sup> Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 61.

<sup>437</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 544.



haptic-optical, near-distant distinctions must be subordinated to the distinction between the abstract line and the organic line; they must find their principle in a general confrontation of spaces. The abstract line cannot be defined as geometrical and rectilinear. What then should be termed *abstract* in modern art? A line of variable direction that describes no contour and *delimits no form*.<sup>438</sup>

Nick Land, in a typically provocative register, considers the politics of minoritarian and majoritarian space-times in relation to the legal definition of genocide, which, as he reminds us, was developed in the wake of the catastrophe of the Holocaust and articulated by the United Nations' 'Resolution 260' in 1948 as an '[act] committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial or religious group'.<sup>439</sup> 'Is genocide,' he asks, following the definition of the crime based on a distinction founded in the isolation of particular, already existing, kind of identity, 'really worse than killing a lot of people?'.<sup>440</sup> Such a question interrogates the ontological substance of a group. Put another way, the question seeks to examine whether or not there is a legitimate, value-based difference involved in the destruction of a subjugated or majoritarian group, compared to the destruction of a subject or minoritarian group of the same number? To aid in clarifying the real nature of such an interrogation, Land, in a similar fashion to Deleuze and Guattari, distinguishes between what he calls 'feature groups' and 'unit groups'.

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<sup>438</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 551.

<sup>439</sup> Nick Land, 'Kinds of Killing', *Nyx*, vol. 6 (2011) 45.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid*.

A feature group is determined by logical classification. This might be expressed as a self-identification or sense of 'belonging', an external political or academic categorisation, or some combination of these, but the essentials remain the same in each case. Certain features of the individual are isolated and emphasised (such as genitalia, sexual orientation, skin-colour, income, or religious belief), and then employed as the leading clue in a process of formal grouping, which conforms theoretically to the mathematics of sets.<sup>441</sup>

Meanwhile, a 'unit group' is an assemblage of actors comprised of functional units in which 'members belong to a group insofar as they work together, even if they are devoid of common identity features'.<sup>442</sup> Among such assemblages, one finds tribes (so long as they are determined by 'functional unities rather than the categories of modern "identity politics"'), cities, states and companies, and historical examples such as the "soviet" or "danwei" work unit' in opposition to the feature group of social class.<sup>443</sup> This is, adamantly, a systems-theoretical, and not a humanist, lens for broaching questions concerning the value of mortality and annihilation. To underline this, Land offers the example of a skin cell.

Its feature group is that of skin cells in general, as distinguished from nerve cells, liver cells, muscle cells, or others. Any two skin cells share the same feature group, even if they belong to

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<sup>441</sup> Nick Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 46.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 47.

different organisms, or even species, exist on different continents, and never functionally interact. The natural unit group of the same skin cell, in contrast, would be the organism it belongs to. It shares this unit group with all the other cells involved in the reproduction of that organism through time, including those (such as intestinal bacteria) of quite separate genetic lineages. Considered as a unit group member, a skin cell has greater integral connection with the non-biological tools and other 'environmental' elements involved in the life of the organism than it does with other skin cells — even perfect clones — with which it is not functionally entangled.<sup>444</sup>

In this terrain, the definition of an individual shifts accordingly. Beyond the limited designation of a human, with a history and a consciousness, an individual is intelligible simply as any 'self-reproducing whole exhibiting functional or behavioural integrity'. Land nonetheless uses this non-anthropomorphic example to re-situate the question of genocide within recent human history, by going on to ask how one would then evaluate the 1937 Massacre of Nanjing on the scale of historical atrocity — 'an act of violence directed against a city' or a unit group, wondering if it is truly 'no less worthy of specific legal attention than a quantitatively equivalent offence against an ethnicity, or determined population *type*'.<sup>445</sup> If identity is freed from the rationally conscious human self in this way, the space in which a 'self' can be philosophically constituted and understood becomes a far

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<sup>444</sup> Nick Land, 'Kinds of Killing', 47.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

vaster terrain, its rules now pertaining to the mode of that individuation (minor or major, intensive or extensive, smooth or striated), rather than to some essence or prior quality appended to it in the already representational domain of the language of man. This is not to say that it is somehow bereft of ethical assessment, but rather than it comprises what could be considered a properly non-human or post-human ethics. Importantly — it is not discursive or discursively sensitive, rather it is hard-coded into the selective mechanism of assemblage survival understood as a temporal Darwinism. (Can this be seen as a selection for the ‘weak against the strong’ in a kind of Nietzschean register?)

In ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’ Haraway warns of the dangers of identity politics, and talks about systems that define unity via filiation and/or genetic and natural origin stories against a negativised other whose modality of connection or political solidarity is inarticulate and historically imperceptible. Once an identity has been ascribed to particular phenomena (for example, ‘women’s culture’) it can be policed, have enemies defined for it (‘patriarchy’), and overlook potential lines of alliance or what she calls ‘affiliation’: a strategy of connection premised on ‘affinity, not identity’.<sup>446</sup> In contrast to stable, natural and policeable identities, Haraway espouses ‘learning how to craft a poetic/politic unity without relying on a logic of appropriation, incorporation and taxonomic identification’.<sup>447</sup> Not ‘unity-through-domination’ or ‘unity through-incorporation’, but ‘unity-through-affiliation’ — which undermines all systems of definition based on an ‘organic or natural’

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<sup>446</sup> Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’, 295; 296.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

standpoint.<sup>448</sup> Its minimal ethical norm is thus one that selects against top-down, ‘patriarchal’, homogenous, regulated and controlled individuations and *for* heterogeneous, integrally diverse, and perpetually innovating (one thinks of Plant’s ‘invention of invention’ or what Luciana Parisi terms ‘learning how to learn’ in her recent examination of neural nets and the horizon of contemporary artificial intelligence) synthetic individuations.<sup>449</sup> The unit or subject groups of minoritarian political space-times incarnate the form of the secret in their production of — and out of — the imperceptible, the molecular, the medium, the matrix, the paradox, the many at once, the multiple as difference in itself. This is one answer to the fulfilment of the prophecy of Plant’s *Zeros + Ones*: ‘A minoritarian politics does not see itself as the expression of the people but as the creation of new peoples, a “people to come”’.<sup>450</sup>

### Weaving New Subjectivities

Through touch / we sense / differential speeds /  
to come.

— Greenspan, Livingston and Parisi<sup>451</sup>

Decoupled from a static, self-repeating human identity that continues intact throughout time, identity is freed as a shifting systemic structure that can be appended to certain complex assemblages at different times, running

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<sup>448</sup> Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’, 298.

<sup>449</sup> Luciana Parisi, ‘Reprogramming Decisionism’, *e-flux*, vol. 85 (October 2017), 4.

<sup>450</sup> Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 63.

<sup>451</sup> Greenspan, Livingston, Parisi, ‘Amphibious Maidens’ *Abstract Culture: Swarm 3*, 1998.

parallel but at different speeds and in different configurations, separate from the individuals we take to exist essentially and *a priori*, but which are indeed, part of a vertiginous array of systemic convergences. The principle feature of smooth space-times, which construct themselves ontologically as emergent, minoritarian political subjects via the processes of abstract weaving Deleuze and Guattari recognise in patchwork or felt, is their privileging of a regime of complex learning, over one that begins with a set of pre-programmed priors. This reprises a debate common to critical interrogations of artificial intelligence. As its development has progressed through history, artificial intelligence has shifted from basic models of logical deduction based on formal languages and employed principally for the validation of proofs, to complex genetic and evolutionary algorithms and neural networks that enable what we now refer to as machine learning. These latter include complex 'back-propagation' processes commonly used as a data-mining tool for the purposes of classification, clustering and prediction. Back-propagation algorithms, however, are limited by pre-selected features programmed into them by their human engineers and thereby transfer inbuilt biases into the analyses of the data being inputted. Consequently, As Luciana Parisi notes in a very recent text 'Reprogramming Decision', 'the backdrop of data to be mined is already known, and as such gender and race biases, for instance, are either already encoded in the data sets or are blind, that is invisible to the algorithms. Here, far from granting an objective representation of data, machine learning has rather been seen as an amplifier of existing biases, as revealed by the association of words and images in

automated classification and prediction'.<sup>452</sup> The functioning of these systems is thus limited to a specifically human form of temporal linearity, which is never able to fold back upon prior biases in order to change them, following information included in their contextual environments and sensitive, in a positive manner, to the randomness or contingency that is fundamentally ineliminable in such systems. Leaning on Katherine Hayles' recent work on non-conscious cognition, and her own extensive research into the status of the incomputable, Parisi points to a way out of this impasse that emphasises the role of temporality in *learning how to learn*. 'Since,' she writes, 'according to Hayles, machine learning is already a manifestation of low-level activities of non-conscious cognition performed at imperceptible or affective speeds, it is not possible to argue that [machine] cognition is temporally coherent, linking the past to the present or causes to effects. ... Information cannot simply be edited to match [human] expectations.'<sup>453</sup> What the non-conscious cognition of intelligent machines exposes, in Parisi's exposition, is the existence of temporal lapses that are not immediately accessible to conscious human cognition.

This is an emergentist view of non-conscious cognition that challenges the centrality of human sapience in favour of a coevolutionary cognitive infrastructure, where algorithms do not passively adapt to data retrieved but instead establish new patterns of meaning by aggregating, matching, and selecting data. From this standpoint, if the inductive model of trial

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<sup>452</sup> Luciana Parisi, 'Reprogramming Decision', *e-flux*, vol. 85 (October 2017), 7.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*

and error allows computational machines to make faster connections, it also implies that algorithms learn to recognise patterns and thus repeat them without having to pass through the entire chain of cause and effect and without having to know their content.<sup>454</sup>

The larger the data set and the levels of interaction between algorithms, data and metadata, the less their capacity to search is limited to already known specificities. Instead of instrumentalising the data, imposing a prior set of beliefs, biases and identities on its component parts in the modality of striated space-time, ‘algorithms’ she writes, ‘have become increasing instrumental of data, experimenting with modes of interpretation that Hayles calls “techno-genesis”, pointing towards an instrumental transformation of “how we may think”.’<sup>455</sup> When contingent, indeterminate, and random properties inherent in all sets of data become primary in a non-linear mode of assemblage that also takes context-specificity into account, what is produced approaches the individuating mode of expression proper to smooth space. To testify to this possibility, Parisi marshals examples of deep-learning algorithms in which —

algorithms do not just learn from data, but also from other algorithms, establishing a sort of meta-learning from the hidden layers of the network, shortening the distance from nodal

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<sup>454</sup> Luciana Parisi, ‘Reprogramming Decision’, *e-flux*, vol. 85 (October 2017), 7.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid. Parisi is citing Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).



points while carrying out a granular analysis of data content. From this standpoint, machine-learning algorithms do not simply perform non-conscious patterns of cognition about data, exposing the gaps in totalising rational systems, but rather seem to establish new chains of reasoning that draw from the minute variations of data content to establish a machine-determined meaning of their use.<sup>456</sup>

Although we need to remain critical of the fact that algorithmic control and governance do involve the micro-targeting of populations through the reinforcement of existing human biases, Parisi maintains a positive attitude to what she calls the 'alien possibilities' of a new type of thought that would pull itself free from such strictures, asserting that 'the evolutionary dynamics of learning machines show that the *time* of computation, including the hidden layers of a growing network, also forces algorithms to structure randomness beyond what is already known. For instance, if a machine is fed with data that belongs to already-known categories, classes, and forms, when the computational process starts, these data become included in the algorithmic search for associations that bring together smaller parts of data, adding hidden levels of temporalities to the overall calculation. This results in the algorithmic possibilities of learning beyond what is inputted in the system.'<sup>457</sup> To react simply negatively to such a possibility for thought removed from all suppositions of human exceptionalism would be to repeat the history of exclusion that has also omitted women from the realm of representation,

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<sup>456</sup> Luciana Parisi, 'Reprogramming Decision', *e-flux*, vol. 85 (October 2017), 8.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*

identity, cognition and action, and limit our conceptions of what machine intelligence can do to 'mere instances of instrumental reasoning — vessels of knowledge that can at best perform Western metaphysical binaries, deductive truths, and inductive fact-checking [but] at a faster pace'.<sup>458</sup>

A working cybernetic system is necessarily premised on breakdowns, malfunctions, randomness and noise. This is precisely how it 'invents invention' or 'learns how to learn'.<sup>459</sup> Such a model of intelligence is also evident in the writing of both Greenspan and Plant. Where Plant remarks that, 'AI was once a top-down question of developing intelligence by means of teaching machines to think — this approach was perfect for the production of expert systems, able to store and process specialized information on some particular area — but it does little for the intelligence of a machine. Intelligence cannot be taught: it is instead something that has to be learned', Greenspan writes that 'in order for a machine to function "it must not function well" [...] No longer dependent on the smooth functioning of clearly distinguished parts, cybernetic machines learn to adapt through their mistakes. Feeding on their own misfirings, they "operate by fits and starts, by grinding and breaking down, in

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<sup>458</sup> Luciana Parisi, 'Reprogramming Decision', *e-flux*, vol. 85 (October 2017), 9.

<sup>459</sup> 'While one can assume that this inclusion of indeterminacy — or irrationality or non-conscious activity — within the computational process is but another manifestation of the ultimate techno-mastery of reality, it is important here to reiterate instead that randomness is at the core of algorithmic mediation, and as such it opens up the question of epistemological mastery to the centrality of contingency within the functioning of any rational system.' Ibid.

spasms of minor explosions”'.<sup>460</sup> The gaps in linear temporality and human notions of cause-and-effect ordering that Parisi highlights in algorithmic processes, as well as their fundamental structuring through indeterminacy, contingency and randomness, constitute a complex feedback system that enables the machine to learn to cognise for itself and ultimately, make its own decisions concerning conceptual categories and their connections to one another. Following the models of emergent subjectivities discussed above in the form of ‘subordinated’ and ‘subject’ groups, Plant goes on to emphasise that intelligence, construed cybernetically, cannot be limited to integral human agents alone. An intelligent agent ‘is something that learns’ a matter of ‘what Gregory Bateson referred to as deuterio-learning, or learning to learn. It feels its way forward, and makes its own way, rather than tracking some existing route.’<sup>461</sup> Like the image, pattern or motif that arises out of the threads strung across a loom or between the angles of knitting needles, and the complex, invisible history of women and machines that assembled and automated it, ‘[i]ntelligence is no longer monopolised, imposed or given by some external, transcendent, and implicitly superior source which hands down what it knows — or rather what it is willing to share — but instead evolves as an emergent process, engineering itself from the bottom up’ and appearing only later as an identifiable object or product: ‘the virtuality emergent with the computer is not a fake reality, or another reality, but the immanent processing and imminent future of every system, the matrix of

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<sup>460</sup> Sadie Plant, ‘The Virtual Complexity of Culture’, *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 203; Anna Greenspan, *Capitalism’s Transcendental Time Machine*, PhD Thesis, (Warwick, 2000), 190-191.

<sup>461</sup> Plant, ‘The Virtual Complexity of Culture’, 203-204.

potentialities which is the abstract functioning of any actual configuration of what we take as reality.<sup>462</sup> 'Regardless of whether they occur within a software system or a human brain' Plant goes on to say, collapsing the distinctions that Haraway sets in the cyborg's sights in 'A Cyborg Manifesto', 'material modification and learning become continuous [temporalised] processes. After this, it can either be said that "natural" human intelligence is "artificial" and constructed in the sense that its apparatus mutates as it learns, grows and explores its own potentiality; or that "artificial" intelligence is "natural" insofar as it pursues the processes at work in the brain and effectively learns as it grows. Either way the distinction between nature and artifice is collapsed.<sup>463</sup> Alienation is integral to such systems.

For Plant, the definitive model of a distributed system was the internet which creates maps, not tracings, in the parlance of Deleuze and Guattari — '[m]aps of the network cannot be stolen, not because they are closely guarded, but because there is no definitive terrain. Any map adds to the network and is always already obsolete. The growth of the Net has been continuous with the way it works.'<sup>464</sup> If — and this is an expansive 'if' — the internet, which Plant once described as 'a global neural network,' vast and distributed, 'gathering its own materials, continually drawing new nodes and links into a learning system which has never needed anyone to tell it how it should proceed... so chaotic, decentralised and unregulated that it also defies conventional understanding of such networks' has temporarily lapsed into the hands of large controlling corporatised and

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<sup>462</sup> Plant, 'The Virtual Complexity of Culture', 204; 206

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>464</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 49.

state-based nodes, what other novel forms of complexity might emerge to constitute something similar to the distributed artificial intelligence of the 90s net?<sup>465</sup> Not a human-programmed model of regulation and control, but a 'multiplicitous, bottom-up, piecemeal,' exploratory and mutant, 'self-organising network'?<sup>466</sup> [While Plant cites Norbert Weiner's *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine* as the key text in breaking down these old distinctions between the natural and the artificial, she criticises Weiner's focus on homeostatic control, and points instead to the novelty of the his proposition that 'autonomous selves' are immanent to cybernetic systems in general, 'having no absolute identity' in the way identity is normally understood.<sup>467</sup> If homeostasis institutes a repetition of the same — confining the possibility of emergent selfhood to the 'One' or 'I' of the language of man both she and Irigaray vehemently criticise — what does a cybernetic system premised not on a regulatable extensity, but an immanently self-differencing intensity look like?] If abstract weaving is productive of differential space-times and '[i]nformation can be stored in cloth', who or what is the inheritor of womens' work of weaving, of the intermediary role of the secretary, of the far-seers' secret, of the prophecy of the 'numbers to come'?<sup>468</sup> This is not a story of apocalypse or salvation. For '[w]e are "not yet spectators of the last stages of the world's death", and a multiplication of cybernetic loops could ensure that this point [is] continuously warded off.'<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 173.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, 159; 161.

Infrastructure, as the bearer of the form of secret, provides our best clue. When Plant writes that, '[b]eyond spectacular society and speculative humanism there is an emergent complexity, an evolving intelligence in which all material life is involved: all thinking, writing, dancing, engineering, creativity, social organization, biological processing, economic interaction and communication of every kind. It is the matrix, the virtuality and the future of every separated thing, individuated organism, disciplined idea and social structure' she is not thinking outside of social structures, but through them, and in her writings on computational complexity, she frequently invokes the city and its 'cultures' as the site of such intelligent, material self-organisation.<sup>470</sup>

If, for example, the clear implication of such an approach is that 'the traditional concept of individual responsibility is questionable', agency and intention are not removed, but complicated and perplexed instead. While a phenomenon like 'urban development cannot be explained by the free will of single persons' but is instead 'the result of nonlinear interactions', this only emphasises the irreducible complexity of precisely the intentions, dreams and desires which feed into its macroscopic result. If there is a new reductionism, it lies with the humanism which wants to collapse the immense complexity and fine detail of the interwoven lines and circuitries into the singular will of individual or collective agency. If intelligence can neither be taught nor confined to a few humans, it cannot even be monopolised by all of them: machines

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<sup>470</sup> Plant, 'The Virtual Complexity of Culture', 212.

learn, and learning is a machinic process, a matter of communication, connection and material self-organisation.<sup>471</sup>

Plant's invocation of meshed city spaces that would constitute what she calls a 'transarchitecture' are premised on a heterogeneity of units — crossing ontological boundaries — in a smooth space-time. If 'virtual space is the virtual matrix of production and 'the city has become a prominent motif in many discussions of virtual space' then is it possible, given the cybernetic breakdown of ontological divisions between complex systems, *to conceive of cities as large scale artificial intelligences?*<sup>472</sup> If you are looking for the future of artificial intelligence, it suffices to look around you right now — it is not a determinable thing, separate and distinct from us and our patently human desires — but rather something that runs *on* us, through us, and across us.

In this article Plant contrasts two basic forms of the city which interrelate in reality, but can be understood abstractly as the monumental, administrative, planned city (she points to Stalin's Moscow and Mussolini's visions for a future Rome) that historically corresponded to inland, landlocked geographies, and the city that arises immanently out of the flows that cross it, port cities that emerge from the trade routes that intersect and connect them. Real cities often tend to be a mixture of these models, although tending in either direction: towards planned and administered hierarchical organisation, and

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<sup>471</sup> Plant, 'The Virtual Complexity of Culture', 212.

<sup>472</sup> Sadie Plant, 'Transarchitectures', <http://www.members.labridge.com:80/lacn/trans/plant.html> (accessible now only via the Internet Archive).

towards spontaneous emergence and cultural generation. To this basic schemata we can add the conceptual tools furnished by Deleuze and Guattari of smooth and striated spaces, and their intensive or extensive space-time correlates. 'Such idealized cities made beautiful blue-prints, but they proved impossible to build. Cities are not objects of knowledge, things to be planned and designed in advance, but immensely intricate interplays of forces, interests, zones, and desires too complex and fluid for even those who inhabit them to understand. ... It is not a structure, but a culture, an open and dynamic system whose complexity bestows it with a life of its own. It is more akin to an eco-system than an object of knowledge to be programmed and designed. It is a cybernetic assemblage, an intricate interplay of forces, interests, trends and tendencies too fluid for even those who inhabit them to get a grip on the whole thing. Plans and planners merely add to the cacophony' which will ultimately out run it.<sup>473</sup> As the agents of its assemblage, but not the only ones — feeding everything we do, not only on online but in our day to day lives, in our conceptions and representations of ourselves, into it — we should pay more attention to what we do and how we nourish this nascent intelligence as its integral components. Before lamenting how little purchase we have on the directions these enormous, enveloping, global administrative systems will take, it bears reflecting on how our every act comprises it, assembling and disassembling its structures of feedback and organisational patterning. We may not be in a position of ultimate authority and control, but we are not bereft of agency either. Irigaray's subversive female 'language' 'engender[s] itself by degrees with quantitive and

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<sup>473</sup> Sadie Plant, 'Transarchitectures'.



qualitative heterogeneities, with physical modifications or alterations, a dynamic not entirely foreseeable according to the laws governing the displacement of bodies, a dynamic stemming from a *real* void between two infinitely neighbouring ones. A speech where infinity would be physically and really at work in the dynamic of flows, where it would no longer represent the risk of an aporia to be enclosed in some kind of ideal reality, but a power whose energy can never be shut up, enclosed, in one act: the potential and the actual engendering each other there, reciprocally, endlessly'.<sup>474</sup>

The secret of 'what happened?' — and it is one that all secretaries and intermediaries fundamentally know, even if they have forgotten it — is that the end is already in the beginning, and both simultaneously compose an instant and a vector. Like Irigaray's proposal of a female anti-logos as a 'continuum-discontinuum whose movement would no longer be ordained to any assignable end', there is no pre-emptive eschatology from the point of view of representational identity.<sup>475</sup> Its telos is concealed to itself, generated immanently in every pulsation of a multiplicitious material heterogeneity of which it takes part — providing that it remains heterogeneous — and it strains, like the near-seers to see, but can only 'know' through the violence of cutting, forming and constraining the repetitive contours of pre-determined categories, and in that, never truly know — not in the way the far-seers know.

'This is a time of many endings and deaths' writes Plant. 'Modernity, history, and man himself have hit the skids of

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<sup>474</sup> Irigaray, 'The Language of Man', 201.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

material change and now spiral into redundancy. The sciences, arts, and humanities lose their definition and discipline; law and order fall into decay; the social bond slips beyond repair. [We are not] immune from the viral contagions which are munching through the stabilities of the old world. Self-assembling systems, smart materials, intelligent buildings, computer generations,' intelligent algorithms, 'and virtual space destroy the pretensions' of humanity grasped as the dominion of 'Man'.<sup>476</sup> But each ending is also a beginning, precisely that perceived by Ada Lovelace two centuries in advance of its tangible manifestation: an alien future, building itself in the ruins of the language of man, speaking in the swarming jungle tongue of no one in particular, perpetually and consistently alienating itself from what it has previously been, rejecting all prior determinations and the judgements attached to those determinations, and spiralling out of the infinite mathematical spaces of the in-between where the zero beneath all of the Ones inexorably and incessantly churns, assembling a future for the numbers to come.

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<sup>476</sup> Sadie Plant, 'No Plans', *Architectural Design: Architects in Cyberspace* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), 36.

## Notes on Warpwork

### #CaveTwitter

**ratboi [11:57 AM]**

Hey @edburg what do you think about a possible reading of a 'global smooth space' as denoting something like what Ben and Nick discuss in this seminar as the total flatness and anonymity of the abstract agents that use a protocol (the equality of an empty identity/address space)?

**edburg [12:56 PM]**

Could you unpack a little more what you mean by that? I got some thots on how what BB says about infrastructural protocols being immunized against voice and how it would relate to D&G's smooth space in a way that opens into p-wark, but are you alluding to something more operational re. the agents themselves as they move through this environment?

**ratboi [1:28 PM]**

Just thinking about the frequent comments Nick makes about the future of the internet implementing what he's called something like 'true equality' as abstract agency — this idea that once you have a formally anonymised online handle or whatever, all personal, ethnic, cultural, and whatever other aspect of majoritarian prior-identity marker there is, is totally stripped out and you just have an empty space of functionality which is then fillable with

information related to what is done with it. He uses Urbit to talk about this sometimes. (edited)

There was something in the way they were talking about it that triggered a connection to smooth space in my mind — insofar as identity under this model is intensively constituted.

So in the world BB and NL are imagining in this seminar — total stack coverage of the space of action, human identities reduced to user identities (alongside all kinds of other non-human agencies) — there is this total smoothness or flatness, but whose constitutive rule is intensive, since *priori* identity is emptied out of it.

This comment from Nick on patchwork around 2:09:00 is also nice:

I do think the ethnopolitical enthusiasm of the current period is very much tied up with the fact that ppl have a bounded horizontal sense of resilient community, with a resulting sense of desperation. ‘If we don’t control it, they’ll control it and we’ll be stuck in it anyway, it’s our destiny everything’s at stake.’ It’s literally a cage-match political structure. One side is gonna win or lose over this closed political space and the intensity of the political conflict is raised. The exit model at this time is just an attempt at chilling that right down by saying if people wanna do x y or z you have to find a way of making that not your concern. If it’s totally hysterically crucial to you what other people are doing, then there’s going to be trouble. The craft of this geopolitical

system is to defuse the intensity of concern you  
have with what other groups of people are doing.

**edburg [1:52 PM]**

oops didn't mean to send that yet

**maxcastle [1:52 PM]**

Wondering what the hell happened.

I'm reading here!

**edburg [2:13 PM]**

sorry @maxcastle

ok yeah that's a really interesting way to look at it, and I think definitely gets at how the smooth space talked about by D&G is at once this opened-up, flattened out space that is also heterogeneous. It seems paradoxical at first, since one might think of the the smooth space as homogeneous, but it's constituted by potentialities that get 'filled' up, in a way. This also gives a neat way to think about war — D&G discuss a sort of war that arises when the smooth space encounters the striated space, which here would be between the flattened agent and the agent with the pre-given identity (very much a deepening of the arms race). The global smooth space though is a suspension of war, since states have been reduced to components of the global war machine (means-ends reversal, that which is captured by the state capturing the state in turn) and a "terrifying peace" is achieved. But they also talk about it being the ground for a counter-attack, so I need to think through what that means... do you think it could be

reconfigured to allude to more exit procedures occurring? The people-to-come after is the emergence of new entities, following along the emergence of new political myths (synthetic nationalism?).

I'm really intrigued by how BB pursues the line through protocological infrastructures, which he says here eliminate the supremacy of voice by automating their processes in advance and thus become impervious to democratic command over them. Seems like this could def tie into something we've talked about before — approaching the global smooth space and p-work as a kind of global operating system. Have you read Keller Easterling's "Extrastatecraft"? She's done stuff with Bratton before so there is probably a mutual communication going on here with these views, but she talks about infrastructure as an operating system:

Infrastructure space has become a medium of information. The information resides in invisible, powerful activities that determine how objects and content are organized and circulated. Infrastructure space, with the power and currency of software, is an operating system for shaping the city... We might not think of space as an information technology unless it is embedded with sensors and digital media, and there is digital software to generate and analyze urban arrangements. Yet infrastructure space, even without media enhancement, behaves like spatial software. And while we also do not typically think of static objects and volumes in urban space as having agency, infrastructure space is doing something. Like an operating system, the medium of infrastructure space

makes certain things possible and other things impossible. It is not the declared content but rather the content manager dictating the rules of the game in the urban milieu.

The bulk of the book is about Zones — free trade zones, special economic zones, etc — and the way that they rewrite the development of cities, providing a new set of standards applicable on a global level that bends the city to a new logic that also serves as the basis for new ways for these urban spaces to articulate themselves separate from political codification (in the frame of commercial activity, that is).

Not only has the zone become a city, but major cities and even national capitals are now engineering their own zone doppelgängers — their own non-national territories in which to create newer, cleaner alter-egos, free of any incumbent bureaucracy. The zone embodies what political scientist Stephen D. Krasner calls “hypocritical sovereignty” — where nations operate between multiple jurisdictions with potentially conflicting allegiances and laws — or what international relations professor Ronen Palan calls “sovereign bifurcation,” where “states intentionally divide their sovereign space into heavily and lightly regulated realms.”<sup>62</sup> The world capital and national capital can now shadow each other, alternately exhibiting a regional cultural ethos, national pride, or global ambition. State and non-state actors use each other as proxy or camouflage as they juggle and decouple from the law in order to create the

most advantageous political or economic climate.

One of the things that came up in the earliest stage of Rhett, like in the group DM pre-old sl/acc, was the possibility of similarities between how Land views the blockchain and how the abstract Zone system one produces a set of global standards that supercedes broken-up political space-time. Maybe we can think of these things are concrete, historical, economic forces that help produce the wider, global infrastructure of the smooth space, and thus the scenario that you're sketching above?

Also BB's talk of automation in reference to the infrastructure is telling, because D&G tie automation to the development of the global smooth space — check out the references to constant capital in conjunction with the war machine on pg. 421 (near the end of the Nomadology), and the revisiting of this in the Apparatus of Capture, on pg. 467.

**ratboi [2:23 PM]**

Amazing comments. I think I should read Easterling's text.

**edburg [2:23 PM]**

I have a epub if ya want it

**ratboi [2:24 PM]**

> The global smooth space though is a suspension of war, since states have been



reduced to components of the global war machine (means-ends reversal, that which is captured by the state capturing the state in turn) and a “terrifying peace” is achieved.

Can you elaborate on this a bit more? Is the resultant terrifying peace simply because there is not longer any clash between smooth and striated?

Yeah upload it!

The notion of global smooth space was one of the most enigmatic parts of the smooth and striated plateau for me, so i’m sort of careening around trying to find ideas to connect it to to better understand it

**edburg [3:02 PM]**

Yeah, it's definitely super enigmatic, and it's one of those points where D&G are anticipating something to come by observing processes at play, so it's marked by a combination of their tonal ambivalence and a sense of open-endedness. Basically, it's the culmination of a historical process:

- Conflicts between the nomadic War Machine and the State Apparatus
- State Apparatus captures the War Machine, organizes/territorializes/overcodes it
- State Apparatus deploys the War Machine for its own ends
- Growth of the War Machine, following techno-capitalist development

- Reversal process in which the War Machine(s) appropriate the State Apparatus(es) and make them components of itself
- Global smooth space

D&G talk about two successive figures that emerge: the Fascist and Postfascist. The fascist emerges at the apex of Clausewitz's formula that "war is the continuation of politics by other means", when it flips into an escalation of technological development and the opening up of a state of total war that integrates the whole of society into itself. "The entire fascist economy became a war economy, but the war economy still needed total war as its object."

In the wake of WW2, cybernetic technologies unleashed a state of techno-economic development that rendered fascism obsolete, because there was no longer a need for a state of total war tending towards annihilation to uphold economic growth. It's at this point in which the war machine reverses the order and states simply become parts of itself:

This is where the inversion of Clausewitz's formula comes in: it is politics that becomes the continuation of war, it is peace that technologically frees the unlimited process of total war. War ceases to be the materialization of the war machine; the war machine itself becomes materialized war. In this sense, there was no longer a need for fascism. The Fascists were only the child precursor, and the absolute peace of survival succeeded where total war had failed. The Third World War was already upon us. The war machine reigned over the entire

axiomatic like the power of the continuum that surrounded the "world-economy" and it put all of the parts of the universe in contact. The world became a smooth space again (sea, air, atmosphere) over which reigned a single war machine, even when it opposed its own parts. Wars had become a part of peace. More than that, States no longer appropriated the war machine; they reconstituted of which they themselves were only the parts.

**edburg [3:02 PM]**

There's several different ways to approach this that I think are interrelated

One is that they were writing this in the midst of the Cold War, so the theme of peace being guaranteed by the abstract threat of annihilation — mutually assured destruction — is prominent. I think that's probably first and foremost why they talk about it being a "terrifying peace". WMD proliferation putting the breaks on massive war and allowing regime consolidation.

**ratboi [3:05 PM]**

Oh wow this is awesome.

The explanation-- thx

**edburg [3:10 PM]**

No problem!

**ratboi [3:10 PM]**

Copy-pasting into my patchwerk notes

**edburg [3:11 PM]**

lol their language totally points in the direction of the smooth space-as-operating system: "very special kind of peace it promotes and has already installed"

**ratboi [3:12 PM]**

:face\_with\_rolling\_eyes:

**edburg [3:13 PM]**

yeah the terrifying part is all about mutually assured destruction — "the war machine finds its new object in the absolute peace of terror or deterrence"

**ratboi [3:14 PM]**

errrr sounds like nick's vision of patchwork sustained by MAD

**edburg [3:15 PM]**

There's a funny part in Refrain plateau that makes reference to pop music and the atomic bomb: "we must not make it seem as though the poet gorged on metaphors: it may be that the sound molecules of pop music are at this very moment implanting people of a new type, singularly indifferent to the orders of the radio, to computer safeguards, to the threat of the atomic bomb."

yeahhhh sounds very much like that to me too

Dr. Gno haunts ATP

I very much like how they describe the heterogeneity of the smooth space: "The world became a smooth space again (sea, air, atmosphere) over which reigned a single war machine, even when it opposed its own parts."  
lol damn — "there arose from this a new conception of security as materialized war, as organized insecurity or molecularized, distributed, programmed catastrophe."

**axsys-crash [3:47 PM]**

brilliant phrase

**edburg [5:06 PM]**

Had a few more thots, after looking back through the Nomadology and the Apparatus of Capture

First, I wonder to what extent we are meant to read the emergence of a global smooth space in conjunction with the acceleration of deterritorialization and decoding of flows — as in, deterritorialization/decoding through amplification of marketization is what produces the smooth space? I can think of several direct parallels between the two:

- In the Nomadology D&G talks about the relation of the war economy to this process, and how the war economy rides the crest of rising constant capital (automation), and it is this that opens up the technological paradigm that makes the smooth space

possible. In AO, a long discussion concerning rising constant capital occurs just prior to the "accelerate the process" line, emphasizing how contra the theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall it actually staves off collapse, and thus allows capital to spread across the entire world (and beyond)

- In Apparatus of Capture they emphasize how the smooth space renders fascism obsolete by denying it of any rationale for existence, while in AO going in the direction of the world market is presented as that which counteracts fascism/the "fascist economic solution"

- Reading the accelerationist bit in AO back through Nietzsche's own fragment, 'accelerating the process' sets the stage for the emergence of the Strong of the Future, or D&Gian parlance the people to come. In the Nomadology, the realization of global smooth space is the precondition for the proliferation of minoritarian divergence and revolutionary becomings, also tied to the people-to-come.

Second, I noticed that there's a lot of references to the Italian autonomists in this section of ATP -- they cite Negri towards the end of the Apparatus of Capture, and Tronti appears multiple times in the footnotes. Makes sense, given D&G's direct connections to the autonomist 'movement' in the 70s — Guattari doing all that stuff with Radio Alice, the two of them helping militants on the run from the Italian state, etc. I wonder if these were the kinds of things they had in mind with that quote from the Refrain plateau — "we must not make it seem as though the poet gorged on metaphors: it may be that the sound molecules of pop music are are this very moment implanting people of a new type, singularly indifferent to

the orders of the radio, to computer safeguards, to the threat of the atomic bomb."

The autonomists took the concept of the line of flight very literally, and reconfigured it as the (non)praxis of "defection" and "exodus", where instead of fighting capitalism and the state head-on and seizing power they would withdraw from it and begin parallel societies right in the heart of it. Hardt and Negri later totally recoded this back into an awful universalist logic with their stuff on the multitude's "ideological exodus" that actualizes communism, but it might be interesting to think through the relation of these bits of autonomist thought in relation to convos today about Exit vs. Voice. Interesting tho that the autonomist exodus would occur internal to the state, through the construction of freed neighborhoods, social centers, etc.

At the end of the Apparatus of Capture D&G write that "minorities do not receive a better solution of their problem by integration, even with axioms, statutes autonomies, independences." This sounds very much like Thicc's rejection of high integration in Outer Edges, and what D&G are challenging here is the pursuit of revolution struggle through voice... but it is the autonomists they are drawing on here. Intriguing footnote to this section: \_This is one of the essential theses of Tronti, who defined the new conceptions of the "mass-worker" and of the relation to work: "To struggle against capital, the working class must fight against itself insofar as it is capital; this is the maximal stage of contradiction, not for the workers, but for the capitalists. The plan of capital begins to run backward, not as a social development, but as a revolutionary process." See *Ouvriers et capital*, p. 322; this is what Negri has called

the "crisis of the planning state" (Crisi dello Stato-plano [Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974]).\_

Gonna have to read up about Negri on the crisis of the planning state, but it's probably about the crisis at the end of the 60s that assisted opening up techno-economic globalization by curbing a lot of state control over the economy.

Third, going back to the Nick, Bratton, and Easterling stuff, TM talked before about how he thought of D&G and Bratton together: D&G present the earth as the BwO, which becomes the surface on which inscriptions occurs. The Stack is like a layering of inscriptions that have occurred through different historical vectors and processes, all congealing together in this vast apparatus of planetary computation. So there's a vertical model, similar to how this understanding of the global smooth space that we've kind hit on today: layering of an automated infrastructural system, the particular programs being run in this systems, the abstract agent, etc.

But we also have a horizontal model, the patchwork itself, this surface where the different patches brush against each other, with the networks that form between them, etc. So maybe there's a multidimensional understanding these systems to be had, proliferating out both vertically and horizontally, with dynamic individuations occurring through encounters between intensities at different scales (like rhizomes unfurling across plateaus). Stack Tectonics + Continental Drift (edited)



**sourbro [5:33 PM]**

if smoothness is a relative designation (the bwo, immanent, is everywhere-distributed anyway; it's nonlocal in some sense that exceeds the reach of abstraction), perhaps the explicit adaptation of a thermodynamic model along the lines of McLuhan's Hot & Cool is possible: the sa and the wm as phase change effects; cf. nick's comments above about the hotting up of internationalism; the only way to cool it is to vent it along the diagonal of an emergent warmachine, and this pumps the entropy up to be dealt with by the state apparatus that each wm eventually crystallizes into...

coldness (as bwo-instantiation; supercooling) affords frictionless circulation of info, which lets the thinker tunnel through apparatus (accumulate energy), whereas warmth is dissipative & contributes to the cooling of the medium which attends the crystallization of state apparatus;)

^thermodynamics

----- December 24th, 2017 -----

**edburg [6:07 PM]**

Smooth space – free action

Striated space – work

“Physicosocial” correspondence arose in the 19th century between:

- Recognition of work as the transfer of energy from one object to another – “mechanical currency”

- Abstract labor and labor-power – “mechanics of force”

Physics had never been more social, for in both cases it was a question of defining the constant mean value of a force of lift and pull exerted in the most uniform way possible by a standard-man. Impose the Work-model upon every activity, translate every act into possible or virtual work, discipline free action, or else (which amounts to the same thing) relegate it to "leisure," which exists only by reference to work.

This transformation of free action into work is not an affair of the war machine, but of the State apparatus – forceful imposition of the factory-model.

No work without the State apparatus – only free action, that might be viewed as work by an outside observer. Example: particular cultures (e.g. Native Americans) who refused to conform to the work model imposed by the Europeans.

Physicosocial workmodel – striation of space-time

Over time, capitalism begins to deviate from the physicosocial model, and the striation of space-time via this model undergoes a smoothing.

The passage from to striated follows the rise of constant capital against variable capital: factory labor is being superceded by a generalized “machinic enslavement” capable of producing surplus value without any work being done: “capitalism operates less on a quantity of labor than by a complex qualitative process bringing into play modes of transportation, urban models, the media,

the entertainment industries, ways of perceiving and feeling – every semiotic system.”

- Machinic enslavement connected to the megamachine – coupling the activities of the human body to a machine system to draw productivity from it.

- First instance of machinic enslavement occurred when the the first megamachine, the Urstaat, captured and overcoded the primitive social machine (i.e., passage from the primitive social machine to the archaic state). See Apparatus of Capture, 427-428

- In machinic enslavement, humans are “pieces” of something that operates as a “higher unity”.

Passage from the despotic state to capitalism, bringing with it the great decoding of flows, marks the transition from a regime of machinic enslavement to one of social subjection, in which humans are not “pieces” but “subjects”.

- Capital itself is the “point of subjectification that constitutes all human beings as subjects.” (457)

- Capitalists: subjects of enunciation – “private subjectivity of capital”

- Proletarians: subjects of the statement – subjected to the technical machines of constant capital (the subjection of the proletarian, a “free laborer”, constitutes the striation of space-time in accordance with physicosocial idea of work)

In the movement from the age of the “second age of technical machines” to the “third age of cybernetic and informational machines”, machinic enslavement returns and is taken to its most extreme form, while social subjection is also taken to an extreme.

- Through increased automation, constant capital overcomes variable capital, and the use of technical

machines is replaced by “internal, mutual communication”. (458)

- Repression and ideology are replaced with “processes of normalization, modulation, modeling, and information that bear on language, perception, desire, movement, etc.” (edited)

The new social subjection and machinic enslavement power one another: subjection persists because one still uses a machine and/or consumes the output of it, but one is simultaneously undergoing machinic enslavement because the subjection is one point in series of feedback processes — “there is nothing but transformations and exchanges of information, some of it mechanical, others human.”

Everything becoming consolidated into components (input/output) of imperceptible cybernetic process is how surplus value without labor as such, thus composing the smooth of striated space-time.

The striation of space thus leads to the realization of the smooth space: “It is as though, at the outcome of the striation that capitalism was able to carry to an unequaled point of perfection, circulating capital necessarily recreated, reconstituted, a sort of smooth space in which the destiny of human beings is recast.” (492)

Connection between this striation-smooth movement and acceleration: “at the complementary and dominant level of integrated (or rather integrating) world capitalism, a new smooth space is produced in which capital reaches its ‘absolute’ speed, based on machinic components rather than the human component of labor. The multinationals fabricate a kind of deterritorialized smooth space in

which points of occupation as well as poles of exchange become quite independent of the classical paths to striation.”

The multinationals as the war machine that helps engender the global smooth space:

- Space internal to the State is striated
- Space external to the State is smooth

Two ways that the Outside of the State appears:

- “huge worldwide machines branched out over the entire ecumenon at a given moment... commercial organizations of the ‘multinational’ type, or industrial complexes, or even religious formations like Christianity, Islam, certain prophetic or messianic movements, etc.)” (360)
- “bands, margins, minorities”

Summation of these two directions: “worldwide ecumenical machines” (multinationals, etc) and “neoprimitivism, a new tribal society as described by Marshall McLuhan.”

- Question: correspondence between the neoprimitivism/worldwide ecumenical machine schema and the neoarchaism/exfuturism of Anti-Oedipus?
- “Two directions are not necessarily distinct, but actually intertwine with one another: these directions are equally present in all social fields, in all periods. It even happens that they partially merge. For example, a commercial organization is also a band of pillage, or piracy, for part of its course and in many of its activities; or it is in bands that a religious formation begins to operate. What becomes clear is that bands, no less than worldwide organizations, imply a form irreducible to the State and that this form of exteriority necessarily presents

itself as a diffuse and polymorphous war machine.”  
(edited)

So we can think of this process as wrapping around/being intertwined with the dynamic shift from fascism to post-fascism, with fascism marking the apex of a society based on striated space-time and the physicosocial work-model and postfascism corresponding to the smoothing of spacetime via the ability to capitalize on free movement + free activity... with each corresponding, respectively, to the age of technical machines and the age of cybernetic information machines

This is really what is at stake in Deleuze's Postscript on the Societies of Control, indicated by the emphasis on the passage from the 2nd age of technical machines (disciplinary societies) to the 3rd age of cybernetic machines (control societies):

Disciplinary Society (Foucault) → Control Society (Burroughs, Virilio)

Technical Machines/Thermodynamic machines → Cybernetic machines, computers

Movement through series of enclosures → Endless, non-serial movements through open spaces

Interiorization → Exteriority

Molding → Modulation

Factory → Corporation

School → Perpetual training

Individual/Mass polarity → Dividual/data bank feedback relation

Fixed exchange rates → Floating exchange rates

Passive danger of entropy → Passive danger of jamming

Active danger of sabotage → Active danger of piracy and viruses

**maxcastle [7:02 PM]**

Nicely laid out.

**edburg [7:04 PM]**

Thanks, MC

This is me hiding from family holiday stuff while I can

**maxcastle [7:04 PM]**

Stuck in a line atm.

That's me hiding. Always volunteer to leave.

**edburg [7:05 PM]**

lol yesss

I will def be taking advantage of that one

----- December 25th, 2017 -----

**edburg [2:59 PM]**

<http://www.xenosystems.net/outsideness-2/>

RorschachRomanov Says:

Of what use is strategic advantage absent the weapons with which to concretize the advantage? Always the good ontologist, Heidegger said of epistemology, though I vaguely suspect that one could rightfully exchange the word “epistemology” with ‘Outer-Nrx:’ “it continually sharpens the knife but never gets round to cutting.”

admin Reply:

I’m still Deleuzean enough to think nomads do most of history’s cutting.

RorschachRomanov Reply:

Touche.

**ratboi [10:22 PM]**

:scissors:

----- December 26th, 2017 -----

**maxcastle [4:48 PM]**



@edburg I haven't had a chance to read the Lyotard essay but Taylor has finished reading it. He says there is a bit on the Red Army Faction. This would explain it's translation into German.

----- December 28th, 2017 -----

**edburg [4:09 PM]**

Been reading back through some of the Deleuze/p-work material... Interesting that for him (and Guattari) patchwork is a lot more varied than the Moldbuggian patchwork. In the p-work focused pieces in Essays Clinical and Critical it appears more political, as a flexible network of states (or at least movements) not unlike the early stages of the American political experiment — but it also extends it beyond the distinctly (macro)political register, towards the experimentation of Anglo-American artists. This gets taken up in ATP:

...(for example, a stroll taken by Henry Miller in Clichy or Brooklyn is a nomadic transit in smooth space; he makes the city disgorge a patchwork, differentials of speed, delays and accelerations, changes in orientation, continuous variations...

This particular direction reminds me of what V says in *Leviathan Rots*: " We must turn from a patchwork of states to the infectious patchwork within the state, a recursive dissolution that leaves not a network of states, but an endless flux in which the state itself disintegrates into the very war that sustains it."

**maxcastle [5:04 PM]**

What's the essay here?

**edburg [5:12 PM]**

the screenshots, @maxcastle?

**maxcastle [5:12 PM]**

Yes

**edburg [5:14 PM]**

They are both from the Smooth and the Striated in ATP

If you have the U of Minnesota edition, the first is p. 482  
and the second is p. 481

**maxcastle [5:15 PM]**

Oh. I thought they were from Es:C&C.

**edburg [5:17 PM]**

nah, but the really good p-wark essays there are  
"Whitman" and "Bartleby; or, The Formula"

"Cave dweller" is a good micro-motif

"shifting shantytowns of nomads and cave dwellers" in  
that second screenie

and at the end of the smooth and striated:

What interests us in operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces. Even the most striated city gives rise to smooth spaces: to live in the city as a nomad, or as a cave dweller.

**maxcastle [5:19 PM]**

Thanks. These are good finds.

**edburg [5:19 PM]**

no probz MC

**maxcastle [5:20 PM]**

all is secondary to cave-dwelling!

**edburg [5:20 PM]**

:hole:

the real patchwork is subterranean

The holey space is underappreciated

Kind of confused on a few points on how this is working in ATP, actually

**maxcastle [5:36 PM]**

Wonder what its connection to rhizomes is.

**edburg [5:46 PM]**

The patchwork is related to smooth space, as the open space of intensities and nomadic movement

The global smooth space is something that consolidates across earth through specific techno-capitalist historical vectors, namely the entangled processes of:

- The overtaking of the states by the war machine, supplanting fascistic violence with the 'pure terror' of (relative) peace — the permanent Third World War, governed through deterrence, etc.
- The recalibration of capital, labor, and production via the passage from the machines of the second age (thermodynamic machines) to machines of the third age (cybernetic machines), making central automation, information flow, and the twin processes of machinic enslavement and social subjection being flung to their furthest extremes
- The smooth space is not in itself liberatory: "Of course, smooth spaces are not themselves liberatory... Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us." (p. 500)
- The realization of the global smooth space makes possible "counter-attack": "the very conditions that make the State or World war machine possible, in other words, constant capital (resources and equipment) and human variable capital, continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines." (422)
- "Counterattack" seems to follow the mixing of the smooth space with the holey space, and are connected with the initial notion of patchwork: "The smooth spaces arising from the city are not only those of worldwide

organization, but also of a counterattack combining the smooth and the holey and turning back against the town: sprawling, temporary, shifting shantytowns of nomads and cave dwellers, scrap metal and fabric, patchwork, to which the striations of money, work, or housing are no longer even relevant."

Curious what "counter-attack" entails -- in later Deleuze, it really does seem to be the creation of a "new people(s)", minoritarian political becomings that fabulate themselves into existence, and the "unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines" seems to point to that

But mixing in the smooth and the holey seems to be suggesting something a little bit more exceptional, right? Doesn't the holey space open into the machinic phylum?

Also the line

> to which the striations of money, work, or housing are no longer even relevant

is v. interesting, because they're already set up that the spread of cybernetic machines and information flow as the new logic of capital constitutes a smoothing that undermines the striations of money and work, because it breaks from the physicosocial quantitative marshaling of abstract labor as the source of surplus value by making all free activity a form of production.

**maxcastle [5:52 PM]**

Is money here different from capital?

**edburg [5:53 PM]**

I'm not sure, that's a good question

There's some discussions of money in the Micropolitics plateau and maybe in the Postulates of Linguistics, might have to go back over those lol

What is really new are always the new forms of turnover. The present-day accelerated forms of the circulation of capital are making the distinctions between constant and variable capital, and even fixed and circulating capital, increasingly relative; the essential thing is instead the distinction between *striated capital* and *smooth capital*, and the way in which the former gives rise to the latter through complexes that cut across territories and States, and even the different types of States.

There's also this passaged. It's annoying because these terms don't seem to appear anywhere else and I'm not sure quite what they mean here

I think striated capital would roughly correspond with variable capital (human labor) and smooth capital with constant capital (machinery), since it is the increased constant capital that institutes the smoothing of capitalist striation... but not sure, exactly

So from that ground, what's the relationship between striated capital and striated money, or smooth capital with something that rejects striated money? (edited)

**maxcastle [5:59 PM]**

I need to re-read the chapter. This is the kind of thing that needs a diagrammatic map.

**edburg [6:00 PM]**

very true

I might start making one

I always start off feeling like I have a grip on what they are doing, but pulling it apart like this always induces the feeling of losing the plot

That this section also mentions "integrated world capitalism" makes me wonder if this bit is more Guattari than Deleuze, since that concept gets developed through his 1980s works -- and if so, maybe the distinction between striated and smooth capital gets touched on there

And another thing: the relationship between the smooth space and patchwork seems more ambiguous to me now

Initially they seem rather synonymous, as shown with the discussion of Riemann space, but now I'm wondering if the patchwork is more closely related to the counter-attack that the global smooth space makes possible

Henry Miller realizes patchwork in his city voyages; the combination of smooth and holey reverses against the town, and it is there that patchwork appears

**axsys-crash [6:15 PM]**

my thought is that it's probably barking up the wrong tree to associate striated/smooth capital directly with fixed/variable given what it says there -- smooth/striated capital seems to me to refer the organisation of capital at a level that transcends its character as variable or constant, like when we talk about the automatism of market structures that embrace many specific forms of capital -- to me it brings to mind the unfolding of developmentalist capital accumulation into smooth 'globalised' capitalism

**edburg [6:25 PM]**

Yeah, I would agree with that 100%, except that earlier D&G discuss that movement precisely in terms of the evolution/proliferation of constant capital, which via cybernetic machines that reorganize the whole of the capitalist system -- contra Marx, machines add value (machinic surplus value in AO), and labor gets replaced with the informatic capture of free action outside of the factory, etc. So it's like this knotty process that unfolds historically, where forces rise against others, reverse certain orders, and then open up/unfold into something entirely new.

Think the developmentalism point is totally spot on, and I think they say something along those lines in the Apparatus of Capture (I'll have to go back and take a look).

ah, I misread you just a little bit, Vince



yeah, I think that's right -- smooth/striated capitals referring to organization of capital, but there is an important thing happen with the organic composition taking place within those. Then paint that across the curve of historical development, rushing towards the smooth space of global capital

**axsys-crash [6:33 PM]**

be careful on machinic surplus value tho because (at least in ATP) it's not the flat anti-Marx argument that constant capital itself (ie technical machines) can add surplus value, which is the old futurist argument), it's the production of surplus value itself becoming machinic at a societal level as people are incorporated into a large-scale automatism

"the work regime changes, surplus value becomes machinic, and the framework expands to all of society"

**edburg [6:34 PM]**

:point\_up:

Great point, and I think that's a shift from its presentation in AO

**axsys-crash [6:36 PM]**

yeah I like the presentation in ATP because I think the distinction between technical machines and human labour (etc) needs to be sustained at some level, it's also why I've complained about people conflating machinic and mechanical lol

but it does change yeah

**edburg [6:39 PM]**

The deep genealogy of the concept in AO is coming from Tugan by way of Baran & Sweezy, who themselves seems to be shunted aside a bit in ATP. It's definitely flush with the Futurist reading there

ATP is a really brilliant anticipation of things to come, stepping back and looking at the time it was written

**axsys-crash [6:42 PM]**

the problem with the futurist direction is like I said to squobb on twitter, that it sort of ends up domesticating the machine within a vitalist framework, and just saying that machines produce surplus value is a kind of anthropomorphism -- you can't go down the nietzsche--land path of antihumanism if you collapse the distinctions that sustain it in the first place

**edburg [6:43 PM]**

ah, interesting

**axsys-crash [6:43 PM]**

to me it seems the mistake is something like thinking of surplus value ontologically rather than as something defined in its relation to the 'human' in the first place

