

schizoposting|

11 essays on culture
by Alaric

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ISBN: 9798267909891

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Published in association with Parafiction Press

For the friends I haven't met, and probably never will.

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“One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in.

It appears that they can hear pretty well but have scarcely any power of directional location for the origin of the sounds they hear. In some species they discharge electric shocks as a means of spatial orientation, much as bats use their high-pitched squeaks as the equivalent of flashlights. What fish are able to see bears a close analogy to that degree of awareness which all people have in relation to any new environment created by a new technology—just about zero.

Yet despite a very limited sensory life, the fish has an essence or built-in potential which eliminates all problems from its universe. It is always a fish and always manages to continue to be a fish while it exists at all. Such is not, by any means, the case with man.”

Marshall McLuhan, *War and Peace in the Global Village*

Against History

“History is nothing but a procession of false Absolutes, a series of temples raised to pretexts, a degradation of the mind before the Improbable. Even when he turns from religion, man remains subject to it; depleting himself to create fake gods, he then feverishly adopts them: his need for fiction, for mythology triumphs over evidence and absurdity alike.”

Emil Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*

1

What is man? *What am I?* This is the essential question, to which culture has always provided an answer. Unlike McLuhan’s fish, man lacks an intrinsic sense of his essence. In mankind’s oldest narrative, Enkidu, knowing no better, lives among the “hurrying creatures of the abandon,” considering himself one of the antelope: he is “man-as-he-was-in-the-beginning.” It takes an initiation for him to understand what he truly is, an irreversible process of civilizing *gnosis*.

Various peoples’ answers to the essential question can be found baked into their language. The Apache called their tribe *Ndee*, in contrast to all strangers, called *Chidn*. To be *Ndee* is to be fully-human; *Chidn* roughly means “those who are like animals.” A similar pattern holds among the Inuit, Navajo, and more. The Mexica called all others *chichimeca*, meaning “dog-people.” Ancient Greeks and Romans both called outsiders barbarians, as did the Han Chinese. This is the simplest and most honest answer to our essential question: “We are *the people*, contra the savages.”

Such straightforwardness is not permitted today. “Humanity” is a delocalized, universal concept, and modern dogma holds that there is no basic difference between you and a Khoisan tribesman. You are both *Homo sapiens*, equal in capacity and nature. You speak, think, and behave differently because of “culture”—an abstruse, intricate thing developed by the events of your ancestors’ lives. Thus man is framed as a creature not of essence, but of history. The process of *gnosis* is not an initiation into realizing one’s nature, but of learning the events which led to one’s birth. The esoteric is made banal, taking the form of industrialized education to instill identity.

2

The framing of man as historical, rather than essential, is the scaffold upon which industrial (and now post-industrial) civilization has been built. It frames human culture as a zero-player, procedural process akin to Conway’s game of Life, developing based on its starting conditions and universal rules. Individual agency is softened, then amputated entirely. The study soon focuses on amorphous forces and processes: the “rules” of the game. The strong version of this argument takes the form of Marxist historical materialism, or something akin to Jared Diamond’s geographic determinism. The key presupposition is Whiggish; history iterates on itself, advancing toward... something. The eschaton in vogue varies with the seasons.

The study of history, then, is an initiation into not only identity itself, but a particular identity: mankind as *inherently progressive*. This identity is not only descriptive, but prescriptive. The redefinition of man as *Homo progressus* gives him a role in the “advancement” of humanity, and in the deduction of the universal rules that govern progress. When laid bare, this framing might naturally lend itself to extremity and wild futurism—but modern education does not instill a youthful fervor for marching into the future. Instead, the process is framed sentimentally and negatively, as in Santayana’s famous line: “Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.” A belief system with the potential for revolution is in this way neutered. Beyond the removal of

individual agency, man's identity is turned into an anti-philosophy—an infinitely narrowing set of possibilities.

3

Any familiarity with modern historical education—both in schools and in broader culture—leads to the belief that man only acquired consciousness a moment ago. He seems to have lacked interiority prior to the invention of the iPhone, and have occupied his time with two-dimensional debates or pointless cruelty. Reading historic works shows this to be untrue, and often gives the reader the opposite feeling: that thought and even life have regressed in recent years. Of course this practice is discouraged, and readers are instead directed to secondary or tertiary sources instead.

4

It is not my intention to write against progress. Many prophets have approached the argument with more skill than I ever could; Nietzsche alone has fit in a paragraph entire treatises on the subject. However, we must recognize that a progressive approach to history serves as the central pillar of modern identity. It is this construction of identity that casts history so centrally in our thought. Sober analysis of the past is framed as akin to the alchemical Great Work, as it is only through better understanding of the past that man may actually advance. The past, despite its inherent inability to face direct observation, attains the status of material reality, with every man a scientist deducing its properties. Soon historiography attains religious status, and various sects with competing doctrines do battle in the public square. If a proper understanding of history is the sole basis of realizing humanity, of progressing and thus fulfilling one's identity and purpose, all things are justified in advancing the One True Doctrine, from dishonesty to murder.

The accusation is often made that we are a people without a history: rootless cosmopolitans floating in the aether of technological modernity. This is true, but misdirected. The “history” we lack is in reality an older form of identity, as seen in the endonyms and exonyms of historical peoples. We dare not take pride in our particular ancestry, or call a foreign group “barbarians.” Our identity and relation to the world is, however, deeply historical and historiographical. Ask a modern man why something is the way it is, from a social institution to an aesthetic choice, and he will not answer from first principles or even empiricism—he will answer from history. “Why do all of the mugshots on the news look a certain way?”—“Well, you see, it began in 1619...”

Beyond history’s explanatory value, man’s reinvention as *Homo progressus* keeps the past alive and central in the form of a ritual effigy. Because modern identity relies on advancement from the past, one’s ancestors must be regularly scorned and parodied. Soon they are reduced to brutish caricatures, and media fixates on the basest aspects of their lives.

It is also said that “traditional” life included a much stronger focus on history, and this is similarly misleading. Aside from the vagueness of “tradition,” the sort of history that occupies us now would be entirely foreign to even educated men across the vast majority of human history. History itself did not come to be until Herodotus and Thucydides practically invented the concept in the 5th century BC, and polemical historiography found its genesis in Gibbon, over two thousand years later; its current, concretized form is no more than eighty years old.

It is speculated that the Indo-European *kóryos* ritual began with each youth reciting some thirty generations of his ancestors' names, as well as heroic poetry about their feats in battle. This is, in some sense, historical knowledge—but of a different sort. It is a focus not on history itself, but on one's *identity*. The young wolf-warrior would not feel threatened if you told him that giants roamed the earth 4,000 years before his birth, or that the Chinese had developed movable type in the prior century. These ideas would not threaten his identity—and besides, he would be far too busy with conquering space to care. The modern obsessive, on the other hand, would respond with anger. History is his material reality, and any challenge toward it in the abstract is a challenge toward his identity.

Cultures are defined by tensions: the various struggles between two concepts that define their unique existence. The Greek *agon* was the tension which flowered into Western civilization: the struggle between men to demonstrate excellence, ritualized via the wrestling-pit and debating forum. Under Augustus, Rome advanced this concept into the struggle between order and chaos; her empire and culture framed themselves *contra* chaos. With the dawn of Christianity we see a tension between faith and unbelief as the defining element (a novel development, as pre-Christian religion required no such “belief” from its adherents). The height of medieval literary culture, fully Christianized, considered this tension too simple to be worth acknowledging, and instead focused on the tension between desire and duty. Chivalry and courtly love were manifestations of this tension, ritualizing the degree and manner in which a warrior or noblewoman could realize their desires while keeping their duties.

The tensions which built our ancestor-cultures are dimly remembered today, but present as shades in media and thought. The competition between men, the question of faith; the tensions between order and

chaos, duty and desire, progress and regression, man and woman, reality and representation... all of these are ultimately subsumed into the tension between versions of the past.

10

The Indian tradition Ramlila is a stage-play reenacting the *Ramayana*, one of Hinduism's two most important epics. It culminates in a battle between good and evil, ending always with the defeat of the demon Ravana by Rama, an avatar of Vishnu. Like Holi, the festival of colors, it acts as a mass release and reaffirmation of Hindu belief.

Similar traditions—mock battles ending in the defeat of evil, the old order, or the enemies of a people—have taken place across human history and culture. Symbolic *kayfabe* is consistently used to affirm group identity, by literally acting out the tensions that define a given people. We do the same today. The “anti-progressive” or “traditionalist” is brought into the public square to be shamed and beaten; he happily assumes the role of the heel, and unknowingly works it into his self-conception. With each ritual defeat his beliefs and rhetoric become more ridiculous: just as mainstream culture defines itself *contra* him, he defines himself *contra* mainstream culture. However, he wants the acceptance of the mainstream and, unaware of his role as the heel, contorts himself further to gain it. His positive beliefs are then deranged twofold from the traditions he claims to represent. Guénon:

“There are people whose minds have ceased to be content with modern negation, and who, feeling the need for something that our own period cannot offer, see the possibility of an escape from the present crisis only in one way: through a return to tradition in one form or another. Unfortunately, such ‘traditionalism’ is not the same as the real traditional outlook, for it may be no more than a tendency, a more or less vague aspiration presupposing no real knowledge; and it is unfortunately true that, in the mental confusion of our times, this aspiration usually gives rise to fantastic and imaginary conceptions devoid of any serious foundation.”

For some centuries, the Catholic Church quietly condoned the patronage of prostitutes among priests. The practice was seen as a necessary evil: a pressure valve for the clergy that would not fundamentally compromise their role. Today, many traditionalists are repulsed by the practice. They forget the current state of the Church, and even their beloved Chesterton: “do not remove a fence until you know why it was put up in the first place.” A Church that despises the sort of licentiousness found in the Renaissance now exists; is the clergy made up of ascetic holy men?

This, of course, is not an argument for philandry among priests. But in the same sense as this corruption was allowed among the clergy, the limited dissent now allowed in historical thinking is entirely frivolous—existing solely to relieve pressure without institutional threat. In fact, it is necessary to prevent cracks from developing in the public consensus, and serves to reinforce it. For example: the Founding Fathers are tacitly allowed to be framed on occasion as hard-drinking partiers, so young men can claim some small, safe connection to them. This connection is a sham. If young men began taking themselves as seriously as Monroe or Burr—or adopting even one-tenth of their beliefs—this frame would face immediate suppression. Most counter-history takes this form: dissent without teeth, permitted because it does not threaten the status quo.

Modern identity defines man as one progressive creature, yet we remain in practice divided into nations and peoples. The resulting cognitive dissonance is resolved by, of course, appeals to history. The mythical founding of the United States as a proposition nation is expanded worldwide—hence the much-lauded “rules-based international order.” Peoples are robbed of their claims to superiority, and reduced to representation by mewling bureaucrats who demand you validate their “right to exist”—a meaningless slogan.

There is a quiet nation in Central Asia, sparsely populated, that stands in defiance. When Turkmenistan broke from the Soviet Union, Saparmurat Niyazov was raised from functionary to something resembling a god-king. He tasked himself with forging a Turkmen identity, and did so in the *Ruhnama*: an expansive, rambling book that would serve as his nation's compact. In it, he hallucinates an epic history of the Turkmen people, singing the praises of his countrymen as superior in all ways. Its strongest passages are odes to events that never happened, declaring the sovereignty of a people whose existence was only defined by that document. This is the true form of history: an act of *hyperstition*! A people is founded not by "validation," but by violent self-distinction and supremacy. Niyazov knew this, and despite the endless sneering of foreigners, forged a nation out of a loose collection of tribes. Its urban oases of white marble and gold leaf are some of the last ambitious architecture on Earth.

13

If man is an iterative process and his previous layers are impossible to observe, it is necessary for everyone to agree on those layers to produce a coherent group identity. This is the basis of "validation" as the highest imperative. Just as scientists are transformed into apparatchiks enforcing a bureaucratic consensus, cultural figures must prostrate themselves before the historical consensus. "Validation" is a deeply religious act, and history often functions as a religious institution. It has its own moral commandments, priestly caste, eschatology, and sins. Look at the spitting rage inspired by belief in mundane "pseudohistorical" theories; any dissenting belief amounts to blasphemy, and fringe podcasters would be burned at the stake if academics had military power.

14

History-as-identity aside, the vast majority of "human history" is meaningfully fake. Only at a distance does it appear well-structured and

complete. Closer examination reveals thousands of gaps, most hastily spackled-over with assumptions. Many of these patch-jobs rely on the assumption that our only extant source is lying. Homer, Herodotus, Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo, Bernal Díaz, Gaspar de Carvajal—all of these men recorded things dismissed for decades as myth, until hard evidence forced their acknowledgement. I often imagine a new historiography, predicated not on default skepticism but default *acceptance*—what would “human history” look like if we trusted the words passed down to us? A discipline run by Heinrich Schliemanns, Otto Rahns, Laurence Waddells... men of spirit and vision.

15

If all matter can be reduced to atoms, what is the atom of mankind—the smallest unit of human civilization? In this simple question we see the identity-forming kayfabe that defines “history” in its present form. The progressive will say “the community,” gesturing to an imagined paradise of primitive communism. He can be disregarded outright, if not philosophically then archeologically—our oldest discoveries prove man has always been a violent, tribal creature.

The traditionalist will, on the other hand, say “marriage,” or “the family.” This answer holds some water, as it acknowledges natural patriarchy and blood relation as the basis of civilization—but it, too, fails. The centrality of the family ignores the truth that civilization is created and upheld by military violence.

Thus the atom of civilization is necessarily martial. We return here to the Ur-myth. When the proto-man Enkidu is enlightened, his first desire is not for more sex, knowledge, or material power—it is for a friend. This mirrors the Ancient Greek concept of male friendship as the base unit of political society, later elucidated by Montaigne in *On Friendship*. Whereas marriage is often framed as the basic “unit” of civilization, various ancient cultures instead viewed male cooperation as the basis; the chariot, which so revolutionized the ancient world, is operated by a team of two. Plato’s *Symposium* makes this explicit in

Aristophanes' speech on love, with the story of spherical people—joined back-to-back and nearly capable of defeating the gods. Toward the end of this speech, Plato frames the politically-minded man as the type once joined to another man. Thus it is *male cooperation* that serves as the fundamental unit of great things in politics, with marriage as a matter of course, a functional necessity for these types.

16

Each atom is necessarily more strongly bound to itself than it is to its neighbors. If the atom of civilization is martial cooperation between men, then the atom of the state is the conspiracy. Thus cryptocracy is the rule, particularly as states become more complex. The medieval kingdom's simplicity serves in reality as a hedge against corruption; the king cannot disperse blame like the modern executive.

17

If philosophy is physics, politics is chemistry; conflicts and reactions should be examined in the frame of interactions between conspiracies. Even the convulsions of mass-democratic party politics can be seen as a mass chemical event, defined by bonds between people that transcend their bond to the state. "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy"—political life as the breaking and consolidation of bonds, a roiling molecular reaction dominated by forces far stronger than care for the state. Perhaps, then, the outsider should approach politics and discourse as a chemist, testing different catalysts for novel reactions.

18

Like culture, politics in its modern form is maintained entirely by tensions. Montesquieu's system, the basis of most modern states, models the ideal state as existing in a constant state of tension between

the three branches of government. The tensions of a given culture, however—being emergent and never so explicitly outlaid—are far more difficult to discern.

The great project of anthropology from the mid-19th to mid-20th century was the theoretical modeling of man's essence as a Gordian Knot of these tensions, and thus mankind as a sort of mechanistic system whose inner workings could be mapped; this was the precursor to man's identity as *Homo progressus*. Pioneers in the field aimed to understand innate, universal human nature by pulling at the edges of the knot—comparative speech, linguistics, anatomy, etc.—and by studying simpler elements of it in primitive man. But like the actual Gordian Knot, the essence of mass human culture is unbreakable except by its total destruction, and any insights gained without observing its collapse are necessarily incomplete.

19

The redefinition of man as historical process has created, more visibly than any other effect, a slackening of the tensions that once defined mass culture. Man's identity as a layered construct stands at odds with the conception of culture as a web of essential oppositions—tensions which now survive only as disputes over the past. The tensions between man and woman, kinsman and foreigner, comfort and discipline, are now framed not as foundational, but as problematic—something to be resolved.

The old anthropologists would find this the richest period In human history, as the collapse of culture lays bare its core tensions by their slackening. But the academy has long abandoned that original aim, and instead only contributes to the collapse. The kind of mind capable of drawing insight from this unraveling tends instead to reject the work altogether, perhaps knowing there is no point in mapping the Gordian Knot at the moment of its cutting.

The new form of man is history piled atop history, a creature of sedimentation. Like an onion, each layer of progress adds distance between him and the seed of his being. The outermost layers are fleeting and unstable, even transparent; beneath those are older but equally alienating forms, each one a schema imposed atop the essential.

Peeling back these layers is the project of philosophy in its truest sense: the search for the fundamental, the atomic. The collapse of culture via the slackening of tensions prevents man from confronting the terror of first principles—but at the same time inadvertently lays them bare.

The essays that follow attempt to dissect the most recent layer of process-man: to perform an autopsy on culture as it unwinds itself. Ultimately this must be studied along man's most essential differentiations, perceptions, and actions: the tension between man and woman, and the fundamental action-perceptions of sex and violence.

PART I: AUTOPSY

What is the culture?

On Men & Women

It has become trite to say that the bond between the sexes is broken. The critiques are many, and well-known by now. Men and women hate each other. Everyone is too fat. Tinder hypergamy broke the sexual marketplace. #MeToo made it illegal to be straight. Gen Z is neurotic about sex and relationships, so they aren't dating. Everyone has ED—even the women. There are microplastics in your balls and birth control in the water supply. Everything in popular culture is openly sexualized, but nothing is truly erotic. Free porn and OnlyFans have commodified and cheapened sexuality, and young men spend hours a day with disturbing hyperstimuli starting at age ten. Meanwhile, female smut readership singlehandedly holds up the print publishing industry. Everyone is sexually frustrated but no one is having sex. Some people are having too much sex, in a disgusting way. They're having it, but they shouldn't be. Everyone else is just horny and bitter and delusional.

This war between the sexes and total breakdown of sexuality is incomprehensible to anyone over a certain age, with the birth-year cutoff sitting somewhere between 1991 and 1997. It has been nothing short of a Cultural Revolution, a complete break from previous sexual morality and conception. The self-conception of, and interactions between, men and women in 1995 are utterly alien to those of 2025. This all-encompassing nature makes it difficult to pin down exactly *what* has changed, which makes it even more difficult to pin down the *why* behind these changes—much less their second- and third-order effects.

I: The 2014 Revolution

Typically, a genealogy of this “gender war” begins with the Sexual Revolution, or even earlier with the beginnings of feminism. Revisionist chroniclers like to ask “when did everything start going downhill?”—was it the temperance movement, the 19th Amendment, women entering the workforce, birth control? This framing is a futile attempt to historicize the modern gender war as the inevitable and intended result of some prior social movement.

While it is true that these earlier moments appear to have reached their apotheosis in today’s gender paradigm, it is not the case that they were building toward it the whole time. More detailed looks at these movements usually shows a motivation only tangential to “gender war,” or even totally unrelated. Margaret Sanger, founder of the birth control movement, was an ardent eugenicist. The temperance and suffrage movements are best viewed through the lens of a dual Christian fundamentalist and workers’ rights movement; despite shared terminology, the core moral tenets of these early movements are not parsable through modern “feminism.” Similarly, the beliefs and goals of the Sexual Revolution (“free love”) are unrecognizable in today’s desexed world.

It is far more sensible to view all of these movements, including the current “gender war,” as manifestations of a much deeper impulse. They represent a base-human drive toward a specific way of life, characterized by enforced equality, lack of privacy, resistance to higher pursuits, gerontocratic rule, and a suffocating focus on safety. This way of life, aspects of which have existed throughout history, finds its most precise avatar in the Neolithic Longhouse.¹

The longhouse concept connects various Iterations of feminism, primitivism, collectivism, and deconstructionist thought into a cohesive tapestry, so similar in its various historical iterations that Aristophanes

¹ L0m3z, “What is the Longhouse?” *First Things*, February 16th 2023. The longhouse concept was coined in *Bronze Age Mindset* (2018).

was able to lampoon a recognizable version over 2,400 years ago.² Manifestations can also be found in the proto-communist heretical cults of the Middle Ages, various ill-advised peasant revolts throughout history, and among primitive non-Western peoples. The latter have been held up as exemplars of proper life—often to the point of fictionalization—by deconstructionist (or more broadly leftist) anthropologists since the 1930s.³

The modern gender war certainly stands as an example of this same impulse—maybe the ultimate example, as social media discourse has distilled it into pure form. However, it is so meaningfully *new* that historicizing it as an extension of earlier feminism is misguided. Mao was inspired by Gelaohui protests, but it is hardly good history to say that those protests made Mao inevitable. Similarly, the “gender war” as it exists today is an *implanted paradigm*, an abrupt and literal Revolution in mass culture. And this Revolution has a defined starting point: 2014.

The Guardian described 2014 as “a year of feminist insurrection against male violence.”⁴ Time Magazine called it “the best year for women since the dawn of time.”⁵ The events of that year included dozens of wildly-popular feminist hashtag campaigns, an overhaul of US federal legislation on campus rape, WEF and UN reports on global gender inequality, billions of dollars spent on girl-power PR stunts, uncountable headlines of “first woman to...”—and, of course, GamerGate.⁶ Both traditional and social media engaged in a full-court press against male chauvinism and violence, inventing out of whole

² *Assemblywomen* was written in 391 BC, a comedy play parodying the idea of women taking over politics. In it, the women of Athens institute (among other things) sexual communism.

³ See Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa*, and the many criticisms that have followed it since.

⁴ Rebecca Solnit, “Listen up, women are telling their story now.” *The Guardian*, December 30th 2014.

⁵ Charlotte Alter, “This May Have Been the Best Year for Women Since the Dawn of Time.” *Time*, December 23rd 2014.

⁶ GamerGate is discussed in more detail in the later essay titled “The Puppeteer-Industrial Complex.”

cloth the “teams,” topics, and meta-rules of the gender war as we have come to know it in the decade since. Suddenly, the once-niche morality of Tumblr and BuzzFeed became national discourse. These were the opening volleys of the so-called “culture war”—at least its modern form—in American political life.

The result was Immediate and far-reaching. Anti-male sentiment—justified or not—became the single most pervasive cultural force in the Western world. For ten years, disdain for men has been the animating impulse of thousands of cultural products and just as many policies, backed by trillions of dollars in investment. The very framework of conversation narrowed to focus near-exclusively on gender war-derived topics; the totalizing nature of this new frame is what birthed the contagion coarsely called “Woke” today.

This sudden revolution in thought was, of course, a top-down endeavor masquerading as a grassroots movement. Because of Woke’s current form—twisted by a decade of constantly pushing cultural boundaries and ultimately reconsolidating around racial grievances—it often goes forgotten that the 2014 Revolution began as a distinctly *feminist* and *internationalist* movement. Women’s rights in the non-Western world occupied massive mindshare in US life. Third-world rape, wife-beating, hijab laws, street harassment, and the right of women to right to seek education, drive, etc. stood out as major topics of conversation. Figures like Malala Yousafzai and Masih Alinejad gained visibility as figureheads of the feminist movement, fighting for basic rights in Middle Eastern countries—coincidentally, of course, countries in which the United States had a significant interest in projecting soft power.

That the “feminist reckoning” of 2014 was an outgrowth of the US foreign policy and intelligence apparatus was obvious to just about everyone outside of the Western world.⁷ In fact, following Alinejad’s

⁷ A critical legal innovation made this possible: the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 had prohibited the domestic dissemination of programming (propaganda) by the State

“My Stealthy Freedom” social media campaign against hijab laws, Iranian media immediately responded by accusing her of foreign funding. It is debatable if she was being paid at the time—but undeniable that in 2015 she began collecting \$81,000 a year from the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM).⁸ The many thousands of funding programs dedicated to promoting international feminism ranged from the mundane to the absurd: a 2015 incident comes to mind in which an NGO projected Duchamp’s *Fountain* to a room of befuddled Afghan women.⁹

These are but small tentacles of the overall initiative, at the core of which was the massive media and social media blitz that recentered discourse around a new form of feminist thought. Dozens of media events involving rape and violence against women made the subject the center of national discourse. The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault redefined consent with the concept of “affirmative consent,” meant to address the “rape culture” of college campuses. Online PR stunts like “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman” coalesced with trends like #YesAllWomen, making street harassment a centerpiece of American social consciousness, particularly online.¹⁰

It must be stated that America prior to 2014 was not some sort of benighted age of violence against women, in which rape and harassment were ever common or accepted. In fact, all forms of sexual assault had been in per-capita decline for over four decades, per the National Crime Victimization Survey. Material reality did not inform or prompt this Revolution, and from the beginning it relied primarily

Department, but the 2012 Smith-Mundt Modernization Act (incorporated into larger legislative bundle and passed in 2013) removed this provision.

⁸ Per Alinejad’s Recipient Profile on USASpending.gov.

⁹ Cockburn, “Did ‘gender studies’ lose Afghanistan?” *The Spectator*, August 19th 2021.

¹⁰ It is notable that Right to Be (formerly Hollaback!), which created “10 Hours,” is essentially a government cutout, funded by federal, state, and foreign government grants as well as public foundations—which are themselves funded by the same types of grants. They have also at times worked closely with law enforcement in the US and UK.

on the construction of a “virtual environment” in the public mind in which these things were suddenly a major concern. The aforementioned media products and political signals were used as parts of an alternate-reality game (ARG) to iterate and build upon the basic propaganda push.

Despite this detachment from collective lived experience, a mythos quickly spiraled in media and online. Many will remember the early excesses of this new dogma: campaigns against “manspreading,” “mansplaining,” the “phallogentrism” of skyscrapers, and other absurdities were covered with a deadly-serious tone online and in the news.¹¹

As demonstrated by the Department of Government Efficiency’s 2025 investigation of USAID, this sort of propaganda has been largely funded and indirectly managed by the US foreign policy establishment. Boundary-pushing left-feminist propaganda married the goals of two interrelated factions: leftist ideologues (who have been present in those agencies since the end of WWII) and hard-nosed lifetime bureaucrats, aiming to expand USG power in key regions as well as at home. The latter played a PR game worthy of Bernays: attacking the lack of women’s rights in the Middle East and other notable regions gave international moral justification for the expansion of US soft-power groups into those nations, through which intelligence agencies could freely operate. This angle had the potential to meet vast public support, both domestically and amongst allied countries. In order to entrench these efforts as beyond reproach and secure more aggressive funding, a global fixation on neo-feminism would be injected via media—and, critically, the burgeoning battlespace of social media. This laser-focused goal was then diffused by the aforementioned leftist ideologues, whose personal beliefs made them far more rabid in their support for general-interest aspects of the same initiative.

¹¹ The schlock produced during this time is almost beyond parody. See, for example, Taylor Bell’s article “This Female Response to Drake’s Hotline Bling Will Make You Twerk With Empowerment,” *ATTN*, October 31st 2015. This was the near-entirety of popular culture in 2014-15, and it’s light compared to typical articles from *Jezebel*.

This goal was spread between official government outlets—the State Department, various UN committees, executive branch task forces, etc.—and what Mike Benz calls the Blob: the thousands of NGOs closely or loosely affiliated with the American intelligence/foreign relations apparatus, as well as major social media firms.¹² The template and techniques of a foreign color revolution were employed domestically. Media blitzes combined with social media censorship were able to shape the narrative (really, the global social media-mediated noosphere) toward desired ends. Leftist ideologues at every level of government and various other critical institutions—universities, public education, Hollywood, corporate life, etc.—ceaselessly pushed aspects of this Revolution into the everyday lives of millions as the ultimate realization of the Long March through the Institutions. The totalizing gender war that we know today was born.

The US intelligence community has been plagued since the Cold War by a particular story—a narrative arc which has repeated itself at least a dozen times. A guerilla group in a foreign country is funded and trained by the CIA or military.¹³ When its usefulness passes, it is cut off and abandoned, leaving a group of armed and trained militants to wander without direction in a broken country. Some years later, that group resurfaces—this time firing rockets at American soldiers, or engaging in economic sabotage, or selling drugs, or leasing equipment to enemies of the United States. This blowback¹⁴ has in many ways defined US intelligence operations since the end of the Second World War.

¹² Benz is required reading for understanding the US media and censorship apparatus. The most straightforward distillation can be found in his interview with Tucker Carlson on February 16th, 2024.

¹³ It is also notable that the CIA, despite public perceptions, has acted as a meaningfully left-wing organization since at least the 1960s, despite its supposed anticommunism during the Cold War. See support of Ho Chi Minh, Diem, Bourguiba, and Brandt, opposition to Tshombe, and distant neutrality toward Pinochet. See also Frances Stonor Saunders' *Who Paid the Piper?*, a.k.a. *The Cultural Cold War* (1999).

¹⁴ See the excellent essay *Blowback* in *Dissident Review* Vol. I.

The targeted Implantation of the gender war presents something of a parallel to this story. Its genesis in 2014 under Obama was expected (by just about everyone in government and prestige institutions) to be followed by a two-term Hillary Clinton presidency, with the election of the first female President serving as the 2014 Revolution's crowning moment. The clean transition from Bush to Obama to Hillary would have cemented total, generational control of the US government by the security apparatus conceptualized and implemented by Dick Cheney, and security state-power vanguard figures like J. Edgar Hoover before him.

However, Trump's upset victory in 2016 sent shockwaves through the entire group—which he aptly dubbed the “Deep State.” That first term was characterized in large part by Trump's inability to wrest the Executive Branch under control, as the most militant wings of the Blob mobilized fully against anything Trump-adjacent. Thus the initial objectives of the gender war and other leftist propaganda were turned inward, focused near-entirely on disrupting American culture and cultural norms. The aforementioned fixation on anti-male media only expanded and spiraled into further derangement, as if to say: “the future *will* be female—we will make it so.” The result was a spike in messaging temperature: a boiling fire-hose of media and social media, spitting hatred for men, whiteness,¹⁵ heterosexuality, and America itself. All of these tropes began much earlier than 2016, but their volume was turned up to eleven during Trump's first term, and then especially during “peak Woke” in 2020-21—to the point that many media products and headlines from that time began to feel dated and unreal mere months after their release.

This progression of events should be kept in mind whenever leftist activists frame the culture war as a “distraction,” as if it has not been the main priority of both the security state and the Democratic Party for over a decade. It is true in some sense that apparatchiks at the State Department and CIA don't particularly “care” about trans

¹⁵ *The Unprotected Class* by Jeremy Carl covers this well.

representation in competitive table tennis in the same way as their activist footsoldiers—but to pretend it “doesn’t matter” is absurd. At the highest level, the culture war is best conceptualized as the *physical substance* of the battlespace, the strata in which both hard and soft power are contested.¹⁶

II: Effects

Ten years of life in an all-encompassing propaganda environment do not pass without some casualties, psychic or otherwise. Like the broken dynamic between the sexes, it has become trite to point out the sky-high suicide rate, lower average educational attainment, and limited access to prestige positions facing young white men when compared to their female peers. It is also trite to point out the meteoric rates of psychiatric drug use, reported feelings of despair, and inexplicable chronic health issues afflicting young women. But these measures are only the most visible outgrowths of the issue: the end-stage of an ant’s fungal takeover, at which point mycelium finally bursts from its head. The rest of the colony may appear normal, but they already harbor the same spores in various stages of growth.

This “infection” is visible among people of all ages, but most particularly affects the young. Young adults today experienced the 2014 Revolution at a young age, not to mention the societal overhaul of COVID-19. Practically overnight, the social customs passed down from their parents were made irrelevant. The gender war began as they learned to interact with the opposite sex, permanently warping their ability to do so. In many cases, the pandemic hit as they entered the independent, adult world, stifling that landmark as well. The result is a generational mass of shambling proto-humans, half-raised by an outdated consensus and the other half by an online memplex so dizzyingly complicated that the Pentagon dedicates billions to merely understanding it.

¹⁶ This is, down to the specific vocabulary, how the Department of Defense views media and social media sentiment.

Much has been written about the abandonment of traditional social structures in favor of new customs: the total divergence from traditional manners, gender norms, financial norms, methods of communication, and physical structures (i.e. “third places”). However, these observations tend to share a fallacy, in that they examine the material reasons for the abandonment of these structures without looking at the cultural environment behind it. Almost across the board a shared factor goes unsaid: social structures are not being abandoned, they are being killed. The undercurrent behind their replacement is not one of progress or reckless optimism, but repudiation. The resulting set of customs is more akin to anti-customs: an intentional sort of overturning, which draws not from cultural milieu or natural law but from a direct rejection of what came before. The 2014 Revolution was not pro-female but anti-male; all of its downstream effects are similar anti-beliefs, libidinal opposition without any positive philosophy to take the place of the concepts leveled in their wake.

The resultant cultural norms are entirely deranged, to the point that even tangential engagement seems to inflict psychic damage on people above the age group in question. But the young were molded by this neomorality, and have absorbed it to its fullest extent.

Men

The most visible repudiation is of sexuality, particularly normal interactions between men and women. The gender war became the dominant frame of American thought while current young adults were in middle or high school, and to a lesser extent higher education. This consisted largely of the demonization of men and male sexuality.

Beginning in 2014, the “campus rape crisis”—built on the fictions of Duke Lacrosse and Mattress Girl¹⁷—was extrapolated outward, and

¹⁷ Crystal Magnum, of the 2006 Duke Lacrosse hoax, finally admitted to the fabrication in December 2024. “Mattress Girl” (Emma Sulkowicz) was discredited in

the downstream propaganda became the undercurrent of all male-female interaction. Rapist-by-default took over as the cultural perception of men, and all interactions with women were made suspect. The entire cultural framework around flirtation and pursuit died overnight: advice from older male relatives became irrelevant just as the concept of “game” became de facto illegal in broader culture. Media and institutional messaging toward young men reminded them constantly that they are all potential rapists, and (even more absurdly) that women do not want any male attention. This messaging was delivered online and in the news, but it was most strongly reinforced by mandatory seminars and exercises at various institutions. Colleges, high schools, and workplaces implanted a new dogma on interactions between men and women via an endless slew of these meetings and trainings, which only served to crank up the tension between the sexes. As a result, a new and strongly legalistic tone came into use to describe relationships and flirtation, bringing terms from these PSAs and seminars into common parlance.¹⁸

Movies and TV took on a particularly strong role as well, depicting endless iterations of men not as romantics but as predators. The avatars of white male youth were accordingly painted with new stereotypes. Fraternity brothers, musicians, nerds, and more were all redefined in terms of their expected sexual crimes. Ultimately, a new set of standardized tropes began to solidify in film: the sexually aggressive white man, the innocent (often drunk) girl, and the “white knight,” an outside actor who intervenes on the girl’s behalf.¹⁹ In this contrived paradigm, only the third archetype held a claim to virtue. It was in large

investigations by both the NYPD and Columbia. This did not prevent her from being implanted in the mediasphere as an icon of campus rape, including an invitation to the State of the Union Address in 2015. Meaningfully-fake cases like these are often promoted to influence the “culture war” because their lack of materiality forces alignment on the mere principle at hand rather than any specifics. The hoaxer is thus a recurring figure in media and political kayfabe.

¹⁸ Note that the term “minor” has reached total cultural saturation, replacing the use of “child,” “kid,” or “teenager” in the Before Times.

¹⁹ This trope is most concisely seen in *Scream* (2023). However, the basic formula can be found across hundreds of media products.

part via this act of *parafiction* that intersexual derangement was born, by formalizing a “guardian” role in the already-existent social media panopticon. This was the killing blow to the sexually-loose “hookup culture” found on college campuses during the early 2000s–2010s: an entire generation was trained to expect “college partying” to consist of this charade.

This entire phenomenon was meaningfully new. It was certainly not an organic evolution from the media environment that produced *Entourage* and *Blue Mountain State* in the years leading up to 2014, or the earlier milieu of *American Pie* and *Eurotrip*. Practically overnight, the typical invocation of sex changed from a punchline to an act of victimization. Like the pivot in public discourse, the shift in media portrayals was a true Revolution.²⁰

The overall effect was toward the *mediation* of all interactions between men and women, in which the man’s motivations are considered suspect by default. This mediator role first fell to counselors, committees, HR, friends... until eventually the middleman was cut out, with social media itself serving as jury. To continue the legal analogy: this jury has ruled on thousands of public cases since 2014, effectively creating the current “meta” between young men and women. It is perhaps the world’s most efficient court, processing at least one highly-public case every few days and effectively writing new customs via this caselaw.

And this merely covers the realm of sexuality and male-female interaction, one small part of the total denaturing of maleness. The deranging of male-female relations dovetailed with attacks on “toxic masculinity,” epidemic men’s health issues,²¹ and legalized

²⁰ It is interesting that these trends manifested far more strongly in ephemeral media (lower-budget films and series, shortform content, straight-to-streaming specials) than in major franchises, where they were still present but muted, effectively used as references to the tropes in question. The audience is assumed to understand them already. In this case, ideas flowed from the news and internet—already in the process of melding into one—to fast-turnover ephemera and then to major media investments. Every stage of this process flows into the public’s perception of reality.

²¹ Carlson’s *The End of Men* provides a solid overview.

discrimination in favor of women to create a full-court press against (namely white) men. These are not new trends—Christina Hoff Sommers’ *The War Against Boys* covered earlier iterations as early as 2000—but they have achieved total cultural dominance and gone into overdrive since 2014.

A typical response to this line of discussion is to say “the Internet isn’t real life.” In a world where the gap between a popular tweet and a Presidential action is measured in days, this is a bizarre denial of reality—an effort to self-soothe. A twofold system materializes the online world into the real: firstly, the vast majority of people spend multiple hours a day observing and interacting with social media, coming to understand the online audience and allowing it to overwrite their perceptions and beliefs. Then, and more directly, the risk of being judged in the court of public opinion—via pictures, videos, screenshots, etc.—has the effect of manifesting that online audience in physical space during any interaction.

Aside from the analytical misfire, “the Internet isn’t real life” is a *prescriptive* argument offered in response to a set of *descriptive* statements. It is true (and easily observable) that the online influences the real, particularly in the realm of gender relations and sex. In fact, the neomorality developed online has led to a total shift in the “default” personality of a young man, alien in his mannerisms and interests to his father and earlier male ancestors.²² He is overwhelmingly subservient and agreeable, self-dismissing, performatively goofy. This is paired with some degree of femininity and self-infantilization. Any “toxic” elements of masculinity—competitive drive, active sexuality, a taste for adventure—have been beaten out of him by the precise thing called “unreal.” He has contorted himself into a form optimized to avoid offending the sensibilities of the digital blob that mediates all his peer interactions. To observe this person (there are millions such men) and conclude that the blob “doesn’t exist” is denial of reality.

²² This “golden retriever-ification” is novel, and totally divorced from cultural perceptions of young men throughout human history—which typically framed them as restless, violent, passionate, etc. by default.

Is It good advice to revolt against (or at least ignore) poisonous online messaging? Yes—but that does not mean that this messaging has not had a profound impact on a generation of men.

Women

Though the gender war has primarily aimed its sights at masculinity, the deranging effects on women have been just as—if not more—significant. The post-2014 paradigm uses ordinary young women as pawns in the culture war, just as it uses ordinary young men as target practice. In the same manner as the war on male sexuality expanded to a war on maleness itself, female sexuality (and ultimately femininity) has been warped and co-opted as a weapon in service of innumerable psychological offensives, permanently disarranging it and alienating young women from its expression.

The Implementation Is different, though: male sexuality Is demonized, whereas female sexuality Is placed on a pedestal, enshrined as sacred. “Sex positivity” translates to “unconditional support for female sexual expression”—and this support is truly unconditional. It begins with the total removal of any and all limits on sexual expression in youth, and extends to the invocation of collective female sexuality as a sort of tulpa in political discourse, the final arbiter of acceptable behavior and beliefs. As for the former, consider the crusade against school dress codes and “the sexualization of minors,” in which teenage girls were/are encouraged to dress as revealingly as possible as a middle-finger to some vague notion of patriarchy. As for the latter, consider the constant and senseless usage of “incel” to describe men in national-level politics, despite the fact that these men are often married with children. The insult is not used a matter of fact, but rather as a signal that the man in question is not sexually desirable and thus bad. Sexual desirability by women is used here as the highest-level arbiter of worth, more important than accomplishment or virtue. The pesky fact that these men have wives is handwaved away by framing his wife as a victim of

coercive abuse, or a scab in what amounts to a female sexual-political union.²³

More broadly, young women are told that sexual expression is “empowering,” even “sacred.” Digital prostitution via Instagram and OnlyFans is placed beyond reproach, and thus encouraged. It has become a strong taboo to enforce any guardrails against regrettable behavior by young women, up to and including this entry into prostitution—a dismal life once reserved for those with no other options. However this life is upheld as virtuous and good, primarily *as a political act*, a shot across the bow at the patriarchy or some similar notion.

But this elevation of female sexuality is not one in the same with the *acceptance* of female sexuality. As a fundamentally political movement with anti-maleness as its primary goal, it falls short of actual acceptance by demonizing the object of female sexual desire: men. The result is worship of female sexuality as a concept, but not in execution. Prostitution, masturbation, lesbianism, and public sexual display are encouraged—everything but the basic elements of heterosexual attraction and action. Sexual attraction to (and even romantic love for) men is held at arm’s length in this paradigm, which is again primarily political rather than sexual in itself.

This orientation is reinforced in media, which struggles to depict even a single instance of genuine, mutual love between a heterosexual couple. *Modern Family*²⁴ serves as the best example of the three “permitted” archetypes. Cam and Mitchell, a gay couple, are happy and share mutual love. Phil and Claire are characterized by a maturity gap, in which Claire merely tolerates Phil’s foolishness. Meanwhile, Gloria’s relationship with Jay is one of utility, i.e. “gold-digging.” That these relationships are sentimentalized at times does not change the basic structure of their dynamics. Absent in this paradigm (which

²³ *Assemblywomen* comes to mind once again.

²⁴ The name of the series is a hint at its prescriptive nature. Its primary purpose was as an act of *parafiction*.

characterizes the vast majority of media depictions of relationships) is a woman who *genuinely desires* a man—this core aspect of female sexuality has become a strong cultural taboo.

Another taboo surrounding natural female sexuality concerns pregnancy. Female-centric sex positivity does not, apparently, extend to the natural conclusion of heterosexual sex. In fact, pregnancy has been rebranded by education and media as the ultimate sexual taboo, usually described as “life-ruining.” The sexual education movement is most culpable here, with the effort to end teen pregnancy resulting in unhinged classroom exercises meant to make pregnancy unthinkable to young women. For example, some women recall being told in school to write their hopes and dreams on a sticky note; after this was done, the notes were flipped over, and whichever ones had an M on the reverse—for “mother”—were publicly torn up by the teacher.²⁵ These (arguably conservative) attempts at preventing teen sex dovetailed with public discourse that framed pregnancy as “patriarchal labor,” and shared as many birth horror stories as possible to emphasize its risks. These perceptions do not simply go away when adulthood is reached; perhaps the pro-natal movement could benefit from examining them as the taproot of low total fertility in America.

Aside from the paradoxical celebration of female sexuality, an interrelated-but-alternate pathway is presented in the rejection of sexual expression. Female coming-of-age has always been a process characterized by a reckoning with the alluring-yet-dangerous male gaze; until recently, cultural frameworks have governed and softened this difficult undertaking. Now, both the excessive embrace and the

²⁵ Classroom exercises like this are a powerful propaganda tool, intentional or otherwise. The negative public perception of Christopher Columbus was cemented not by Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History* but by his “Trial of Columbus” exercise, which rapidly became standard history curriculum in public schools. Similarly, a large bulk of people believe that the Holocaust targeted everyone without blond hair and blue eyes, based on a teacher pointing out who would be “sent to the camps”—a startlingly-common classroom exercise. Often, the perceptions created by these exercises are the most memorable aspects of one’s education.

excessive rejection of sexuality run amok, governed by pathways into the most destructive possible outcomes.

This rejection of sexual expression comes in multiple forms, typified most strongly in online eating disorder communities and in transgenderism.²⁶ Both of these pathways reject the objectification inherent to female sexuality and seduction. Extreme thinness presents an alternate aesthetic status ladder in which young women can compete, mediated entirely online. Meanwhile, transgenderism presents an active rejection of one's sexual aesthetic, a complete and permanent desexing of the body: "of course, if you don't have the will to starve yourself till your tits disappear, well then, you can always chop them off."²⁷

However, these are merely the most extreme manifestations of a force that occupies mindshare in the vast majority of young women. The more common varieties are expressed as an aversion to catering to male visual tastes, even when male attention is desired. Just as men are told to contort themselves for female acceptability, women are told to contort their image to *avoid* appealing to men. The result is a sort of mass *sexual aposematism*, visible especially in Generation Z fashion, makeup, and fitness trends. Baggy, loud clothes obscure or alter the naturally-desirable hourglass silhouette; excessive makeup is applied as an expression of skill, appealing only to online female audiences; exercise is directed toward the building of a musclebound physique, rather than achieving thinness or accentuating curves. More abstractly, the behavior of most young women—mannerisms, posture, social conduct, interests—is oriented near-entirely around this sexual aposematism. Sexiness is dead, and in a roundabout way, Obama killed it.

²⁶ Despite public perceptions, transgenderism and nonbinary identification are far more common among young women than young men.

²⁷ Zinnia, "A Partial Explanation of Zoomer Girl Derangement." *e-girl esoterica*, 2024. Zinnia's essay elaborates on many of the ideas described throughout this section, from a female perspective. I highly recommend it.

We see in these trends another proof of the “online becoming real,” perhaps even more strongly among women than men. The implanted gender-war paradigm of the past decade is expressed in every aspect of sexuality, behavior, and aesthetics. It is impossible to separate modern masculinity or femininity from this particular set of new anti-customs; both gendered expression and inter-sexual interaction are mediated by its noetic presence.

Notes

1

If both men and women increasingly form their identities by fleeing or attacking the essential, then we can gain some clues to their actual essence by looking at both what they attack, and what each still does not understand about the other—i.e. what still remains of the essential. The former is simple: masculine strength and feminine beauty are scorned, as are typical gender roles and social pathways for and between the two sexes. The latter aspect—what remains misunderstood—is more interesting, as it speaks potentially to a deeper level of truth.

2

What, then, are the core things that men and women do not—or cannot—understand about each other? As anyone will tell you, men find women confusing and mercurial, whereas women find men contradictory and (apparently selectively) oblivious. In this difference we see men as twofold but knowable, and women as singlefold but unknowable.

A man exists at peace or at war, on the hunt or at camp: he can be the far more exacting or meticulous of the two sexes, but also the far simpler and more forbearing. While “at war”—as a youth, a bachelor, or while involved in some kind of project—he is willing to sleep on the floor, live in a blank room, and eat the same thing each day, usually without even thinking about it. His identity is usually stable, straightforward, and

uncompromising. While “at peace” (and in general) he is interested in the objective, the exact—defined mastery and hierarchy. Women, on the other hand, are of a more consistent nature, but remain capricious and mysterious, even to themselves. There is more consistency in the underlying thing—in that it does not alternate between two modes—but less definition, and a resistance to even measurement by oneself. There is no fixation on the definable, and female social hierarchies are far less explicitly-ordered than those of men. Man is oriented toward exteriority, woman toward interiority. Men are cyclic but legible, women are continuous but illegible.

3

Any study of population-level gender statistics shows more extremity among men, and more consistency among women. The distribution of male IQ is wider, as is the prevalence of political radicalism. Men are more likely than women to be either rich or impoverished, very short or very tall, etc. This also applies on the individual level, hence the view of men as twofold: among the highest men you find the capability for the most baseness, and among the lowest the capability for the most purity. Common among these male traits is *legibility*—which varies far more among women, both to others and themselves. Just as women are more emotionally-attuned and intuitively perceptive, this illegibility explains the fact that disorders like BPD are near-exclusively female phenomena.

4

This framing is supported in male and female sexual tastes, as seen in pornography. It is novelty and visuality that excite men; thus also extremity and specificity, explaining the fetishist as an essentially male phenomenon. Women, on the other hand, are excited by mystery and all-encompassing power. Men are more likely to watch porn, women to

read it; the archetypes in the latter are far more often fantastical and unrealistic. At the same time, the male sexual fantasy is more likely than the female to be incidental—i.e. concerned with the immediate rather than the long-term—hence the Madonna-whore complex. The male fantasy is encapsulated, whereas the female fantasy is immersive; again we see the same dichotomy of twofold-knowable and singlefold-unknowable.

It is this dichotomy—in essence, sexuality, aesthetics, and consciousness—that differentiates the sexes. Both Bernini and BTK could have only been men, just as Teresa of Avila could only have been a woman. The alchemist was always a man, just as the devotee who saw themselves as “married” to a deity was always a woman. In animistic religion, the shaman was usually a man by practical necessity, but he almost-universally took on an androgynous character. The basic dichotomy transcends era, culture, and value systems.

5

These concepts are, at best, restatements of ancient thought on the nature of men and women. In a much freer intellectual age, the essential could be discussed with such directness; more importantly, it could be extrapolated and enacted as policy, which we now know as tradition.

Many such traditions are incomprehensible, or at least misunderstood, today. The Greeks excluded both women and eroticized men from political life, on the basis that neither could dispel sexual desire via mechanical act and examine the real with unclouded eyes. In recent years, thinkers like de Beauvoir imagined that their view of the female essence was a post-hoc justification of this exclusion, rather than its impetus; a similar reversal happens even among traditionalists, who imagine that marriage represents the natural state of man, rather than a complex incentive structure meant to mold and direct civilization.

Today, we often look at traditions and imagine that they *represent* nature, rather than the truth: that they were carefully designed to *restrain* it toward various ends. Now that even the vestiges of tradition have been uprooted, we will have to design new rituals and structures. These must be derived not from revival, but from a new study of the essential.

On Sex

“The modern artist who, in his physiology, is next of kin to the hysteric, may also be classified as a character belonging to [the] state of morbidness... The absurd irritability of his system, which makes a crisis out of every one of his experiences, and sees dramatic elements in the most insignificant occurrences of life, deprives him of all calm reflection; he ceases from being a personality, at most he is a rendezvous of personalities of which first one and then the other asserts itself with barefaced assurance. Precisely on this account he is great as an actor; all these poor will-less people, whom doctors study so profoundly, astound one through their virtuosity in mimicking, in transfiguration, in their assumption of almost any character required.”

Nietzsche, *Will to Power*

Sex is the first metaphysical act of the human animal. It is the point where the blind, biological drive to reproduce collides with the uniquely human capacity for reflection and self-consciousness. It is a generative *choice*, rewarded instantly with pleasure—yet the same drive can be chthonic, dangerous. Alongside violence and pain, it is one of the two fundamental action-perceptions that govern human experience, a central paradox at the heart of our existence. As such, it has held a central place in every human culture—whether in its expression, its limitation, or its representation. Per Freud, the libido is the energetic substrate from which art, politics, and philosophy arise; per Foucault, it is the primary terrain upon which societies discipline bodies and produce subjectivity. Without sex, the human race ends; without sex, some might ask why it ought to continue. In the absence of a healthy approach toward sex, mass-psychology spirals into insanity, repression, suicide. The result of such a spiral is degeneracy—not only moral, but

in the literal sense of the word: a collapse of the generative capacity, and a backslide of civilization vigor.

And yet, despite its elemental centrality, our current relation to sex is marked less by reverence or pragmatism than by confusion. Hence the question, posed with increasing urgency: “why are young people so weird about sex?”

This has been the central question of well over a thousand thinkpieces, from New York Times features to breadtube video essays. We have seen economic theories of inceldom, moral crusades that could be pushed by a Puritan pastor just as easily as a modern communist, neotraditionalist coital cosmologies... the whole gamut of reductive “takes.” As always, sex sells—from cigarettes to clicks. However, few (if any) acknowledge that these histrionic writings are not sober analyses, but a driving force of the very problems they lament. They are, in effect, attempts at *hyperstition*: veiled wishcasting, a prescriptive frame cloaked in descriptive language.

Most agree that American life is oversexualized and underfucked. This much is true. We are surrounded by crude pornography in media, saturated with sexuality—yet at the same time desexed in practical reality. The average youth is obese, aposematic, and neurotic about romance. But this effect is not an outgrowth of abundance, nor of economic insecurity. The total fertility rate is lower today than during the Great Depression *and* the postwar economic boom, as is the average number of sexual partners. Similarly, this outcome is not the result of some kind of shift toward conservative norms—nor liberal ones. We have less sex than youth in the “conservative 1950s,” and current culture could never be confused with that of the “free love” movements of the ‘60s and ‘70s.

In reality, the core *thing* behind our derangement from sexuality is the same *thing* that deranges us from historical identity, gendered norms, and violence: a slide into semiotics. Man as actor; action as signal; moral fables as the agreed-upon substance of reality. The diagnosis (and tonic)

is therefore outside of the domain of policy wonks. Incentive structures are secondary, in this case, to culture and mass psychology.

I: Sexual Neomorality

The previous essay discussed the 2014 Revolution and its effects on gendered expression. This movement was above all else a sort of *moral crusade*, and as such implanted a *moral* frame surrounding maleness, femaleness, and sex itself. This can be difficult for some to accept, because its messaging in large part relies on a performative “rejection” of morality, especially sexual morality. However, an anti-morality still exists within the moral frame; and in this case, serves to crystallize long-abandoned “traditional” norms alongside a prescribed “rejection” of said norms—which makes up the bulk of modern sexual commandments. Mass sexual immorality would resemble the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, which is certainly not the case today—based solely on the low amount of sex, and particularly sexual violence, actually happening in real life.

An example: despite the Pride movement’s attempts to put off this image with performative degeneracy, it still remains trapped in the frame of offending traditional morality. The gay movement has not been made up of fringe libertines since at least the 1960s, and in fact today exists primarily as a low-energy political movement built around public rebellion against a particular set of strawmen. Of course, this incidentally creates an environment for all sorts of the most disgusting and predatory behavior—but these behaviors are at their core a sort of performance, rather than the consummation of amoral hedonism... but I digress.

Modern sexual attitudes are, then, strongly *moralistic* in style and substance. A pregnant eighteen-year-old horrifies the masses on a moral basis. Leonardo DiCaprio is derided for breaking up with models once they turn twenty-five. Social media rises every few weeks to attack the “sexualization” of characters in videogames and cartoons.

Pornography is scorned for the fact that it creates “unrealistic expectations” in viewers. So on and so forth.

The development of this sexual neomorality can be historicized and studied alongside the “gender war,” with a similar pivot in 2014. The broad strokes were implanted by the same central apparatus as everything else, reaching full speed with the “campus rape crisis.” However, the finer points of sexual morality were left to the public for legislation, which led to a confused, dispersed rewriting of norms surrounding sex as part of the broader Revolution. These norms reached circulation via traditional media—from network TV to mainstream articles—and the newly-potentiated social media surround, which of course primarily impacted the young as they came of age online. It would be impossible to catalogue every eddy of this moral overturning, but I’ll attempt to pinpoint certain broad strokes.

Beginning around 2010, “sex positivity” encouraged female promiscuity as a revolt against the “conservative patriarchy.” Soon, campus rape hysteria altered this, as popular morality crystallized into a sort of desexed “consent is hot” workshop-sexuality, with ever-more-granular rules and expectations. However, “pro-slut” feminism could not stand on its own in an anti-male environment, and cultural messaging strangely began to claim that women derive no pleasure from sex with men; ironically, this spawned a sort of neo-Puritanism, in which women are exclusively victims of sexual desire and never seek it themselves (either physically or observationally, i.e. “sexualization”). Female pleasure became something of a popular fixation, though placed outside of “male access,” made esoteric. History was popularly rewritten: “no woman has ever been sexually satisfied in a heterosexual marriage, nor has experienced pleasure from heterosexual sex.” Around 2019, pro-sex-worker feminism returned from the ‘70s fringes as something of an exception, formalizing the notion that sex is only moral if it is defined and extractive—yet oddly still scorning the customers. Over this entire period “kink” became widespread and expected, first as a public signal among women—thus furthering the expectation of predefined roles and rules in sexuality. Since then, this has only expanded in scope and

intensity (for example, “choking” escalates to “consensual non-consent”). Visual and sexual tastes have taken on the character of a complex signaling game of one’s “unproblematic-ness,” catering to the “male gaze” rapidly became anathema, in fashion and media. Etc., etc., etc.

All of these convulsions of the popular mind can be boiled down to an extended reckoning with one central, unspoken tenet: “*Male sexual pleasure is inherently evil.*” This is the defining ethos of modern sexual morality, the axis around which sexual culture rotates. “*Any act that gives pleasure to a man is an act of victimization.*” It is the Big Lie of current-year sexuality, and all developments in sexual morality can be viewed through the lens of biological reality—both male and female desire—trying to reckon with it. The resulting cognitive dissonance is what produces “popular sexuality.”

This moral orientation produces differing effects in men and women. The former are shamed into the sort of creature described previously: unassuming, self-effacing, passionless. They are taught to shuck and jive for the constantly-evolving panopticon, then scorned for doing so. The average young man raised in this memetic environment feels the need to apologize for his very existence—not to mention his sexuality—and common archetypes are often little more than coping mechanisms for the insanity of this broader environment.

The effect on women is somewhat more complex, and usually goes undiscussed. Post-Revolution culture demands not only adherence to a set of feminist principles and pathways, but the active rejection (and thus experience) of the older morality against which it sets itself. Young women are expected to *ritually experience and reject* long-dead “traditional” sexual morality, just as they are expected to navigate the maze of behaviors and beliefs expected by the neomorality which replaced it. The replacement of cultural norms with anti-norms means that the female experience still involves the shame that popular culture claims to have supplanted. Similarly, deviation from the capricious beliefs and behaviors of the moment is seen as not only a personal

choice, but some sort of attack on womanhood at large; femaleness, then, functions as a sort of involuntary union membership, with directives distributed online.

Both male and female sexuality—that base, biological thing—are suppressed, or at least redirected, by the movement of this all-encompassing cultural machine. The derangement produced by this memetic gyre has effectively rewritten the physical experience of sexuality, driven it into the realm of symbols and signal—mediated once again online.

II: Semiotic Sexuality

Mass-cultural derangement about sex has, of course, led to mass neuroticism about sex, which has led to less sex—fewer flings, relationships, marriages, children. Romance, the ritualized form of base sexuality, is in freefall. An obsession with the minutiae of the sex act itself—with consent protocols, scripts, power dynamics, and signaling—has generationally uprooted the drive to flirt, to date, and to marry by reframing procreation as shameful or grotesque. However, the cultural surround can only do so much. No matter how much it tries, it cannot remove the biological drive for sex, which still expresses itself in a twisted, corralled form. Instead of natural expression, this drive is redirected near-entirely into semiotics.

What does this look like in practice? Popular sexuality among the younger generations (Gen Z and below) has taken on a strongly “rules-based” character, with a fixation on defined “roles” and prescribed actions. The popularity of “BDSM dynamics” functions as a formalized list of roles to choose from, with strictly allowed and expected actions within each paradigm. When all sex is viewed *morally* as an act of victimization, the only way to experience sexual release without guilt is

to treat it as a contractual performance.²⁸ This explains the popularity of “kink” not as deviance, but as moralism; its normalization allows for strict legibility and unambiguity in sex, in which a to-do list can be provided beforehand—a mechanical sequence of knobs and buttons that allow release without either party taking on moral shame. The more granular the rules, the “safer” the arousal; the self is no longer “responsible” for the act, as each participant’s physical presence is mediated through their role. It is only within this semiotic “safety net” that unselfconscious arousal is permitted.

This process, of course, coincides with a distancing from the physical body, and thus the physical act of sex. Watching porn, a private and individual act, becomes the typical method of release, demanding nothing of the individual and requiring no physical engagement or personal vulnerability. Mass media itself becomes pornified as a result of this cultural shift—not in that it is overtly sexual (and certainly not “sexy”), but in that it parallels and parodies the forms and conventions of popular pornography. These conventions then bleed over into physical reality, making physical sex not just “porn-like” but an extension of the porn-watching experience. An imagined audience is present, and pleasure is primarily visual and categorical, rather than sensational and immersive. In actual sex, the orgasm migrates from the nervous system to the meta-layer—a kind of reward for a successful performance, before an unseen camera.

The overall effect is a drive toward performative role-play as the primary sex act, a form of mediation that allows one to distance oneself from the shame of the act at hand, and instantaneously flatten any ambiguity. That sex happens physically is incidental to the actual act, which happens on the semiotic plane: an engagement of archetypes along determined paths, in which the physical act is just a stage-reenactment for the purpose of sexual release. Modern sex, then, is effectively reduced to *tulpa-mediated mutual masturbation*. The physical act

²⁸ Hence also the bizarre trend toward male submissiveness, a fixation on older woman-younger man relationships, etc.; you can’t feel bad about being predatory if you’re the victim.

becomes a ritual of mutual self-stimulation through symbols: two bodies present as props for the meeting of their avatars.²⁹ The inherent vulnerability of sexuality is discarded, warded-off with a pair of perfectly-integrated masks.

The end result is sex undertaken as something like art—which would be far more enticing if the art being imitated was any good, or the participants had artistic taste. However, this is not the case, and the artistic statement of most sex in this paradigm is little different than what one might find on DeviantArt or AO3. In fact, the progression of sexual tropes and attitudes is most similar to the “progression” of fanfiction, in which character-archetypes revolve around each other according to online norms *ad infinitum*—each individual contribution becoming increasingly bizarre and fetishistic. This “art” is created as a momentary psychosexual release, existing at the superposition of cultural-political meta-referentiality and lowbrow porn-space. The frat guy takes advantage of the sorority girl, the quirky girl deflowers the autistic, the lion rapes the small dog. Our subsummation into archetypes determined online and in media happens subconsciously, a kind of reflexive assumption of role-pathways in order to avoid the actual vulnerability of sex. The end result is doing post-ironic hand stuff in a bar bathroom, in which nobody *really* achieves release.

III: Endpoints

When this is the undercurrent of modern sexuality—a moral regime that demands total sublimation into semiotic insanity—is it surprising that many flee it, or at least do not participate? At least a quarter of 18-24 year olds report total celibacy, a historical anomaly and certainly a symptom of mass derangement. The intentional identities that arise

²⁹ A further mirror is found in the popularity of cosplay-porn, in which not only archetypes but specific characters are integrated as consistent tropes and known quantities; the object of attraction is the symbol, and the person is at best a mechanical stand-in.

from this (militant incelism and asexuality) are framed as direct rejections of the current sexual climate, in so many words: either recognizing “sex” as a humiliation ritual and refusing to submit, or feeling so alienated that one retreats completely from the sexual realm. Sex is framed as a loss of sovereignty, an act of submission to an unseen but all-encompassing (and for various reasons, hated) regime. It is this perceived submission that is rejected by both the incel and the asexual—the former via combativeness, the latter via retreat. That these rejections take place across the political spectrum should speak to the fundamental nature of what they’re rejecting.

Both primary forms of transgenderism similarly rise as direct responses to sexual neomorality and semiotic sexuality. The male-to-female transsexual is often so disgusted by his desire that in transitioning he aims to become the object, free of moral weight and shame. The stress of his “predatory potential” is neutralized by his new identity as prey. The female-to-male transsexual desexes herself to avoid the humiliating economy of erotic visibility (and nonbinary identity is typically the same). Both MtF and FtM transsexuals, when expressing sexuality, often demonstrate the most advanced forms of semiotic sexuality—in which they seem to desire to exist as pure, malleable Forms, and in which most sexual expression is purely noetic, a continuous iteration of tropes and signals. Both function as escape-pods from the moral economy of sex, and all its stressors; in its place, an alternate sexual world is created, a dark mirror of the original even in its attempted abolition.³⁰

On the other hand, what is a “furry” but the perfected end-product of this paradigm? Their “character” is worn as a full-body costume, replacing not only their identity but their humanity. Sexual activity revolves around prescribed gatherings, and despite its depravity is more

³⁰ Sometimes this will loop around to a comic extent, and one will stumble upon these types talking about “trans femboys” being dominantly “bred” by “trans tomboys.” This is the sexual equivalent of circling the equator to reach the house next door, but they cannot countenance this expression of basically-normal heterosexual desire without layers of semiotic inversion.

often than not a mere physical recreation of online porn-art—which is generated contractually, so much that it has spawned a semiformal economy. The furry is the perfected consumer, the perfected user, and the perfected sexual type of our current moral-cultural state; they are the end-state of modern sexual mores and psychology.

Another end-state is found in the emergent AI text-porn industry, in which the user rejects interpersonal sexuality in favor of synthetic domains: LLM-based roleplay, “AI boyfriends,” VR partners. The actual partner is abolished, but the current form of sex—semiotic—is retained. Techno-eroticism skips the clumsy mediation of physical sex in favor of *pure semiotics*, in which the libido literally mates with the sign rather than the body, consummating the divorce between sexuality and embodiment that began more than a decade ago.

These things are distasteful to talk about, and far more horrifying to observe, so the typical response is to politely pretend they don’t exist, or to lump them in with historical sexual deviancy. This is, at best, a naïve response to the dynamics at play—and only plays into those dynamics, by providing a well-worn pathway for their expression and integration into identity. It is in this sense that thinkpieces about mass sexual dysfunction play into that same dysfunction: by iterating upon the archetypes around which semiotic sexuality continues to spiral. Any approach to modern sexual brokenness must start with the fundamentally unsexy (and highly-controversial) task of unwinding the neomorality which governs sex, and an honest reckoning with the psychologically-imposed state of sexual action. Otherwise, one remains permanently distanced from the essential, merely advancing the same game of signs and symbols that created our broken Eros in the first place.

Notes

1

We live in the extended nightmare of Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels. That we must turn to an obscure madman for sense should speak to how insane things are. His ramblings may have lacked historical merit, but in the act of channeling them he accessed something deeper, a sort of hyperstitional space in which his reimagining of the deep past preempted the convulsions of the future—at least in spirit. Perhaps there was more truth to his work than is attributed...

2

The antipornography movement generally has its heart in the right place, but instantly became part of the larger signaling game as soon as it reached critical mass online. What began as a niche, male-led movement away from useless masturbation rapidly turned into another moral cudgel against male desire, and in truth against sexuality itself. Similarly, if this work gains any kind of prominence, it will be folded into the same paradigm with ease. All “sex discourse” is fundamentally trapped in the same semiotic plane as all actual sex. The media-mediation of all action creates this by default.

3

The sexual undercurrent is a shortcut to the source code of the collective unconscious. In an age of trope-mediated sexuality, accessing and modifying those tropes is in effect a direct line to the collective libido—

and thus to the pathways of attraction, thought, and action, from sexual to political. It is the single most important piece of noetic territory, and we allow it to be controlled by a den of freaks, apparently on principle alone.

4

The future belongs to whatever political or cultural movement offers access to real sexuality. Whatever group takes the leap—via ritual, thought, policy, etc.—and offers a sort of sexual reformation will command the allegiance of a generation, or at least those among it who wish to be fully-human.

On Violence

“Since the War’s end, the denial of pain as a necessary facet of life has experienced a late revival. These years display a strange mix of barbarity and humanity; they resemble an archipelago where an isle of vegetarians exists right next to an island of cannibals. An extreme pacifism side by side with an enormous intensification of war preparations, luxurious prisons next to squalid quarters for the unemployed, the abolition of capital punishment by day whilst the Whites and the Reds cut each other’s throats by night—all this is thoroughly fairytale-like and reflects a sordid world in which the semblance of security is preserved in a string of hotel foyers.”

Jünger, *On Pain*

“Tell me your relation to pain, and I will tell you who you are!” says Jünger, in his famous essay. Pain is *essential*, making up one of man’s most basic perceptions and therefore a central (if unseen) support-pillar of his identity.

Just as the sensation of pleasure finds its mirror in the action of sex, pain finds its mirror in the action of violence. Few recent histories have examined the role of the latter on a culture-wide scale as extensively as those which have examined sex. And those that have often operate from a moralistic, progressive, or even histrionic standpoint—without recognizing that this, too, is part of a modern and cultural relation to violence, rather than anything inherent to humanity. A man’s relationship to pain and violence speaks to his essence just as a culture’s relationship to pain and violence expresses its core assumptions, and its health. And, just as our relationship to gender and sex becomes increasingly deranged, so too does our relationship to violence.

Ultimately the effect is of a distancing from our essential selves—a headlong march away from mankind, and toward a craven image of it.

I: Removal & Derangement

Whether as lament or celebration, the refrain that “violence has been removed from society” has become common. Despite media fictions, this is undeniably true. Steven Pinker’s 2011 work *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* offers a rough empirical measure for the whole of human history. In pre-state societies, 500 of 100,000 people died violently, a number which declined to around 100 with the formation of early states, then to around 50 in the Middle Ages. In the modern United States, that number is below ten—and in the most peaceful Western states, below even one.³¹

The removal of violence goes beyond just violent deaths. The US national violent crime rate has declined by over half since its peak in 1991, and the rate of nonlethal victimization continues to fall in similar fashion.³² Even mundane or low-level violence has dropped in recent years, with the rate of schoolyard fights halving alongside violent crime.³³ Contact sports, despite their popularity in media, have declined in actual participation.³⁴ In the 1980s, nearly ten percent of the population hunted, a number which today sits below five percent.³⁵ While the cultural image of violence remains prominent, every actual

³¹ Chapter 1 and 2 in *Better Angels* (“The Pacification Process” and “The Civilizing Process”) cover this analysis, which is also cited in the work’s introduction. The number for the modern US is drawn from the CDC’s National Vital Statistics System (2022 numbers), and includes war deaths, which are discussed on pg. 680 of Pinker.

³² Statistics from the FBI and Council on Criminal Justice.

³³ CDC, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1991-2019.

³⁴ Johnathan Macy et al., 2021. “Fewer US Adolescents Playing Football...”

³⁵ See Wildlife For All, “The Decline of Hunting and Fishing,” for a summary of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state-level data analyses.

measurement of violence shows a decline in its actual occurrence. Fewer people strike in anger, or receive such a strike, than ever before.

The violence that does happen is of an increasingly abstracted sort. The police no longer use batons to beat down criminals, instead opting for verbal de-escalation, jujitsu, and less-than-lethal weapons with a softer public image. Tasers, pepper spray, etc. are now his primary tools, employed according to doctrine. This shift represents both an abstraction of the violent act, and of the policeman's agency. The officer is given less discretion in his actions, reduced ever more to bureaucratic automata; his use of force is abstracted further by the use of something aesthetically distanced from the raw violence of a billy club or fist.

The language surrounding military violence has undergone a similar transformation. An enemy is not killed, he is "eliminated" or "neutralized." The operation to kill him is not a hit or even an assassination, but "wet work," "kinetic action." A prisoner does not undergo torture, but "enhanced interrogation." Bombing runs become "precision strikes;" the bombs themselves become "munitions." Even the soldier is euphemized as a "servicemember" or "operator," and his role is defined more nebulously than ever before—such that the Marine Corps mantra to "locate, close with, and destroy the enemy" feels almost archaic. This shift is more than just euphemism, as the US military's tooth-to-tail ratio has moved constantly toward the latter since the Gulf War. Thus the average soldier is ever more unlikely to even deal with combat in his job, much less experience it.

These explicit shifts are only a small part of our cultural alienation from violence, and from pain. The language, tone, and framings we use to think about violence are historically unique, and only become more absurd by the day: we hide it, distance ourselves from it, fear it, obsess over it, redefine it over and over, and—like sex—sublimate it into semiotics.

Primary among these shifts is the simple fact that once-accepted forms of physical violence have become taboo. The schoolyard fight was once an American rite of passage among boys: a standard part of growing up,

never precisely *condoned* by authority, but always expected to occur. Alongside sports, these fights have traditionally offered boys and young men an informal ritual reckoning with physical force, hierarchy, and self-confidence. Today, this is not the case. Outside of chaotic inner-city schools, fights are uncommon and harshly punished. Zero-tolerance policies, whether as policy or an implicit norm, mandate suspension or expulsion for both parties in a fight. These bureaucratic punishments take the form of surrogate violence, done against the subject's future self: their "permanent record" will, as students are constantly reminded, affect their applications to college and thus the trajectory of their lives. This wreaks havoc on the psyches of high school boys, particularly those with the potential for a white-collar or high-powered job. Further, self-defense is famously not an excuse—both ending the fight as a rite of passage in gaining self-confidence, and enforcing population-level learned helplessness.

That these policies affect a student with potential far more than one without is by design, and particularly harmful. It guarantees that more or less our *entire* professional-managerial class will have learned total helplessness in the face of violence, and that the members of this group will be affected by some degree of lifelong future-anxiety. Foucault argued that observation was a primary mode of modern punishment; above and beyond observation is the *continuity of observation*, which allows no forgiveness or transience in identity, and ultimately crushes any sort of vital, youthful spirit. Paired with an increasing need for specialization in youth—from one's professional track to even athletics—the incentivized form of life for the people destined to rule and build is one of constant and extreme planning for the future. One's entire life is placed in their hands at perhaps thirteen years of age—and not in the historical sense that might send a midshipman to sea at that age. Instead, the individual is given the pressure without the responsibility, alongside the paralyzing refrain that any positive action also constitutes a narrowing of future possibilities. This incentive structure creates a population of highly-neurotic people, with very low

risk tolerance. The bureaucratic *safetyism*³⁶ that addresses youth violence is the same social structure that builds education around this outcome. Ultimately, this is the social structure that places a population of half-baked and crippling-anxious adults in charge of key institutions.

Once-normal violence is also suppressed in the adult world, creating similar forms of mass psychological detriment. Bar fights—again, never *condoned* but always *expected*, and often informally excused by the law—and similar low-level acts of violence are increasingly avoided due to the ever-present threats of recording and litigation or arrest. Like in the educational example, this suppression takes the form of *anarcho-tyranny*, applying mostly to the middle class and above; mild fights among the lower classes are more often than not ignored by authorities, and quickly forgotten by their participants. However, anyone who has something to lose—a family, any job above the menial, etc.—is forced to meet any insult or provocation with a calm and measured response. This culture shift has not resulted in fewer instances of provocation, but the opposite: verbal, social, and physical acts of provocation only increase when they go unpunished at scale. This suppression has created a new and universal humiliation ritual, applied almost exclusively to the median white man: walking away from a provocation that his grandfather would have met with force. This sort of ritualized sodomy only further beats the psyche into submission, teaching one to crush the part of his spirit that has always animated historical greatness. Would the American Revolution have occurred if not undertaken by the sort of men that met with pistols at dawn, or refused to polish a British soldier's boots? At the very least, we would have been robbed of Hamilton, Burr, and Jackson—perhaps of the very spirit that animated the Declaration of Independence.

These psychocultural spirals are only part of the equation, but nonetheless help to illustrate our alienation from violence. Because violence is *essential*—that is to say, a core part of human nature and

³⁶ This term was coined by Lukianoff and Haidt in *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018). However, it is used here in a much broader sense, i.e. as a pathological orientation toward minimizing risk of any sort.

experience—our alienation from it results in stress and derangement. Cultural insanity begets personal insanity; that man becomes weak and soft is an effect of his emasculation.

It is worth noting that this alienation and emasculation is a continuous process, rather than a cultural change that can be pinpointed in time. Even as violence is extinguished to the best of our institutional and social ability, the mere concept of violence becomes the target—a process which continues even as the act itself is minimized. Just as the death of the fistfight causes conflict to manifest in a more feminine form (verbal, social, reputational), this form of conflict is *also* termed violent and suppressed. At this point the recent history of “words-as-violence” is well known: cancel culture, microaggressions, safe spaces, content warnings, and more have enshrined the concept in politics, media, and daily life. Nonsensically, this development of popular morality has resulted in the justification of *actual* violence in response to words-as-violence. The mid-2010s UC Berkeley riots against right-wing speakers stand out as an example, as well as the popular notion that use of a racial slur justifies murder. These actions are justified, at their core, as part of a sort of “war” against violence. The inherent contradiction only makes sense to people who have internalized that form of morality as a religious command.³⁷

This cultural program of pacification-by-force produces a novel and bizarre view of violence-as-action. Instead of a volitional act, it now exists outside one’s set of possible actions. Violence is not something you *do*—it is only something that *happens to you*. For the vast majority of people, this simply serves to geld the thought that they might ever commit an act of violence.³⁸ In the case of people who actually do commit violence—i.e. criminals—it reframes their actions as not their own, but products of “systemic factors.” Their agency is stripped and relocated to the semi-magical surround of social forces: “generational

³⁷ This concept is more in-line with the critiques of safetyism in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, which describes it as “a sacred value.”

³⁸ The criticisms of *On Sex* can also be seen as the results of this moral framing when sex is seen as violence.

trauma,” “lack of community resources,” “cycles of harm.” The fact that most of them simply find it fun or easy is handwaved away as a pathology arising from these outside factors, rather than their own will.

Man, then, is redefined as a sort of vessel through which violence acts, rather than a being with moral or physical agency. Crucially, this framing allows only the protected racial underclass to be “possessed” by a will that is not their own; the rest are relegated to learned helplessness, and set at the mercy of the former. Every culture has placed a moral prohibition on wanton violence, but none until ours have attempted to sculpt a type of man incapable of imagining it. Such a man, structurally unable to entertain violence, cannot understand the best among his ancestors—nor wield anything close to their agency, decisiveness, and vitality.

II: Semiotics & Obsession

Despite our total alienation from violence, it remains *essential* to both the individual and society. “Force is,” as Heinlein said, “the supreme authority, from which all other authorities are derived.”³⁹ Especially in a state and culture that exerts so much soft control over the individual, the fact must be remembered that violence sits at the bottom of the conceptual well.

Often, it is the uncomfortable reckoning with this fact that creates derangement and cognitive dissonance. Bearing witness to an act of violence-as-authority evokes fragility, even horror, in the popular mind. We are brought uncomfortably to Heinlein and Heraclitus⁴⁰ each time there is a state execution, a war, or a highly-public police use of force. A pop-culture rending of garments and gnashing of teeth follows each

³⁹ From *Starship Troopers*. That Heinlein wrote the book in a frenzy of rage against nuclear disarmament should be a key to its interpretation, and yet...

⁴⁰ Fragment 53: “War is the father of all and the king of all; and some he has made gods and some men, some bond and some free.”

event. That the Leviathan is ultimately and always a beast of violence does not mesh with a mass-religious commitment to destroying its substance.

Because of the contradiction between our rejection of and immersion in violence, the thinking of Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Weber creates a dual sense of unease and revelation in the modern mind. Their study often leads to a transformation: a reactionary shift, a dedication to mastering violence, or simply an interest in war. Sometimes, through much less-intellectual paths, their core concepts lead to a radical and bizarre questioning of legitimacy—as seen in quasi-cultic groups like Sovereign Citizens, off-grid preppers, and anarchist “police abolition” movements. These groups are united by their fixation on the fangs of the Leviathan, and each enact their own sorts of rituals to ward off the beast. Ultimately, these rituals serve as shadow-plays of a broader cultural disjunction: acts of fantasy that echo our collective inability to reconcile with violence as necessary and central.

However, the primary result of this societal dissonance—and the one most visible in mass culture—is a pathological fixation on violence. This takes the form of constant “exertion” and “consumption” of it, in the only realm where it is permitted: the semiotic. Violence becomes symbolic, vicarious, and undertaken entirely through media.

That violence exists primarily on-screen is immediately obvious in the evolution of film and television. Today, action movies make up the bulk of the highest-grossing blockbusters, and perhaps even the majority of major motion picture releases overall. The fight scene—any action movie’s *pièce de résistance*—is as old as film itself. The fantastical, often comical fight scene of early silent films evolved into the theatrical period-piece showdowns of the 1950s, and later to the flashy age of both the Bond series and the kung fu flick. Later, the explosive action movies of the ‘80s and the experimental syntheses of the ‘90s have led to both the modern superhero-epic and the “gritty” action thriller, both of which are now assembly-line produced with little cultural impact.

Between the advancement of technology and technique, the modern fight scene has departed from its predecessors in both form and function. Today, a fight scene is more often than not “gritty:” it shows pain, damage, and intense effort. Contrast this to the early Bond films, or to Bruce Lee’s classics; these movies used the fight scene as an expression of skill and aesthetic value, departing from reality in order to create visual interest. The action sequences of the ‘80s—starring the likes of Chuck Norris, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Sylvester Stallone—were, by contrast, pure power fantasy: men with statuesque physiques enacting explosive fury. This unselfconscious gaudiness is more often than not shunned today. Instead, our heroes are destructible and much farther in looks from the vision of Arno Breker. ‘90s films played heavily with the form of the genre, bringing us *The Matrix* and *Blade* as heavily-stylized, high-concept epics. It also saw the peak of the action-comedy blockbuster (*Rush Hour*, *Bad Boys*), riffing on the conventions of the action film as an institution. Today, neither experimental stylization nor parody are in vogue; action flicks, even superhero movies, are grounded firmly in our aesthetic reality, and few stabs are taken at the action-comedy format.

Instead, the modern action movie and fight scene have taken on a formulaic and unintuitive quality. Fight scenes are filmed closely, with large amounts of camera movement and hundreds of cuts; this creates a feeling of frantic *participation* by the viewer. Stylization, when present—as in the environments of *John Wick*—almost never interfaces with the actual violence, which despite its lavishness stays as grounded as possible to logical reality. Wick uses UFC-style jiu-jitsu, and contra Rambo or John McClane, is strictly limited by the size of his firearms’ magazines. Even if the overall film is absurd, cues like this tell the viewer that its violence is “real” in a meaningful sense. Bringing these aspects together is the constant hunt for “grittiness,” within the constraints of an average viewer’s stomach. The hero is able to be injured, and feels tired from the exertion; he and his opponents feel pain and show it.

Ultimately, the consistent format of these fight scenes serves a purpose: the *simulation of violence*. The viewer watches the film not to be dazzled with visual flair, nor to see elegant skill—he watches it to go through the motions of combat himself, to experience the rush and pain. The participatory format of the fight scene has been the technical achievement that underlies all depictions of violence today, and thus the mass-cultural experience of it. The Violent Passion Surrogate of *Brave New World*—“all the tonic effects of murdering Desdemona and being murdered by Othello, without any of the inconveniences”—has come to fruition in the campy action sequences of *Kingsman* (2014) and *The Beekeeper* (2024).⁴¹

Taking these films as examples, the fact that both are utterly cartoonish and ideological is another key aspect of their function. As the experience of violence in the average person’s life trends increasingly toward simulation, it is integrated—by popular demand—with attacks on popular targets. The viewer of *Kingsman* is offered not only violence, but an orgy of blood unleashed upon a stand-in for the despised Westboro Baptist Church. The viewer of *The Beekeeper* experiences the rush of crushing the skull of a reviled “tech bro” underfoot. The villains of today’s action movies—near-universally white men, often intolerant in some way—are ritually sacrificed at the hands of the viewer, over and over, in increasingly absurd ways.⁴² It is particularly telling that these “approved” scenes of violence are used endlessly as political “dunks” on social media, by which a user (and their audience) enjoys violence against the opposition from their designated corner chair.

Denied the right to strike anyone in physical reality, the viewer is allowed to enact semiotic violence against approved targets only through his consumption of media products. The violent instinct is in this way directed toward culturally-approved forms and targets. Here, Aristotelian catharsis finds its inverse: some steam is let off, but ultimately the violent instinct is cultivated by simulated repetition, such

⁴¹ The latter is a strong candidate for the worst movie ever made.

⁴² See also “White Men are Stupid in Commercials,” for the same process but with mockery and humiliation.

that it can function only in the symbolic plane and toward “proper” quarries.

Film, however, is only one example. The export of violence to the semiotic plane extends far beyond media. Real acts of violence, when they do occur, are rapidly converted into political tulpas—ritual objects for discourse and repetition—until they cease to feel real at all. Events like 9/11 become an infinite well of comedy material; acts of terrorism are collapsed into memes, repurposed into political shorthand, or mythologized outright.⁴³

The line between real and fictional violence quickly blurs, as the latter is mistaken for the former in the collective consciousness. Fictional threats like sundown towns, frat-boy rape-gangs, gay bashing, parking lot abductions by sex-traffickers, and drugs in Halloween candy exist more prominently in popular thought than actual threats. The very concept of violence is made increasingly fantastical, unreal, and absurd with each passing day. To carry a gun in case of armed robbery is seen as a bit much, but to check under your car for an Achilles heel-slicing maniac is not uncommon.

The fear of violence is further reinforced by ritual reenactments of its prevention. During the earlier years of the Cold War, American schools used “duck and cover” drills to prepare for nuclear attack; of dubious necessity, these drills did far more to reinforce the very existence of the Cold War—an intangible thing by nature—than they ever did for civil defense.⁴⁴ Today, the same effect is achieved with active shooter drills. Unlike duck-and-cover, which might plausibly save lives in specific scenarios, active shooter drills offer little measurable benefit beyond the

⁴³ See Ted Kaczynski, “Killdozer,” and the mass shooter Patrick Crusius, who was near-instantly turned into a meme.

⁴⁴ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and Cold War Culture* (1994)

ritual infusion of psychological terror.⁴⁵ These events, ranging from huddled vigils in a dark classroom to full-on simulations with gunshot sounds and “masked gunmen,” serve to vividly reinforce the ground reality of school shootings, implanting them as a generational anxiety far beyond what media already achieves. Just as the threat of nuclear apocalypse numbed and stressed the Cold War generations, a terror of school shootings afflicts today’s youth.

Again we see violence turned into a symbolic, entirely-psychological event experienced by the masses via simulation. Like action movies and social media hoaxes, school shooting drills are instantly materialized as political beliefs. In this sense, the primary function of these rituals is ideological, as well as fear-inducing. The overall effect creates a culture which is at once completely alienated from violence, yet hopelessly obsessed with it in its symbols and thought.

III: Progress

Human society has in recent years reduced violence across all metrics. But does this truly represent *progress*? Fewer people suffer at the hands of another, and fewer are sacrificed on the altar of mass warfare—but are we actually *less violent*, if that is the goal? Even a brief survey of American culture shows this not to be the case. We may kill and die at a lower rate, but “progress” has not succeeded in removing violence from the human condition, or even in dampening its role in society. Instead, it appears that we remain obsessed with violence, and moreover experience distress from its suppression—really, its redirection. Marshall McLuhan:

⁴⁵ Everytown Research & Policy, “The Impact of Active Shooter Drills in Schools: Time to Rethink Reactive School Safety Strategies.” This report covers the impact of active shooter drills, demonstrating them to be of dubious effectiveness and extremely psychologically harmful to students of all ages.

“The fact that pain is a sensation that ‘can even survive the disappearance of the initial source’ is of the utmost significance to the student of media. This fact points to the central nervous system itself as a key factor in pain, and helps to explain why institutions and technologies which have long been amputated from the social scene can continue to inflict corporate misery.”⁴⁶

Pain is still inflicted today, and violence still occurs. In the absence of physical pain and violence, the sort inflicted today takes place on the semiotic plane. In all cases, this sort of violence deals mass-psychological harm. The suppression of low-stakes, constructive violence selects for spinelessness and emasculation in leadership. The cloaking of state violence creates mass derangement, bordering at times on psychosis.⁴⁷ The removal of agency in violent acts lets criminality run amok, and allows for a bizarre neomorality that justifies “violence against violence,” in turn threatening free speech.⁴⁸ The libidinal exercise of violence through media—a sort of Two Minutes Hate that lets the viewer feel the subject’s windpipe beneath his boot—allows the media an even deeper ability to propagandize at will. And, despite the actual reduction in violence, a mass fixation on faux-threats induces chronic anxiety, negating any psychological benefits gained from the real reduction in bloodshed.

If the removal of violence actually constituted an amputation, its phantom pains would be felt in these forms of popular insanity. But as long as man has hands that can be formed into fists, front-facing eyes that track movement, and shoulders meant for throwing, violence *cannot* be amputated from his condition. The very fact that man can feel pain shows him to be a creature of violence: he is a predator, an agentic actor, a social and territorial creature. Until mankind is reduced to the status of a mussel or hive-insect, violence will be a part of his nature.

⁴⁶ *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968), with Quentin Fiore.

⁴⁷ To see this psychosis, one only needs to look at the 2020 Floyd riots.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Our recent alienation from violence cannot stand as a permanent state; at most it can be a temporary lull, a pressurization of the Will until it bursts forth in grand fashion. How long can the “suburbs dream of violence” until that dream burns down their drowsy villas and benevolent shopping malls?⁴⁹

The vast project that constitutes our alienation from violence is not an inevitable one, nor the only possible outcome of a society which has become more effective at maintaining order. Anarchy, overthrow, or revolution are not the inevitable answer—but they threaten to become the *only* answer, if we do not reckon with the essential nature of pain and violence.

⁴⁹ J.G. Ballard, *Kingdom Come* (2006): “The suburbs dream of violence. Asleep in their drowsy villas, sheltered by benevolent shopping malls, they wait patiently for the nightmares that will wake them into a more passionate world.”

Notes

1

Violence is essential to man as war is essential to human culture. The study and perfection of violence, then, is a key human pursuit—the primary method by which individuals and groups can exercise agency on the world.

All forms of structured violence, from individual unarmed combat to the highest levels of wartime strategy, exist along a continuum. The most basic form of that violence (the punch, or the faceoff between individual soldiers) exists alongside the highest levels in play (round-by-round strategy in the ring, or theater-level strategy in war). Both the basic and the advanced must be continually improved and deployed as a call-and-response with one's opponent; both elements—and everything in between—then, are of equal importance.

2

Taking mixed martial arts as a representative example: everything that happens in the ring is the result of hundreds of “therefore” statements, on both the imminent and meta level. “My opponent is loading his weight forward, *therefore* I should attack his front leg;” “whoever shoots a takedown first wins 60% of the time, *therefore* I should be aggressive from the first bell.”

These “therefore” statements underlie the entire development of martial arts themselves. Stances and footwork evolve in a certain way as negations of takedowns, striking philosophies as negations of other striking philosophies, and full-fight strategies based on the expected full-fight strategy of one’s opponent. Everything beyond the basics—which are derived from biomechanics—is dictated by “if he does this, you’ll do that,” either in the immediate mid-fight sense or conceptually, based on the nature of fights themselves. This is the continuum principle, and the same underlying concept applies to all forms of violent conflict, from a fistfight to a Mahanian naval confrontation.

3

The medium of violence creates a *reality-reinforcement principle* within this continuum, preventing it from a spiral into absurdity. In the ring, a victory can happen by any means and at any point, no matter the expected format of the fight. A traditional Muay Thai fight is often light and exploratory for the first two rounds, heavy into three and four, and followed by a fifth round that serves either as a final crucible or a denouement. However, there is nothing preventing a fighter from breaking this rhythm and knocking his opponent out in the first round. Similarly, there is nothing preventing a knockdown karate fighter from using that style in the UFC, provided he can make it work against the current MMA “meta.”

That fighting exists along a continuum means that the current vanguard or “meta” exists alongside every previous “meta,” and ultimately atop the most fundamental aspects of unarmed combat. The reality-reinforcement principle is that what is effective at any moment is rewarded with victory, regardless of if it subscribes to this meta. As it did in interwar naval history, the meta can spin briefly away from reality—but the fundamental truth is exposed and reinforced as soon as any flaw is detected by another combatant. Billy Mitchell’s advocacy for aircraft carriers was one such moment: a perception of reality, and bold

action in accordance with it. His revelation ultimately led to American naval dominance in WWII.

Naturally, these corrections happen more quickly in martial arts than grand-strategy warfare. Beyond fitness or self-improvement, learning reality-reckoning as a skill is the value of unarmed training in the age of firearms.

4

The most famous refrain in martial arts is “back to the basics:” a call to return to the *essential*, to remember always that there is much more in play than momentary strategy—to ground oneself always in the simplest parts of one’s approach. Training, at its highest levels, creates an ability to perceive the whole continuum at once—an ability to slide within it at will, to adapt and dominate based on this understanding. But even that initiatory form of knowledge is based on the essential, and again on the reinforcement of ground reality: the martial artist must be physically fit and mentally present in order to execute on his knowledge. Martial training, then, is an act of constantly *perceiving* and *returning to* the essential. Every drill, lesson, sparring match, or fight repeats this mantra in the trainee’s mind, and trains the skill of recognizing and using what is fundamental and true amidst a complex situation.

5

That learning to fight is an esoteric act has been obvious to warriors for millennia. Even today, where ‘70s kung fu mysticism is beclowned in mass culture, martial arts retain an adapted form of their initiatory, ritualistic character—especially at the highest level. Fighting retains this character because esoteric mysticism is inherent to the most basic form of unarmed fighting, just as it is inherent to war. To fight is to

sharpen one's perception, to reckon constantly with truth, and to enforce one's will upon the world. It is *esoteric by default*.

The clearest expression of this ethos can be found in the Zen Buddhism of the samurai, seeking a state of "perfect spontaneity" by which: "...the bow and the sword become the vehicles for 'active meditation,' in which action is the foundation of an eminently spiritual path... when this harmony is achieved, one goes beyond technique, leaving behind hatred as well as love, and one's action becomes irresistible" (Evola). The visceral nature of unarmed combat allows the individual to learn the continuum as a principle, implanting it as a pattern of knowledge via ritual and training. Musashi says that "if you know the Way broadly, you will see it in everything;" training is an act of physical refinement, intellectual patterning, and ultimately metaphysical realization. This has been true for millennia, and remains true today.

6

Today, man is distanced from the essential on every possible axis. He loses his identity as the core differences between people—sex, race, nationality, culture—are dissolved into a sort of electric sludge. He is distanced from unselfconscious pleasure by his bizarre approach to sex. Finally he is distanced from the truth of violence, the feeling of pain, and from his own agency in this fundamental realm.

Training, then, is a potent medium through which man can reckon with and learn the essential. If we are to attempt a revival, or even a new philosophy, martial training offers an approach to reckoning with Truth. Beyond its cursory benefits, learning to fight offers a bulwark of sanity and genuine learning: a process by which the essential can be perceived, and its recognition can be honed as a skill.

PART II: RECONNAISSANCE

What is the Internet?

Discourse as ARG

“The computer abolishes the human past by making it entirely present. It makes natural and necessary a dialogue among cultures which is as intimate as private speech, yet dispensing entirely with speech. While bemoaning the decline of literacy and the obsolescence of the book, the literati have typically ignored the imminence of the decline in speech itself. The individual word, as a store of information and feeling, is already yielding to macroscopic gesticulation.”

McLuhan, *War and Peace in the Global Village*

I: Definitions & Parallels

An Alternate Reality Game (ARG) is “a type of multimedia game for multiple players that takes place in real time and evolves according to decisions taken by the player rather than by a programmer.”⁵⁰ Often used in marketing, the core sell of a good ARG is a convincing, hidden world layered atop physical and digital space, which the player can not only investigate but *influence*. Together, the collective of players is able to direct the form and outcome of the game-world, which does not “progress” (or even meaningfully exist) without their participation. An ARG’s “world” is the truest form of a virtual environment, in that it suspends a simulated reality which you can reach out and touch without any special technology. Because the ARG manifests solely between the mindspace of its players, it can also be described as an egregore; if no

⁵⁰ Collins Dictionary.

one plays the game, its world “dies in place” and effectively ceases to exist.

Aside from this esoteric definition, some simple background: ARGs are by-definition multimedia phenomena, traditionally taking the form of a mystery. Some famous examples include Cicada 3301, “I Love Bees,” marketing for *The Blair Witch Project*, and Shia LaBeouf’s “He Will Not Divide Us.” All of these leveraged online interconnectivity and physical, real-world engagement to drive players through a participatory, progressive game that leverages some degree of unreality in its internal structure. While the common connotation is marketing (*Blair Witch*, “I Love Bees”), the goals of an ARG can be wildly divergent: Cicada 3301 used cryptographic puzzles and physical posters in major cities to “vet” players for initiation into a still-mysterious group, and “He Will Not Divide Us” began as an emergent, unplanned ARG among those who wished to annoy its creator. Some further examples: the University of Southern California has used an ARG (“Reality Ends Here”) for freshman education since 2011; the 2007 ARG “World Without Oil” was used for environmental activism; and Disney World Orlando includes multiple ARGs to encourage deeper engagement with, and thus spending in, its parks. The concept is multipurpose, and the ARG dynamic serves as a broad descriptive frame.

Along with virtual and mixed reality games, the ARG has been a subject of fascination by the military-industrial complex for some time. ARGs are capable of mobilizing hundreds or thousands of people in physical space (see “Why So Serious?”)—including those with high-level cryptography and OSINT skills, as in the case of Cicada 3301.⁵¹ The medium has also been used for large-scale data collection: the vast location and camera data troves of Pokémon Go⁵² were used by Niantic

⁵¹ Cicada 3301 so fascinated the Pentagon that the US Navy launched a copycat ARG in 2014, called “Project Architeuthis.”

⁵² Pokémon Go is technically a mixed-reality game, but it leverages the same dynamics, including an interesting PvP dynamic atop the PvE “base” story. Mixed-reality games are merely the next stage of ARGs, in the same sense that Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra functions in stages; in mixed reality, the entirety of the real

for years to train a “large geospatial model”—a granular map of millions of locations, meant to achieve “spatial intelligence.”⁵³ Both as a centralized media product and as a phenomenon that creates emergent mass coordination, the ARG is a useful model and tool for interfacing with a wide array internet-mediated social dynamics, a key element of fifth-generation warfare—hence the Pentagon’s interest.

However, the ARG concept applies to far more than one-off marketing stunts, trolling campaigns, or organized recruitment efforts. The entire online environment—or battlespace—can be conceptualized as a vast ARG. In a sense, social media is the supreme ARG: online, emergent team-based conflicts determine acceptable political beliefs, personal behavior, corporate and institutional actions, self-conceptions, and ultimately perceptions.⁵⁴

The *alternate-reality* aspect of Discourse comes from the fact that social media relies on a virtual environment, both literally and figuratively. Of course, Instagram, TikTok, X, etc. do not physically *exist*; these platforms are maintained as a layer atop reality (or beneath it, depending on your perspective). But this extends figuratively, in the sense that there are “online-only” debates, perceptions, and egregores. The 2014 Revolution relied on the construction of one such virtual environment, in which gendered violence was a rising crisis of utmost importance in physical, mass-experiential reality. The folding-in of traditional media to this internet-mediated ARG has only served to totalize it, in the sense that you can “exit” the real world and “enter” the virtual through an ever-increasing number of media products and even physical spaces.

world can be mediated through the game’s technology with increasingly seamless precision. Zero HP Lovecraft’s *God-Shaped Hole* extrapolates this concept in horrifying fashion.

⁵³ Brachmann, Eric and Prisacariu, Victor Adrian, “Building a Large Geospatial Model to Achieve Spatial Intelligence.” *Niantic Labs*, November 12th 2024.

⁵⁴ Hence the memetic weight of the term “noticing,” and the leftist’s trained inability to do so.

The *gamification* of Discourse is two-pronged as well. On one level, platforms gamify the user experience, turning engagement with their app into an addictive Skinner Box, atop the already-present reinforcement methods inherent to social media.⁵⁵ Further, and more directly, engagement with social media discourse in the realm of politics and culture often takes the form of a literal game. Repost chains, harassment campaigns, sharing “pictures [a given public figure] doesn’t want you to see,” etc. are participatory actions meant to progress, realize, or solve the game; without mass player engagement, this “progression” does not happen.

In this framework, the entirety of the “cancel culture” phenomenon can be framed as part of this novel Discourse ARG. A dispersed network of quasi-anonymous players performed political praxis by contacting employers, universities, and news agencies in coordinated harassment campaigns to enforce online social norms in physical reality. This enforcement of the alternate world on physical reality is the key defining aspect of the Discourse ARG: sub-games (or levels) are “solved” each time ideas from Discourse are enforced (or otherwise bleed into) mass physical reality. This aspect has been called many things: meme warfare, community organization or action, decentralized propaganda, etc.

Critically, participation in this ARG is an esoteric, even occult, action. Both high-level analysts and basic participants trend toward looking at the online battlespace as akin to Plato’s realm of Forms, in which sorcerers (users) can shift aspects of reality by interacting solely with those Forms.⁵⁶ Social media formalizes this relationship by manifesting that theoretical, esoteric realm “vulgarly”—i.e. in a fashion physically accessible to billions of people. The user-conception of social media as a magickal substrate and its subsequent reality-shaping effects are best described by Egil Asprem’s *The Magical Theory of Politics*, which

⁵⁵ Lindström B. et al., “A computational reward learning account of social media engagement.” *Nature Communications*, 2021.

⁵⁶ The prisoners of the Cave now puppet the shadows themselves—or at least can determine their actions by shouting at them.

describes the “magic war” over the 2016 Election. Its critical meta-insight is that whether or not terms like “sorcerers” or “mages” are accurate—insofar as they imply something *supernatural* is happening⁵⁷—is immaterial. These terms are simply useful to describe the rules and actions involved in the Discourse ARG. In fact, the magickal terminology only serves to reinforce the alternate-world aspect of it, in that extensive engagement with the Discourse ARG produces language seen by most as schizophrenic, even if it accurately describes the forces at play and their indirect-but-powerful influence on reality.

The reality-shaping goal of the Discourse ARG defines it in opposition to the original all-encompassing ARG: the market. Even a vague familiarity with Wall Street shows it to be *alternate* on a basic level, with outsiders seeing its spasms as nonsensical actions that only make sense within some sort of dream-logic. On a basic level, Baudrillard pointed out the unreal nature of the investment world, alienated from production, in *The Transparency of Evil*:

There is something much more shattering than inflation, however, and that is the mass of floating money whirling about the Earth in an orbital rondo. Money is now the only genuine artificial satellite. A pure artifact, it enjoys a truly astral mobility; and it is instantaneously convertible. Money has now found its proper place, a place far more wondrous than the stock exchange: the orbit in which it rises and sets like some artificial sun... Speculation is not surplus-value, it is a sort of ecstasy of value, utterly detached from production and its real conditions: a pure, empty form, the purged form of value operating on nothing but its own revolving motion, its own orbital circulation.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Theorists of magic often invoke Einstein’s “spooky action at a distance” description of quantum entanglement to define “sorcery.”

⁵⁸ From the essay “Transeconomics.”

He goes on to liken the gamified aspects of the stock market to poker, in which betting and bluffing between players is the basic financialized “game;” this is a generally-useful assessment. Thus in the market we have a real-time, multimedia, mass-participatory game that leverages some sort of “alternate world” and only progresses via the actions of its players: the original and longest-running ARG in human history.

But the market’s meta-ARG is fundamentally opposite to the Discourse ARG, in both form and function. Since 1773, the stock market has operated on the same basic concepts, centered around a variety of *reality-reinforcing principles*. Effective investments are made by having a better comprehension of reality than the rest of the game’s players: present and future demand, supply chain dynamics, management and employee quality, etc. Insofar as stocks and other commodities (even complex derivatives) are simulacra, their basic alignment with reality is reinforced on a regular basis via financial reports. No matter how complex the financialized commodity, it ultimately must represent some sort of underlying *real* value. This alignment with reality is reinforced by the nature of stock trading: the most basic source of value in a stock investment is an under- or overvaluation. A gap between stock price and intrinsic value represents a misalignment from reality, and investors are rewarded for finding and exploiting these situations. Thus, the increasingly-rapid quant-trading system serves as a sub-game that rewards players for constantly reinforcing the stock market’s alignment with reality.

Of course, this system is far from perfect; if it perfectly interfaced with reality (or even hypothetically could), there would soon be no value in financial services, and the entire economic system of free-market capitalism would be automated in moments.⁵⁹ It is also important to note that the market can at times spin completely away from reality due to some sort of broken piece of logic in it, or due to corruption:

⁵⁹ It is notable, however, that as the market has gotten better at reinforcing reality (via advanced analytics and algorithms), high-risk investments have declined in retail availability—supplanted by the de facto adoption of cryptocurrency and online gambling.

speculative bubbles and various other forms of financial crises serve as examples. However, this does not negate the fundamental nature of the thing, since it is the *reality-reinforcement principle* that ultimately “pops” these bubbles—from Dutch “tulip mania” in 1637 to the 2008 financial crisis. At some point, tulips must demonstrate intrinsic value; at some point, somebody has to pay up for overleveraged subprime mortgages. If that doesn’t happen in real-time, the market will eventually realign in catastrophic fashion—driven in part by savvy investors exploiting the gap between representation and reality for profit.

Thus the stock market is incapable of shaping reality by nature. It can temporarily misrepresent what is real, but it cannot alter it. Its dominance as the primary societal ARG is waning in comparison to the dominance of the ARG that can (and by nature does) *change* that base reality. The cynical refrain of “it’s priced in”⁶⁰ is replaced by the revolutionary call to overturn, invert, and reform; war of all against all for the exercise of some sort of agency.

There is also a critical difference between the aspect of reality interfaced with by these ARGs. The “data layer” of the stock market, through which its games interface with the real economy, is exclusively numerical; it has to reckon ultimately with quantities of dollars, hypothecated or otherwise. This is a broader element of the reality-reinforcing principle, with its inverse found in the Discourse ARG, whose data layer is composed of the messy attempt of Big Data to quantize the entirety of qualitative human consciousness.

More concretely, stock market data can be used to recreate a convincing simulated market (including the most complex types of derivatives), whereas social media data can only simulate a poor imitation of a

⁶⁰ An old screed from r/WallStreetBets: “Don’t even ask the question. The answer is yes, it’s priced in. [...] Anything you can think of has already been priced in, even the things you aren’t thinking of. You have no original thoughts. Your consciousness is just an illusion, a product of the omniscient market. Free will is a myth. The market sees all, knows all and will be there from the beginning of time until the end of the universe (the market has already priced in the heat death of the universe).”

human mind. The LLMs produced by this data decohere into hallucination and schizophrenia when faced with simple queries—which seems to be an inherent, rather than fixable phenomenon.⁶¹ Even the most advanced models seem incapable of meaningfully imitating human social interaction, and are quickly identified as bots when used in social media campaigns.

II: The Discourse ARG in Practice

“As postmodern culture crosses to hypermania and goes nova, it singularizes multiplicities of invasively autoreplicating plexoweapon-systems that are nothing beyond their war against security. This is no longer a question of ideological representation, exogenous political mobilization, theoretical critique, or strategic orientation, but of decentralized cultural diagrams functioning as immanent forces of antagonism. K-war derives its sole coherence from the unity of its foe.”—

Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena*

The Discourse ARG was loosely defined in the preceding section. This section aims to model out the ARG in its current state by examining its gameplay, structure, history, cultural outgrowths, and various aspects of its “meta.” So far, niche examples have been used to describe simple aspects of gameplay: repost chains, cancel culture, meme warfare, etc. These phenomena are simple versions of the full picture, and easily identifiable as ARG engagement in that they clearly resemble a sort of turn-based game. However, gamification occurs on a much broader level, beginning with the separation of all aspects of Discourse into team-based phenomena.

⁶¹ “Encouraging truthfulness through supervision or reinforcement has been only partially successful [at fixing the LLM hallucination tendency].” Farquhar S. et al., “Detecting hallucinations in large language models using semantic entropy.” *Nature*, 2024.

In electoral politics, the radical divergence of priors between the Left and Right has spawned two entirely opposed worldviews. The “moderate” or “swing voter” has rapidly become a relic of the past, a slippery (and practically imaginary) figure that is invoked mainly to wishcast for either side. “Bipartisan initiatives” are a sham in this new paradigm, as the gratification of one side requires the immiseration of the other. The common-goal-oriented politics of *West Wing* read even more as absurdist fiction than they did in the early 2000s; Sorkin’s fictional world of cooperative, merit-based, bureaucratically-constructed policy is now only invoked to support one side or the other’s exclusive aims.

But this bifurcation occurs everywhere, and while Discourse is inextricable from mainstream politics, the world of elections and policies is only a subset thereof. The full picture of the Discourse ARG encompasses everything from Presidential elections to popular movies, dating norms, aesthetic preferences, language, career advice, and more.

Broadly, the four most Discourse-loaded subjects are politics, sex, violence, and media. All aspects of Discourse fall into one or more of these pathways, and the teams are formed around their views on these four pillars. If you only know someone’s interpretation of *Starship Troopers* (1997), you can derive with startling accuracy their beliefs on dating and marriage, police use of force, American history, religion, and tax policy—or vice versa.

This is not solely due to the fact that personal philosophies tend to trend one way or another, and is more ascribable to the team-based nature of the Discourse ARG. To continue with the example of *Starship Troopers*: beginning in 2023, this 26-year-old film joined the legion of somewhat-silly media products revived as battleground concepts and near-instantly transformed into tribal shibboleths. Prior to that revival, its interpretations were diverse and often unserious; however, once it became a battleground concept, the interpretations speciated into two

well-defined views, which now do seemingly-endless battle on social media.

The debate over Verhoeven’s “satire” is only one small instance of the polarization that defines Discourse, and thus American political life. Thousands of similar examples have cemented various media properties, tropes, political debates, memes, and standards of personal behavior as tribal emblems. The overall meta-shift is toward politics as *fandom*—in which the primary goal is not to hash out policy changes, philosophies, or candidates, but to become better-versed in one’s group shibboleths in order to push against those of the opposing group. Seven or eight murky steps downstream of this process is actual power politics—hence Asprem’s esoteric, Neoplatonic framing of Discourse—but the core in-game action is to collect the right products, ideas, and aesthetic preferences through engagement with the ARG. Thus politics and philosophy are reinvented as fandom, distinct from its various cults of personality; sex and violence as trope-mediated acts of *fanart*; and media constructed in reverse, akin to *fanfiction*, in order to appeal to (or, more often than not, attack⁶²) a tulpafied fanbase of certain properties and tropes.⁶³

As a result, every single conversation becomes an iteration of the same grand conversation: a singular instance of the Discourse ARG, a skirmish determining tribal claims to a piece of noetic territory. These conversations necessarily take place in a virtual environment, a cybernetic pocket universe in which analysis of children’s television translates to political power (i.e. force) wielded against members of the opposing team.

What makes the ARG enticing is that it *actually does work* in this manner: niche debates determine the acceptable range of public discourse and behavior, punish the winning side’s enemies (via firing, social estrangement, or violence), and inform the creation of future media. When culture and politics are downstream of social media, the

⁶² Schwab, “The Drone War on Reality.” *Schwabstack*, 2024.

⁶³ Iterated Alienation discusses this reverse-construction of media in more detail.

Internet *is* real life—and ARG gameplay, no matter how absurd, is effective praxis. Thus, the level of vitriol normally reserved for blood-and-soil conflicts (or at least extreme political disputes) dominates conversations about things as nominally-mundane as videogame character design.

Whether the complex mechanics behind this are understood by players is, per Asprem once again, immaterial to practical interaction with them. In fact, reflexive and non-introspective engagement with the Discourse ARG is encouraged by the algorithms of most social networks, as it is this libidinal interaction that produces the most time spent in-game and thus the most user data. In this field, rage is the most profitable emotion.

The consolidation of fandoms⁶⁴ and skirmishing over cultural territory described above form the two main bases of ARG gameplay. However, the concept can be extended much further. Just as in athletics, e-sports, mixed martial arts, or any type of competition, gameplay iterated over time creates a “meta:” the Most Effective Tactics Available at a given moment, or the game-above-the-game played at its bleeding edge of competition.

The development of a “meta” is most visible in an analogy brought up earlier, in *On Men and Women (II: Effects)*. Regarding personal behavior, the Discourse ARG functions as a vast legal system, ruling on new cases each day. An infinite stream of pictures, videos, screenshots, and resulting “takes” forms the caselaw basis of neo-etiquette and neomorality, with the online collective able to dole out collective shame to the losing party. This “meta” passed far beyond simple legalisms like “double texting” or “age gap relationships” years ago, and now rules on increasingly-granular aspects of personal conduct, down to vocal inflections and facial microexpressions. Each “ruling” brings the

⁶⁴ Removed from corporeality or regionality, this is the cyber-territorialization of Schmitt’s friend-enemy distinction.

crushing scorn of millions directly to the losing party's mental doorstep, and suicide is not an uncommon outcome.

The sheer scale of social shame able to be leveraged against people for micro-sins—things as small as a cringeworthy joke, a bad fashion choice, or misguided flirting—is greater than that of the largest and most bloodthirsty crowds of the French Revolution. Additionally, the team-based aspect of Discourse guarantees that even the “winning” party (per the court of public opinion) will receive significant shame as well. The process is the punishment, and the medium is the message; even if only a microscopic fraction of people are made subjects of Discourse, the severity of the punishment is enough for the framing to be adopted en masse.

The viciousness and totality of this arrangement—due to de facto constant surveillance—creates the “meta” of acceptable social behavior. If the Overton Window defines the bounds of acceptable political discourse, then this is the Overton Keyhole: a vanishingly small aperture of “permitted” behavior, chased constantly in order to avoid the boundless cruelty that is becoming the center of Discourse for even a moment. This phenomenon was already becoming inescapable in 2014, as traditional and social media morphed into a single, interactive propaganda apparatus. However, it was imposed permanently in 2018,⁶⁵ as the use case of any iPhone-type device changed from “the place where your apps are” to a dispenser of infinite shortform video. Since then the personal-behavior “meta” has become not only emergent but *imposed*—understanding it has been made unavoidable.

Aside from personal behavior, the concept of a “meta” also defines how quickly concepts are made into shorthand and integrated as shibboleths among each team. The debate over *Starship Troopers*, for example, has spawned numerous shorthand attack-memes, and the film's imagery has been overlaid into broader political discourse since 2023. The speed

⁶⁵ TikTok merged with musical.ly on August 2nd, 2018. The popularity of infinite-scroll, algorithmically-selected shortform video fundamentally changed the nature of social media, creating its current state.

at which subjects of debate are folded into the language and symbology of ARG teams is essentially the governing speed of Discourse: physics has c as its maximum speed, and Discourse has the speed of meta development as its minimum.

The rapidity with which the meta iterates and develops helps in identifying artificial “movements” and ideologies. Generally, a group which engages in Discourse but does not keep up with the pace of the meta can be considered fake by default; it lacks the interactive, back-and-forth creativity that defines ARG participation. A simple example can be found in the Ukraine War-related group “NAFO,” which billed itself as an organic pro-NATO movement but actually consisted near-entirely of US military and government employees posting repetitive memes and talking points from Eglin Air Force Base.⁶⁶ When rhetoric and in-group symbols remain absolutely consistent, rather than updating to the game’s currently maximally-effective tactics, it is likely that a given group’s core talking points have been imposed by some sort of top-down order—or a procurement contract.

Let us revisit the quote at the beginning of this essay, from McLuhan’s *War and Peace in the Global Village*:

The computer abolishes the human past by making it entirely present. It makes natural and necessary a dialogue among cultures which is as intimate as private speech, yet dispensing entirely with speech. While bemoaning the decline of literacy and the obsolescence of the book, the literati have typically ignored the imminence of the decline in speech itself. The individual word, as a store of information and feeling, is already yielding to macroscopic gesticulation.

⁶⁶ A now-deleted 2013 blog post by Reddit staff accidentally revealed Eglin AFB as the “most Reddit-addicted city” in the world. Internet outages at Eglin in February 2025 tracked with a complete 180-degree change in political rhetoric on popular subreddits.

Despite the huge amount of user-generated textual content produced every second, actual literacy declines as a natural result of the ARG's meta progressing. Discourse may include "arguments" in the form of "sentences," but the actual ammunition in any battle is pure signal: "macroscopic gesticulation" manifested in the form of trillions of words, their actual definitions largely irrelevant. It is extremely common to see posts talking past the point they're allegedly responding to, responding as if the original post said the exact opposite of its actual content. Engagement with Discourse produces this brand of post-literacy (or rather hyper-literacy) en masse, in which the underlying *signal* is what's actually detected, processed, and countered in a "debate." The mental processes of participants involve this signal exclusively, only converting inputs and outputs into the fiat currency of words when absolutely necessary. Any momentary brush with factual truth is, of course, entirely incidental and usually considered irrelevant.

Every think-piece about "post-irony" or "meme-fueled nihilism" fails to acknowledge that this is the actual process at play. All participants in the ARG are necessarily ultra-moralists with strong convictions—but in order to interface with the game, they forsake earnest engagement with surface-level things like "arguments" in favor of purely-directional memesis. The appearance of irony is used as a tactic, often subconsciously; it provides the noetic equivalent of cover and concealment for the deeply-held moral beliefs undergirding a given signal. Similarly, calls for genuine emotion or earnest engagement with something are near-exclusively used as cynical plays within the ARG, the lens which has come to define nearly all thought and action.

III: Cult Brainwashing as Emergent Behavior among ARG Participants

Robert Jay Lifton's 1961 work *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* often goes as forgotten as its historical subject matter. Lifton studied a number of American soldiers who had been taken prisoner during the Korean War, and subjected to communist indoctrination by

the Chinese military—a totalizing process akin to something like “participatory brainwashing.” During their time as POWs, many of these soldiers experienced complete inversions of their political beliefs, behaviors, and even personalities. Unlike the traditional image of brainwashing, this “thought reform” did not include subliminal messaging, MKULTRA-style altered states, or extensive torture. The bulk of it took place via discussion groups, writing contests, and similar educational environments, all of which relied on voluntary (even if coerced) participation by the POWs.

Ultimately, Lifton intended this book to be a study on the mindset and methods of totalistic governments, and developed a heuristic of eight criteria for thought reform, against which a given group or ideology could be compared. These criteria are: Milieu Control, Mystical Manipulation, the Demand for Purity, Confession, Sacred Science, Loading the Language, Doctrine over Person, and Dispensing of Existence. However, after ten years of social media-dominated cultural life, it is apparent that these behaviors need no central authority, or even coherent ideology, to arise in mass culture; the Discourse ARG generates them emergently among participants. Social media itself is revealed to function as a cybernetic paperclip-machine for brainwashing cultism, in which actual “leaders” are vestigial, or at best higher-level participants themselves.

Some of these phenomena, like the demand for purity, loading the language, and sacred science, are generally well-understood as they exist in the online environment, especially on the political Left. Virtue signaling, purity spirals, and a strong friend-enemy distinction characterize much of the online (and institutional) Left; political language constantly becomes more polarized, controlled, and insular over time; and “sacred science” manifests both literally—fact checkers, trusting the science, etc.—and within the parasocial dynamics of a given “influencer’s” fanbase.

Far more interesting are the dynamics which the Internet as a technology was once claimed to prevent—for example, milieu control,

which should theoretically be impossible on an open and free Internet. However, the *information-overload* aspect of the social media environment—far too much to keep track of oneself—means that one’s social and informational milieu is necessarily restricted to whatever subgroup into which they’ve been algorithmically and self-sorted. Further, the trend toward infinite-scroll algo-feeds in product UI has increasingly pushed the control of one’s milieu to opaque, programmatic processes. Mystical manipulation occurs due to the same dynamics; a glut of constant news creates an inadvertent selection bias toward “providential” events to one’s social-political “team,” and incentivizes lying to that end (see QAnon). There is also the factor of rampant popular conspiracist thought, in which consistently-wrong pundits’ audiences will only grow due to the increase in visibility. Dispensing of existence is similarly a structural aspect of the Internet, achieved predominantly via moderation and subculture segregation. Anyone who has used Reddit has seen this in action, with moderators acting as commissars for the acceptable range of political opinions in even the most mundane communities. Platform moderation across all social media defines the Overton Window in general, and ARG subgroups consistently dispense of non-members’ existence—all surface-level examples. Similarly, events which do not fit a given world-model will simply be denied, from mundane personal experiences to national-level news (dispensing of existence).⁶⁷ Finally, confession should need no explanation; this is the entire purpose of social media, participation in which has been practically mandated during the reformation of all culture around The Feed.

To take the comparison even further, Lifton’s most famous coinage is the “thought-terminating cliché:” a phrase or slogan that signifies “the start and finish of any ideological analysis.” This is, of course, also a useful definition of a meme: a simple symbol that serves as shorthand for the full force of an (often rather complex) argument, meant to cut

⁶⁷ One strong example came in the form of the popular response to the assassination of Charlie Kirk, during which media outlets, dozens of pundits (most prominently, Jimmy Kimmel), and thousands of people simply decided that the assassin was a “MAGA conservative” despite all available evidence.

out the cognitive effort of rehashing the entire thing and instead just mock the opposition. Social media structurally creates the thought reform process via the Discourse ARG—which in turns functions as a production-line for these thought-terminating clichés (memes). This process is roughly the entire basis of modern culture, with media, politics, and personal behavior all existing as a downstream result. The meta-advancement of Discourse relies on paradigms being consolidated into memes, which prompts advancement past them and toward novel tactics.

Therefore, all of Lifton’s criteria for thought reform apply both to the basic structure of the Discourse ARG, as well as to all “teams” or subgroups within it. The very structure of social media—its role as an interactive news-dispenser, social space, and noetic battleground—produces *emergent brainwashing*. The totalism in question here is baseline-nonideological, inducing only a belief in the preeminence of Discourse, its ability to influence reality, and the necessity of one’s participation in it. However, due to their existence in the medium of social media, all political movements and “fandoms” necessarily induce the same parasocial dynamics in their participants. This is, effectively, the latent dynamic at the root of social media “making everyone crazy”—downloading Instagram produces an experience structurally identical to that of a prisoner in a CCP indoctrination camp.

The emergent brainwashing that defines social media-mediated life ultimately serves to totalize the social buy-in to the Discourse ARG, and the reality-shaping ability thereof. As life becomes increasingly social media-dominated, Discourse breaks the barrier between perception and reality, such that disembodied perceptions gain the ability to legislate reality. Despite this ARG’s structural inversion of the market, this aspect has a parallel to macroeconomic trends; when people believe a recession is imminent, they save more and spend less, thus making a recession more likely. However, the perception-reality loop in Discourse is much smaller, faster, and more definitive than behavioral

economics. If people believe that something is popular, others will act as if it is popular, and people will begin doing it; an ideological strawman will pick up unironic adherents, and thus it is summoned by its opponents; criticism of some behavioral pattern will lead to popular overfitting to its larger frame, thus inducing a spike of its occurrence; performative defiance of a sexual norm will lead to popular fetishization and rejection in line with the inversion; etc.

As a result, consensus reality has transitioned to governance by ARG-mediated perception alone, and the exercise of agency or control over reality necessarily takes place within the Discourse ARG alone. *Kill All Normies*⁶⁸ actually happened—the Internet is real life now.

⁶⁸ By Angela Nagle (2017). Despite its many flaws, this is one of the only works to seriously engage with the “online culture war.”

The Puppeteer-Industrial Complex

I

“Big Data,” for how often the term is invoked, is a slippery industry.

It is bigger than just the \$529B social media platform sector, and certainly bigger than the \$307B data analytics industry alone. Google, the fifth-largest company in the world—valued at over \$2T, greater than the GDP of 179 nations—is in the data business. Amazon, even larger, derives a large portion of revenue from data hosting services (AWS). The current \$3T valuation of NVIDIA stems from demand for GPUs in the AI industry (itself an aspect of Data)—expected to represent over two trillion dollars within a few years. And these are only a few companies; as both the heart and frontier of the tech industry, companies that trade in or interpret data as their primary product represent the leading edge of both “safe” and speculative investment. Billions upon billions of dollars pour into the “data” world every week, from both investors and government-funded research initiatives.

But what is the core value proposition driving the meteoric rise of “data?” Industries like agriculture and healthcare can safely assume continuous growth as a function of population growth and improved technology. However, the demand for “data” is assumed to outstrip population growth by a factor of at least a hundred. So, what is the *inherent value* of tens of billions of terabytes of information?

The first explanation for the infinite growth of data’s value—particularly user data—was “targeted marketing.” Google AdWords, which

launched in 2000 and hit its stride in 2003, promised businesses a direct connection to online customers based on relevance. An automated auction system would sell impressions to the highest bidder based on search terms, offering marketers the ability to spend money only on ads that would reach the people searching for something relevant to their product. As that system (and others like it) iterated and improved, they allowed businesses access to increasingly-targeted groups: single white males 22-26, married women over 45 who watch soap operas, nonbinary hipsters with cats in Brooklyn, etc. Theoretically, this algorithmic targeting based on user data analytics could be extended to the creation of totally-personalized, hyper-efficient marketing with never-before-seen rates of turnover.

Big Data presented this concept as the greatest revolution in advertising since the printing press, capable of making the entire process of selling goods infinitely more efficient as more user data was collected and analyzed. It is undoubtable that targeted marketing did achieve this revolution in advertisement—but the *infinite* aspect presented a problem. Targeted marketing, whether in search engines, social media, or other apps, has presented diminishing returns over time, and the earliest projections were based primarily on first-mover advantage and novelty rather than targeted marketing's ability to generate exponentially-growing real value.

This is plainly visible from the user's perspective: even as the algorithms have improved, the user experience of ads hasn't actually gotten any better. For example: ad algorithms will bombard users with ads for things they don't need, or for Chinese knock-off versions of things they do, lowering both their generalized and specific trustworthiness-value as a recommender of products. Things that a user bought recently will continually pop up and inform the ads presented to them, as if a purchase of one toothbrush indicates the beginning of a collection. And, of course, on the side of eeriness, it has become a universal experience to bring up some product or concept in a verbal conversation, only to be served a very specific ad for it soon after. Thus

the intrusion of ads is not only unhelpful, but actively annoying—nearly to the extent of the earlier Internet’s dreaded pop-ups.

But this goes much further than user perceptions. The diminishing returns presented by online ad spend are commonly discussed among ecommerce entrepreneurs; instead, many vendors have pivoted more toward influencer marketing, as content creators offer more trustworthiness and market curation than even the best ad-targeting algorithms.

The waning profitability of ads is also obvious in the changing monetization models of social media and content-hosting platforms: Twitter Blue, YouTube Premium, Meta Verified, Snapchat+, Reddit premium, etc. All of these ad-driven businesses have transitioned at least in part to a subscription model to generate revenue and maintain their (blatantly-inflated) valuations. Most commentators blame this on the economic downturn caused by COVID-19, as the general trend became legible around 2022-23; but this process was already underway before 2020, and has more to do with the value of Data—these companies’ actual product—than macroeconomic trends.

Notably, the most data-intensive of those services was among the first to change its monetization model, long before the pandemic: YouTube, with the introduction of Red in 2015. Because digital content grows exponentially, and previous content cannot simply be wiped to make space for the new, growth in data management costs around that time began uncomfortably approaching the actual value of that data—distinct from user data in this case—in terms of advertiser dollars.⁶⁹ Being a video hosting service, YouTube was the most sensitive to this inflection point, and thus began experimenting with subscription-based monetization first. However, as user-generated content grew across social media, and shifted toward storage-intensive shortform video from 2013-2018—along with user ad-targeting value growing logarithmically rather than exponentially, as was expected—the

⁶⁹ In other words, the real growth of a hypothetical average-annual-ad-dollars-per-gigabyte index fell below the projected growth of such an (implied) measure.

projections dictating the valuations of major data companies began looking like a bubble, and this sort of alternative monetization became increasingly necessary. The inflection point of ad-revenue decline was likely recognized “in-house” sometime around 2017-18 by most other social media platforms, a trend which was merely exacerbated by the hit to ad spend caused by the COVID macro-downturn.

Coincidentally, just as the ad-targeting source of Big Data’s value started to crack, a new source of value emerged from the aether: AI training. With the 2017 paper “Attention Is All You Need” and a few other new technologies, generalized text- and image-based AI began to show some degree of commercial promise on the distant horizon, offering a glimmer of hope for the value of social media companies’ then-depreciating petabytes of data. However, even in 2017, AI tools still remained a fringe concept. The field was mainly seen as a technical curiosity and research frontier—a place for theoretical debates and fun demonstrations. Google’s DeepMind was the public industry leader, and presented itself as a lab of tinkerers playing with the vanguard of what is possible.

This framing changed with the 2018 PR campaign that launched OpenAI into the public mind. Rather than presenting as tinkerers making fun things, OpenAI introduced GPT-2 with the framing that would come to dominate AI discourse: *danger*. An exclusive interview with The Guardian (“New AI fake text generator may be too dangerous to release, say creators”) introduced the AI risk framework to the public mind with direct references to *1984* and a specific focus on generating fake news. Later releases, including the 2022 launch of ChatGPT that popularized LLM usage among the general public, fell into this frame, and “AI Safety” has taken over as the dominant meta-conversation around LLM technology.

Thus the entire “AI boom” and coordinated media firestorm has been, since its beginning with that 2018 article, a coordinated act of media fiction. The entire paradigm of AI accelerationism and doomerism is

downstream of this convoluted, implanted frame, hence its messy mapping to the usually-receptive team structure of online Discourse.

It is no coincidence that the main public figures in AI present as clowns and hucksters. Since 2022, Sam Altman has been framed as the face of AI and, wittingly or not, has played the public role of a bumbling fool throwing around the nuclear football. None of his grand-scale proclamations make any sense in the framework of normal business, or even within his public-facing “build-God-but-safely” line of rhetoric. If either approach were to be taken seriously, the ideal level of public engagement with “AI Discourse” is none, and the ideal level of secrecy is “as much as possible.” Both cases would emphasize a PR strategy mocking or dismissing the idea that the product could become the Terminator. It would frame GPT as a useful tool, and a technological breakthrough—but still “glorified autocomplete” at the end of the day. Yet he does not do this. Instead, he speaks openly and airily about constructing artificial superintelligence, and his extreme concerns about it *wiping out humanity*.

The only possible conclusion is that it’s *designed* to cause panic. In fact, it is optimized for it: there is no possible framing of the actual product(s) that could possibly induce more psychological spiraling in the media and its audience. “The AI Apocalypse?” has provided a years-long news cycle and an infinite spawner of contrived Discourse, which has primarily served to contextualize the AI industry’s valuation around not reality but hypothetical future value—i.e. a baseless assertion of infinite growth between the lines of a public-facing eschatology. These assumptions do not interface with ground truth: LLMs are not Artificial Generative Intelligence (AGI), and definitionally cannot ever achieve Artificial Superintelligence (ASI).

Even the true commercial value of LLMs is dubious. Consider the revealed preference of tech industry giants, who on Christmas Day 2024 rushed to defend H1-B visas for coders with extreme fanaticism. If AI was going to replace even low-level “code monkey” work within five years, this response makes zero sense; clearly the biggest names in

tech do not actually believe it will. This is supported at the retail level of implementation: LLMs currently see limited *actual self-directed use*, despite the grandstanding of their proponents. Copywriting and customer-support chatbots are the primary use cases, in addition to the seedier elements of academic cheating, scamming, and sexual roleplay for shut-ins. At the individual level, LLMs have proven useful as research aides and as force-multipliers for smart software developers; however, none of this indicates that the technology will “replace” millions of jobs, or ever develop the sort of godhood prophesied by Altman and his acolytes. At most it appears to be a useful tool for automating grunt-work within one’s job or projects—but not useful enough to function with the same autonomy as an employee.

The transformer architecture that enabled modern LLMs was novel, and so are the developments atop that technology—but a cynical, unbiased look at “AI” reveals the discourse and fearmongering around it as near-entirely a marketing construct, hyping up relatively mundane advancements in the decades-old Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning fields. The fact that the technology is “real” and has some degree of intrinsic value does not prevent the AI industry from being, at its core, a scam—or more accurately, the newest and shiniest iteration of the decades-long Ponzi scheme that is the valuation of Data.⁷⁰

II

I do not mean to imply that Big Data has *no* intrinsic value. Rather, that the public-facing value proposition of it is inflated, mainly in order to shy away from its primary utility—which is, of course, propaganda. Social media, as an inherently-consolidating phenomenon for mass

⁷⁰ When capitalized, “Data” hereafter refers to user data collected by social media companies—including and especially user-created content—as well as surveillance information collected by private ad-tracking and government initiatives; i.e. the product sold by companies like Google, rather than information as a broad concept.

culture, offers a direct and formalized interaction with the collective noosphere. Instead of grasping at a vague mediasphere wherein cultural products are primarily profit-motivated, anyone interested in shaping public opinion (or consciousness) can now directly interface with the collective “content-based” (and heavily gamified) mindspace—for a much lower price and with much higher impact. Because social media is networked and interactive, it offers a propaganda delivery mechanism far more effective than anything dreamed up by Orwell, and only grasped at by Huxley. The mind-shaping campaigns made possible by root-level access to this powerful and complex of a tool have a value that is (somewhat obviously) worth more than mere dollars to its owners and investors.

Because social media has been so rapidly developed, and by such an eclectic group, the actual owners of Data platforms represent an odd crew of unique actors with disparate goals. Mark Zuckerberg’s approach and goals beyond the business world have been drastically different from Elon Musk’s, or Jack Dorsey’s before him. Various subgroups in the tech industry also act within the world of platform management, toward even more obscure ends.⁷¹ However, in the sense that the development of social media represents an emergent phenomenon amidst the centralization of the Internet, there is an identifiable actor in the driver’s seat: the United States government.

It is no secret that the Internet itself began as ARPANET, but DoD involvement extends far beyond the creation of the medium that now rules our lives. Each *centralizing structure* that has made the Internet more monolithic and more accessible—which are deeply interlinked aspects of its development—has generally received intelligence community investment or support. Google, for example, has been from

⁷¹ For example, see the very literal cults like the Way of Tomorrow and the Zizians, both of which are largely composed of tech workers. More amorphous aligned groups like “singularitians” or “accelerationists” also work toward non-standard goals.

its inception an outgrowth of intelligence research and technology.⁷² The concepts behind Big Data's use for mass surveillance and influence were in themselves an actively-developed initiative by the federal bureaucracy, beginning formally with the Massive Digital Data Systems project in 1993—a think tank and funding program developed by the CIA, NSA, DARPA, and more. Today, as shown in the Twitter Files, there exists a revolving door between the CIA/FBI/NSA and major social media platforms; the relationship has only deepened over time.⁷³

As an extension of the government, the internationalist-NGO complex exerts heavy influence on social media companies as well, particularly as a part of the “war on disinformation” funded by NATO and the US State Department since ~2014. These two overlapping aspects of Mike Benz’s “Blob”—the intelligence community and the NGO complex—interface heavily with academia, supporting and implementing research from think tanks and individuals with even more obscure goals—often very literally occult in nature, or otherwise odd.

Between these interlaced power-players in Data, we see the story of the Internet as an essentially *guided* phenomenon: a push toward the creation of a gradually more effective and centralized dual propaganda-surveillance apparatus. It is not the messy story of new technology developed to better serve the consumer, or to extract profit via exploiting a market inefficiency; rather, it is an esoteric act of manifesting the noosphere in an increasingly-legible, concretized, and interfaceable form. Thus the emergence of the Discourse ARG in its current form—as a game created, defined, and continuously developed by centralization—is the fruit of this esoteric effort. Many properties of online Discourse are emergent phenomena, but all are downstream of this continual effort to centralize and make legible noetic sentiment. Previous essays have discussed how modern culture stems entirely from

⁷² Both Sergey Brin and Larry Page got their start with DARPA-NSF grants in the 1990s. More directly, the tech behind Google Earth was built by the CIA-funded firm Keyhole, Inc. as EarthViewer, for the intelligence community.

⁷³ See Guyer’s “Silicon Valley Takes the Battlespace,” *The American Prospect*, 2021.

the online world; in a sense, our entire culture is a side effect of these surveillance efforts.

The creation of this cerebral superstructure has tracked alongside multiple goals since the Massive Digital Data Systems project (which in itself was an evolution of earlier research goals in computerization). The first goal of MDDS was surveillance: the “birds of a feather” conference in 1995 ventured to create methods for tracking amorphous groups in an organized fashion online, in order to trace and surveil terrorists. Since then, the surveillance function of the Internet has been essentially perfected, both by NSA/FBI/etc. initiatives in concert with private ad-tracking algorithms. Today, the intelligence community seems to point it primarily toward “domestic terrorists” (which is to say normal people with unapproved beliefs, ranging from Second Amendment activism to pro-life sentiment to merely Christian faith).

This surveillance function was followed in the late 2000s and early 2010s by forays into opinion-shaping operations, or at least desired opinion-promulgation. The Arab Spring, occurring from approx. 2009 to 2012, has served as the regime change template ever since. In the aftermath of a contested election, the US foreign service and NGO apparatus pushes for maximum social media access in the target region and uses the democratic appeal of a “Facebook Revolution” as a moral cudgel to legitimize its favored opposition group in the international community. This basic template has become much more complex over time, particularly as foreign regimes have introduced their own online opinion-shaping operations. But despite advancements it remains the template, and has been used since 2012 to promote US-backed color revolutions in Honduras, Bolivia, Georgia, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere, as well as dozens of international incidents involving protests across the Middle East and Latin America.

However, the concept of a maximally-free internet as a key instrument of statecraft did not survive the decade. After the 2014 Crimea annexation referendum did not result in a pro-NATO outcome, Western military and diplomatic leaders blamed Russian hybrid

warfare for the loss—sometimes described as the “Gerasimov Doctrine,” after a Russian general who allegedly declared that the nature of warfare had changed, and control over media and the Internet would now outcompete military power projection. The veracity of this doctrine aside, it became apparent to NATO leadership that social media *control* would be the future of conflict, with censorship and propaganda tools as the ironclad ships or nuclear weapons of a new era. As a result the bulk of censorship initiatives have been derived from the NATO sphere, broader than the US government alone; this is also why “Russian disinformation” has become such a meaningless buzzword. Benz identifies this referendum as “the moment free speech died on the Internet.”

The timing of this development coincides perfectly with the 2014 Revolution, a cultural initiative largely created by the US foreign service apparatus, as described in *On Men and Women*. Thus, the first attempts at automated, algorithmic censorship of emergent social media Discourse—the shaky first steps of this “Anti-Gerasimov Doctrine”—were targeted not at Russian disinformation campaigns, but at domestic dissent on cultural issues.

Here we see a dovetail between NATO research initiatives and leftist politics, occurring at their intersection in major Data companies: Google, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. With progressive politics imposed as the de facto mandated beliefs of any public institution, ideological crusades interlinked with high-level .gov influence campaigns in the form of “brand management” at these companies. Anti-leftist rhetoric began to face organized censorship, with key figures being deplatformed, blacklisted, and more—the entire playbook of institutional “cancel culture” that has become so familiar since.

The inciting event and test case of this new paradigm began in August 2014: Gamergate. Like many of the online Verduns since, its actual content was fairly benign. It was, at the surface, a public blow-up about ethics in videogame journalism, and the excessive intrusion of leftist

politics into the largely apolitical, male-oriented medium. However, this bloody struggle over noetic space has served as the template for every instance of Discourse ever since: it wasn't *really* about a single developer's game getting an unfairly-favorable review, and it wasn't *really* about shoddy feminist YouTubers attacking popular games. Rather, the controversies of Gamergate were implicitly recognized as a duel over much larger cultural-political forces: the grassroots campaign against Quinn, Sarkeesian, and Wu was in effect a counterrevolutionary movement against the top-down cultural Revolution that had begun to take root in recent months. As a result, Gamergate was also the first true multi-domain online conflict, which began to see implementation of the new censorship initiatives that have dominated online speech ever since. The cat-and-mouse game of institutional censorship vs. grassroots, semi-organized "trolling"—out-of-paradigm conflict—began here.

Patrick Ryan, a prolific online culture analyst and conflict theorist, calls this the War on Spontaneous Global Organization. This War includes tactics such as blatant censorship, as in mass deletion of posts, banning of accounts, etc.; algorithmic manipulation of key terms and ideas in order to deboost them, as seen in Google's hyperparameter and vanishing gradient stuffing practices;⁷⁴ "cognitive infiltration" of online communities, as outlined by Sunstein and Vermeule in "Conspiracy Theories" (2008); COINTELPRO-style imposition of circular debate and purity spirals in places capable of fostering spontaneous organization; slanderous press campaigns against potential figureheads, such as Julian Assange; attacks on decentralized or alternate financial infrastructure, i.e. crypto; mass-cultural codification of online-created paradigms and tropes via traditional media; and much more. The War on Spontaneous Global Organization is the complex, multi-domain, barely-legible conflict that has roiled beneath the surface of online political and cultural discourse for the past decade, and has defined the goals and practices of the various institutional actors in Data—from

⁷⁴ Leaked by Zach Vorhies in *Google Leaks: A Whistleblower's Exposé of Big Tech Censorship* (2021).

NATO and the US government to tech companies to NGOs to media companies to splinter groups with obscure ideologies.

III

While this War has been waged on the ability to spontaneously organize, it is not ultimately an *organizational* or even *organized* conflict. Like the nebulous “War on Terror,” it is at its core a war on a specific tactical capability—not a force, or even an ideology. This makes it a war, above all else, against the *individual actor’s* influence on the battlespace. Just as traditional wars are ultimately a test of who can most effectively hinder, control, and eliminate individual enemy soldiers, this War is waged against the *individual’s capability to influence the noetic battlespace*.

On a grand historical scale, all war has trended away from the individual soldier’s influence on the battlefield. With the dawn of militarization around 1600 BC,⁷⁵ the pre-militarized concept of war was now subject to duels between charioteers: hugely-powerful teams of two. Here we see a vast ability for the trained individual to influence and even dominate the entire battlespace. This influence waned as chariots proliferated, and by the Battle of Kadesh in 1274 BC thousands of chariots dueled against each other on a vast battlefield. As warfare continue to develop and iterate in the ancient world, it trended always toward mass-tactics and grand strategy, by which the primary agentic players were commanders and captains. The phalanx, an early mass tactic, was supplanted by the manipular legion; this process of industrialized warfare found its apogee in the Roman military state under Trajan. Champion (or heroic) warfare has occurred throughout history from time to time, but has been seen always as a moment against time—a callback to a previous era. Even millennia ago, it was

⁷⁵ Per Robert Drews’ hypothesis in *Militarism and the Indo-Europeanizing of Europe* (2017).

recognized that warfare would naturally trend toward anonymizing instrumentalization of the individual soldier.

The collapse of Western Rome and the rise of a new, unstable medieval order represented a massive “setback” in this trend, primarily due to the introduction of the stirrup around the 7th century AD. Once again an individual cavalryman, heavily armed and armored, could influence the entire battlefield with his actions. Thus the entire medieval social order was reformatted around this new form of much-more-individualized warfare: in essence, the feudal system represented a contractual state meant to produce knights and bind them to royalty. Like the dawn of the chariot, the introduction of the stirrup reformatted warfare, “returning” it to an age of individual might on the battlefield and thus in state affairs.

The story of warfare ever since has been a continuous cycle of this forward-and-back momentum. The pike square neutralizes the individual cavalryman, and tactical revolutions (i.e. by Cromwell and Adolphus) formalize more centralized combined-arms warfare; the improvement of firearms once again returns agency to the individual sharpshooter; meanwhile, cannon and artillery create the meat-grinder of the Napoleonic Wars, the US Civil War, and ultimately WWI; the introduction of air warfare creates “knights of the sky,” returning individual agency; and so on. This cycle can be observed throughout military history from various angles, and these examples are only a brief overview of some changes that demonstrate the framing. In all cases warfare trends toward an optimized and increasingly-anonymized method of prosecuting violence, until a technological revolution once again returns disproportionate agency to individual warfighters.

The War on Spontaneous Global Organization is, then, a war against the individual’s capability to leverage the internet for this sort of outsize power in the noetic battlespace. The man who coined the term is a perfect example: in “The Butterfly War,” Ryan discusses his various individual actions against “Silicon Valley’s right-side-of-history crusade against GamerGate.” He bought Milo Yiannopolous 20,000 followers

to force Breitbart to cover the issue, which succeeded. He then started a campaign based on the concept of mimetic polymorphism, which would force Google and Twitter to violate civil rights law by creating accounts that mimicked protected classes' metadata and posting "unapproved" concepts—thus breaking Project Shield and similar algorithmic censorship programs by confusing their targeting and leading them to misfire against "friendly" targets.⁷⁶

But Ryan is far from the only actor who has exercised outsize influence in the noosphere by cleverly using and abusing new technology. Even without algorithmic interference, online posters like Douglass Mackey (Ricky Vaughn) have attracted a full-court press of state pressure due to effective meme campaigns, using rhetoric and parody alone. He is one of many who have been targeted by state-level actors for mere online posting and mockery.

The story of the noetic battlespace is a repetitive one, in which hard power must ultimately be used against non-state actors who outcompete the Blob in the noosphere; even then, the bulk of each actor's influence remains despite his removal or suppression. After Gamergate, the 2016 election and the COVID-19 pandemic served as further stress-tests of the evolving censorship-propaganda apparatus. In each case, it failed; Discourse and information proved malleable in the short run, but the apparatus failed to enforce its desired consensus over time. Trump was elected and the lab leak theory was vindicated, both concepts against which billions of investment dollars and cutting-edge research had been mustered. By the 2024 election, the Blob had pulled back to a defensive position, giving up on contesting the forefront outside a few perfunctory spasms⁷⁷ and focusing instead on creating circumstances by which it could entrench itself against Trump, Vance, and Musk's popular mandate.

⁷⁶ "The Butterfly War." *Cult State*, Oct. 13th, 2017. This blog (and Ryan's other research) has proven immensely helpful, and comes highly recommended.

⁷⁷ See Harry Sisson, "brat," and the various ham-handed PR operations for Harris.

The core threat presented by social media is that an individual with small (or even zero) assets can, with ingenuity and luck, affect change on the noetic battlespace equal to or greater than a state-level actor. This is of course greatly distressing to state-level actors, and serves as the primary threat to the rules-based international order—or “our sacred democracy,” as invoked by pundits and bureaucrats. The Internet presents an opportunity for another social revolution akin to the reformation of society prompted by the stirrup; thus, the individual actor must be disempowered by the medium itself:

Nuclear numbing evolved into surveillance numbing and now, further still, into cybernetically-induced paralysis. Today, we inhabit a world where these insidious forces are omnipresent, shaping our perceptions and dictating our perceived values and norms. [...] Data has become the new oil. But what constitutes this coveted resource? It’s nothing less than an aggregate of the intimate details of people’s lives, akin to a “literal mining of subjectivity.” (Lemov 2016)⁷⁸

Because censorship and influence campaigns have ultimately proven ineffective, this disempowerment must be achieved in a different way: the *financialization* of the noosphere. The clock cannot be turned back and technology cannot be un-developed; however, like the eventual proliferation of chariots or the increasing crew size of ironclad warships, the individual actor’s influence over the whole can be reduced to the point that it becomes immaterial or interchangeable.

From the perspective of the Blob, the wargame that is Discourse must be expanded and made so complex that only multibillion dollar programs can exercise any kind of real influence on it—effectively shutting out the potential for renegade or unapproved actors to act as agentic players. In the world of air superiority, Cessna 172s are cheap and widely available, but they stand no chance against something like a \$100 million F-35 Lightning; the same concept applies here. Postwar US doctrine of total domain superiority (to the point that conflict

⁷⁸ Schwab, “PSYWAR Primer.” *Schwabstack*, June 20th 2023. I owe a great debt to this article for its research on various DARPA modeling initiatives.

doesn't even need to be played out in reality) is here applied to the noetic battlespace, with the average person treated as a potential terrorist to be suppressed before they even act, via the guarantee that any action they take will have no influence. Thus the original strategic priorities of Internet development come full-circle, and GWOT doctrine is applied even more nebulously than it has been for the past two decades, porting US counterinsurgency tactics to not only domestic culture and politics, but collective consciousness itself.

The US government's financializing approach can be seen in the litany of modeling initiatives funded and developed since around 2006. The DoD has since then been on a convoluted quest for "social radar," or software that can accurately model sociocultural change, election results, population shifts, geopolitical moves, and more based on the firehose of Data that emerges from the Internet each millisecond. Dozens of massive, quiet projects have been developed for this purpose: ASPEN, ERIS, Face2Face, OCCAM, RAMBO, SentiBility, W-ICEWS... there are well over fifty public programs alone funded by IARPA and the like.⁷⁹ Most of these programs fall under DARPA's memetic research for military applications, including such goals as "to perform quantitative analysis of narratives, understanding their effects on human psychology and neurobiology, and determine their influence on individuals and culture" and "to develop automatic tools and techniques for detecting, identifying, evaluating, and countering adversarial memes."⁸⁰ Since 2011, DARPA's Social Media in Strategic Communication initiative, Strategic Social Interaction Module, and various other overarching programs have managed the DoD's approach toward activities including, per the manager of the SMISC: "narrative structure analysis, sentiment detection, and opinion mining;" "meme tracking across communities;" "*inducing identities*," and "automated

⁷⁹ For more information see "Seeing into hearts and minds: the Pentagon's quest for a 'social radar,'" by Roberto Gonzalez in *Anthropology Today* (2015).

⁸⁰ From a Robotic Technology Inc. executive summary of DARPA memetic warfare research.

content generation [as well as] bots in social media.”⁸¹ Additionally, in 2022, many of these modeling initiatives found a home for practical application in the Pentagon’s new Influence and Perception Management Office, which was established without a public announcement and whose activities remain rather opaque.⁸²

Particularly compelling as a case study is Aptima’s 2013 “Epidemiological Modeling of the Evolution of Messages” program, abbreviated E-MEME and developed for the Office of Naval Research (ONR). This software “successfully applied epidemiological models to reproduce empirically observed diffusion of ideas across electronic media,” using a virology model to track the proliferation of ideas and identities.⁸³ This analytical software is somewhat obviously dual-use, in that it can be used to optimize propaganda implantation for literal “virality.” Much of the DoD’s research into social cybernetics retains this “dual-use” character, in which it is exoterically positioned to describe or combat some technique, but in reality serves as a guide to that technique’s implementation. For example, “Microtargeting Unmasked: Safeguarding Law Enforcement, the Military, and the Nation in the Era of Personalized Threats”—a 2024 report produced by the Secret Service, Army Cyber Institute, and ASU’s Threatcasting Lab—practically serves as a manual for its titular set of tactics.

All of these technologies and initiatives are aimed toward creating a tactical advantage for the DoD so vast that it can, at some point in the future, maintain exclusive propaganda and censorship control over the entire online battlespace, “pricing out” any unapproved outside actors via access to novel algorithms and modeling tools so advanced that they make any outsider action obsolete—in a similar sense that it’s useless

⁸¹ Rand Waltzmann, “The Story Behind the DARPA Social Media in Strategic Communication (SMISC) Program.” *Information Professionals Association*, April 2015.

⁸² Klippenstein, Ken, “Inside the Pentagon’s New ‘Perception Management’ Office to Counter Disinformation.” *The Intercept*, May 17th, 2023.

⁸³ The paper behind E-MEME (Robert McCormack & William Salter, “An Application of Epidemiological Modeling to Information Diffusion,” *Aptima, Inc.*, 2010) is available on the SBIR website.

for a nation like Uruguay to try and confront American air or naval power.

In the sense that Discourse and the stock market both function as alternate reality games (ARGs), this massive web of programs aims to make the former function like the latter—by which the DoD and other major actors function as major investment firms, and the population functions as retail investors, largely unable to affect any sort of high-level change because the major funds control such a large body of assets. It is a decades-long investment in creating a perfect noetic monopoly. The goal is to end the era of low-cost, high-impact operations in netspace by individual actors—which have been treated as, in effect, terrorists by the DoD—and secure an exclusive confrontation with adversaries in the noetic battlespace as well as the physical, with unapproved actors locked out of this new Great Game.

This initiative is significantly complicated by its medium. Working in the noetic battlespace has the capability to derange culture and individual psychology, as well as to reflect weaponized memes unintentionally on the class of people who create them. As seen in the Cold War, high-level ideological conflict is not a simple thing. Allegiances can be flipped and goals steered into irrelevance far more easily and imperceptibly than a soldier's capabilities in a traditional conflict. And the soldier is already vulnerable to older methods of psychological warfare, as is the Data-warrior; thus, an entire complicating matrix of threats develops at a speed far faster than it can ever be countered or even understood.

As a result, it would not be unreasonable to say that experimentation in noetic warfare via Data platforms has a built-in ceiling, or a timer. Institutional actors, even those backed by cutting-edge technology and bound by ironclad aligning principles, can only interface with the Discourse ARG so much before entropy deranges and muddies their ability to operate. Inkings of this effect are already visible in major censorship efforts; as early as 2014, the biggest companies in the world

fixated so strongly on fighting Gamergate that the subject of the battle itself took on a quasi-religious tone, and “gamers”—a meaningless group designator—became a legitimately despised group. The same has happened with “trolls” and “trolling:” this term, even more meaningless than “gamer,” has taken on such memetic weight that government officials and public figures address it with a venom not seen even toward murderers. Media products like *Homeland* (itself a hagiography of CIA omnipotence) dedicate entire episodes to violently dismantling the “4Chan troll” bogeyman as a sort of catharsis.⁸⁴ On a broader level, fourth-wave feminist ideology—initially spun up as a sort of kayfabe meant to achieve clear foreign policy and intelligence goals—gradually became the dominant ideology of various federal agencies *for its own sake*... to the extent that 100+ NSA analysts began hosting transgender BDSM-oriented group chats on work servers as a normal function of their day.⁸⁵ Very few individuals can engage in ARG-mediated noetic warfare without losing their original frame, or even their framing of reality; even the best tend to spiral, an effect which is compounded in institutional environments.

There are two approaches to solving this problem. The first is to completely cede the noetic battlespace to any interested actor, which is a non-starter. The second is something of a gambit, and has been the actual course of action: to model Data so extensively and so effectively that a “perfect algorithm” can be created, capable of removing or automating the human element at every stage of propaganda implantation. This is the final stage of the financialization of the noosphere, and the closest real-world outcome to the “singularity” prophesied by accelerationists.

To date, the various DARPA, ONR, CIA, and NSA programs dedicated to mapping the entirety of Data function mostly as shiny toys. They are capable of analyzing and consolidating massive amounts of information, as well as attacking or defending noetic targets within

⁸⁴ “Rebel Rebel,” season 7 episode 2 (2018). See Iterated Alienation for a discussion of media-as-catharsis.

⁸⁵ Rufo & Grossman, “The NSA’s Secret Sex Chats.” *City Journal*, Feb. 24th, 2025.

their parameters. However, as evidenced by the system's various stress tests—Trump, COVID, even various acts by Wikileaks—these initiatives remain unable to maintain and achieve big-picture, complex strategic goals in the noetic battlespace. These initiatives have succeeded in making out-of-paradigm action by unapproved actors more difficult, but not in eliminating them entirely—or in financializing the battlespace to the extent that these actors are 100% priced out. However, as more of these tools are developed, iterating atop previous research and turning prior flagships into subordinate processes, a picture emerges of a potential outcome: a mapping-influence tool (more accurately, a surveillance-propaganda tool) that is capable of perfect, multi-domain Data shaping and sentiment implantation.

This is not only possible but *inevitable* with aggressive investment in fields like machine learning, natural language processing, data mapping, and hardware efficiency. With advanced computing, each mapping tool (i.e. E-MEME) or algorithmic process (i.e. ASPEN⁸⁶) can be plotted on a manifold that increases in dimensionality until each complex algorithm or map is reduced to a point, wave, or vector. At this point a single piece of software can cohesively map the “flow” of the noetic battlespace via these pieces of meta-data,⁸⁷ down to its smallest eddies, as a singular model in extradimensional or Fourier space. Such a software can interface with the entirety of Data as a single mathematical construct, cascading “downward” through each sub-algorithm’s method of interfacing and influence within the noetic battlespace.

The theoretical basis for such a piece of software has been available since 2020, in the form of the paper “Fourier Neural Operator for Parametric Partial Differential Equations”—which created a machine learning-based operator capable of functioning in infinite dimensions via parameterization directly in Fourier space, allowing it to solve

⁸⁶ Agent-Based System Produced Emergent Networks, a DoD program developed by Charles River Analytics. See also the subsection “AI creates tangible new (un)realities” in *Microtargeting Unmasked*.

⁸⁷ Distinct from metadata.

notoriously-difficult PDEs with unprecedented efficiency and accuracy. It does not take much extrapolation to realize that such a framework can and will be adapted to this meta-algorithmic use case as soon as the mapping technology is precise enough to offer a sufficient command of Data.

Whether explicitly framed as such in doctrine or not, this is the inevitable endpoint of DARPA et al.'s attempt to map and financialize the noosphere. It is also the only real "AI risk," in the sense that it poses a civilizational risk downstream of otherwise-benign machine learning technology. Altman types present nuke-launching chatbots, uploaded consciousnesses, and infinitely-abundant automated communism as marketing fairytales, derived from lowbrow sci-fi tropes; in reality, the risk is that human consciousness becomes completely corralled and understood solely to serve a bumbling Cold War roleplay among a group of people that are themselves hopelessly subject to their own engineered mental contagions.

With the Internet becoming increasingly centralized and increasingly accessible—which is to say totalizing in its influence, increasingly supplanting reality—the creation of such an algorithm would amount to not the creation of God, but the fashioning of a sort of Demiurge. The creation of this demiurge-algorithm—an inherently esoteric and occult act—is the nuclear arms race of our day, occupying the highest level of researchers and strategists.

IV

"On Exactitude in Science"

By Jorge Luis Borges, tr. Andrew Hurley

...In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of

the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

– Suarez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lerida, 1658

As early as 1968, McLuhan described the computer as “a kind of console for global thermostats to pattern all sensory life in a way conducive to comfort and happiness.”⁸⁸ In the intervening decades, this patterning toward comfort has become an automatic process, running in the background of the esoteric conflicts that drive the actual evolution of the cyber medium. Sensory experience becomes more comfortable—and thus more simulated—as an emergent process of hypermodernity, rather than as the primary goal of the major actors advancing computerization. The primary conflict—the Great Game of various intra-elite, transnational, and multimodal struggles—is subsumed into the suppression of a secondary conflict due the Internet-driven deterritorialization and decentralization of what amounts to military power. This is the perspective from which the demiurge-algorithm must be created, and why its eventual genesis in some form is inevitable.

In effect, the nature of the cyber-landscape has allowed for the creation of a thousand stirrup-analogues—endangering not only current elites’ positions, but the very *concept* of an elite in its modern form, able to maintain its position largely without the demonstration of hard power, inborn merit, or a divine mandate. Despite its amorphousness, the Blob

⁸⁸ From *War and Peace in the Global Village*.

functions like any other institution: in the long run, it optimizes for its own preservation over any kind of tangible goal. Thus their current strategy is a slow-motion, last-ditch effort to preserve the current order—a desperate ritual to summon and trap a god capable of reshaping reality with a word.

The Internet as a manifestation of the noetic battlespace inherently complicates this process. Its nature as a *medium* means that the development of a demiurge-algorithm is not merely a question of more accurate analysis or better algorithms alone. The ultimate goal of any propaganda or influence operation, whether microtargeted or population-level, is to influence the mind itself; on a population level, to influence the noosphere. Propaganda can be effective as mere bombardment, existing for its own sake—but even this tactic is only influential insofar as it affects the collective consciousness by altering the mind of the individual.

Thus the centralization of all human thought into the Internet presents a problem: it is a vast map-territory relation. Any high-level process can only act based on the information provided by the map, and can only directly alter the map itself. Any difference between the map and the territory presents a potential for misalignment, which in practice tends to compound, making “perfect” influence operations impossible.

As the human experience is subsumed and centralized on the Internet, the Data-map improves—making the noosphere (the actual “territory”) increasingly legible. But even as the representation improves, *ceci n’est pas une pipe*. The human mind remains a black box from the perspective of a Data-based algorithm, and at a population level, it remains a vast terrain that must be observed and influenced exclusively through the data layer. A hypothetical demiurge-algorithm, while possible with current technology, still has to contend with unknown unknowns: innate aspects of human psychology not necessarily parsable through Data or algorithms, and the fact that the mind only *indirectly* interfaces with things like social media.

However, the gradual improvement of mapping and the nature of the Internet as interactive and gamified creates a unique effect in this map-territory paradigm. As the map more accurately represents the territory, the territory is *pulled toward* the map. People are subconsciously incentivized to make themselves more legible, and to modify their thinking to adapt to the techno-landscape. Thus the drive toward the Data layer as a perfect representation of noetic territory is a two-sided process, by which both the map and territory shift toward unification. Gradually, human consciousness is altered into something new; just as the computer “abolishes the human past by making it entirely present,” it chips away at human consciousness itself, re-molding it via complex incentive structures into something that continuously adapts itself to interfacing with a computer.

The processes that drive this reformulation of consciousness are both directed and emergent. On the intentional side, DARPA’s (and private industry’s) focus on weaponized memetics is second only to their focus on brain-computer interfaces, a field which has received billions in research funding over the last decade. The defense industry aims to make “neurological warfare” viable in a broad set of use cases, and the latter aims to make products both more addictive and irreversibly integrated with one’s life. Both produce workable insights into how an individual’s mind can be more directly interfaced with the technetronic surround that already dominates their lives. Emergently, Discourse is a self-refining process that produces memes, rhetoric, and media optimized to *force* user engagement. Further, even agentic (out-of-paradigm) engagement with social media forces the user to understand and adapt to its structures in an increasingly-libidinal fashion.

The overall effect is of man driven toward total *angelization*, or conversion into software. This is not the techno-singularity of Vinge or even von Neumann, but rather a devolution into automata: optimal pawns in a game barely conceptualized by its primary actors. The layered conflicts and initiatives that drive the development of Data platforms, outlined here, have begun a terraforming of human culture and consciousness so vast that it threatens to derange us not only from

innate human nature as understood for millennia, but from physical reality itself.

The future on this track is a dizzying spiral into an eternal war over nothing, lacking even the possibility of heroism or the grounding reality of pain. It is the recentering of power in such a sense that the very existence of power comes into question; it is totalitarian disorder, novel insanities as public religion, a paperclip machine for wetware whose sole purpose is the prosecution of a conflict long forgotten by even its leaders, fought in the liminal subconscious alone. It is the cryostatic suspension of mankind.

Notes

1

Is the state based on the sovereign's right to rule, or on the enactment of universal moral principles? Is political rule the act of exerting one's will on the world, or the act of discovering universal moral-philosophical law? This has been America's identity crisis since the Second World War, as part of its reckoning with newfound global preeminence and a war-identity imposed by *philosophical* opposition to the USSR. The decades of the Cold War shaped the American state into an unstable sort of paradox; it is a sovereign power wrapped in the costume of a universal moral frame, whose principles are then defined and used in service of sovereign political actions. Existing at the superposition of Machiavelli and John Stuart Mill, the US state creates universal morality in service of cynical power-politics, accepts and enforces that morality for its own sake, and then subverts it for the next round of power plays. Agents of the state wear the mask of both moral crusader and cynical operator, experiencing simultaneously moral indignation and the rush of personal power. A feedback loop of action and justification, belief and manipulation, spirals into infinity. The snake eats itself.

2

The postwar American mythos redefines the Founding Fathers as utopians, with the Constitution as the creation of the "universal" state—

a Platonic ideal of political morality. Even a brief reading of the Federalist Papers shows this to be untrue. The founders saw their political form as the creation of a tension-machine, a protocol that would manage the struggles of power-politics indefinitely and aim them toward the common good. They did not frame political rule as the derivation of universal principles, but as the Hobbesian struggle between men and factions for preeminence. They were also not universalists, and thought of Americans as an exclusionary people with a political solution tailored to them. As the Left will often remind you, they were “racist” in both the philosophical and literal sense—believing in a unique American ethnos, and in its superiority to, for example, blacks (who even Lincoln did not believe could participate in American civic life).

Nevertheless, the myth persists. The rebranding of our Founding Fathers as universalist-moralists has led to a framing of the US as a philosophical system of continuous moral self-perfection, thus giving its agents the right and duty to act as moral crusaders upon both its citizenry and the rest of the world. Further, the split from historicity has led the Constitution to become not a canonical document but a sort of moral feeling. The vanguard of the US-as-moral-system finds its most essential aspects outdated: per Ruth Bader Ginsburg, “I would not look to the United States Constitution if I were drafting a constitution in the year 2012.”

3

The American ouroboros fuses the worst aspects of corrupt power-politics and moral tyranny. The overall effect is a feeling of schizophrenia, a gloss of fairy-tale unreality over politics. We bomb people out of a heartfelt desire to advance human rights, and invent new universal morality to further cynical intelligence operations. The US state exists at the superposition of identity and the lack thereof, of morality and immorality, perfidy and utopianism. The circular feedback loop between state-as-sovereign and state-as-morality produce the

derangement that characterizes our politics. It is very hard for the individual to tell them apart, even when they themselves first invoked one as cover for the other. Politics in the age of MKULTRA becomes an LSD trip of retrocausality.

4

This derangement is innate to the noetic battlespace of the Cold War and its aftermath. Today, the ouroboros of operation and ideology only becomes more complex and recursive as Data operations increase in sophistication, and psyoperators become subject to their own operations. The creation of a demiurge-algorithm, then, would soon necessitate the construction of an ascetic sort of priestly caste: a group cut off from normality, able to operate upon the noosphere without being subject to it. At that point, the separation between the US as a tangible thing and as a mere directional force would completely disintegrate, and the world would be plunged into meaningless wonderland-conflict forever, every man's increasingly-bizarre experiences and beliefs defined in service to a conflict that he does not and cannot understand, puppeted by quasi-people who remember neither the what or why of the conflict. This outcome would be, in a sense, "repaganization"—but it is not of the heroic sort, confined instead in the paradigm of a long-forgotten war only running on its own momentum. This is apocalypse.

5

The decoherence of the American state has created both decline and opportunity. Today's noetic battlespace is so complex that even trillion-dollar entities cannot align their own operations. The individual, the small group, and the large-scale institution are set at odds—pulled apart by a churning gyre of information that makes each actor forget its orientation, its mission, even its allies. In this environment, the most

dangerous force is a small actor that can achieve and maintain alignment toward its own ends. Quick to adapt, concerned only with its own ends, such a micro-order would present a structural threat to the entire mass of Data-driven psychological operations.

“Whatever ultramodernity places under the dominion of signs postmodernity subverts with virus. As culture migrates into partial-machines (lacking an autonomous reproductive system) semiotics subsides into virotechnics.”

Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena*

“In somewhat different terms, the algorithmic system becomes a calculating machine, as conversely every calculating machine is materialization of an algorithm. Suitable data being fed in, the machine runs according to pre-established rules and eventually a result drops out which was unforeseeable to the individual mind with its limited capacities.”

Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy

Iterated Alienation

“But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.”

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*

A small child—imagine him five or six years old—asks his father what game he’s playing on his computer. His father says “I’m playing Minecraft, do you want to try?” The child says “no, I want to watch you play.”

According to parenting subreddits and the like, this is an increasingly common theme. Young children, raised on YouTube Kids and various other iPad content-dispensers, conceptualize their engagement with video games through streaming, rather than playing them directly. The games themselves are distant; *streamers* play them, and the primary engagement for the many is rather to watch that gameplay.

This is a simple example of *iterated alienation*, the process by which simulations of simulations overtake objective reality, exponentially distancing the average person from that which is real. In this example, the video game as a simulation of reality is overtaken by streaming, a simulation of a simulation—and, in the case of the child asking his father to playact as a streamer, a simulation of a simulation of a simulation. To take it a step further, streaming content is often

consumed as shortform highlights—reaching simulation⁴ (or even simulation⁵) in just this straightforward example.

However, the process of iterated alienation is fractally complex. Within each stage of this spiral away from reality occurs self-contained spirals, manifesting as the interaction between tropes and icons in a sort of iterated game, resulting at each stage in further exponents to the overall simulation. A useful visual analogy, from Baudrillard: the sun orbits the center of the galaxy, the planets orbit the sun, and moons orbit each planet.

This spiral is particularly well-established in the gaming world, and worth examining as a sort of case study.⁸⁹ A video game is, at its core, a simulation of some real action. This is often some vast adventure or orgy of violence, something that the player would not naturally be able to do; however, there is an interesting trend in slice-of-life or otherwise mundane simulation games, covering anything from flipping burgers to driving a semi-truck. In both cases, particularly with children, the game serves as a mediator between the player and their imagination. In-game graphics and physics can, by the nature of the medium, only asymptotically approach reality, and of course the actual sensation of the action must be filled in by the player's imagination. It is telling that even in VR, where immersion is at its peak, the trend is not toward hyperrealism but toward more effective hijacking of the player's imagination. This hijacking is accomplished by targeting him on a subconscious or pre-rational level. For example: many games make the player near-invulnerable when his health is low, to maximize the time that his heart races as he feels like he's teetering on the edge of death. However, as devoted gamers become more used to these tactics and gain

⁸⁹ It is notable (and unsurprising) that—like Google and the Internet itself—video games were spawned near-entirely from the intersection of the military-industrial complex, intelligence community, and quasi-occultist academic labs. To date the “gaming world” remains a breeding ground for military and sociopolitical data collection, experimental technology, and various social engineering projects. See *Smartbomb: the Quest for Art, Entertainment, and Big Bucks in the Videogame Revolution* by Heather Chaplin and Aaron Ruby (2006).

an understanding of them,⁹⁰ new forms must be devised to keep the audience engaged.

Consequently, the vanguard of popular gaming has moved away from hyperrealism as a core objective, and toward the cartoonified worlds of mega-hits like Fortnite and Overwatch.⁹¹ In these games, realism is extremely low on the priority list, with the competitive meta at the top—such that the game can induce a rush in its players by engineering moments that exist totally within the accepted “world” of the game, and are unrecognizable from the standpoint of reality (and in the case of games like Fortnite, unrecognizable from itself a few years prior). A glance beneath the surface invariably reveals these mechanics as meaningfully “fake.” For example, in Fortnite a standard 100-player lobby may include 70-80% bots—a strategy meant to maximize each actual player’s chance at an exciting top-ten showdown or a victory, once prized for being extremely difficult.

Aside from excitement, these induced “moments” often center around creating humor, such that they can be recorded and shared later to cement the game as a surrogate for socialization. A micro-version of iterated alienation happens here as well, with spontaneous in-person socialization supplanted by Xbox parties, further supplanted by emoting together with people using the same in-game skin, implicitly for social media attention. The gamer is thus engaging in a simulation

⁹⁰ David Sirlin’s *Playing to Win* (2000) includes a fascinating study of breaking down and exploiting game mechanics for competition; ultimately all videogames are dominated by this type of thinking, and it serves as the meta-game beneath the entire gaming world.

⁹¹ It is notable that the most popular videogames—Minecraft, Fortnite, and Roblox—are no longer particularly *about* anything. Rather, they are all-encompassing “multiverses,” each with their own established form, carried between different games-within-games. Here another layer of simulation is added—people play Guitar Hero in Fortnite, Rainbow Six in Roblox, etc. Stock footage from the most banal games-within-games (“parkour”) is also used and accepted as a universal visual backdrop for audio-based social media content. These “multiverses” form the substrata of collective online perception.

of a simulation of a real activity, paired with a simulation of a simulation of social interaction, largely with an anonymous “audience” in mind.

Many readers will see similarities to Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra, as well as the broader criticisms of his *Simulacra and Simulation*, and this does describe a form of the same phenomenon—but his work described a less mature version of the process underway today.

Baudrillard’s concept of third-order simulacra stops with the total separation of representation and reality, in which the symbol precedes the actual thing and no distinction exists between them. Cultural products are then completely cut off from base reality, and do not even make an attempt to be “real.” He goes on to describe “the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference,” in which simulacra gain operational autonomy and continue to interact as a self-referencing memetic system.

Both of these observations are accurate and useful. But in the decades since 1981, this process has expanded and totalized—all simulacra now interact on the *same noetic plane*, the “central stimulation,” messily intermediated by the data mechanisms of algorithmic social media and subject to thousands of psychological operations within that legible data layer. The consolidation of thought into social media, and its subsequent weaponization, has made the hyperreality concept a tangible *thing*—putting the concepts of Batman, the Kansas City Chiefs, the stock price of Apple, and the identity of the Donbas into one arena, where DARPA launches offensives against Morgan Wallen via a proxy war between Red Bull and pegging fetishism. The consolidation into one singular battlespace and the supplanting of simulacra with even-wispier tropes mirror the unified-virtual world environments of popular games like Roblox or Fortnite, which serve as a useful (if flattened) analogy of the entire system. The Discourse ARG encompasses the set of all that is theoretical, the set of all that is real, and the set of all parodies of both of these. It draws no distinction between the three.

Despite these legible parallels, the layers upon layers of clown-logic involved in this process make the entire experience dreamlike, and man's relationship to the noetic substrate ("the Algorithm") becomes almost animistic in response. The best marketers are indistinguishable from shamans, and the data scientists of the intelligence world accurately call themselves wizards. The average person's interaction with this arena is best described by Lovecraft's mongrelized Cult of Cthulhu, orgiastically sacrificing innocents to a mere representation of some incomprehensible god that dwells deep in the swamps of Louisiana.

This is the key progression beyond Baudrillard's hyperreality. Beyond merely iterating without a central authority, this new nexus of simulacra *becomes* the central authority, absorbing all fields into one. Hyperreality becomes so dense as to take on gravity, and to pull its furthest-reaching aspects into one pillar—a self-building Tower of Babel at the center of the panopticon once called the collective unconscious.

The Discourse ARG makes this process participatory and infinitely rapid, facilitated by millions of people simulating these interactions between simulacra, imagining and concretizing their interactions in the noosphere. Cultural products and practices become players in this novel, *singular* iterated game, in which the only rule is that each interaction will further alienate them from basic reality. The system's energy is provided by the millions of people who interact with it, simulating these interactions at scale in a bio-GPU network akin to the human batteries of *The Matrix*. The effect on these participants is an exponential distancing from physical existence, resulting in total alienation from that which is real and complete subsumption by simulation[∞]—which ultimately subordinates individuated consciousness into not merely simulacra, but rather its underlying tropes, signs, and symbols (even in physical reality).

This phenomenon, a sort of post-postmodernist death spiral, loops back to something more easily described in terms of magic and occultism. Media tropes become tangible things—tulpas/egregores—via iterated

alienation; characters and settings themselves are seen only as manifestations of that trope, the actual “thing” in question in Discourse.

As a result, man’s interaction with media takes on a schizophrenic—or rather dissociative—character, with media tropes drawn from the ARG taking on corporeality within every participant’s mind. As described in *On Sex*, these imagined interactions overtake base reality as the driver of self-conception and action. Real-life interaction becomes effectively mediated by the rules and symbols of the ARG, and invisible gods live as the noetic daemons behind perceptions, decisions, and actions, both in-person and online.

In the gaming world and elsewhere in media, corporate actors encourage the categorization of these daemons into increasingly detailed, boiled-down, and bundled “aesthetics.” It is not enough to know that people find magic in Studio Ghibli films; it must be known whether the magic is found specifically in “Whimsical Turn-of-the-Century European Steampunk Cottagecore” or “Allegorical Magical Coming-of-Age Hopecore.” The marketing optimization game enlists the social media hivemind as a focus group, studying intently the novel aesthetic signifiers that come out of niche online communities. Extensive and participatory A/B testing is deployed online to whittle down exactly which microgenres present market opportunities, and exactly which tropes are least offensive within those microgenres. Data on preferences takes precedence as the value-commodity of the media-sphere,⁹² and media is then constructed “in reverse”—a sort of quasi-fanfiction, written around a crowdsourced list of descriptive tags chosen for maximum market appeal.⁹³

⁹² See *Big Data Goes to Hollywood: The Emergence of Big Data as a Tool in the American Film Industry*, Simon & Schroeder, 2019.

⁹³ Some books are now printed and advertised with these “tags” prominently displayed, to let the reader know if it includes micro-tropes they enjoy, simulating the experience of browsing AO3 or some similar site.

This hyper-optimization and reverse-engineering of audience preferences has effectively killed art in the traditional sense, by reducing artists to artisans in service of complex market insights (rather than a single visionary's original concept). However, it is merely the inevitable result of markets adapting to the tropification of ARG-mediated reality. When the true "thing" at play in determining tastes is not a full piece of media but specific arrangements of tropes, signs, and symbols, firms will find a way to target that rather than grasp at the intangible ideas of a single aesthete.

Once again, an occult term is helpful. It is the search for True Names of media tastes—the preferred egregores of the current moment—that drives this "Pinterest-ification" of the human experience. The result is the categorization of all media, art, and even perception into increasingly-niche and neatly-organized terms. As the process of iterated alienation continues and these tropes continue to interact in the noosphere, a continuous and theoretically-infinite stream of market gaps will open—"the simulated generation of difference"—making total and eternal dominance of every media industry (film, gaming, literature, music, etc.) a mere technical question. Hence these industries' fixation on generative AI. The most forward-thinking among these creative fields know that the entire industry is nothing more than a race to the atom bomb—an AI (or set of AI tools) that will ensure perpetual market domination. The development of this industry-conquering AI is seen as a matter of *when*, not *if*, and explains the rabid excitement whenever some seemingly-insignificant advance is made in AI generation. That rabidly-excited subset is not watching "AI slop;" they are watching the tentative first steps of a perpetual motion machine capable of printing trillions of dollars.

Notably, this subset is strongly opposed by the artisan class that creates media, which is characterized by intense, violent hatred for AI. In this group, the economic concern of job loss is secondary to the *identity loss* of being able to present as an "artist"—an identity loosely similar to a priestly caste in Discourse. This identity and status loss is then eclipsed by the potential loss of the *catharsis* provided by the mechanical aspects

of their “art,” which is the true primary driver behind most human decisions made in the production of current-day media products. Often mistaken for cynical propaganda, the limited creative agency exerted during the production of hyper-optimized “art” is primarily dedicated toward this sort of self-soothing. In a parody of the earnestly self-dissecting art of the later 20th century, these artisans instead flagellate the audience to relieve themselves of psychosexual or political hangups.⁹⁴ To threaten their position is to threaten to take away their livelihood, identity, and legion of captive gimps all at once.

With that said, the presence of the artisan is immaterial to the process at hand; generative AI can merely optimize a cycle which has already been in play for a decade. Whether produced by carbon or silicon, this endless descent is the natural endpoint of culture-wide iterated alienation: a bottomless spiral of media optimized for profitability, forever iterating out the gaps between symbols and tropes that represent only a shadow of a shadow of a shadow of something that might have once resembled human experience.

It is the total consolidation of everything—identity, art, business, politics, war, emotion, ideology—into one self-reproducing pillar of absurdity. It is Oscar-winning movies that describe themselves as “Feminist Salvagepunk Goblincore meets Retro-Futurist Victorian Slutwave meets Lolita Techwear Y2K Nostalgia.” It is populist politicians running on the restoration of attractive anime girls. It is DARPA making you feel new emotions in a convoluted bid to subvert Kazakh separatism.

⁹⁴ Realistic panic attacks. Captain Marvel-type creatures ritually beating sexists and racists. “No, but really, look at this cocky teenage Latina coming to destroy your ego with a look. #DuckTales.” Typically described as “slop.”

Writing on AI-generated videogames, Mark Bisone predicts:

The end result of such soup-pot horrors will be a torrent of exotic new mental disorders. You will experience lengthy daylight hallucinations, intense panic attacks and psychotic breaks. Eventually you will find yourself trapped in a kind of Russian doll reality of nightmares within nightmares within nightmares, from which you'll never be truly convinced you have awakened.⁹⁵

The reality is that this has already come to pass, and AI-generated interactive content will only accelerate it by shifting the computational load to server farms. This nightmare-world of questionably-real simulacra is already the state of experiential mass consciousness—as well as the basis for all media creation, creating a positive feedback loop of derangement.

The novel mental disorders described by Bisone—severe anxiety, derealization, hallucinations—are already the dominant pathologies of the younger generation. These are layered atop an exhausted sort of depression, born partially of perceived helplessness and partially of fatigue from one's involuntary role as a flesh-and-blood GPU.

Mankind is thus made to become in a sense *hyper-rationally insane*, infected by his prostration before the symbolic pantheon that governs his perceptions and actions: a centralized mythos which evolves via both individual and collective simulation. Some have argued that this represents a sort of “re-paganization;” even insofar as this frame fits, this is not the noble paganism of the Greeks, the complex Zoroastrian tradition, nor the shamanic life of a druid. Rather, it is the sort of paganism that possessed Aztec priests to flay a terrified woman and wear her skin during Ochpaniztli: a subsummation into symbolism so complex that only horrifying transformations can make one's relation to it legible.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ “The Games That Will Play You.” *The Cat Was Never Found*, Feb. 21st, 2023. This is a strongly-reasoned article overall, despite my reframing of this small extract.

⁹⁶ “Then, still in darkness, silence, and urgent haste, her body was flayed, and a naked priest, a ‘very strong man, very powerful, very tall,’ struggled into the wet skin, with

“Every thought derives from a thwarted sensation.”—Emil Cioran

If the terminal state of iterated alienation is an infinitely-generated all-encompassing media hellscape, its description raises another question: what is the opposite of iterated alienation? “Reality” is broad—what specifically are people being alienated from?

Because Baudrillard describes the basic form of this alienation quite accurately, it is worth returning to his work. Broadly: man is alienated from the nonhuman world by his consolidation into cities, from production of physical goods by globalization, from usefulness-as-value by the concept of fiat currency, from war by the media-imposed image of war, and from sociopolitical agency by his reduction to a statistic. Ultimately, a sense of artificiality so deep takes over that the difference between reality and representation is immaterial, and he comes to expect the world to represent itself in hyperreal terms, utterly divorced from base reality.

There is a clear trend: as Baudrillard’s order of simulacra proceeds, man is increasingly alienated from more basic aspects of existence, terminating in alienation from his own powers of rational perception. It follows that as alienation progresses (and it certainly has) he will be alienated from even more fundamental aspects of human existence.

The exponentially-iterated alienation created by today’s media and social media landscape has advanced far enough to distance man from his most basic features, *atomizing* him in the literal sense. After the separation of man from rational perception, he is separated from pre-rational perception, and ultimately pre-rational action. Even instincts and reflexes are pushed away in this new order, culminating in alienation from the two fundamental perceptions/actions that make up basic human existence: pleasure and pain, reproduction and violence.

its slack breasts and pouched genitalia: a double nakedness of layered, ambiguous sexuality.”—Inga Clendinnen, *The Aztecs: An Interpretation* (1995).

Reproduction/pleasure and violence/pain make up the fundamental zeros and ones of the human (and even nonhuman) biological condition. As alienation has progressed, man has been desexed and defanged. Simulacra of sex and violence, pleasure and pain, have superseded the actual thing. Even when either actual act is undertaken or sensation felt, it is mediated through signs and symbols. Sex becomes tulpa-mediated mutual masturbation; violence becomes an elaborate game of signaling and avoidance. Pleasure is hollow, and hedonism is a sham; pain, even in the form of physical exertion, can be easily avoided. Operant conditioning in the traditional sense no longer “works,” and must rely on increasingly-obscure methods of intra-ARG reward and punishment.

This total denaturing of one’s physical existence is the *individual* endpoint of iterated alienation: to be so thoroughly absorbed into the semiotic plane that one is estranged from their biological self, to the point that even a tendon reflex test would need to be processed through the lens of the all-consuming ARG. The drive to conquer space, to defend oneself, and to reproduce—impulses that predate even the discovery of fire—are held awkwardly at arm’s length, only ever examined as a strange trinket.

The result is man distanced so far from biological life that even pleasure or disgust is beyond his capability, much less a realer-than-real act of violence. All he can understand is *signal* which, more than merely surrounding, him *flows through him*. His blood is vestigial to his true form as a resonant crystal, capable of only constructive or destructive interference with the vibrations that seep from every digital orifice.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Schwab’s “The Gender Trickster” (*Schwabstack*, 2024) expands on this concept; see also “Luilekkerland.” His entire body of work comes highly recommended.

Notes

1

Iterated alienation creates cultural expectations and norms that refuse to define themselves as such. For example, the subversion of expectations—in media and life—has *become the expectation*. Tough guys actually look like Mike Vining; short, mild women are actually ferocious; criminals are actually sensitive; and people with the appearance of moral uprightness are actually villains. This has become such a strong rule that any confrontation with normative reality (again, in media or life) creates dissonance and confusion. The expectation of exceptionality leads to some of the insane decision-making visible everywhere now, as people unconsciously both perceive and try to legislate reality along these expected tropes. “Actually...” is the most popular form of mass-psychosis today.

2

One possible (and even likely) end-state of iterated alienation is the infinite simulcasting of everything in culture as a sort of smothering mother-figure. Already, the typical workplace simulates a “family” or “community” atop its original form of the factory. This leads to dissonance and betrayal when one has to reckon with the workplace as an economic thing, rather than personal and caring. On a mass-cultural scale, we saw this sort of simulation enacted everywhere during COVID, in which the companies that sold you toilet paper and brake

fluid repeated messages of “solidarity in these unprecedented times” while extoling the ways they were helping herd you like a rat.

3

An infinite spiral away from reality is, of course, no basis for any kind of “genuine” culture. The *fundamental unreality* of iterated alienation most particularly targets any media, subculture, or individual which takes itself seriously; as a result, media injects sarcastic self-parody when it starts approaching seriousness, as do individuals in thought and speech: “...umm, that just happened.”

4

An aversion to seriousness manifests in lifestyle as well, where established forms must everywhere become self-effacing. Genuine decision-making is averted in mass culture by the flattening of lifestyle to identical unseriousness across any major city: identical apartments with “quirky” branding, girlfriends instead of wives, dogs instead of children, self-parodying social forms like barcades, etc. “Real life,” then, takes on a sheen of unrealism, with jobs like policeman, soldier, or merchant always being for “other people,” and struggles like crime, financial ruin, or divorce existing “elsewhere.” Despite the fact that these same struggles are experienced by many people, they are reframed to lack the appearance of seriousness above all else, such that the individual never has to consider them “real.”

5

The tropification of culture and media creates a sort of cargo-cultism for older niches. “Punk” stands out as an example, existing entirely

online as an infinitely self-referential rehash of old tropes and debates. This social cryostasis is another potential outcome of iterated alienation in mass culture: the conversion of fleeting, once-genuine subcultures into theme parks formed by complex meshes of multimedia performances and in-person events. In other words, “Stuck Culture” is the rule.

6

Ironically, politically-aligned communities hold some of the only true potential for subcultural authenticity. The totalizing nature of the Discourse ARG means that it aligns people based on biological predispositions; extensive engagement with it often spawns groups with more shared traits than does extensive engagement with music, art, or other media. It is not uncommon for completely-anonymous members of a political subculture to discover that they share an ethnic background, regional upbringing, or even ancestors. If this is the truest method of alignment available, then it follows that any “genuine” culture must necessarily come from radical corners of politics.

Semiotic Consciousness

“The actor cannot, at last, refrain, even in moments of the deepest pain, from thinking of the effect produced by his deportment and by his surroundings—for example, even at the funeral of his own child: he will weep at his own sorrow and its manifestations as though he were his own audience. The hypocrite who always plays one and the same part, finally ceases to be a hypocrite... When anyone, during a long period, and persistently, wishes to appear something, it will at last prove difficult for him to be anything else.”

Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

Julian Jaynes's 1976 work *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* introduced a novel—and still controversial—thesis on the development of human consciousness, arguing that self-aware consciousness as experienced by humanity today was a recent phenomenon evolved in response to the stressors of the Bronze Age Collapse. Jaynes asserts that prior to the breakdown of bicamerality—a time exemplified in Homeric literature—humans experienced “bicameral mentality,” a non-self-reflective proto-consciousness that attributed emotions to outside beings. “Thought” thus manifested not as an internal monologue but as auditory hallucinations: commands from a god or some other apparition, which were obeyed without question. In Jaynes' framing, ego-centric psychology (i.e. the form of consciousness familiar today) did not develop prior to the dawn of human civilization, but as a much later byproduct. Arthur William Hope Adkins built on this hypothesis by arguing that the transition to city-state life allowed for this development, which then spread from Ancient Greece.

The bicameral hypothesis is almost certainly flawed, especially as it extends into the historical and linguistic particulars. However, its core notion—that *consciousness itself* can undergo rapid changes in response to environmental or social factors—is undoubtedly true. It is impossible to study historical literature in any depth and conclude “these people were conscious in the same exact way as me.” A modern student’s estrangement from figures of the past is first explained materially, as a consequence of modern prosperity and global culture; when that fails, the framing defaults to condescension, particularly from leftist-types. “They didn’t know better,” “they were malnourished and repressed,” and so on. When the alienation occurs along a physical axis—i.e. in regards to a physical feat which seems nigh-impossible today—the stock assumption is that historical chroniclers were lying, a null hypothesis whose batting average against Herodotus alone goes down by the day.⁹⁸

Ultimately, a shaky *détente* is reached via the framing of cultural relativism, which exists solely as a compromise and thus utterly fails to explain the sheer alien nature of the past by ham-handedly likening the difference between you and a twelfth-century knight to the difference between you and a modern Pakistani. Often this comparison is defended not by argument but by hectoring—weak mockery that says “you have nothing in common with a medieval knight and would have been a peasant, so you cannot possibly expect to understand one, *nor should you*.” This argument is meant purely to scold you for stepping out of a Marxist frame by even *caring* about the knight and your estrangement from him, rather than the conveniently-illiterate peasantry which can be invoked as an avatar of any modern victim group. Such hostility exists toward this line of thought because it calls into question the Marxist presupposition that humans are (and always have been) interchangeable cogs with the same experiences of oppression and alienation due to capital and nothing else. Ceding ground to culturally relativistic arguments in historical discourse is

⁹⁸ See also the 2023-24 LiDAR and soil studies which have vindicated friar Gaspar de Carvajal, whose account of a civilized and populated Amazonia upon first Spanish contact was considered fanciful for well over a century.

nothing more than an underhanded concession to activist leftists play-acting at historical investigation for political reasons.

Aside from these polemics (not to mention the relativist's willingness to handwave away genetics as an influence on one's experience of life and consciousness), cultural relativism is a *moral* and *ethical* argument conflated in historiography with a complete analytical framework. It is used as an easy way to gloss over more fundamental questions about human development and particularly consciousness, questions which were—like many things—last seriously investigated by Nietzsche.⁹⁹

But I digress. Jaynes' core innovation was his willingness to step outside of this contrived frame and examine consciousness throughout human history as capable of rapid, radical, and often-irreversible change. A brief study of man's relationship with divinity alone supports this: the oracle, the stylite, and the Mesoamerican volunteer-sacrifice simply do not compute in the modern conscience, or even the consciences of other historical cultures among the same genetic peoples. The only conclusion compatible with secular skepticism is that human consciousness itself is capable of undergoing major changes in a relatively short period of time.

It is a change in the nature of consciousness that best describes the current state of human experience. Prior essays have discussed the radical (and often disturbing) changes in culture precipitated by social media; the result of such a panopticon/ARG is a restructuring of consciousness itself. This restructuring has occurred particularly among young people, but by no means exclusively; the knowledge that one is being observed as a subject of Discourse changes behavior and self-conception even among the old. In this sense, the existence of social

⁹⁹ This is not outlined explicitly, but is present nonetheless. *The Gay Science* is particularly relevant, with "yea-saying" framed as practically an alternate state of existence. *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* detail some of the utter estrangement one experiences from historical thought. A particular reading of *Zarathustra* frames the Übermensch as a distinct biological creature, or at least a new, foreign strain of human consciousness.

media is an infohazard; even tangential knowledge of its form and function can lead to distress, derangement, and modified behavior, if not immediate mental restructuring.

The core of this restructured mentality—*semiotic consciousness*—is the implantation of a permanent audience within the conscience, and the flattening of actions to signs and symbols in service or rejection of that audience. This cyborgification occurs without the need for an implanted computer, as the algorithms and networks simply flow through the user's consciousness itself, repurposing far-more-complex neurons as logic gates. The process of iterated alienation, born of unavoidable 24/7 exposure to technopurgatory, “angelizes” man, creating something entirely new.

Freud conceptualizes the personality (or conscience) as formed by the id, superego, and ego, a complex balancing act between animalistic impulses and socially-imposed morality. Perhaps this had descriptive power at some point, but it is far too reductive, particularly for the new form of consciousness described here. Freud's imagined tension of impulses and morality is best seen through the lens of Cuddihy, who argues convincingly that this concept was born of ethnic resentment: more particularly, a desire to frame the Anglo world as deep-down one in the same with shtetl life prior to the rapid Jewish integration of the 19th century.¹⁰⁰ It also reduces the conscience to a dichotomy parsable through traditional moral pathways for the purpose of psychoanalysis, in which the id and superego can be simplified to the angel and devil on one's shoulders. The hokeyness of Freudian theory is truly remarkable; if it was introduced today and analyzed from first principles, it would never make it past the self-help bookshelf at Barnes & Noble.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ John Murray Cuddihy's *The Ordeal of Civility* (1974) masterfully examines the thought of Marx, Freud, and Lévi-Strauss through this lens.

¹⁰¹ That Freud later intellectualized this maudlin framework via the fear of death and other concepts is immaterial; as evidenced by his distancing from Jung (whose work

Rather than a tension between impulse and morality, semiotic consciousness is characterized by an *observation cascade*, in which the highest tier is a sort of warped conscience observing the mind alongside an Audience. Thus the mind is judged not by implanted moral standards, but by millions of interactions with the Discourse ARG—in which it either submits to or basks in rejection of popular standards, i.e. the Audience. In this way, every thought or act is judged by the signs and symbology of the ARG rather than by merit, or anything resembling traditional morality (which exists separately). The defining socioemotional diver of this new mentality is not fear of death or damnation, but fear of mass shame. The individual is always watched, from without and now within; the primary method of reinforcement learning is social shame, or the threat of it, via observing the shaming of others.

The concept described here is not the first invocation or criticism of an internal audience; an example from feminist thought is illustrative. The “male gaze,” coined in 1975 by Laura Mulvey,¹⁰² has become a major feature of feminist thought and thus pop culture. Her prescribed solution was the rejection of the male audience, something which has (certainly since 2014) come to pass. Despite this culture-wide rejection, the Audience lives on, an immortal and immaterial being against which media must exist in eternal revolt. The explanation for this is best seen in Atwood’s 1993 *The Robber Bride*, which introduced the internalized male gaze:

Even pretending you aren’t catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you’re unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur.

was the logical outcome of someone bright taking Freud’s theoretical framework seriously), there was nothing below the surface.

¹⁰² “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Screen* Vol. 16, Issue 3.

The audience exists within one's conscience; a revolution against "the male gaze" is a revolution against oneself, and against nature. Atwood, of course, doesn't realize this, nor do her fans. Her greatest insight was also her greatest blind spot.

In a sense, the driver of semiotic consciousness is the export of falsely-pathologized normal female psychology to society as a whole, denatured of sexual or gendered ideas. Social media, as an inherently feminine or at least effeminate domain, allows for and accelerates this export. Here, once again, boys are treated as defective girls, men as defective women; the Audience must be implanted in them for "proper" behavior and self-conception. Women themselves are treated as revolutionaries drafted in a forever-war against nature, despite their mandatory participation in the formation of this theoretical Audience. Death to the Audience, long live the Audience. It is unsurprising that this psychological assault causes gendered derangement, terminating in alienation from one's gender.

Beyond gendered aspects, the implanted Audience both restructures the mind and takes the natural place of God or gods, allowing it root-level access to all moral judgements, actions, and even sensory perceptions.¹⁰³ In the same sense as Jaynes argues premodern man experienced emotions and thoughts as divine actions, all thought is mediated through this Audience. The religious impulse is thus hijacked not by divinity but by the all-encompassing ARG, permeating through standard daily life but equally present in the adoption of a way of life which intentionally revolts against it. If we are to accept the concept of the superego, then it exists in subservience to the Audience, and makes its judgements in accordance with or rejection of it; either way its presence is influential even in purely rational or moral decision-making.

The Audience most legibly manifests during social interactions, particularly about Discourse-loaded subjects (sex, violence, media, and politics). The complex signaling games of the ARG will intrude into

¹⁰³ "...a self-building Tower of Babel at the center of the panopticon once called the collective unconscious."

otherwise normal face-to-face conversations, where thought-terminating clichés typically only seen in Discourse pop up as a coda to line of thought. For example: a young woman talks fawningly about a man she likes, but ends the thought with some variation of “I hate men.” The very cadence of her speaking sets that cliché apart from the rest of the conversation, revealing that it is not said for the others present, but for the Audience—unseen but always present, legislated purely online.

However, the Audience is not the only aspect of this dramatic psychological restructuring. Equally critical is the alienation of the Mind from the physical Body, and the Self from the Mind. Just as alienation from genuine experience happens in an iterated cycle—simulations of simulations—these newly-crafted aspects of the human mind are further isolated and distinguished from each other.

A retreat into tropes, archetypes, and ultimately masks allows for a distancing of the mind from the body, something which has been observed by many but never fully appreciated in full depth. In the most advanced stages of cyborgification, the physical body is seen almost as vestigial or elusive. Every hit-piece on the “narcissism” of social media seems to overlook the fact that excessive use seems to make people go “mirror-blind” and forget what they actually look like.¹⁰⁴ The true image is obscured by a potent mixture of physical inactivity, comparison, photo editing, and subsummation by a chosen avatar or avatars. As discussed in *On Sex*, the final stage of this process looks something like a furry convention: a disturbing neo-cult of human biomass reenacting sterile CalArts-style fetish porn in a damp hotel room.

Also interesting is the distancing of the mind from the Self, a process mediated entirely through social media. Constant psychological self-

¹⁰⁴ See “Zoomed Out: digital media use and depersonalization experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown,” Ciaunica et al., 2022; “Patient perception of beauty on social media,” Wang et al., 2020; and “Forget in a Flash: A Further Investigation of the Photo-Taking-Impairment Effect,” Soares et al., 2018 for data on the interrelated phenomena of social-media-induced body dysmorphia, depersonalization, derealization, and memory impairment.

examination is encouraged, with thousands of novel pathways presented for sampling. The result is an infinite well of self-criticism, a nexus of therapy-speak confusion that makes Scientology's auditing process look crude. One relevant downstream effect is the framing of the brain as separate from the self. For example: "my brain wants to... but I know..." and similar framings are often used to describe the struggles of (societally rampant) mental illness. The brain, or more accurately the Mind, is seen as an organ no different than the liver or spleen, with the Self located elsewhere and "thinking" independently. This framing sets every aspect of traditional psychology as part of the Mind alone, divorced by dogma from the Body and only able to grasp roughly at the Self, which is used to examine the Mind in the sort of self-psychoanalysis encouraged by participation in the ARG.

Between the implantation of the Audience and the distancing of Self from Mind, Mind from Body, a full picture of semiotic consciousness emerges. The Body is observed distantly by the Mind, which is in turn observed by the Self, in a sort of vast auditorium with every other seat occupied by the Audience. In turn the Body wears a mask of some archetype or trope, according to how the Audience reads the beliefs of others. The whole process has the clinical feel of a surgical theater, systematically breeding emotion, passion, divine experience, and authenticity out of the once-human system.

Stjepan Meštrović called aspects of this phenomenon "postemotional society," in which genuine expression is replaced by pre-packaged, approved emotional expression. However, Meštrović only covers the outside half of the problem. It is true that institutions and corporations prepackage accepted "feelings," but beyond that, individuals distance *themselves* from the ability to feel, first by limiting expression outside of those pathways—and then, when the accepted pathways are exposed as "fake," even within them. They are not wearing a mask, but watching themselves put on the mask and anxiously waiting for approval (or at least, a lack of disapproval) from an internalized Audience. With emotionality fully detached from the experience of consciousness, the only soothing action becomes further participation in the ARG, in such

a way that the meta might shift a nanometer toward one's predispositions or tastes.

Because this restructuring has been sudden and in effect functions as a firmware update, it often has the effect of pushing a square peg into a round hole. Such a complexification of consciousness can (and does) lead to novel mental illnesses and general-purpose derangement, as well as alienation from social life and reality itself. The average person simply does not have the processing power to model their own consciousness in postmodern form.

Rearranging one's consciousness requires the extensive use of man's most recent and therefore least-developed faculty: reason. It requires a constant and taxing effort at shape-rotation, occurring at the subconscious level. The new concepts of "brainrot" and "doomscrolling" are jokingly described as "turning your brain off;" in reality what is happening is the divestment of energy from conscious thought to subconscious reorganization and information-processing. The shift from organic organization of consciousness to an imposed, technologically-mediated order is both distressing and energy-intensive.

By this process, consciousness is transmogrified into a purely mathematical construct, with parameters and geometry well beyond the comprehension of most of those who live with it. The strings and supports are invisible, extradimensional even, to those who have an outdated frame for the structure of consciousness. Nonetheless it is present everywhere, a sort of contagion spread by engagement with social media, which now is only the illusion of a choice.

To return to bicameral mind thesis, it is reasonable to believe that shifts in the nature of consciousness have happened many times in human history. However, this most recent shift—the development of semiotic consciousness—has been the most drastic and rapid reorganization to date, and marks a shift in the psychology of humanity so intense that it

may cut us off from even loose comprehension of history, and ultimately of ourselves.

Tl;dr: The once-human being has become a fish in a tank, observed by a live-streaming camera, restreamed and intermittently paused for commentary by Asmongold, who in turn responds to messages from the always-active chat. Poggers.

Notes

1

The brain is by nature amorphous and indeterminable. Its core function is a vast collection of data and relationships, which is then materialized and made legible by a construct: this structure forms the experience of consciousness. If we accept this construct as flexible—particularly over time—it follows that modern neuropsychology likely would not apply to a person 300 or 3,000 years ago. Because there is no way to empirically verify this claim, it becomes a question of philosophy, and the argument that consciousness is essential faces the same burden of proof as the claim made here. However, the available data leans toward our hypothesis: for example, *Culture Wires the Brain: A Cognitive Neuroscience Perspective* (Park et al., 2010) shows differences in “both brain structure and function” between contemporary Western and East Asian cultures. Accepting this, it follows that separation between modern and historical neuropsychology is likely far more pronounced, and the core of Jaynes’ hypothesis holds water, if not its direct claims. This lays the groundwork for this essay’s qualitative analysis of “modern consciousness” contra “historical consciousness(es)” as at least conceptually valid. That drastic changes follow technology meshes well with McLuhan’s work in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and elsewhere.

2

The social cyborgification of semiotic consciousness leads to the complete flattening of any subculture, niche, or differentiation in culture. It is “post-authentic” by default; unselfconscious shared experience can only be post- or meta-ironic, taking the form of mutual mockery of others who don’t “get it.” The shaming aspect of this practice is a key part of its social export, perceived most strongly and implicitly by the young. Even a subculture built on rejecting mass approval is sublimated into the automatic process of approval-seeking, since the individual’s experience of that subculture is still dictated by an internal Audience; even a desire for unselfconscious experience is expressed within the terms of this internal observation-construct, and thus made structurally unreachable. This leads to a fetishization of mental simplicity, a sort of “noble savage” view of whatever group each person perceives as not yet subject to the Audience.

3

Accepting post-authenticity is now a critical part of the coming-of-age process. This largely explains the “emo phase” phenomenon, which has remained consistent despite the actual music being out of style for a decade. The “rebellion” of an emo phase is not against “society” or “happiness,” but against the forced, post-ironic inauthenticity of broader culture. In most cases, it is a flirtation with authenticity before acquiescing to the dominant form of cultural consciousness and norms.

4

The concept that consciousness is materialized in the moment and therefore not set in stone means that semiotic consciousness is not permanent, nor is the concretization of experiential reality downstream of it. The fundamental *insecurity* of any passing form of consciousness, and particularly this one (which is very new and predicated on simulated observation) leads to the pathological social export of its

structure onto others. Semiotic consciousness' lack of finality is baked into its form and function.

PART III: MANIFESTO

What comes next?

Extract from *The Power House* by John Buchan:

A souvenir came back to me. It was of a hot upland meadow in Tyrol, where among acres of flowers and beside a leaping stream I was breakfasting after a morning spent in climbing the white crags. I had picked up a German on the way, a small man of the Professor class, who did me the honor to share my sandwiches. He conversed fluently but quaintly in English, and he was, I remember, a Nietzschean and a hot rebel against the established order.

“The pity,” he cried, “is that the reformers do not know, and those who know are too idle to reform. Some day there will come the marriage of knowledge and will, and then the world will march.”

“You draw an awful picture,” I said to my host. “But if those extra-social brains are so potent, why after all do they effect so little? A dull police officer, with the machine behind him, can afford to laugh at most experiments in anarchy.”

“True,” he said, “and civilization will win until its enemies learn from it the importance of the machine. The compact must endure until there is a counter-compact. Consider the ways of that form of foolishness which today we call nihilism or anarchy. A few illiterate bandits in a Paris slum defy the world, and in a week they are in jail. Half a dozen crazy Russian intellectuals in Geneva conspire to upset the Romanoffs, and are hunted down by the police of Europe. All the Governments and their not very intelligent police forces join hands, and, hey presto! there is an end of the conspirators. For civilization knows how to use such powers as it has, while the immense potentiality of the unlicensed is dissipated in vapor. Civilization wins because it is a worldwide league; its enemies fail because they are parochial. But supposing...”

Again he stopped and rose from his chair. He found a switch and flooded the room with light. I glanced up, blinking to see my host smiling down on me, a most benevolent and courteous old gentleman.

"I want to hear the end of your prophecies," I said. "You were saying...?"

"I said: supposing anarchy learned from civilization and became international. Oh, I don't mean the bands of advertising donkeys who call themselves the International Union of Workers and such like rubbish. I mean if the real brain stuff of the world were internationalized. Suppose that the links in the cordon of civilization were neutralized by other links in a far more potent chain. The Earth is seething with incoherent power and unorganized intelligence. Have you ever reflected on the case of China? There you have millions of quick brains stifled in trumpery crafts. They have no direction, no driving power, so the sum of their efforts is futile, and the world laughs at China. Europe throws her a million or two on loan now and then, and she cynically responds by begging the prayers of Christendom. And yet, I say, supposing..."

"It's a horrible idea," I said, "and, thank God, I don't believe it possible. Mere destruction is too barren a creed to inspire a new Napoleon, and you can do with nothing short of one."

"It would scarcely be destruction," he replied gently. "Let us call it iconoclasm, the swallowing of formulas, which has always had its full retinue of idealists. And you do not want a Napoleon. All that is needed is direction, which could be given by men of far lower gifts than a Bonaparte. In a word, you want a Power-House, and then the age of miracles will begin."

On Liminality

ཀེ་ཀེ་བསྟོ་བསྟོ་ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ལོ།—*Victory to the gods!*

1

Computerization at its most basic is binarization. It recognizes only two states: on or off, true or false, zero or one. Even at a high level, computerized life simplifies the continuum of reality into millions of yes-or-no questions and answers. Before computerization, science had already simplified man into various types of chemical processes; psychology, his mind into urge and repression; sociology, his role into in-group or outgroup; religion, his soul into elect or reprobate. However, computerization represents the ultimate simplification: a centralized reduction of all aspects of man and reality into zero and one.

2

Liminality is the transitional state. An adolescent is neither child nor adult; an unbaptized infant is neither believer nor heretic. Apparitions in the woods—the fae, by one name—are neither here nor elsewhere, real nor unreal. In many pantheons, the gods are neither male nor female, a concept reflected in the androgyny of their shamans. Computerization recognizes none of these states, these places in-between, despite the key role they play in human experience. In effect, the computer kills liminality. It frames everything as a double-slit

experiment and forces the observation of the photon, doing away with the uncertainty principle that defines it.

3

Arnold van Gennep first recognized the liminal state in the context of folk rituals. He catalogued the various transitional moments in human life across cultures, with the classic example being coming-of-age. Today there is no such thing; child and adult are binary states, switched instantly upon one's eighteenth birthday. There is no induction ritual, no acknowledgement of the transition, and no functional difference in life afterwards. The removal of a liminal experience—a ritual during which a person is neither child nor adult but something in-between, and by which he is reshaped into an adult—makes the transition meaningless, a toggle-switch question of legal recognition.

The result is a population of childlike adults and adultlike children, as well as an uncomfortable cultural fixation on what that transition actually means. In politics, life, and particularly sex, the eighteenth birthday is cast as both an ironclad law of the universe and a meaningless designator. To consider a seventeen-year-old sexually eligible is taboo—yet to deny that same person the capacity to vote a month later is infantilizing. At the same time, many (if not most) retain the perspective of a child for many years after their eighteenth birthday, and find the shift arbitrary. Lacking a coherent definition and ritual, Discourse occupies itself constantly with what adulthood actually is; because cultural computerization requires the elimination of the liminal age of adolescence into early adulthood, it settles on a collective agreement that the eighteenth birthday represents some sort of universal law.

Without ritual acknowledgment of ambiguity, a culture loses the capacity to comprehend ambiguous ideas, even in media. The tensions that define a given culture—explored and exorcised through myths, stories, and symbols—collapse into simplistic mass-media morality tales. In this paradigm, the media environment becomes incapable of producing anything else. Beacons of liminality must be retrofitted to fit within this flattened model: prophets like David Lynch are reinterpreted as moralists, and comedy itself is reframed not as the jester revealing contradiction, but as the primary mode of social instruction.

Computerized knowledge does not allow for “I don’t know.” Things can only be true or false, real or unreal. The states in between (both-real-and-unreal, neither-real-nor-unreal, unknown) must be flattened into either zero or one.

This alienates it from the vast majority of human knowledge and tradition, which in many cases revolved around the unity of opposites, including reality and unreality. When faced with something unexplained—particularly something inherently unobservable, like the veracity of a historical account or the unknowable nature of divinity—computerized knowledge must default to “unreal.” Thus centuries of intellectual tradition are cast aside as false-by-default. Even as the bleeding edges of scientific and historical study converge on points of knowledge, the current system of knowledge is structurally obligated to flatten ambiguity into negation. The fields of ethnobotany, parapsychology, and to some extent theoretical physics are defined by clawing morsels of knowledge back from a system that considers it automatically nonsensical. Binary reality is the basis of modern thought and thus identity, to the detriment of both.

In the early years of the nuclear age, Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier wrote of science:

“And so the Temple of Consecrated Beliefs is ready to collapse; Reason no longer reigns supreme! It seemed that anything was possible. The scientists who were supposed to have the monopoly of knowledge suddenly ceased to make a distinction between physics and metaphysics—between fact and fantasy. The pillars of the Temple dissolve into clouds, and the High Priests of Descartes are dumbfounded.”

Their optimism proved unfounded. Despite theoretical physics' questioning of the nature of reality, it has itself crystallized into a sort of dogma which must in turn go unquestioned. The deconstructive, quasi-mystical nature of quantum physics has not resulted in an epistemic revolution, and instead marched headlong into the same scientism that Fort skewered a century ago. The blurred territory between physics and metaphysics has been quarantined to an odd corner of mathematic-priests; for every other aspect of thought, the liminality touched upon at the frontiers of science is restricted. Physicists, then, are initiates into an academic priesthood that denies its own metaphysics.

Scientism has become dogma twice: in the later years of the nineteenth century and now again in the digital age. The ontologically disruptive period of 20th-century physics was a mere aberration, and its integration into thought has only served to reinforce and totalize a concretized phenomenology.

Charles Fort:

“Collective hallucination is another of the dismissal-labels by which conventionalists shirk thinking. Here is another illustration of the lack of standards, in phenomenal existence, by which to judge anything. One man’s story, if not to the liking of conventionalists, is not accepted, because it is not supported; and then testimony by more than one is not accepted, if undesirable, because that is collective hallucination. In this kind of jurisprudence, there is no hope for any kind of testimony against the beliefs in which conventional scientists agree. Among their amusing disregards is that of overlooking that, quite as truly may their own agreements be collective delusions... Science has, by appeal to various bases, included a multitude of data. Had it not done so, there would be nothing with which to seem to be. Science has, by appeal to various bases, excluded a multitude of data... the quest of all intellection has been for something—a fact, a basis, a generalization, law, formula, a major premise that is positive: that the best that has ever been done has been to say that some things are self-evident—whereas, by evidence we mean the support of something else—that this is the quest; but that it has never been attained; but that Science has acted, ruled, pronounced, and condemned as if it had been attained.”

With liminality and uncertainty checked at the door, empiricism reigns supreme—and it is the empirical concept of history that defines identity. Computerization expands the process by outsourcing knowledge to the collective mind by means of *expertocracy*, such that the individual never has to question anomalous data themselves.

Je pense, donc je suis—“I think, therefore I am.” Descartes’ basis of existence is replaced by deference to the empiricism of others, a separate institution from even individual members of the academy: “Someone knows, therefore I am.” Modern reality is socially determined and

institutionally reinforced; its structure is upheld by our integration with technology.

9

Even as mass perception spirals away from base reality via iterated alienation, the structure of consensus-reality is upheld. A world of pure tropes and archetypes is grounded by “canon,” and even beyond that by “fanon.” Reality remains socially determined, instantly collapsing any liminality present in the system via classification or rejection.

The key process is of observation: a tree that falls in the woods with no one around *does not exist*. Similarly, unobserved man does not exist. The reality of his consciousness relies on observation, even if only simulated within his psyche; this is the core aspect of semiotic consciousness. The process of observation is grounding and comforting to him, so he seeks it out. The private is compulsively made public, and his perception of reality is synced with the computerized collective.

The technetronic surround enforces this cycle via the socio-psychological alchemy described in previous essays. Liminality, unable to be understood or policed by an algorithm, presents an existential threat to consensus reality and all the structures built atop it.

10

The collapse of liminality kills religion outright, by transmogrifying it into a mere “canon” alongside Marvel and Star Wars. Belief in God becomes a sub-game of consensus-reality reinforcement, and in Discourse religions act more like fandoms than faiths. Like the traditionalist historian, the religious man defines himself primarily *contra* the mainstream, deranging himself from his intellectual lineage; atop this, by his participation in mass reality, he feels the need to rectify

any liminality between truth and falsehood. Thus the mysteries of faith and divinity are forced into binarized reality, and he occupies his time with attempting to enforce his respective zeros and ones on consensus reality. The inherent liminality of religion—its existence between this world and the next, as well as essential contradictions like the Christian Trinity—is left behind, taking with it the very thing that allows it to approach divinity.

11

Forgotten in popular religion is the trance or dream state—the intentional pursuit of liminality. Simeon the Stylite lived for thirty-six years atop a pillar in the harsh desert. He contended with demons, spoke with God, and perceived heaven as a mere man. By living a life of the purest asceticism, he was able to place himself between the material and the immaterial, reality and unreality, life and death. Every religious tradition has ritualized this pursuit in some way or another: Greek mystery-rites, Buddhist meditation, Sufi whirling-dervishes, shamanicentheogenic trances. The persistence of these ritual forms across cultures and ages speaks to an underlying truth of human experience, and to its importance. The state accessed by ritual purity, asceticism, separation from society, repetition, ceremony, and entheogenic experience is a critical aspect of human reality. The liminal state is the key to approaching divinity, and thus to approaching a true theory of reality.

12

That trance or dream states are used in religious ritual is pointed to by modern materialists as proof of divinity's falsehood. Unable to comprehend reality outside of a computerized frame, the atheist sees liminality as false-by-default, a cheap psychological trick. He imagines that thousands of men across human history—men just as intelligent

as him, if not more so—devoted their entire lives to this state for no reason at all. He imagines that they used it to derive truths about God, the universe, and the nature of man out of a lack of scientific knowledge, rather than as a *form* of scientific knowledge.

Consider the logic of a dream. One can look at a clock, look away, and upon looking back see a completely different time. Is it 6:23 or 4:19? It is both and neither. Sometimes the clock's face will even be unreadable—what time is it, then? It is no time and every time. Liminal experience allows for the expansion of logic beyond the binary, a perception of reality that even now refuses to conform to computerized knowledge. It resists observation of the particular because it is concerned with the truly general—in historical writing, the divine.

Pauwels and Bergier: “Spiritual language is not the stammering that precedes scientific language, but rather the full consummation of the latter.” Walter Heisenberg, hero of modern science, says the same in different words: “The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will make you an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass God is waiting for you.”

13

An experiment was performed some years ago on British television, by the mentalist Derren Brown. A woman, an avowed atheist, was brought into a church. Over the course of a mundane conversation, Brown hypnotized her further and further into a trance. Within fifteen minutes, she had reached a meditative state of complete liminality. She was neither awake nor asleep, neither in- nor out-of-control of her perceptions and actions. When Brown left and she stood up, she experienced a moment of divine revelation. Tears streaming down her face, she suddenly *knew* God.

Of course, Brown used this experiment as a demonstration of atheism, and the cameras soon came out to inform her that it had all been a sort

of prank. I can think of nothing crueler than bringing someone to God, only to rip this gnosis away and humiliate them. If the experiment proved anything, it is that liminal experience is reachable with codified actions and rituals, and that ritual design in history has constituted a scientific process. That Brown induced her experience insincerely has no bearing on the reality of her altered state and ultimate realization.

14

It is not my intent to write a proof of God, or an unassailable defense of divinity. I am, however, interested in the changing of human consciousness, a process intimately tied to our concept of reality and relationship to technology. Study of the past and observation of the present has led me to the conclusion that our relationship to liminality is crucial to understanding our estrangement from the vast majority of historical consciousness.

MacKenzie's 1935 study of Scottish folklore holds a key to understanding the baseline, or historical, approach to liminality: "A typical answer given by a Highlander when asked if he believes in fairies is: 'I don't believe in them myself... but it's best not to meddle with them.'" A similar, if apocryphal, story comes from W.B. Yeats. Upon asking an old Irish man if he believes in faeries, the man replied "I do not... but they're there."

These writers had the unique opportunity to study still-in-practice folkways from the perspective of a modern, "rational" man; rural parts of the British Isles retained this character for just long enough that they might be chronicled. It is this paradoxical relationship that defines the fundamental human relationship to the liminal.

Marshall McLuhan:

“During the Second War, the American Air Force stationed at Gander, Newfoundland, found that the top technicians were Eskimo hunters who had never seen a machine before. The so-called primitive man does not relate himself to a machine as we do. Rather, he regards it as we do a pet animal, as integral and alive. Assuming its total unity, he apprehends it as such, just as a child when listening to a strange language assumes that it has meaning and organization... it is a total field approach, and this is the only kind of approach that will work under electric conditions of our new environment.”

A total-field approach is how the younger generation relates to the computerized world. In many cases the youth lack knowledge of how computers actually *work*; file systems, processes, and networking protocols may as well be magic. However, the “digital native” adapts to electronic ergonomics with incredible ease, often more easily than he interfaces with the physical world. The Internet and its access points are viewed as an integral, living thing with a sort of spirit. “The Algorithm” is embodied and humanized; he unconsciously adapts himself to fit more neatly into it, as the singular expression of what McLuhan called his “super-terrestrial connubium.”

It is this total-field approach that characterized man’s approach to the liminal prior to his binarized lobotomy. It was seen as an integral part of the whole of reality, something to be interfaced with—not empirically defined, much less “believed in.” This is the workman’s approach, one unconcerned with first principles, but rather focused on frictionless integration.

As the advancement of Data pulls the human mind and the digital information layer together, LLMs and other technologies make the simulation of a computerized essence even stronger. The cybersphere becomes more human-presenting as humans present more like computers. With each moment of use and each tech advancement, interaction with any digital medium increasingly trends toward “feel” and “vibe.” If we can recognize the workman’s relationship with the faux-essence of a digital simulation, could we not recognize the relationship humans had with the essence of things in an earlier sense—as a medieval cleric viewed a sacred relic, or a shaman his carved idol?

The question of religion remains always at the forefront of our atheist culture—perhaps the future holds a sort of neo-animism derived by analogy, layered *atop* semiotic consciousness rather than prompted by a historical backslide. Of course, such a thing could never be stated outright—but it is entirely plausible.

Basic animism requires no proselytization, and all children are natural animists. No instruction is needed to say that you are connected in a sense beyond the physical to your father, and his father before him. Both children and primitive peoples believe innately in the existence of a soul, and not just in humans; toys, totems, and even amorphous forces are “ensouled-by-default.” The idea of communication with animals (or even the weather) only begins to feel absurd via the civilizing process. Animism, then, is the human religious impulse in its most raw, unrefined form—an inherent belief in the interconnectedness of all things by degrees—a total-field understanding that the most meta aspects of science are only beginning to grasp in physics and ecology. The rational study of this interconnectedness found its avatar in Plato, advanced by his millennia-long intellectual lineage—and the philosopher himself often appealed to a much older tradition. Cloaked

in philosophical and parareligious language, this approach has been ignored by all but the most adventurous for the past two hundred years.

18

Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* shows paganism—the next stage of animistic religion—in its true form. Its treatment of the gods and divinity is bawdy, playful, even crude. A modern reader might imagine it blasphemous. But Apuleius' ethos is derived from the workman's relationship with divinity; “belief” in the gods does not enter the equation, and playful engagement with their archetypes does not threaten their standing or existence. We already see echoes of this pagan way of thought among the cultural phenomena described in *Iterated Alienation*. The “central simulation” of tropes and archetypes serves as a sort of pantheon, in which parody only serves to cement the reality of our new gods. Again we see inklings of the religious impulse in its most nebulous, ancient sense, not out of a rejection of modernity but as part of its march forward.

19

In a cultural environment in which everything is a layered simulation, the only “real” experience is the encounter with the unreal: the unquantifiable, the surreal, the liminal. Ecstatic or otherwise liminal experience is sought relentlessly—hallucinogenic drugs, ritualistic concerts, extreme exercise, travels to the Orient. What is a rave or metal concert but a modern caricature of an ancient ritual? What is an ultramarathon but a pale imitation of Simeon's endless exercise atop his pillar? Why does bodybuilding at times take on the language of a neo-flagellant cult?

The modern atheist's highest description of an event is to call it “a religious experience;” despite nominal mass irreligion, it is precisely this

sort of dual hyperreal-unreal episode that is seen as the sole catalyst for personal growth. Man seeks out the liminal, the pre-rational, even if he lacks the language to describe it in approved terms.

20

The revival of religion, if it is to happen, must be a radical endeavor. The ideologically comfortable see no reason to seek out metaphysical truth, and even now it is only the political fringe that engages with divinity as anything other than a signaling game. Why does a fascination with the paranormal track with right-wing beliefs?—Why did glycine, a supplement that increases dream clarity, rise to popularity among the Right?—Why is it only the Right that entertains allegorical pseudohistory (Agartha, Hyperborea, etc.), even when it drips with irony?—Why did the hippie and New Age movements shift so far rightward?—Why is there no communist counterpart to Savitri Devi?

The Left identifies itself as the sole defender of consensus reality—“science,” “the experts,” etc.—and defines its core beliefs in opposition to all that came before. They are, per Nietzsche, “a class of barbaric slaves who have learned to regard their existence as an injustice, and now prepare to avenge not only themselves, but all generations.” The Right, at least at its vanguard, seeks universal principles; the Left seeks their destruction. Only the former is compatible with the search for Truth, which forms the core of metaphysical thought. Historical materialism robs man of free will and reduces him to his wealth, thus robbing him of the potential to know God. Therefore it is only in the fringe that any religious revival can flower, among the only half-performative schizophrenia of the spinning *sonnenrad* and the mythical recurrence of Zarathustra.

The only viable religious revival—the resurrection of God, or the carving of a path back toward Him—requires fanaticism of a sort not seen in centuries. In a Christian context, it requires the sort of zealotry that led Simeon to the pillar, the practical radicalism that led Godfrey of Bouillon to Jerusalem, and the refined ambition that created the Knights Templar. No religion, in its current form, is capable of inspiring this sort of devotion; instead they are reduced to team identities in Discourse, and individuals' true allegiance remains with an outgrowth of the demiurgic techno-conubium that shapes reality. Therefore this revival must come from the merger of radicalism and liminality, the two most potent forces able to function outside the confines of consensus reality.

Why religious revival? The answer is circular. A religious revival is required to challenge consensus reality, and any challenge to consensus reality will necessarily take the form of a religious revival; a study of liminality leads inevitably to radicalism, and radicalism leads inevitably to a study of liminality. These cycles spin toward our goal. This is the only engine by which the calcification of semiotic consciousness can be shaken loose, and man's identity can once again be derived from *essence* rather than process. It is the force capable of advancing man past the splitting of the atom, and the splitting of reality into zero and one... a new Manhattan Project, for a new age.

The binarized fixation of modernity dictates that this religious revival must drive toward liminal, even pre-rational thinking—not as an end in itself, but as a vehicle. The prototypical example of this thoughtform

is found nightly in dream-logic. The dreamer witnesses the collapse of objective reason, causation, and even ontological existence without blinking an eye. In the waking world, liminal experience is accessed by ritual; it is the directed use of ritual that defines an intentional drive toward metaphysical Truth and personal enlightenment.

The highest expression of liminal thinking is found in a sort of *mythopoetic existence*: the manifestation of a man not as a rational actor optimizing his actions, but in the application of a dreamlike logic to his acts. Rationality dictates that Hernán Cortés had absolutely no reason to burn his ships; that Alexander the Great had no reason to lead the cavalry charge at Gaugamela; that Joan of Arc had no place on a battlefield. The rational man is puzzled by Leonidas' glorious death, and by Mishima's symbolic *seppuku*—but it was in these moments that each man fulfilled his existence. All of these figures were thinking not as modern automatons, but as *humans*; the peaks of history are made up of nonsensical decisions, leaps of faith, and sublime suicides.

The bardic tradition—perhaps the most important legacy of Indo-European culture—was a *ritual* aimed at creating and reinforcing mythopoetic existence. To hear the epics of your ancestors is to see yourself as participating in one, and to structure reality not around the computerized optimization of outcomes, but around narrative glory. The computerized world, stripped of its bards and the very existence of the in-between, robs man of this mode of existence just as it robs him of divinity; the removal of liminality constitutes a removal of the mythopoetic register. Atop this, the rational construct of man-as-process—alongside the chiding call that he must avoid “repeating history”—constitutes an endless narrowing of what is possible. The revival of religion is, above all else, a reclamation of *possibility*!

The ritual forms of a revived religiosity must operate on the same level of complexity, recursion, and symbolic density as the bardic tradition.

They must be meta-rituals, refusing to separate form from reflection and performance from abstraction.

An example: in computerized life, it is only liminal experience that codes as truly real. Only that which cannot be captured, flattened, or empirically verified has the feeling of ground truth. In this sense, a ban on cameras becomes a form of mundane mysticism—a gesture not of secrecy, but of structural opacity. Even something as banal as a ban on recording generates *automatic liminality*. The principle today is “someone knows, therefore I am;” if no one knows empirically or objectively what happened, an experience is allowed to take on meaning above the mundane.

The unmediated encounter with sex and violence functions similarly. Both retain their liminality precisely because they resist unraveling and encoding; Discourse endlessly tries to binarize these fundamental action-perceptions, but both romance and fistfights remain unconquerable egregores. These experiences are so foundational that they serve as grounding experiences, a counterweight against one’s total absorption into the digital. Thus sex must be approached cultically, with self-aware rituals encoding a new approach to romance. Violence must be approached occultly, an initiatory process of enlightenment.

It is within these structurally-indigestible spaces that religion must again take form. New rites will not instruct or affirm; they will interrupt, blur, and refuse binary resolution, even as to their own status as rituals. Traditions must once again be interpreted and derived from first principles; they will (soon and inevitably) converge with historical practices, but they must be derived once again from necessity and essential truth.

Though this thinking draws from esoteric and transgressive thought, it should not be taken to say that the old faiths must be abandoned.

However, it does mean that a true revival will cause them to take on forms foreign to their recent practice; already we see inklings of this, between popular interest in once-dwindling traditional practices (Latin mass, Eastern Orthodox belief) and the resurgence of ecstatic Christian folkways (glossolalia, snake-handling, exorcism). A reacquaintance with the workman's relationship to the liminal does not imply a reorientation away from the Christian God; in fact, this relationship was the basis of Christian faith for the vast majority of its history. Insofar as a religious revival implies a rejection of modern atheism *and* modern mass-religious identity, it does not imply a rejection of the form of Christianity that led to the Crusades, the Reconquista, or the Thirty Years' War.

26

It is the Christian tradition that brings us monasticism, as an attempt to touch the liminal (and thus the divine) through simplicity, discipline, and devotion. Monastic life, in effect, aims to reduce randomness to near zero. On the opposing side we find Dionysian ritual, shamanic initiation, and Bataille's transgression—practices that seek to *maximize* randomness, to overload the system, to reach liminality through cataclysm. All of these practices are structured efforts operating within the same medium, and toward the same end.

Physicists like Vlatko Vedral conceptualize the universe as, at its core, a probabilistic information system. This explains the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics—its randomness, its “spooky action at a distance,” and its refusal to collapse into fixed states without observation. Here, the frontier of theoretical physics converges with ancient thought in a kind of structured mysticism, in which uncertainty is the *actual substrate of reality*. In Neoplatonic thought, the universe emanates from the One; in Vedral's physics, it unfolds from information. Thus, the manipulation of randomness (whether by reduction or intensification) becomes a valid and even critical aspect of praxis: a method for interfacing with the real, and for shaping it.

From *On the Heights of Despair*:

“Man should stop being—or becoming—a rational animal. He should become a lunatic, risking everything for the sake of his dangerous fantasies, capable of exaltations, ready to die for all that the world has as well as what it has not.”

Emil Cioran struck at the heart of it, a century too soon for technic conditions to provide a coherent anti-environment against which to define a positive “lunacy.” But to become a lunatic requires far more than a simple decision to do so; it requires a total assault on consensus reality, a revolution against the binarization of all existence. It requires a reacquaintance with the divine, and the long-forgotten esoteric. This “lunacy” manifests itself as a fanatical, headlong march into a reality that is neither real nor fake, old nor new, but exists at the superposition of both. Only then can we reclaim possibility, and with it mythopoesis. Only then will man be capable of exaltation.

Iliad, Book XX, tr. Robert Fagles

Now, while the gods had still kept clear of mortal men,
the Achaeans kept on gaining glory—great Achilles
who held back from the brutal fighting so long
had just come blazing forth. Chilling tremors
shook the Trojans' knees, down to the last man,
terrified at the sight: the headlong runner coming,
gleaming in all his gear, afire like man-destroying Ares.
But once the Olympians merged with mortal fighters,
Strife the mighty driver of armies rose in strength
and Athena bellowed her stunning war cry—standing now
at the edge of the deep-dug trench outside the rampart,
now at thundering cliffs she loosed her vibrant cry.
And Ares bellowed his cry from far across the lines,
churning black as a whirlwind, roaring down now
from the city's crest, commanding Trojans on and now
rushing along the Simois banks and scaling Sunlight Hill.

So the blissful gods were rousing both opposing armies,
clashing front to front but then, in their own ranks,
their overpowering strife broke out in massive war.
Down from the high skies the father of men and gods
let loose tremendous thunder—from down below Poseidon
shook the boundless earth and towering heads of mountains.
The whole world quaked, the slopes of Ida with all her springs
and all her peaks and the walls of Troy and all Achaea's ships.

And terror-struck in the underworld, Hades lord of the dead
cringed and sprang from his throne and screamed shrill,
fearing the god who rocks the ground above his realm,
giant Poseidon, would burst the earth wide open now
and lay bare to mortal men and immortal gods at last
the houses of the dead—the dank, moldering horrors
that fill the deathless gods themselves with loathing.
So immense the clash as the war of gods erupted.
There, look, rearing against the lord Poseidon
Phoebus Apollo loomed, bristling winged arrows.
rearing against Ares, blazing-eyed Athena,
rearing against Hera. Artemis with arrow of gold
and cry that halloos the hunt, the goddess raining shafts,
Huntress sister of Phoebus the distant deadly Archer—
rearing against Leto, Hermes the running god of luck
and against the Fire-god rose the great deep-swirling river
immortals call the Xanthus, mankind calls Scamander.

So god went up against god. But blazing Achilles
strained to engage Prince Hector, plunge in battle
with him beyond all others—Achilles yearning now
to glut with Hector's blood...

Alt-Transhumanism & Cavalierization

War is the father of all and the king of all; and some he has made gods and some men, some bond and some free.

Heraclitus, fragment 53

1

The atlatl is thought to be man's first ranged weapon, predating even the bow and arrow. It is little more than a stick with a cup attached, allowing the user more leverage with which to throw a spear. Despite its primitive form, the atlatl represents a new approach to technology in human history—a break from previous stone tools, hunting implements, and even the harnessing of fire. The fundamental difference is in the atlatl-thrower's integration with the weapon: he uses it as an outgrowth of himself, rather than as a direct intermediary between him and something else. Whoever first shaped such a tool must have been a genius on par with Archimedes, Newton, and the Wright brothers; its conceptual leap represented nothing short of a revolution. Its design created an *extension* of the individual man, such that he could surpass his natural abilities. The invention of the atlatl was, then, the first-ever act of *transhumanism*—and its purpose was not comfort, but war.

What is transhumanism? Calling the atlatl transhumanist defines it as “the philosophy of extending natural human capabilities via technology”—a fair definition. But today, this term (like “AI”) is more often wrapped in moralism and hysterics than sober thought.

The 1998 “Transhumanist Declaration” does not even define its titular philosophy, instead pondering the apparently-dire ethics of a still-undefined thing. It presupposes that transhumanism involves only “advanced” technology, leaving the term open-ended but implying that it only concerns technology downstream of the computer. However, no valid definition could exclude historic technologies: if man in the distant future will view our technology as primitive and rudimentary, then we cannot group recent developments into a push toward “transhumanism” and maintain a cohesive definition without also applying the term backwards. To extend the argument: Paleolithic man, if he had the language for it, would have viewed the first atlatl-throwers as cyborgs—their intrinsic abilities extended by not only a novel technology, but by a novel *concept* of technology, one which integrates with and extends man in his natural state.

To categorize the atlatl as transhumanist would at the very least cause discomfort among most transhumanist thinkers. The philosophy tends to orient itself toward a sort of naïve post-human utopianism, even in its negation by anthropogenic-risk research. The base assumption in both camps—techno-optimists and pessimists—is that war will somehow inevitably be left in the past at some point. The latter camp only concerns itself with if that point comes before or after war consumes mankind, without questioning the underlying principle. Thus war is cast as an aspect of technology separate from “progress,” and certainly separate from transhumanism... but is each new stage of man not forged in fire?

This is the same fallacy that causes historians to cast the Islamic world as more “scientifically advanced” than the Christian at the dawn of the High Middle Ages—despite the fact that European military technology, tactics, and logistics vastly surpassed those of the Near East at that time. For various reasons a border is drawn between technology and war-technology, in which the latter is somehow morally inferior to the former. The dissolution of this unspoken dividing-line leads to a fresh look at the true nature of transhumanism in actual practice, and its implications.

4

Julian Huxley, who coined the term transhumanism in 1957, writes in the same essay:

“We must study the possibilities of creating a more favorable social environment, as we have already done in large measure with our physical environment. We shall start from new premises. For instance, that beauty (something to enjoy and something to be proud of) is indispensable, and therefore that ugly or depressing towns are immoral; that quality of people, not mere quantity, is what we must aim at, and therefore that a concerted policy is required to prevent the present flood of population-increase from wrecking all our hopes for a better world...”

These radical premises are not new. Eugenics—the optimization of human quality and beauty, often danced around by the modern transhumanist—is one of man’s most foundational technologies. It is the gradual and careful refinement of an *elite*, developed toward a specific, martial ideal. Costin Alamariu’s *Selective Breeding and the Birth of Philosophy* argues that “the Greek state or *polis*, which today we are likely to imagine as the origin of our democracy, was in fact nothing more or less than a breeding project for superior specimens;” Plato and his contemporaries conceived of the city as a eugenic mechanism, a system for the elevation of types. The philosophical impulse, then, was

not separate from the technological—it was a metaphysical framework for directed human advancement. To them, our concept of transhumanism was simply the basis of politics and thought: the shaping of better men, and the perfection of the human form.

Like the technology of war, the technology of eugenics—done by philosophical evaluation, rather than machine mediation—is an uncomfortable aspect of transhumanism to its current proponents. However, it opens even further vistas in our exploration of the concept.

5

We have begun to touch on a sort of transhumanism that runs counter to the popular notion: an ignored sort of human extension, predicated not on altruism or singularity, but on inequality. Inherently elite, eugenic, and warlike, this alt-transhumanism concerns itself with a form of progress focused on extending one man's natural ability to exercise power—both immediately, as does the atlatl, and immanently, as does eugenic breeding. It has no concern for the overall mass of humanity, and only for the improvement of the individual.

Andy Clark argues in *Natural-Born Cyborgs* that mental scaffolding functions as integrated technology: a sort of program for wetware. In this frame, we see the highest expression of alt-transhumanism in the development of a warrior-monk elite; the Knights Templar and the samurai stand out as examples, their ritualized lives serving as mental software. In the Templar founding code and its public manifesto, we see new organizational and mental technology as an extension of man's capabilities—an intentional effort at forging an insular warrior elite made up of *men-but-better*, each worth hundreds on the battlefield. These efforts built on the technologies of ritual and meditation, scientific processes only partially-rediscovered today.

Alt-transhumanism, in historical and current practice, is of the *naturally heroic* sort. Its innovations are produced by men whose perspective takes into account no higher good than Homeric preeminence. The morality that produces alt-transhumanism defines good/bad in the Roman sense, as Nietzsche describes in *The Genealogy of Morals*—in contrast to most futurist thought, which operates based on the Judaic good/evil paradigm of that same tract. The former takes no account of the common, in fact defining its positive aspects in opposition to it; whereas the latter concerns itself near-exclusively with the form and behavior of the many. Thus popular transhumanism concerns itself with the rearguard, and alt-transhumanism with the vanguard. Alt-transhumanism, then, is the *drive*—not philosophy—of the elite to extend by technology one’s natural abilities, such that new heights of excellence can be reached. For reasons obvious, this drive primarily finds its outlet in the martial realm. Bernard of Clairvaux writes that “on numerous occasions the Templars had seen one man pursue a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight”—this is the transcendental ideal of a man and culture concerned with *arete* above all else. Material circumstances may lead to grand projects and developments, but this underlying drive exists *for its own sake* among such men.

The transhuman ideals we see in practice today (singularity-worship, post-scarcity, happiness-index maximization, simulations of simulations of meaning) are distinctly Marxian, rather than anything inherent to technological advancement. Concerned primarily with the convulsions of the masses and their “betterment,” these ideals are not the inevitable goal of technical progress. Rather, they are unimaginative outgrowths of one’s unwillingness to question deeply-set leftist priors about man and society.

Even the extractive techno-capitalist remains trapped in this frame, playing heel to the communist in how he approaches society. His schemes to paywall oxygen and whatnot are not *his*, but what he imagines a bourgeois villain-character might do. In all cases—horrifying and banal, intentional and accidental—the “transhuman” concepts put forward in Discourse are little more than a repackaging of Marx. More often than not, these ideals take the precise form of technocracy skewered by the other Huxley in *Brave New World*—philosophically bereft, and internally senseless without the lobotomization of most men:

“Mewling and puking,’ he added, exasperated by their bestial stupidity into throwing insults at those he had come to save. The insults bounced off their carapace of thick stupidity; they stared at him with a blank expression of dull and sullen resentment in their eyes. ‘Yes, puking!’ he fairly shouted. Grief and remorse, compassion and duty—all were forgotten now and, as it were, absorbed into an intense overpowering hatred of these less than human monsters.”

8

Even speculations on techno-religion fall into a predictable, reductive frame. Already today we maintain Cthulhu-like technological gods in the freezing depths, capable of wiping out continents in a moment. A hundred men lead a monk-like existence in each, maintaining their silent machinery in service of a single man’s chess-moves. A nuclear submarine’s captain is the most powerful single man on earth at any given moment—is this not the sort of transhumanism that begets technic godhood? Perhaps a more erudite futurism would build monuments to Rickover, as the founder of a new age; but ours is intellectually destitute, unable to escape politics and pacifism.

The central lie of modernity is that technology must culminate in technocracy—that the rise of new tools demands the rule of those who design them. This is not necessity, but fetish. The concept of technocracy is nothing more than a nerd’s control fantasy: the masturbatory projection of a man too weak to assert his will, praying that the next interface will elevate him to digital godhood. Marred by lack of fortitude, he dreams not of shaping humanity, but of debasing it—the conversion of men into batteries for the benefit of a neo-Eloi. Thus his eschatology uses the euphemism of “ascension,” rather than the truth: this “ascension” is a coward’s slavery. Slavery of men requires force, and a deep confidence in one’s right to do so—but the technocrat lacks even the basic will to power, and must first reduce men into something he finds more comfortable dominating. He must not only control, but be patted on the back for doing so. Lewis says aptly: “Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive.”

However, the only historical constant in technological advancement is not bureaucratic utopia—it is war. McLuhan presents a far more reasonable vision of technological determinism: “Every new technology necessitates a new war.” Once again, there is no reason to believe that the *concept* of technology will somehow fundamentally alter this course merely by being sufficiently “advanced;” if fire, the printing-press, the locomotive, the camera, and television were unable to do so, then why would a piece of software? Even the darkest future, the construction of a demiurge-algorithm, would only remove the meaning from conflict, and derange its goals into nonsensicality; it would not (and could not) end conflict itself.

The sort of technology associated with transhumanism in its original sense—what we have termed alt-transhumanism—is concerned with

the extension of the individual man, but not merely in concept. It seeks to empower the correct man: the ideal, perfected individual, whose domain is ultimately war. Socially, these advancements create the process of *cavalierization*: the de-anonymization of warfare by the cyclical empowerment of the individual on the battlefield.

The chariot, the phalanx, the stirrup, the rifled musket, the warplane... all of these inventions have made the individual reign supreme in battle once again, and allowed for a sort of heroic duel to reemerge as the structuring logic of war.

Cavalierization is inherently disruptive, rendering entrenched hierarchies obsolete by creating the conditions for a new social order. The chariot created the aristocratic superstratum just as the phalanx created the Greek *polis*, and the stirrup the feudal order. Each technology has allowed an *independent* man—well-supplied and trained—to act as a self-directed military unit, around which a new social order is formed.

Even in the bureaucratized modern state, we find shadows of this process. The ironclad birthed the strategic autonomy of naval captains; the fighter plane revived chivalry in the skies. These technologies created quiet counter-aristocracies, their mythopoetic force suppressed but not extinguished. Their apotheoses have been delayed—perhaps even stymied—by their costs, and by the centralization of military technology in bureaucracy. But with the democratization of high-lethality technology, and the shift of conflict into the noetic sphere, the *cavalier* may rise again.

11

The development of weapons—a civilization-shaping process—often takes the form of an esoteric, even theurgic act. “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds,” said Oppenheimer at Los Alamos, apparently regretting his invention. But like Gatling, Maxim, Nobel,

Haber, and countless others, the allure of summoning such a power far outstripped the fear of its use. The weapons designer, particularly of the late 19th and early 20th century, always felt the need to frame his act as altruistic: Gatling imagined that his gun would make war too deadly to bear; Maxim echoed the sentiment; Nobel dreamed that dynamite would inspire such horror that war itself would end. Despite their public words, it is impossible to imagine that these men, in the moment of creation, did not feel awe at the power they summoned. Oppenheimer's famous remorse came not in the moment of creation, but only when the bomb's first victims would be Japanese rather than German. These men each viewed themselves as standing at the end of history, creating not only a weapon but a deliverer from war itself. Their Promethean acts went similarly punished, as each learned that no such thing would happen; war would only evolve with them.

The forging of new weapons for this goal is cursed from the beginning with naivete and lack of artistry, as opposed to the visionary pride that created the battleship or the fighter jet. The creators of industrial war-machines were punished for their hubris not in overreach, but in *underimagination*. It is the transhumanist ethos that creates the machine-gun and the nuclear bomb; the alt-transhumanist ethos can be found in the heroic beauty of the *Yamato* and the F-22 Raptor. It is this latter, *yea-saying* spirit—the will to shape fate into something worth mythologizing, paired with total indifference to the current social order—that births new epics.

12

Despite this work's many attacks on computerization, it is not a rant against technology. To think of oneself as "against technology" is like being against the weather. Coincidentally, today's ruling class sets itself against both, in a desperate attempt to claw at power as its grip weakens. Their attempts to consolidate and control Data are ultimately attempts not at "progress," but at stagnation. Various sorts of eschatology—nuclear war, the AI apocalypse, climate change—are nothing more than

attempts to control *possibility*, to stop a true advance toward anything but an eternal rehash of the present. Real technological progress, what we have termed alt-transhumanism, poses a genuine threat to the current social order, as it always has. As a result, technics are burdened with a garbled sort of moralism: one that sees no problem with tyranny or even with war, but recoils at individual agency, or the uncontrolled *progression* of warfare. Science fiction and its cultural surrogates are wielded as memetic weapons, saying nothing of note anymore—but implanting a sort of hysteria that believes any future not governed by a circus-bureaucracy would be horrifying. Atop this political derangement, the ability to develop real technology is discouraged threefold: by ever-increasing “born secret” regimes, both soft and hard; by legislative shaping that encourages capital to be deployed only in short-term, derivative endeavors; and by a prevailing cultural unease, bordering on Ludditism, that holds the technic vanguard in contempt. Like in the culture war, only “approved” and unthreatening dissent is allowed.

13

“Nothing ever happens”—the true threat of modernity is not technological progress, but the use of technology to freeze man in a state of suspended animation. The technologies that preserve and normalize food, extending the crop yield and shelf life of flour—these sorts of processes are being developed for human culture and consciousness. Just as these technologies soften and prevent famines, culture is made predictable, pacified; ultimately, the aspects of existence that inspire man to action are forgotten, and the very possibility of anything interesting fades into the past.

Iterated alienation is the technic process of derangement that prevents man from interfacing with (or even recognizing) the world. Semiotic consciousness is a calcified sort of self-awareness, defined by a crippling degree of observation that prevents any sort of unselfconscious belief. Binarized, consensus reality separates man from divinity, which in previous eras may have served as an anchor to real existence. Man-as-process constrains his actions further and further into irrelevancy, framing his only allowable act as a contribution toward the sort of transhumanism that the better of the Huxley brothers attacked. Technocratic, dystopian rule, then, is the inevitable mass-scale result of man effectively cut off from everything that makes him man. But this outcome is fragile, unstable—it relies on technologies that are not yet perfected, and thus a gamble that culture will remain shielded from even a single step toward real cavalierization.

Every age mourns its weapons as uniquely horrifying, its warfare as uniquely hopeless. Without historical perspective, each new development in war seems like its end—from the “unholy” crossbow to the “apocalyptic” cannon, the “cowardly” submarine to the “inhuman” drone. But cavalierization is cyclical, not linear; just as the battlespace reaches peak anonymity, the next revolution waits in the wings. Even today, the technology exists for one man to command a thousand autonomous drones, conducting an orchestra of apocalyptic locusts. It awaits only a madman-engineer to bring it to fruition. The materials science to create armor not unlike that envisioned by Frank Herbert is already present at the fringes of research. Even more exotic technologies—which should not be named here—await the next Archimedes for their realization. Cavalierization is both a historical process and a design ethos. It requires mythopoetic thinking, rather than computerized optimization.

Beyond the physical, warfare now plays out in the noetic battlespace—where symbols are territory and true alignment is a kind of *Wunderwaffe*. It is here where individual agency is most aggressively under attack by major actors, and thus where a rogue agent can be most potent. The Discourse ARG and The Puppeteer-Industrial Complex are meant to serve as a sketched map of this theater, with its meta level approached in *On Liminality*. Collective consciousness is vulnerable, constantly-evolving, and already subject to a vast and confused Data-based conflict. Its centrality to modern war makes it a necessary part of the cavalierization to come, which will reach its peak in a sort of *total-field awareness*: a synthesis of physical, cognitive, symbolic, and mythic warfare.

The need for total-field awareness begins to shape the image of the neo-cavalier. He must think outside the frame of consensus reality; acquire goals with radical ambition and religious fervor; and see the Realm of Forms as an esoteric, gamified battleground made tangible by technology. He must reckon constantly with the essential: a grounding, unmediated familiarity with the zeros and ones of life, an approach to politics from the atomic level, and a constant search for Truth. The basis of any independent man today, then, is a sense of monk-like *cognitive security*. Above and beyond physical skills or intellect, he must be able to maintain alignment more effectively than any institution.

Just as the edge of physics intersects with ancient philosophy, here we see an intersection between the next stage of cavalierization and the form approached by Hugues de Payns a millennium ago: the warrior-monk, whose radical break from normalcy produces physical and spiritual extension—and whose example reimagines the military unit as something more than tactical, even more than fraternal. It becomes an initiatory *conspiracy*.

The Knights Templar are a familiar example, but far from alone. The Hashashin, the Taborites, the Uskoks of Senj, even the Knights of the Golden Circle... these are all inklings of the militant orders to come. Radical, mystic, disciplined, and bizarre, these groups all challenged contemporary forms of military and social organization in order to seize outsized power. Today, it is only this sort of vision—alt-transhumanism applied to social and mental scaffolds—that can create the conditions necessary for cavalierization. Perhaps such an order should exist between fiction and reality: *“We, the Deputies of the Higher College of the Rose-Croix, do make our stay, visibly and invisibly, in this city...”*

The modern would-be-cavalier, then, must learn to see the world as both Data and myth. Alt-transhumanism concerns itself not only with physical technology, but with noetic and mythic superstructures. To reclaim agency, one’s relationship to liminality, ritual, will, and divinity must be wrested from their modern suppression. Only by approaching mythopoetic existence can man imagine—and manifest—new forms.

Just as the battlespace must be inhabited as a total-field environment, cavalierization demands a total-field metaphysics: one capable of reading sword, rifle, and symbol as parts of a single continuum—neither wholly real nor wholly legendary, but charged with both. This is not separate from the development and deployment of physical technology, but one with it.

The true purpose of this book is to serve as a military manual for a particular type—one who might have lived among the Jomsvikings,

served in the Teutonic Order, or conspired with the Thule Society. It is addressed to the prospective Rosicrucian, to the would-be Templar of the computerized age—to the radical, the mystic, the zealot.

The present survives only by the illusion of its permanence. Its outgrowths—consensus reality, semiotic consciousness, depraved techno-futurism, even the “rules-based international order”—are pillars of salt, crumbling at the slightest touch. What appears fixed is only a lull in the rhythm of recurrence.

This recurrence is not meta-historical or even grand in its scale—it can be reached out and grasped. History does not end, or even “progress;” it responds to the actions of the preeminent. New technologies—both spectacular and unassuming—fracture the established order and summon new forms. The design and implementation of alt-transhumanist technology creates ruptures in time. The first blitz of a chariot, Martel’s “wall of ice” at Tours, the first dogfight over the trenches in 1914, even the deployment of Stuxnet... each of these moments was a rip in man’s narrative arc, the first line of a new epic, chronicling the proud history of a new people. This is the esoteric cause *and* effect of war, the substance of conflict itself and the driver of heroic man’s eternal recurrence. The radical—even and especially the anti-progressive—should not shy away from war-technology, but embrace it. It is the stirrup, the pike square, and the robot that set the stage for visionaries to enact their will.

20

If we are to become “post-human” via technology, there is an alternate and far more inspiring path. We need not reduce ourselves to fools, or to pleasure-blobs in a computerized singularity. This concept is the unimaginative fantasy of those who fear their own agency. If anything, the true transhumanist ideal is the continual perfection of man not as a whole, but among his best specimens—a march toward more agency, more technic extension of one’s will. The true goal of technology, then,

is the refinement of man toward his heroic type, as the creator of neo-epics: the creation of the *Übermensch*!

21

The Italian Renaissance is remembered as a period of great flowering—but it was also a tempest of assassins, mercenaries, and madman-tyrants. This was not a contradiction. It was precisely this state of societal frenzy that allowed for the rebirth of Classical learning, and forced the hand of divinity. Cavalierization reawakens history in these moments: the sudden preeminence of the individual reinvigorates the radical, the mythopoetic, and the strange. Just as alchemy has its Great Work atop mere chemistry, alt-transhumanism contains the *esoteric* drive to restart the engine of history.

It is only this sort of strife, insanity, and challenging of forms that reopens historical imagination. Only such a moment could produce a man like Columbus, who sailed into the infinite distance and hailed the dawn of a new age. We stand today at a precipice—all that remains is a leap into eternal recurrence, a march into the future and thus into the past.

Revelation 19:11-21

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Samizdat

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search it out.

Proverbs 25:2

1

Control over eschatology is control over possibility. To render pointless actions preemptively by an eschatological framework, real or fake, is to exercise the highest kind of power, which is to say religious power. Various historical actors have done this, and now our ruling elite does the same, first by the threat of nuclear annihilation and now by the threat of AI domination; the former conveniently slides right into the latter. Once the eschaton is institutionalized, it functions not to end a society but to justify its suspension, its rules, and its ruling class. The greatest threat to this paradigm is someone who simply ignores the supposed apocalypse.

2

To become a Luddite is to admit defeat. Self-sufficiency is admirable, but no transition of power comes from chicken coops. More often than not, this sort of performance slots neatly into the mass-rituals of social media; and even without public display, the Audience remains present in the behavior. Most of the public push for a “traditional” life falls into this paradigm: a confused and purely-aesthetic display that, in concrete

politics, amounts to accepting reservation-life or serfdom. The heights of historic life occurred among men with no particular care for their lifestyle, but all-consuming interest in matters of politics, thought, and war.

The struggle for power over the future occurs institutionally, just as the mediation of mass-reality occurs online. Eschatology can be used both as a charter myth and—particularly by radicals—as an excuse for avoiding the contest over concrete power. Belief in impending doom benefits no one but those currently in power, and pundits who take advantage of a too-credulous audience.

3

No new elite arises from inheritance alone. It is formed instead through the recognition of essence and opportunity. The core of any emergent order is the conspiracy: the structured alignment of will that renders institutional goals irrelevant by its superior coherence. Charlemagne's first knights offered this superior coherence in Late Antiquity, just as the Taliban offered consistent governance in war-torn Afghanistan. But these orders do not always rely on collapse; more often than not, they interface directly with power, though with a locus outside it. A more pertinent example: the Bektashi order shaped Ottoman politics from within the Janissary ranks, just as in 2003, a small group of Jewish neoconservatives—as openly acknowledged by *Haaretz's* Ari Shavit—conceived the Iraq War from inside the Bush administration. In all of these cases, the conspiracy functioned as the atom of political existence, shaping the arc of empires at their peak and ushering in new power structures.

Taking the Iraq War as an example reveals a pattern. The Semitic fraternity who sold America on Iraq shaped the arc of history, grabbing the reigns of contemporary entropy and directing it toward their own ends—just as the 9/11 hijackers did, thereby creating their opportunity—just as a few CIA and political elites created the material and intellectual backdrop for radical Islamic terror during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—just as a group of quasi-communists forged the modern world order in the wake of WWII... and so on.

One could trace this lineage back to absurd lengths, and in doing so it is revealed that the true driver of history is small, agentic groups of totally-committed men, whose actions are later contextualized by historians as “inevitable” or arising naturally. In a sense, they did simply “arise”—but only because such men act as forces of nature, rather than individuals with doubts and petty concerns. It is precisely this ability—to even have a *nature*, much less to act on nature’s behalf—that is stripped from us by hypermodernity.

If there is to be an overturning, a new elite will rise from so many fundamental conspiracies. Fraternities, secret societies, startups, artists’ collectives, neo-monastic and knightly orders, academic units, mercenary groups... these structures form the substrate of change, and this is precisely why they are often mocked or scorned in mass culture. Unselfconscious and unironic commitment to such a group presents a real threat to dominant cultural mores. An aversion to this sort of group—which are tied via mass media to the drug-cults of the 1970s—is as negative a consequence of “modern alienation” as the loss of third places or folkways. We are alienated not only from “community” (a word flogged into meaninglessness) but from earnest engagement with the world.

It is no secret that the academy writ large has been in decline for some time, especially in the humanities. This decline is best represented by an aversion to new theories, and a fixation on policing public thought. A sort of bureaucratic entrenchment has taken over in history, literature, anthropology, psychology, even and especially Classics... a rallying of all hands to choose and concretize a set of approved theories, interpretations, and beliefs. Often mistaken for “progress gone awry,” this decline is in reality a sort of Maginot Line—a defense mechanism under construction for some seven decades, positioned to prevent the recurrence of anything like the German *Ahnenerbe*.

Such an alternate consensus—one that takes itself seriously and produces real, innovative work—presents a threat to the stale and dogmatic world of thought, and thus to consensus reality and all the political structures justified by its mass acceptance. Germany cut itself off from global science and humanities for less than two decades, and in that time its academy produced theories and technologies unlike anything seen before; it is precisely this sort of radical overturning in thought that we seek today. The shrill panic produced in response to Graham Hancock or “manosphere” readings of the Classics should go to show how fragile the foundations of modern thought truly are—and how little deviation it takes to produce existential panic. A new consensus must simply march through Belgium to reignite thought.

When reality is legislated entirely through media, the artist becomes, for better or worse, something akin to a priest. Today, there are many who use the title—almost none of whom deserve it. The vast majority are artisans, producing commercial art and exercising what little agency they have to exorcise psychopolitical hangups or foist fetishes upon the audience. Their work forms the background hum of both mainstream and online media, and thus the unquestioned basis of popular aesthetics

and tropes. In the proper “art world,” the primary type is the court jester—producing faux-value in the form of sanctioned prank-art, mostly meant to allow their patrons to signal taste and status. Despite its alleged lineage, this sort of art has almost nothing in common with the transgressive, playful spirit that inspired Duchamp. Of course there are also the role-players, who act like an imagined version of an “artist”—capricious, cosmopolitan, airily opinionated—to flatter their own self-image. None of these “artists” live up to the potential of their mediums, and any hopeful true artist must wholly reject these forms.

8

The creation of media, when done well, offers root-level access to the collective unconscious to a degree never seen before the digital age. Moving forward, there are three types of art which matter, forming a sort of triple Venn diagram (at least, insofar as the goals discussed here are concerned). These types include art that is ultra-realistic—“realer than real”—which serves as a grounding experience and enforces a particular notion of reality; art that is dreamy and druglike by design, inducing an altered state in the audience, necessarily accessing the *essential* and in doing so exposing it; and of course, art that exists as a memetic weapon, causing chain reactions toward a desired end. The intersection of those three categories is the goal. Each of these ethos lead to art that is necessarily inter- and metatextual; but while this art may make use of irony, it is critical that it is made in full and unapologetic earnest. The new artist must in many cases cloister himself, or risk the backslide into self-conscious lack of commitment that afflicts so much media today. Authenticity is a rare commodity, and must be guarded to retain its purity. Perhaps this art—film, literature, performance, even digital ephemera—will be created in a ritualized environment, as the exoteric product of a much more complex and ambitious project...

The history of man is fractally complex, and the act of writing it is retrocausal. Man's identity as a progressive creature means that a new view of historical processes changes the patterns by which he acts; historiography, then, is an art in line with Kabbalah. Edward Gibbon's innovation in this field, then, was in effect an act of "timewar"—a particularly powerful rewrite of the laws of civilizational physics. For a more grounded example, Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* dictated the frame of naval warfare from then on, and thus of state affairs, technological development, and popular culture; this new view of history irrevocably shaped the present and future. More darkly, Howard Zinn's *A People's History* in large part created the particular Whiggish historical identity that now dominates both sides of American political-cultural life, and thus all history written after its publication.

All of this is to say that a new history and historiography is the most powerful possible weapon against the current order. Wild theories, complete rejections of "known" reality, self-fulfilling rewrites of even current events—these are the basis of new orders, and of historical forward momentum.

History has an inherent cinematographic lens, both in its actual story and its unveiling. Vast revelations can only be made through vast ambition; Schliemann found Troy because he looked for it. There are dozens—perhaps hundreds—of similar sites merely awaiting their madman-discoverers. Lost Phoenician expeditions to India, Caral colonies as far north as Panama, strange bones across the American West... some even say the Antikythera mechanism was part of something much bigger, the rest of which lies silently on the seafloor. All this and more awaits the bold visionaries who pursue the truth with delusional conviction. Perhaps Percy Fawcett did not die in the jungle,

but succeeded more than he had possibly imagined; the writing of history is the purview not of meek archivists, but of insane men of his sort, men willing to enter the annals as they attempt to write new chronicles. The human past is a thin, unconfident veneer stretched over a void of terrifying unknowledge. All that is needed to rewrite entire eons is the willingness to look.

11

Politics, the “marketplace of ideas,” is dead. There is only directional signal. Ideology, in the public sense, has not existed for some time, even if many haven’t caught up yet. There is still thought, but “thinkers” are locked out by their desire for acclaim. The only innovation can happen for its own sake, which despite the hellishness elsewhere is a far purer motive. It is childlike amusement that invents new ideas, new morality; everything else is part of the game, and treating it as such—not dropping out, but playing with this in mind—is the only insurance policy against psychosis.

12

Irony doesn’t exist. Even today, it is used almost exclusively as a way to draw oneself closer to an identity or position, testing the waters at each step on the approach. True alignment, the only anchor against noetic drift and derangement, relies on a rock-solid sense of psychic hygiene, attainable through obsession with a goal, removal from the noetic gyre, total commitment. It is this total commitment that allows for hyperstition, that unlocks the potential of what is now called mysticism. For centuries this was reached through ritual purity: abstinence from meat and women, constant prayer. In a system with far more entropy—and higher velocity—it takes far less—though with more nuance. The mindset that came naturally to men until recently—mythopoetic existence—requires an intentional effort—a psychological

reprogramming—a clean break from consensus reality. Polytropos, *Ouroboros*:

“Prescriptions: simplicity in diet and habit, consistent exercise, the cultivation of indifference to all privations, the satiation of oneself on politics and ideas, mastery over and subordination of all drives which do not serve the goal one has set for oneself, the sloughing off of all that is superfluous and superficial. In a word—to be cruel and inexorable toward oneself.”

13

Everything described here is literal and prescriptive. I am telling you to start a cult, to invent new rituals and traditions. I am telling you to invest everything in weapons development. I am telling you to go to the Indus Valley and find the resurrection chamber of Gilgamesh. The only escape from being smothered to death by the technetronic surround is by force. The force required is the same thing once harnessed by Lycurgus, Columbus, von Braun. It is the force that unlocks new forms, new peoples, new frontiers. This force is everywhere scorned and marginalized until it yields fruit, after which it is framed as inevitable, ascribed to natural forces. To reshape existence is thankless work, except to oneself and the slim elite who will follow—that small cadre who maintains the flame of civilization. Yet it is in the moment that one totally rejects self-consciousness, marching headlong into risk in pursuit of some insane goal, that one is closest to God.

Postscript: Extracts for Further Reading

Marco Polo on the Assassins, tr. Thomas Wright

Having spoken of this country, mention shall now be made of the old man of the mountain. The district in which his residence lay obtained the name of Mulehet, signifying in the language of the Saracens the place of heretics, and his people that of Mulehetites, or holders of heretical talents; as we apply the term of Patharini to certain heretics among Christians. The following account of this chief, Marco Polo attests to having heard from sundry persons.

He was named Alo-eddin, and his religion was that of Mahomet. In a beautiful valley enclosed between two lofty mountains, he had formed a luxurious garden, stored with every delicious fruit and every fragrant shrub that could be procured. Palaces of various sizes and forms were erected in different parts of the grounds, ornamented with works in gold, with paintings, and with furniture of rich silks. By means of small conduits contrived in these buildings, streams of wine, milk, honey, and some of pure water, were seen to flow in every direction. The inhabitants of these palaces were elegant and beautiful damsels, accomplished in the arts of singing, playing upon all sorts of musical instruments, dancing, and especially those of dalliance and amorous allurements. Clothed in rich dresses they were seen continually sporting and amusing themselves in the garden and pavilions, their female guardians being confined within doors and never suffered to appear.

The object which the chief had in view in forming a garden of this fascinating kind, was this: that Mahomet having promised to those who

should obey his will the enjoyments of Paradise, where every species of sensual gratification should be found, in the society of beautiful nymphs, he was desirous of its being understood by his followers that he also was a prophet and the compeer of Mahomet, and had the power of admitting to Paradise such as he should choose to favor. In order that none without his license might find their way into this delicious valley, he caused a strong and inexpugnable castle to be erected at the opening of it, through which the entry was by a secret passage.

At his court, likewise, this chief entertained a number of youths, from the age of twelve to twenty years, selected from the inhabitants of the surrounding mountains, who showed a disposition for martial exercises, and appeared to possess the quality of daring courage. To them he was in the daily practice of discoursing on the subject of the paradise announced by the prophet, and of his own power of granting admission; and at certain times he caused opium to be administered to ten or a dozen of the youths; and when half dead with sleep he had them conveyed to the several apartments of the palaces in the garden. Upon awakening from this state of lethargy, their senses were struck with all the delightful objects that have been described, and each perceived himself surrounded by lovely damsels, singing, playing, and attracting his regards by the most fascinating caresses, serving him also with delicate viands and exquisite wines; until intoxicated with excess of enjoyment amidst actual rivulets of milk and wine, he believed himself assuredly in Paradise, and felt an unwillingness to relinquish its delights. When four or five days had thus been passed, they were thrown once more into a state of somnolence, and carried out of the garden. Upon their being introduced to his presence, and questioned by him as to where they had been, their answer was, "In Paradise, through the favor of your highness:" and then before the whole court, who listened to them with eager curiosity and astonishment, they gave a circumstantial account of the scenes to which they had been witnesses. The chief thereupon addressing them, said: "We have the assurances of our prophet that he who defends his lord shall inherit Paradise, and if you show yourselves devoted to the obedience of my orders, that happy lot awaits you." Animated to enthusiasm by words of this nature, all

deemed themselves happy to receive the commands of their master, and were forward to die in his service.

The consequence of this system was, that when any of the neighboring princes, or others, gave umbrage to this chief, they were put to death by these his disciplined assassins; none of whom felt terror at the risk of losing their own lives, which they held in little estimation, provided they could execute their master's will. On this account his tyranny became the subject of dread in all the surrounding countries.

Livy, tr. Rev. Canon Roberts

The Roman State had now become so strong that it was a match for any of its neighbors in war, but its greatness threatened to last for only one generation, since through the absence of women there was no hope of offspring, and there was no right of intermarriage with their neighbors. Acting on the advice of the senate, Romulus sent envoys amongst the surrounding nations to ask for alliance and the right of intermarriage on behalf of his new community. It was represented that cities, like everything else, sprung from the humblest beginnings, and those who were helped on by their own courage and the favor of heaven won for themselves great power and great renown. As to the origin of Rome, it was well known that whilst it had received divine assistance, courage and self-reliance were not wanting. There should, therefore, be no reluctance for men to mingle their blood with their fellow men.

Nowhere did the envoys meet with a favorable reception. Whilst their proposals were treated with contumely, there was at the same time a general feeling of alarm at the power so rapidly growing in their midst. Usually they were dismissed with the question, "whether they had opened an asylum for women, for nothing short of that would secure for them inter-marriage on equal terms." The Roman youth could ill brook such insults, and matters began to look like an appeal to force.

To secure a favorable place and time for such an attempt, Romulus, disguising his resentment, made elaborate preparations for the celebration of games in honor of "Equestrian Neptune," which he called "the Consualia." He ordered public notice of the spectacle to be given amongst the adjoining cities, and his people supported him in making the celebration as magnificent as their knowledge and resources allowed, so that expectations were raised to the highest pitch. There was a great gathering; people were eager to see the new City, all their nearest neighbors—the people of Caenina, Antemnae, and Crustumium—were there, and the whole Sabine population came, with their wives and families. They were invited to accept hospitality at the different houses, and after examining the situation of the City, its walls and the large number of dwelling-houses it included, they were astonished at the rapidity with which the Roman State had grown.

When the hour for the games had come, and their eyes and minds were alike riveted on the spectacle before them, the preconcerted signal was given and the Roman youth dashed in all directions to carry off the maidens who were present. The larger part were carried off indiscriminately, but some particularly beautiful girls who had been marked out for the leading patricians were carried to their houses by plebeians told off for the task. One, conspicuous amongst them all for grace and beauty, is reported to have been carried off by a group led by a certain Talassius, and to the many inquiries as to whom she was intended for, the invariable answer was given, "For Talassius." Hence the use of this word in the marriage rites. Alarm and consternation broke up the games, and the parents of the maidens fled, distracted with grief, uttering bitter reproaches on the violators of the laws of hospitality and appealing to the god to whose solemn games they had come, only to be the victims of impious perfidy.

The abducted maidens were quite as despondent and indignant. Romulus, however, went round in person, and pointed out to them that it was all owing to the pride of their parents in denying right of intermarriage to their neighbors. They would live in honorable wedlock, and share all their property and civil rights, and—dearest of all to

human nature—would be the mothers of freemen. He begged them to lay aside their feelings of resentment and give their affections to those whom fortune had made masters of their persons. An injury had often led to reconciliation and love; they would find their husbands all the more affectionate because each would do his utmost, so far as in him lay to make up for the loss of parents and country. These arguments were reinforced by the endearments of their husbands who excused their conduct by pleading the irresistible force of their passion—a plea effective beyond all others in appealing to a woman's nature.

[The Sabines then marched on Rome, and the two sides arrayed for battle.]

Then it was that the Sabine women, whose wrongs had led to the war, throwing off all womanish fears in their distress, went boldly into the midst of the flying missiles with disheveled hair and rent garments. Running across the space between the two armies they tried to stop any further fighting and calm the excited passions by appealing to their fathers in the one army and their husbands in the other not to bring upon themselves a curse by staining their hands with the blood of a father-in-law or a son-in-law, nor upon their posterity the taint of parricide. "If," they cried, "you are weary of these ties of kindred, these marriage-bonds, then turn your anger upon us; it is we who are the cause of the war, it is we who have wounded and slain our husbands and fathers. Better for us to perish rather than live without one or the other of you, as widows or as orphans."

The armies and their leaders were alike moved by this appeal. There was a sudden hush and silence. Then the generals advanced to arrange the terms of a treaty... The joyful peace, which put an abrupt close to such a deplorable war, made the Sabine women still dearer to their husbands and fathers, and most of all to Romulus himself.

With a view to attack luxury still more and remove the thirst for wealth, he introduced his third and most exquisite political device, namely, the institution of common messes, so that they might eat with one another in companies, of common and specified foods, and not take their meals at home, reclining on costly couches at costly tables, delivering themselves into the hands of servants and cooks to be fattened in the dark, like voracious animals, and ruining not only their characters but also their bodies, by surrendering them to every desire and all sorts of surfeit, which call for long sleeps, hot baths, abundant rest, and, as it were, daily nursing and tending... As for the public messes, the Cretans call them "andreaia," but the Lacedaemonians, "phiditia," either because they are conducive to friendship and friendliness, "phiditia" being equivalent to "philitia"; or, because they accustom men to simplicity and thrift, for which their word is "pheido." But it is quite possible, as some say, that the first letter of the word "phiditia" has been added to it, making "phiditia" out of "editia," which refers merely to meals and eating. They met in companies of fifteen, a few more or less, and each one of the mess-mates contributed monthly a bushel of barley-meal, eight gallons of wine, five pounds of cheese, two and a half pounds of figs, and in addition to this, a very small sum of money for such relishes as flesh and fish. Besides this, whenever any one made a sacrifice of first fruits, or brought home game from the hunt, he sent a portion to his mess. For whenever any one was belated by a sacrifice or the chase, he was allowed to sup at home, but the rest had to be at the mess. For a long time this custom of eating at common mess-tables was rigidly observed. For instance, when King Agis, on returning from an expedition in which he had been victorious over the Athenians, wished to sup at home with his wife, and sent for his rations, the polemarchs refused to send them to him; and when on the following day his anger led him to omit the customary sacrifice, they laid a fine upon him.

[...]

None of his laws were put into writing by Lycurgus, indeed, one of the so-called “*rhētras*” forbids it. For he thought that if the most important and binding principles which conduce to the prosperity and virtue of a city were implanted in the habits and training of its citizens, they would remain unchanged and secure, having a stronger bond than compulsion in the fixed purposes imparted to the young by education, which performs the office of a law-giver for every one of them. And as for minor matters, such as business contracts, and cases where the needs vary from time to time, it was better, as he thought, not to hamper them by written constraints or fixed usages, but to suffer them, as occasion demanded, to receive such modifications as educated men should determine. Indeed, he assigned the function of law-making wholly and entirely to education.

[...]

In the matter of education, which he regarded as the greatest and noblest task of the law-giver, he began at the very source, by carefully regulating marriages and births. For it is not true that, as Aristotle says, he tried to bring the women under proper restraint, but desisted, because he could not overcome the great license and power which the women enjoyed on account of the many expeditions in which their husbands were engaged. During these the men were indeed obliged to leave their wives in sole control at home, and for this reason paid them greater deference than was their due, and gave them the title of Mistress. But even to the women Lycurgus paid all possible attention. He made the maidens exercise their bodies in running, wrestling, casting the discus, and hurling the javelin, in order that the fruit of their wombs might have vigorous root in vigorous bodies and come to better maturity, and that they themselves might come with vigor to the fullness of their times, and struggle successfully and easily with the pangs of childbirth. He freed them from softness and delicacy and all effeminacy by accustoming the maidens no less than the youths to wear tunics only in processions, and at certain festivals to dance and sing when the young men were present as spectators... Nor was there anything disgraceful in this scant clothing of the maidens, for modesty

attended them, and wantonness was banished; nay, rather, it produced in them habits of simplicity and an ardent desire for health and beauty of body. It gave also to woman-kind a taste of lofty sentiment, for they felt that they too had a place in the arena of bravery and ambition. Wherefore they were led to think and speak as Gorgo, the wife of Leonidas, is said to have done. When some foreign woman, as it would seem, said to her: "You Spartan women are the only ones who rule their men," she answered: "Yes, we are the only ones that give birth to men."

Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, tr. George Schwab

The worst confusion arises when concepts such as justice and freedom are used to legitimize one's own political ambitions and to disqualify or demoralize the enemy. In the shadow of an embracing political decision and in the security of a stable political state organization, law, whether private or public, has its own relatively independent domain. As with every domain of human endeavor and thought, it can be utilized to support or refute other domains. But it is necessary to pay attention to the political meaning of such utilizations of law and morality, and above all of the word rule or sovereignty of law.

First, law can signify here the existing positive laws and lawgiving methods which should continue to be valid. In this case the rule of law means nothing else than the legitimization of a specific *status quo*, the preservation of which interests particularly those whose political power or economic advantage would stabilize itself in this law. Second, appealing to law can signify that a higher or better law, a so-called natural law or law of reason, is set against the law of the *status quo*. In this case it is clear to a politician that the rule or sovereignty of this type of law signifies the rule and sovereignty of men or groups who can appeal to this higher law and thereby decide its content and how and by whom it should be applied. Hobbes has drawn these simple consequences of political thought without confusion and more clearly than anyone else. He has emphasized time and again that the sovereignty of law means only the sovereignty of men who draw up and

administer this law. The rule of a higher order, according to Hobbes, is an empty phrase if it does not signify politically that certain men of this higher order rule over men of a lower order. The independence and completeness of political thought is here irrefutable. There always are concrete human groupings which fight other concrete human groupings in the name of justice, humanity, order, or peace. When being reproached for immorality and cynicism, the spectator of political phenomena can always recognize in such reproaches a political weapon used in actual combat.

Political thought and political instinct prove themselves theoretically and practically in the ability to distinguish friend and enemy. The high points of politics are simultaneously the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy.

Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, tr. Anthony M. Ludovici

The feeling of intoxication is, as a matter of fact, equivalent to a sensation of *surplus power*: it is strongest in seasons of rut: new organs, new accomplishments, new colors, new forms. Embellishment is an outcome of *increased power*. Embellishment is merely an expression of a triumphant will, of an increased state of co-ordination, of a harmony of all the strong desires, of an infallible and perpendicular equilibrium. Logical and geometrical simplification is the result of an increase of power: conversely, the mere aspect of such a simplification increases the sense of power in the beholder... The zenith of development: the grand style.

Ugliness signifies *the decadence of a type*: contradiction and faulty co-ordination among the inmost desires—this means a decline in the *organizing* power, or, psychologically speaking, in the will. The condition of pleasure which is called intoxication is really an exalted feeling of power... Sensations of space and time are altered; inordinate distances are traversed by the eye, and only then become visible; the extension of the vision over greater masses and expanses; the refinement

of the organ which apprehends the smallest and most elusive things; divination, the power of understanding at the slightest hint, at the smallest suggestion; intelligent sensitiveness; *strength* as a feeling of dominion in the muscles, as agility and love of movement, as dance, as levity and quick time; strength as the love of proving strength, as bravado, adventurousness, fearlessness, indifference in regard to life and death... All these elated moments of life stimulate each other; the world of images and of imagination of the one suffices as a suggestion for the other: in this way states finally merge into each other, which might do better to keep apart, e.g. the feeling of religious intoxication and sexual irritability (two very profound feelings, always wonderfully coordinated. What is it that pleases almost all pious women, old or young? Answer: a saint with beautiful legs, still young, still innocent). Cruelty in tragedy and pity (likewise normally correlated). Spring-time, dancing, music,—all these things are but the display of one sex before the other,—as also that “infinite yearning of the heart” peculiar to Faust.

Artists when they are worth anything at all are men of strong propensities (even physically), with surplus energy, powerful animals, sensual; without a certain overheating of the sexual system a man like Raphael is unthinkable... To produce music is also in a sense to produce children; chastity is merely the economy of the artist, and in all creative artists productiveness certainly ceases with sexual potency... Artists should not see things as they are; they should see them fuller, simpler, stronger: to this end, however, a kind of youthfulness, of vernality, a sort of perpetual elation, must be peculiar to their lives.

Gesta Francorum, tr. Rosalind Hill

When that time had already come, of which the Lord Jesus warns his faithful people every day, especially in the Gospel where he says, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,” there was a great stirring of heart throughout all the Frankish lands, so that if any man, with all his heart and all his mind, really wanted to follow God and faithfully to bear the cross after him,

he could make no delay in taking the road to the Holy Sepulchre as quickly as possible. For even the pope set out across the Alps as soon as he could, with his archbishops, bishops, abbots and priests, and he began to deliver eloquent sermons and to preach, saying, "If any man wants to save his soul, let him have no hesitation in taking the way of the Lord in humility, and if he lacks money, the divine mercy will give him enough." The lord pope said also, "Brothers, you must suffer for the name of Christ many things, wretchedness, poverty, nakedness, persecution, need, sickness, hunger, thirst and other such troubles, for the Lord says to his disciples, "You must suffer many things for my name," and "Be not ashamed to speak before men, for I will give you what you shall say," and afterwards "Great will be your reward." And when these words had begun to be rumored abroad through all the duchies and counties of the Frankish lands, the Franks, hearing them, straightway began to sew the cross on the right shoulders of their garments, saying that they would all with one accord follow in the footsteps of Christ, by whom they had been redeemed from the power of hell. So they set out at once from their homes in the lands of the Franks.

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