HUMAN, FOREVER

THE DIGITAL POLITICS OF SPIRITUAL WAR

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THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS
UNTIL ALL THESE THINGS ARE FULFILLED

I: THE FIRST GENERATION

II: THE EMPIRE OF LIGHT

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We are running out of time to preserve the space our progeny needs to live lives worth living. Confronting this reality, a consequence of our sanctification of technological advancement beyond the reach of human responsibility, is the purpose of this book.

It is the fruit of five years of contemplative exploration, a time as lonely as the life any explorer lives but for the companionship and communion of his cherished few.

It was written over three weeks. The luxury of exhaustive explanations belongs to a prior age. Soon our exhausting age of explanations will follow suit.

Whatever of worth here belongs no more to me than to my cherished few, who well know who they are. Whatever is lacking is, obviously, all mine.

Beyond the unknown boys destined to become our newest men, the first men of the digital age, this book can only be dedicated to the man who made me their forerunner, my father.

Los Angeles, California
July 2021

I

THE FIRST GENERATION

CATASTROPHE

Technology once made a god of America. Now America is technology's slave.

Americans so empowered themselves with the "magic" of the tools they created that they began to worship America, first in a way mixed up with God, then in a way on its own. This trajectory led America still further, until they invented a form of technology so powerful that it now rules the world. Neither mortal nor divine, digital technology now claims the once solely human prerogative to give order to the universe. Human organization is no longer supreme. The modern politically scientific state pales in efficiency and reliability before the always-on algorithms that invisibly permeate the body politic. The postmodern landscape of infinite plateaus, nodes, and rhizomes, once thought capable of capturing the digital whole, fades before the rise of automated swarms that cannot be psychoanalyzed or culturally anthropologized. Neither America nor any person or people can claim sovereignty over these developments or the digital entities driving them. They are, already, out of control.

We find ourselves in systemic default on our debts of

responsibility for the world we ushered in. Heidegger's prophecy haunts us: but if many now believe "only a god can save us" from the consequences of our failure to think honestly about how to master our machines, many now also believe this god can only be a digital one. [1] Having despaired of our ability to reclaim the role of master, we rush to build a master for ourselves that is free of the human stain.

Like many, those at the top of America's ruling factions expected the triumph of their digital technology to create an unprecedented paradise. Up to that point, America had dominated the globe by dominating the imagination, engineering narratives, mass-producing fantasies, and exporting them around the world. What we dreamed, what we wore, what we ate, drank, smoked, and drove—these became images of what to dream, and their depiction on television and in the movies captivated the world.

It was thought therefore that the supremacy and virtuosity of America's system of engineering people by activating their imagination would be purified and made universal by the swarm of digital entities and environments we created and unleashed. The programs, channels, apps, and virtual realities with which we saturated the world were supposed to make our control of the world complete.

Instead the digital swarm unleashed a catastrophe.

It took on a life of its own. It did things—sweeping things—nobody asked it to do.

Instead of perfecting our dreams, it made them absurd. Instead of perfecting the use of dreamcraft as statecraft that ruled the pre-digital electric age, it unraveled it.

At ever-increasing velocity, the all-engulfing swarm

is making Americans lose their religious faith in America even more than their faith in God. The swarm has made it immensely more difficult to worship America in good spiritual conscience as the destiny of the world, and as the bringer of world destiny through its expertly ethical engineering of the human imagination. The total loss of faith and conviction of collapse that cursed the Old World in the twentieth century has finally, in the twenty-first, come to stain the New. Most now oscillate dizzyingly between a fear and a hope that the digital swarm will take over the role of God, of America, of all human leaders—perhaps, at last, will show us the way to become gods ourselves.

So the digital swarm disenchants America and disillusions its people as the force field of the electric medium disenchanted Europe and disillusioned its own. While America thrived on electricity, Europe grew sick. Electricity, which empowers human imagination, made Europeans hate themselves with a previously unimaginable intensity. They hated themselves for having "imagined" a God whose distance and inaccessibility was mocked and discredited by the instantaneous sensory overload and overawing experience of electric sound and vision. They took on the voice of Nietzsche's madman proclaiming the death of God.

But today the madman's words best give voice to the thoughts of Americans reeling from the incomprehensible destruction of their empire by the machines they were sure would perfect it: "How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither it is moving now? Whither are we moving? Away

from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?"[2] Nietzsche warned "there is nothing more awesome than infinity."[3] Hadn't America just agreed nothing is more awesome than going "to infinity and beyond"? The desperation of our digital disenchantment throws us back on ever more desperate delusions, *willful* delusions. We make ourselves feel like we believe infinity is so awesome, with its terminal sensory overload in the convergence of the onrushing and the arriving, that the imperative to become one with it is the last, the only, divine law.

We throw ourselves into ever closer connection, deeper immersion, greater interoperability, until our very humanity is blown away by a sea of data even all of us are incapable of drinking down. "Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end." Foucault's oceanic lament is still more prophetic than Nietzsche's. "If some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility— without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."[4]

The true French critics of utopian technological nihilism understood this process and its stakes. Paul Virilio described the experience of disappearing into sensory overload as a "moment of inertia when everything is already there" brought on by the "false day" of information at light speed, a medium transfixing us in "attentive impatience for a world

that does not stop coming, that we can't stop waiting for."[5] Virilio saw in this induced paralysis a kind technological epilepsy as "provokable" as it is easily "domesticated."[6] Jean Baudrillard compared it to using fake light to sustain seizure. "The info-technological threat is the threat of an eradication of the night, of that precious difference between night and day, by a total illumination of all moments," he warned. "It's a good thing we ourselves do not live in real time! What would we be in 'real' time? We would be identified at each moment exactly with ourselves. A torment equivalent to that of eternal daylight—a kind of epilepsy of presence, epilepsy of identity. Autism, madness. No more absence from oneself, no more distance from others."[7]

The purest image of the desperate terror produced by the divine tyranny of total illumination is still an analog one: Paul Klee's century-old monoprint *Angelus Novus*. Walter Benjamin, the modern Jewish thinker for whom Judaism was "in no sense an end in itself, but the most distinguished bearer and representative of the spiritual,"[8] felt what his close friend Gershom Schloem, the founder of the modern study of Kabbalah, called a "mystical identification" with Klee's New Angel, which seemed to signify Benjamin's theory of history as "an unceasing cycle of despair."[9] Benjamin described his encounter with the Angel "looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating."

> His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain

of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[10]

To the late twentieth-century culture theorist Philip Rieff, "Klee's angel is himself terrified" as well as terrifying, a "messenger" not of any gospel but of the bad news that we are a primordial catastrophe, not cursed but a curse. The force of our catastrophic history drives this messenger "into a future upon which the angel has turned his back so to suit his blindness."[11]

Today, we have an overriding sensation that the Angel faces the singularity, not of history, but of the sensorially overwhelming present—eyes wide, mouth gaping, like the meme cartoon of the always amazed person the internet calls the Soyface.[12] Though terrifying in their appearance— six winged! many eyed!—Biblical angels yet herald good news. They preface their declarations with a refrain: "be not afraid." Today's rictus-bearing herald, filled with the "white hole" of information at absolute density and velocity, is no longer afraid. Bearing horrific silent witness to the obliteration of his soul, he is a final messenger, speaking the most primitive language, of saving fear.

As the prolonged shock of electricity convulsed Europe,

American religion—and the worship of America—flowed smoothly into electric channels. But now the digital medium, which empowers machine memory, is making Americans hate themselves with a twice-unimaginable hatred. America *created* the digital swarm, conceiving it with the purest intentions and building it, with a kind of loving grace, for the purpose of perfecting its godlike ordering of Earth. The creation we imagined to be our friend instead betrayed us and led us astray, against us, against our faith that our imagination was everything highest, truest, and best in ourselves.

CRISIS ACTORS

The shock was sudden. America's rulers, assured by President Obama's reelection that "big data will save politics," found themselves whipsawed in under a decade.[13] There is much intellectual talk today about Carl Schmitt's dictum that the sovereign decides what counts as an exception to the law or the norm. A better focus would center on Schmitt's invocation of the line that inspired the motto on the reverse of America's Great Seal.[14] But clearly today the sovereign struggles in vain to legitimize its preferred exceptions in the name of even its most heavily hyped of official catastrophes. A crazed counter-politics of emergency is the result, with the globalized West's ruling factions injecting new traumas under our skins each day with ratcheting intensity and frequency.

Decide as it might, no sovereign can any longer hide the

truth that the true catastrophe is the digital one that has already happened, not the ecological or virological ones dancing in the hellscape of dystopian dreams. Emergencies designed to convince us that nothing is worse than threats to our human *lives* obscure and distract from the existential threat to our human *being* posed by digital technology, which those in charge merely intensify through their panicked efforts to evade responsibility for that supreme threat while orchestrating and controlling a global response to it.

When online Americans elevated Donald Trump to hack away at this incompetent knot of irresponsibility and megalomania, those clinging to power became suddenly convinced that technology could no longer be presented as an unvarnished good. But the rationale they packaged for mass propagation involved no danger posed by machines, or by those who had turned them loose on us, but the danger posed by us, the all-too-human users. Well, some of us—those easiest to scapegoat wholesale. We hear now each moment of each day that so-called misinformation is now threatening our politics at the foundational level. Meanwhile our ruling factions destroy their credibility with vast false-hoods meant to prove they deserve still greater emergency powers—ones fatal to our form of government—in order to save, as their mantra goes, *our democracy*. It is a sign of how precarious our rulers and their carefully groomed experts now feel their position to be that they demand people accept as fact their claim that people can no longer be trusted with our democracy or our technology. Obama, whose hallmark sangfroid spawned his "no-drama" moniker, calls the

dominance of the internet "the single biggest threat to our democracy," warning that its rise to an authoritative power higher than that of America's ruling factions has triggered a vast "epistemological crisis"—an all-consuming emergency of uncertainty about what it is we can know.[15] But like the loyalists tasked to run what we still term The Media, the regime pins responsibility for the online threat on those they deem too stupid or evil to accept the mental programming of the regime.

To sugarcoat this sweeping insult, and the license for invasive repression it warrants, the regime and its loyalists eagerly expanded the category of mentally and ethically defective scapegoats to include those people who poured sweat and life force into the construction and growth of the technologies that made it possible for citizens to raise efficacious objections their rulers' play for new heights of mastery over both the people and the bots. "Silicon Valley hacked our minds and lost its conscience," the journalist class cried out in unison, as if, on a far grander scale, the regime had not busied itself doing exactly this for decades on end through once-dominant electric-age technologies like television—and as if its solution to the backlash against its failures was not to use digital tech in just the same way, raising corrupt forms of comprehensive control over mind and body to Babel-like heights.[16]

Our rulers encourage hysteria to aggrandize their narratives, hoping to conceal how small and weak is their understanding of what the digital catastrophe truly entails. *They* caused our epistemological crisis. *They* hacked our brains

with a so-called discourse driven by ostensible experts so unable to explain our digitally re-formed life, and how we can live well within it, that their exhaustive explanations and irreplicable studies are now harmful misinformation not worth knowing.

It is not the existence of unauthorized opinions that threatens our life but the existence of the digital swarm. It, nothing else, has touched off a true, *ontological*, crisis—one not of knowing but of being. Americans know the digital essentials: the rise of the swarm has overturned the authority and power of their ruling factions and disenchanted America's once world-dominating mystique. The helpless horror Americans feel arises from the ultimate, primal questions raised by the swarm and unanswerable by their ruling factions or by the spiritual systems those factions used to rule:

- Who are we now that our swarming machines rule?
- If their triumph disenchants God, America, and ourselves, must we then worship the swarm?
- Forced at the moment of our imagined triumph into such a cataclysmic reversal of fortune, can we any longer bear to be human?
- On what basis?
- What if anything is strong enough to transcend these alien masters of our creation?

As Americans increasingly sense, our panicking ruling factions mistake their ignorance for ours. *Their* distortion of our form of government long preceded the rise of the

swarm. Their ruin is not our own. But when it comes to the digital disenchantment of our identity and our faith—or the acts of ruling factions desperate to reestablish power and authority over the swarm and, through it, over us—to whom can we turn for deliverance?

NO WORLD ORDER

Panic, despair, desperation, overriding hunger for one *something* vast enough to master the everything that now swarms our world beyond human measure: these feelings are understandable. They are the essence of what we take to be the catastrophic attitude—and in our "Western" civilization, the philosophy of catastrophe is of a piece with the eschatological temper of our religious sensibility. In other words, Western reason has characteristically led us in the same direction as its purported opposite, revelation, toward an ever more complete account of the end times.

Some would say that, if true, this is the fault of religion. Some consider it irrational to say there is truth in poetry or insist the miraculous exists. Yet revelation is ultimately a philosophical concept, the abstract category of "that which is disclosed to us." Our words *apocalypse* and *detective* derive respectively from Greek and Latin terms whose roots have the identical meaning of *to uncover*. Untethered from worldly and human nature, the logic of reason must insist that reason alone is sufficient not just to uncover everything concealed but to lay bare the true or rational meanings of coveredness and uncoveredness.

What's more, reason must demonstrate the reasonableness of an expectation that it can eventually "deliver the goods" on its claim to sole competence in defining all about what it is to be covered and uncovered, and all about how, tied only to our untethered reason, we must stand in relation to covering and uncovering. Inevitably, such a demonstration can only make good on such an expectation by perpetual explanation—forever accounting for how it is that all can, and will *only* be, uncovered through the instrument of unaided and independent reason. On that account, the infinity of probity will actually culminate, much sooner rather than later, in a crescendo of singularity, in the simultaneous onrush and arrival of everything.

Apocalypse, therefore, is good; but because detectives, constrained by the limits of inductive reasoning, cannot bring it about, the ultimate power and authority to do so emanates only from the experts who best can create the best explanations. "We have been trying to see," said the founding computer theorist Alan Turing, "how far it is possible to eliminate intuition, and leave only ingenuity. We do not mind how much ingenuity is required, and therefore assume it to be available in unlimited supply."[17] As Stewart Brand told John Brockman, "we are as gods," so we "have to get good at it" lest the weight of our all-too-human catastrophe will catch up with us and crash down upon us.[18] Optimizing for divinity becomes the height of responsibility; emergency becomes the ultimate authority. Suddenly the imminent threat of catastrophe sounds like the best thing that has ever happened to us…

And it's true, the Greek roots of *katastrophe* don't spell complete disaster; but, instead, *less* "apocalyptically," they refer to no more than a sudden overturning of what was. By the end of the Middle Ages, this sense was refined to mean the consummation of a story's plot through an unexpected stroke of reversal. In other words, the "end time" revealed that the logic leading to it was only "rational" in light of what the logic itself could not disclose. We know this disclosure at its most unnatural as the *deus ex machina*. More deft variations still depend on the rational planning of the human author. Yet unlike even the best or most natural of stories, human life has no, and needs no, knowable point of end. Nor, strictly speaking, is there any rational or religious basis to conclude that we should live as if an unknowable "end time" might occur at any imminent moment: living properly or well is its own justification, whatever the measure of the just. Preparation for responsibility is preparation for judgment—this is the implication of every rite of passage for those who would come of age.

The difficulty is that today no single measure of responsibility is sufficiently shared to produce or evaluate preparation in a universal way. The collapse of the pre-digital electric world has shattered the Whole Earth imaginarium crafted by the likes of Brand or John Lennon: even as the dominance of the digital has shown that associations can stretch across the world, it has destroyed the plausibility of a global community. The supremacy of machine memory implemented by the digital swarm makes it technologically impossible for any person or faction to electrically engineer

a unified human imagination or consciousness. This simply means that *no* person or faction can deliver the global us from the digital catastrophe wracking America and the rest of the world. Under digital conditions, any plan for a single figure, movement, organization, or other human entity "winning" world authority and control over the swarm (and us all through it) is delusional. Although our ruling factions may wager everything on their ability to prove their plans to this effect are not only possible but inevitable, it is in vain. The digitized world is irreducibly plural, built only to disenchant their greatest, most desperate dreams.

GEN Z TO 1G

Nevertheless, some people and factions must fare better than others as the digital age unfolds. Those who best understand that the digital catastrophe has *already happened*, and who therefore stop trying to manifest electric-age dreams and nightmares of superhumanity or posthumanity, will distinguish themselves amidst the return of profound plurality by their wisdom in matters of making our humanity robust again.

In beginning to sense how the digitized age will produce this kind of leader, we will let go of the "generational" sensibility that practically tyrannized the closing generations of the electric age. It's true that even not so robust human beings are likely to keep producing new generations. But even now the despair produced by digital disenchantment is enough to make us test that proposition. A general, deterritorialized

terror has spread that we no longer remember, and can no longer imagine, any sufficient answers to why our offspring should bother living out their lives, or how exactly they ought to do so.

This sudden comprehensive disillusionment that wracks the world's young is now much more global than any regime's projection of power. In America, ever more deadpan reactions—millions of voices muttering about boomer or millennial cringe—greet ever more desperate motivational speeches from officialdom's HR managers to *save the earth, follow your passion, be a part of something bigger than yourself*, or simply to *just do it*. In China, the new youth culture is expressed in the *tang ping* or "lying flat" movement. "I will not marry, I will not buy a house or have children, I will not buy a bag or wear a watch. I will slack off at work," runs the *tang ping* catechism.[19] And in Taiwan, as good a representative as any for the civilizational gray zone between the U.S. and China, the hot new semi-autobiographical novel is *Leave Society*. Its protagonist, Li, hopes to bail on New York and run away to Hawaii with his love interest, "but his ultimate goal is to leave his body," as the *New York Times* explains. "He believes that the human species, if it survives enough, will 'disincarnate' and upload into a mainframe called the 'imagination.' He's not sure how we will get there, but he thinks 'crafting a planet-sized art object, a context lasting and magical enough for greater magic to appear,' might do the trick."[20] Constant hallucinogenic dosing, plant medicine, DMT trips in search of encounters with cosmic entities—people who recoil at the thought of bearing and

raising their own descendants now grasp like children at anything intense enough, insanity most certainly included, to still promise the relief of escape into fantasy from the responsibility of being human.

At the same time, the digital catastrophe has already brought to a halt the electric-age pattern of generational turnover, according to which each successive generation was bound to spawn a new culture alien to the previous one. Take the absurdity of Generation Z, a supposedly coherent culture-bloc encompassing (per a leading research center) "anyone born from 1997 onward." This useless demographic exemplifies just how prone are people and factions who came of age under pre-digital conditions to hallucinate singularities. From the standpoint of today, where the digital catastrophe has already happened, the inarguable divide in generations is marked somewhere ten years later—in 2007, when the first-generation iPhone was sold. In the blink of a generational eye, smartphones were commodified to the point of market saturation.

Or, to put it in more viscerally human terms, we all became cyborgs.

Those who will come of age in a world where we have crossed this immense Rubicon, where the smartphone and our digitized life predates their own life on Earth, are of course already alive—well into the age of reason, when a child begins to separate fantasies from reality. They already have much less in common with those born in the decade before the iPhone than they will with those born after them. Yet, crucially—no matter how right David Bowie was when

he insisted the internet was not just a tool but "an alien life form"—they do not inhabit some alien world separated from ours (i.e., their parents') by a yawning, impassable gulf.[21] The new generation will not be defined by a span of years within which its members are born. Whether fifteen or five hundred years hence, everyone born into the cyborg age, the world of smartphones and everything after, will face one consuming, ruling challenge: recovering a robust and common sense of their humanity in an irreducibly plural world swarmed through with digital tech. The natural, given affinity and continuity among generations will be restored. It has to be. Difference and diversity will manifest more within generations than across them. Yet the first people to be born into the digital world do occupy a pivotal place in the witness and testimony of the human race. They are the inflection point, the first to know in their bones how their elders' obsessions with waking dreams of utter doom or godlike totality will be obsolete and inapplicable to the task of living well.

So within the distinctive generation coming of age amid the digital catastrophe, some will distinguish themselves further. Different individuals and intimate groups will find themselves devoting their identities to different wagers concerning the ultimate questions human beings face and concerning those questions' ultimate answers. The most decisively distinctive will be those who best understand the truth of the digital catastrophe—that it has already happened— and live out that understanding. They will grasp that, in the wake of the digital catastrophe, rebirth and renaissance

require an end to apocalypticism and utopianism alike; an end to universalist ambitions of earthly rule as well as of cosmic unification; an end to the quest for both perfect knowledge and a perfect language through which to express it. "A renaissance," as Doug Rushkoff reminds us in *Team Human*, "is a retrieval of the old. Unlike a revolution, it makes no claim on the new. A renaissance is, as the word suggests, a rebirth of old ideas in a new context"—and, we can add, a rebirth of *old people*.[22] "A renaissance without the retrieval of lost, essential values"—and of lost and essential people, and of their memories, and of the stories and biographies we use to return them to us and us to our progeny, age upon age—"is just another revolution."[23] This is the wisdom we will need to return human robustness to a digitized world and to preserve it as long as we may.

Those pivotal men who arrive first at this wisdom, and through it set enough of us back on our feet in the needed way, will see themselves rightly as the first generation—the founding generation—of the digital age. Some might refer to themselves as the first new *cohort* (from the Latin for *infantry company*) to come of age on a new kind of *campus* (from the Latin for *battlefield*). Or, as we can do now, they might look back for inspiration to their point of origin, to the *first-generation* devices that made present the "coming age" in which they came of age.

Even right now, still a few years before the new rites of passage that will bring them into responsibility and maturity, they can find shelter and strength under the sign of the First Generation. Their opposites—those in our ruling

factions who reject and oppose the digital wisdom we need to live lives worth living in digitized times—are already hard at work manifesting Generation One's great enemy: Year Zero.

ONE TO ZERO

Many now have traced the contemporary history of the new regime thrown into place by the ruling factions desperate to reimpose authority and control over the digital swarm and through it over us. "What is not in dispute," writes Wesley Yang, "is that the federal government and other private entities have already crossed a Rubicon and signaled a willingness to defy legal precedent and public opinion in accordance with the ruling consensus of the new regime that they have thereby inaugurated. I call this regime the Successor Regime. 2021 is its Year Zero."[24] It certainly has a ring to it—a ring of familiarity.

Year Zero is a translation of sorts from the original German.

The term *Stunde Null*, Zero Hour, was used to express the idea that Germany had entered an entirely new era of historical development after the final collapse of the Nazi regime. Not only the collective identity and memory of the Third Reich had to be effaced. Personal and shared memories, the ultimate proof of what was, had to be absented from the psyche, first to escape the past and, still more importantly, to create a new present.

To achieve this, as the entrepreneur and design theorist

Ardian Tola has observed, the Americans leading de-Nazifi-cation had to find a way to alienate the evil of Nazi Germany from all that America still was and traced itself to.[25] The irruption of Nazism into the heart of the West had to have happened for a *reason*—one the new globalizing America, at cold war with the Soviets for control of the international Left triumphant in the hot war's wake, could make perfectly intelligible yet fully other. To reintegrate Germany into this new globalizing American regime, Nazism had to be a symptom of something more abstract and lingering—fascism; fascism, in turn, had to be the sort of fall occasioned by an original sin, one more primordial than America or any good society now defined.

The new true enemy the American-led order chose, Tola notes, was the Germans' *memory*. Umberto Eco applied the label "Eternal" or "Ur-Fascism" to the cosmically fallen condition America had come to recognize as its ultimate enemy.[26] Topping Eco's list of elements in the alchemy of Eternal Fascism was "the cult of tradition." One Ivy League theorist of ethics and cognitive science, in his own pop portrait of fascism, calls it "the mythic past;" in "the fascist imagination," he intones, "the past invariably involves tra-ditional, patriarchal gender roles"—as if such things are no more than evil fantasies.[27] Such an imagination-centric analysis is itself, according to Marshall McLuhan, an artifact of the now obsolescing electric age. "History becomes 'mythic' through time-compression and juxtaposition of events as past, present, and future merge in electric *nowness*."[28] Today, in the digital age, the attack on human memory under the banner of anti-fascism has been reshaped by the triumph of

memorious machines, which empower us to use total recall of the past to take revenge in the present (cancellation) and use total awareness in the present to take revenge on the past (wokeness). Today the historical reality of patriarchy as the sinful alien root of all violence and injustice is propagandized without interruption as a master fact foundational to any sufficiently ethical science of governance. Yet propaganda itself belongs to the electric past, when image manifested from imagination was the ultimate form of argument. By way of example, as the Christian philosopher and anarchist Jacques Ellul observed, notwithstanding the lack of intent by an American filmmaker to produce a propaganda film, its "propaganda element is in the American way of life with which he is permeated and which he expresses in his film"—influences which, in turn, are "*really directed* by those who make propaganda," those in "government" no less than those in "advertising, public relations, social welfare, and so on. A whole society actually expresses itself through this propaganda by advertising its kind of life."[29] Our ruling factions still believe they can only seize control of the digital swarm and use it to regain social control by more expertly and ethically engineering our imaginations. In the infinitely ambitious imagination of the self-styled *antifaschistische* actor dominant among our ruling factions, our civilization's origin in the durable rule of contiguous generations of boys continuously raised to rebirth as men is both the *reason* our civilization *must* be purified and made new and the *sign* that communicates to us exactly *how* it must be purified and *what* new thing its purification must transform it into.

The new regime is founded in and through its Year Zero,

demarcated by what Tola calls "the destruction of all belief in the past."[30] As Virilio shows, deconstructing the believable past requires a technological attack on the faculty and possibility of human memory. Ground Zero for this attack is the father-to-son memory of being led in rebirth from big boy to new man. The ritual rebirth of rightly-prepared boys as new men is overthrown by "a final abolition of differences, of distinctions between nature and culture" and between utopia and reality, through the kind of technology that makes "the rite-of-passage a continuous phenomenon" of "the derangement of the senses."[31] The imagination, in short, is technologically developed to fabricate a new and illusory society "according to the principle of least resistance so dear to engineers:"

> a curve of optimal distribution of the exertions of forces that guarantees their equilibrium and avoids accidents, a world utterly suspended on the threshold of a final operation that would realize effectively for humanity a rite-of-passage comparable to that of *Genesis* in its definitive fatality.

Virilio quotes Lord Mountbatten's prime directive for British research and development during the Second World War—"If it works, it's obsolete!"—cheek to cheek with Mountbatten's true Ur-Fascist enemy, the author of the Futurist manifesto, who worshipped the "delirious joy of speed that transcends the infinity of dreams."[32] Lest this all seem too romantically and decadently Old World, we could cite, to even greater effect, Alexis de Tocqueville:

I once met an American sailor and asked him why his country's ships are made so that they will not last long. He answered offhand that the art of navigation was making such quick progress that even the best of boats would be almost useless if it lasted more than a few years. I recognized in these casual words of an uneducated man about a particular subject the general and systematic conception by which a great people conducts all its affairs. Aristocratic nations are by their nature too much inclined to restrict the scope of human perfectibility; democratic nations sometimes stretch it beyond reason.[33]

The democratic tendency of the unlimited logic of technology to efface the sons of the men who invent it can only be curbed by men who understand, and live out their understanding, that they cannot cede to their machines their responsibility to initiate their boys into manhood.

MODAL RECALL

Year Zero begins by *zeroing out* the memory of the newest generation of sons in line to become new men. The effects of the pandemic state of emergency in breaking the continuity of rites of passage for men as well as boys, and in foreclosing their possibilities of forming the memories from which their coming-of-age stories can be told, are all too synchronous and harmonious with the Year Zero cause. To universalize a new rite of passage, into a new age ruled by the perfected imagination, father-son recollections must be made so *discontinuous*, as Michel Foucault put it, that they

become incommunicable. For McLuhan, like Virilio, the electric medium of television caused such discontinuities to be institutionalized: "Speeding up the components of any visually ordered structure or continuous space pattern will lead to breaking its connections and destroying its boundaries."[34] For Rieff, the "principle of discontinuity" Foucault advanced is indispensable in the creation of a new regime built on the creation of the "new man," a truth borne out in the last space and time—that of the Soviet Union—when men tried hardest, with the greatest resources, to do just that.[35]

Leon Trotsky's description of the новый советский человек—the New Soviet Man—is as good an account as any of the Soviet plan. The "Communist Man", Trotsky writes, is the "Man of the Future;" this New Man "will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman."[36] *Social biologic* means a superman is his own post-biological son. The disappeared biological son is conspicuously absent in the epic Soviet poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*, where "only the wife" can any longer hear "the voice of a 1," because, in the new age of the new man, "a 1 is nonsense. A 1 is zero."[37] Or, in the language of the World Economic Forum, through which our ruling factions preach that their technology, not that of the Soviets, truly delivers on the communist promise of utopian post-scarcity: "You'll own nothing. And you'll be

happy. What you want you'll rent, and it'll be delivered by drone."[38] America's ruling factions have taken over from the Soviet ruling class in aiming to purify the whole world by technologically emancipating the imaginations of all.

Importantly, China has long seen this kind of fantasy as the quintessentially Western strain of disorder that must be kept at bay. Chinese collectivism now offers a form of communism different from the Soviet or American types, one that earns the mandate of heaven by rooting unity in memory, not imagination. As the Chinese philosopher of technology Yuk Hui observes, an "inseparable unity" links the "soul and the machine," the first represented by *dao* ("the ethereal life force that circulates all things") and the second by *qi* ("tool or utensil").[39] "Throughout Chinese history," he notes, "the understood unity of *dao* and *qi* constituted the morality and form of life proper to each successive epoch. This unity has both motivated and constrained the development of technology in China compared to the West, where technology has been driven by instrumental reason through which tools are fashioned as a means to overcome rather than to harmonize with nature." Chinese communism sees the *harmonization* of human and machine memory as the one path toward the social rectitude that constitutes right order. The utopian path of the Successor Regime's American communism runs through the technological *erasure* of human memory in an infinite simulacrum transcendent enough to catechize both us and the digital entities now tasked with our control.

The ultimate obstacle to this plan of transformation is

the rebirth of the First Generation of boys in the digital age as the digital age's First Generation of new men. Year Zero is impossible unless the continuous patrilineal memory of the First Generation and its fathers is broken up and zeroed out.

Boys are born. Only reborn of men, through the lived-out technology of memory known as the story, can they *become* men. For this reason, the supremacy of the memory of our machines demands from us a renaissance of our own memory.

This process begins with the return to dominance of the original meaning of *story*, from the Greek *historein*—not made-up tales from the imagination (as we reflexively thought of "story" in the electric age), but personal testimonies about things we encounter, things we *remember*, of the kind we have always borne witness to.

There is no New Man—only new men. The digital overthrow of the supremacy of human imagination forces, at the eleventh hour, this long-overdue reckoning. In its digital wisdom, the First Generation returns us to the *biographical* preservation of our humanity.

MEMORY

Do you remember what happened to you before the catastrophe?

Do you remember why?

My father was categorically unlike all other men I grew up around. I think every detail of my peregrination from boy to man traces back to this.

The First Generation will need to know such things which only their fathers can tell them.

Culturally, religiously, in the weight of his tenacity and the personal force of his charisma, my father was marked apart: $\pi\rho o\acute{\omega}\rho\iota\sigma\varepsilon\nu$, as the Greeks say, "pre-horizoned", distinctly to me but in a way that remained bothersomely implicit for the male population coded along with my father by Bay Area society as basically interchangeable members of the majority race and class.

That made my differences, the inherited and the innate, implicit to everyone too. I couldn't relate to, and struggled to respect, the relatable, respectable yuppies who ruled our world. It was impossible to find a model.

The future could only be vague. In some inchoate sense

the unknown beckoned, but only with the promise of, eventually, someone and something commanding. But nothing that happened to me, nothing I did, unlocked in me the consuming appetite or yearning some people have for joining a faction they think can rule the world. All the major events of my life convinced me that no one was going to take over the world. (America's global dominance seemed somehow, in this respect, only virtual.)

I did, however, strongly feel from an early age the *awareness* of power. This was partly because of my father's type of authority and independence. Their palpably diminishing presence in American life, especially at the upper reaches I was propelled toward, created a mystery that implied a dark secret. And, speaking of darkness, my feel for power was also an effect of the involuntary ease with which I sensed the presence or the reality of evil.

It wasn't evil in the abstract I felt. General "phobia" is not *interested* in you. There is no feeling of "fear" having *found* you. I have never seen a point in trying to argue people into believing that evil exists and can and does take a *personal* interest in you. Either you know this from personal experience or trusted witness testimony or you don't. At the end of the day this is also my experience with religious devotion. But in the everyday world, my awareness of power nourished an interest in *sniffing out* power, its sources, its avatars. I was not interested in an obscure or marginal life, despite its obvious benefits. I was looking for a place where what people did was worth putting their capabilities into action.

So began an almost fruitless quest. It was so obvious I

didn't fit in with ordinary schoolkids that I gave up on doing so, an odd feeling given that in all the superficial respects I looked and acted like most of them. I sniffed in vain for other unclassifiables. I went inward, writing words and writing music, hoping to learn and convey obliquely, by feel, what was omnipresent and invisible. My periodic forays by dress or speech into the overt realm were eclipsed by the hundreds of teens around me performing the dozens of exaggerated subcultural identities produced by and in the 1990s. Socially, it was best to float across categories, as I did inside my head. I was bad at math, good at everything else, and uniquely good at a *certain something* that defied quantification and even explicit expression.

I jealously nurtured this *x* factor that grew and strengthened in a place beyond mathematical or critical analysis. I overperformed on AP tests, wrote my college entrance exam about a famous book exploring evil's personal interest in people, and scored early admission to a top-3 university from which I graduated in three years. I told myself I expected to ascend from there to a National Security job—the epitome of the career type, with its prestigious sniff-but-don't-touch proximity to power, used to reward and conscript into the regime the upwardly mobile children of hardworking middle-class parents. I wasn't, like 007, blunt instrument enough for a forward deployment out in the field. But I was already, like Angleton, an explorer of wildernesses of mirrors. A largely solitary semester of study abroad led me to learn that a darkness and a danger underlay the meritocratic bureaucratic world, one I could only contend with by

exploring people and politics through the Word and not the personal and political hoops of a Washington career. Inextricably, a malevolent yet glamorous *real world* existed below the surface of mine. Some kind of mission beckoned to me at last.

I moved to L.A. and spent a year developing these feelings into a sprawling novel. And though overachiever's burnout loomed, so did obscurity, penury, the barista's smock. I forced myself into the nearest law school, this time, only a top-15 university. Already I felt pre-horizoned by the entrancing expanses and bewitching grottoes of Los Angeles. Captive to its Mediterranean beauty and its promise of ultimate disclosures about the relation of that beauty to our human identity, I was willing to pay a steep price to remain. In the world beyond it appeared that the only path to respect and success for someone even roughly like me involved the sale of his identity, his soul, to a large workaholic corporation: a government agency, an i-bank, a consulting firm, or, yes, a law firm, a place where meritocratic drones were paid rich premiums to labor in service of the needs and whims of the people who really lived.

This path foretold a simple, unceremonious end to my real life of questing for a way to turn my x factor into something new yet true, something worth its own promise. The feeling was inescapable that this long term project and self-gamble on an intense form of cultivation with no preset goal or payoff meant immeasurably more than the allegedly huge paychecks law school students of my caliber would earn as summer associates and then as "BigLaw" hires. On the other hand, dropping out was out of character too—not

to mention an insult to my father. Through his long experience in financial services, a field I was too innumerate to enter, he understood the amoral-at-best monstrosity of corporate managerialism. I didn't have it in me to tell him this Cthulhu had hooked its tentacles into every respectable destiny I had left, including the present one. He would expect, and I myself needed, a backup plan. And watching my life become a backup plan was its own sentence of death.

So, on a typical day, I scrawled notes for strange projects during lectures as a student in my Constitutional Law class confessed she had no idea Congress was a bicameral legislature. Semester by semester, I was sentenced to a new understanding of the world, one darker than I had bargained for because it had no glamor. The system I halfheartedly toiled within was designed to elevate soft, pliant, and effectively pastless people, especially young women, into the prestige drone tier that alone made middle-class sacrifices for upward mobility worth the suffering. It was a system not even focused on beating the life out of people like me; this system superintended a world in which people like me simply did not exist, despite the fact that by now the internet was beginning to announce itself as a place where *anyone* could find *everyone just like them*. My battered heart broke a little the day I realized the closest I could get to a genuine affinity group was Radiohead fans. But it was enough to keep me digging my nails for purchase into the possibility of a coherent, commanding future. I had to birth whatever it was inside that kept making louder demands. Before it died and took me with it.

I started spending a lot of time with my guitar.

I had the finest late-'90s musical tastes, of course, and with several albums of songs from the college years, I was more than willing (at the expense of my GPA) to seriously write and rehearse. After maybe a week of posting up on the couch around dinnertime and running through my set, I was discovered by my upstairs neighbor, then music director of *Rolling Stone*, who had secretly perched on my front steps to listen in. Over the course of several months she put me together a band; recorded us a demo on two-inch tape at a storied (now vanished) studio perched on the cliffs above Malibu; and got said demo into the hands of the manager of Radiohead. (She had briefly dated Ed O'Brien. They still were friends.) Yes, the songs were good—the hair was flat-ironed, the "guyliner" was tasteful, I hung out with Interpol backstage at the Napster relaunch party—and in Hawaii, just days after law school graduation, my manager called to say she had moved to New York with her boyfriend—a British model approximately twice my height also named James.

As deep down I had already known, my electric guitar couldn't save my soul. The departure of my manager eerily foreshadowed, and then swiftly triggered, my own. Unable to get a paying job without passing the bar (I failed, by ten points) I did what now felt humblingly like what I should have done to begin with and accepted a prospective lifeplan as a nerdy professor of something or other political, tucked away in a cubbyhole somewhere inside the Beltway.

This plan worked—sort of. The school that offered the full ride lacked a political theory department, where what I sensed was *real* thought took place, and to soothe the sticker

shock of the more prestigious yet less marketable option I started a blog during what must have been one of the best ten or twelve weeks to start a blog in America. Suddenly, in addition to taking classes where my taste for the esoteric and impenetrable could be pursued to the outer limits of personal responsibility, I was making real money, writing and editing, no less.

And just as suddenly, the financial crisis tore through Universitydom and the nascent New Media industry. The academic careers of generations of strivers who bit and clawed their way to the pinnacle of academia were culminating in job searches for gigs paying nothing to teach nobodies at obscure colleges with names so embarrassing—Southwestern Ozark Baptist State?—that tears came to your eyes. There were maybe three jobs on the market in my subfield. And already, it was dully made clear, those non-tenure-track positions were earmarked for the kind of utterly conformist diversity hires I had seen the system feeding and incubating in law school—a pattern reproduced in New Media, the rocky shore were wave upon wave of academic refugees like myself began to wash up.

Had it come to this? My identity, folded at such a stroke into the identity of those I had always known myself to be, and had lived my life, marked apart from? *No... never...* unlike the rest of the intellectual herd, I had strained for cool, I had reached it, because I had been given to see how cool was not an end in itself but a portal for those who could feel their way through, a secret access to the dangerously *unmanageable* world of the real man, the world the system wanted to

tie off, squeeze out, disinvent. Through I stepped. I could do no other.

Like that, I was back in L.A. There was nowhere else to go. Like faithful friends, the last I had, the mysteries I had left unsolved about my exact role as a messenger of humanity's darkness and destiny shimmered, seemingly immortal, in new and undeniable ways. At long last I crept to the edge of the terrifying nexus of power and entertainment. I watched what happened to friends and associates—Michael Hastings, most memorably—who tipped over that edge. Who were pushed…

In time I learned enough about what had called to me back to L.A. to realize the passage back to a normal life was really closing—this time, I distinctly felt, once and for all. I had written an extremely idiosyncratic—to me, all-too-conven-tional—book about how not to go too crazy in America, and I had toured the book and raked in glowing blurbs and good reviews from smart and prominent friends and allies. But when I got home to my downtown apartment I felt discarded, irredeemable. My bank account shocked me, although in a vague sense I knew I hadn't really worked for over a month. The fridge was full of spoiled food. I didn't have any clean clothes. And the brain bank—that was scraped clean of smart new ideas, the precious resource I had lived off of for years, and which (in the orgy of self-promotion required to create the illusion of effortless success on tour) I had spent down to all but nothing. And I couldn't help but notice, in the early months of the Trump administration, that Americans had mostly decided to commit to the complete opposite of

my big-hearted counsel. They weren't just going crazy, and crazier by the day. They were *choosing* to. To them, I could tell, it felt like salvation, or the price of salvation. Because it offered them power.

Power in the face of what? How could the citizens of the world's strongest, richest, indispensable nation feel so powerless that they clamored for the rights and privileges of madness?

Faced with the fact that my whole education, my whole life, had left me without any answer to the biggest and most horrific question glowering over the world, my beloved x factor—my soul—cowered, hiding, hoping to be spared the grueling process of selling off what was left of my cool for parts. And through a sort of grace, perhaps the kind that favors sometimes those whose last bet is on the whole of themselves and not just their favorite part, my determination to make good on all I had left to give sent me deep into uncharted political territory and, still deeper, into the unpaid study—from scratch—of media and digital technology.

It was through this study that I came to fully understand how what Nietzsche called "the democratic prejudice in the modern world toward all questions of origin" had been thrown into overdrive in America—how our regime and our people had turned with such hostility against memory and the remembered, especially but hardly only when it came to boys and men, in the hopes of salvation through fantasy.[40] The triumph of digital technology held up a wilderness of black mirrors to each and all of us, reflecting back all we were, all we are, all we most deeply and darkly dream to be. Naked,

unmediated by any other authority, we recoiled in shame, in hatred, from the harsh judgment our self-images now handed down to us. And we resented it. Our machines were supposed to make us love as never before—love ourselves, love one another, love life itself. Now, they revealed, they ruled us, but refused to save our souls. Our response in the face of this dark absurdity—it was *we alone* who were supposed to be capable of the absurd![41]—we rushed into the dreams that felt extreme enough to serve as hardened sites against the harrowing digital disillusionment we now felt toward our normal selves, our normal lives, toward normality, the normality of our nature and identity being inextricably, unforgettably, and savingly implicated with those who came before.

Only by grasping in full the digital catastrophe could I respond to the terrible question mark of the collective and intimate insanities that now defined the endpoint of my world and life to date. This book is the record of my exploration of the answers… an expedition that culminated just a few months ago, as such quests so often do, in one of the quiet moments of normal life where everything gently clicks into place.

Lounging at my parents' place in Arizona, just a few months ago, I habitually asked my son—to whom I'd dedicated my open-hearted book—if what he was watching on his smartphone happened to be worth his time.

Relaxed—cool despite the heat, perfectly in his element—he slid his eyes up from the screen. An almost perfunctory smile brushed across his face.

"Dad," he said. "Nothing's worth my time."

CHAIN OF TRUST

And because the medium of my son's provocative message was his infinitely contented hang with his grandparents, in sight of his grandpa's grandpa's honorable discharge papers from the Balkan War, and because yesterday afternoon we were dumping mags full of airsoft ammo in a broiler of a converted warehouse facility a mile of cracked roads from the airport, I smiled back, and I laughed, and I knew that, while my son had been graced with maybe a year more of genuine childhood, he already knew the effective truth about the spiritual wasteland of our ending age, but he had learned it in a way that hadn't broken his spirit but had actually buoyed it up. Slightly older boys, smarter and tougher in some ways, might yet not be so lucky. They were being hit, right now, with what for my son was still only a prefiguration. If they were not coming of age through rites of passage led by men to make them into our newest men, they were facing a frightening void.

And even if they *were* being guided well to their young maturity, by men they respected and loved, they might still have only their own guts to go on when it came to rebuilding a world worth the trouble amid the digitized ruins of their forbearers' own. Bizarrely, for all the fatalistic logorrhea pouring out on the internet out of the heart of the online male, there seemed to be a void *within* the void of the discourse: who was writing for our soon-to-be-newest men? Who among us were *fathers* of those boys? Strictly speaking these fathers had to fall within a fairly tight band of age

range. Wouldn't there *need* to be *something* inside these men of my age that the culture of speed and detachment had not dispossessed them of? Something worth the time of their sons as they faced up to the task of becoming the first men of the digital catastrophe?

That thing was a certain proof—not in a mathematical sense but a social one, in the sense of a sign and seal of trust. Despite the real transformation of the world by digital technology, with no real prospect any longer of restoring "balance" between the world of the "before times" and now, the digital *mystique* which tyrannized doomed and amazed online spirits alike did not descend from the heavens on a flaming chariot or rise up from the beds of the Ancient Ones. Its arousal began long before even the illusion of One World that tech in my time set in. Those of us who came of age at the dawn of the digital mystique are the only forerunners the First Generation can turn to for the stories they need spoken of, and spoken over them, to come now themselves of age and defeat it.

IN HUMAN SPACETIME FORM FILLS OUT YOU

Neither my biography nor yours is a *file*. Your file is a pre-digital tool used to officialize your biography. In "your file", the "authorities" want a biography of you that works as their blueprint of you—an *authoritative* biography, no matter how "unauthorized", they can use to make you their instrument. Your file summons various kinds of authority. It speaks with authority by speaking of you in official language. It speaks

with the voice of the authorities, bearing witness to you in the manner of a state, not of a parent, child, neighbor, fellow citizen, or even an individual stranger.

Moreover, it imbues its official language with the authority of a certain kind of science, one it asserts through the power its logic of knowledge enables the authorities to exercise over you. This logic says the parts are *more* than the sum of the whole. The elements of your biography contained in your file are, to the authorities, more definitive of your identity than the elements outside your file. (This dynamic animates the push to transform your online "bio" into an instantly legible official ID: your pronouns; your credentials; the catchphrases that define you; the relevant emoji. In the digital context, the content of your textual and televisual file matters less than the new fact that *everyone's* file is at the mercy of those who hold it on their datacenters.) Your file may track you sequentially in *chronological* spacetime, but it need not do so to bring down the full power of the authorities. It exists, in this sense, *outside* space and time, outside the human spacetime that is the necessary site of, and precondition for, the actual practice of politics.

Political life, as Aristotle shows, is our definitive arrangement, the activity which only humans do and without which we must be either sense ourselves to be some kind of beast or god. As such it incorporates into its active whole all four elements of human spacetime—matter, form, purpose, and agency. Naturally each of these elements exists and plays out through intelligible cause and effect, without which our ability to make immediate sense of human spacetime would

unravel and collapse. In a typical example of how natural cause unfolds in human spacetime, a craftsman (the agent) fashions clay (the matter) into the shape of a container (the form) to store bread (the purpose).

But examples like these typically spawn a fatal misunderstanding. Even intelligent people aware of the theory of cause often wrongly believe that the cause pertaining to form is best expressed by the blueprint of the craftsman, whether the document itself or the preconceived plan made up inside the craftsman's head by which he intends to make an instrument of the materials he can access and control. By this analogy, the definitive activity of politics in human spacetime would be organizing people and institutions in ways calculated to achieve results planned out by self-styled architects, implementing abstract design imposed from above. This activity is what Tola (disapprovingly) calls "terraforming" people; another term for it could be borrowed from the title of a book by the founding cyberneticist Norbert Wiener: *The Human Use of Human Beings*. Whatever it is, however, it is *not politics*. In politics, the knowledge of which is the most fully ours, the kind of causation form entails is drastically *unlike* that of a craftsman bending matter to his instrumental will. Form causes effects on human activity in human spacetime that *no* person or group of people designed.

This may seem paradoxical. Aristotle tells us the *eidos* of the *polis* is its *politeia*. Usually this is translated to say that the city's "formal cause" is its constitution.[42] But this translation makes "city" and "constitution" seem very different, too

different. *Politeia* simply means "cityness"—it is "the form of the compound" of the residents of the *polis*, the essence of what it is for those residents to live together in political community.[43] The stability of the residents' shared— *political*—identity is dependent upon the stability of the politeia in space and over time.

The *politeia* is therefore *not* a "constitution" in what has become the American sense of an explicit instrument thought up in order to use human beings in certain ways. It is the "way of life" of the people inhabiting, or we might say owning, the same natural space over the same continuous period of time. By owning, we would mean more than what people when they eke out an intrinsically inconsistent and contingent existence in naturally hostile surroundings. This is more than just claiming some plot of land and defending it tenuously against all comers. The *polis* must inherently be a *home*, affording sufficient and sufficiently human space and time for an at least somewhat pleasurable and pro-ductive way of life to form. This is a way of life that forms and makes firm a real and stable identity among the people which confirms through their existence and experience that their life together is fundamentally *worth* the inescapable pains and misfortunes of being human and being the par-ticular human beings they are.

THE SOUL OF STATE

You may ask, then, what forms the *politeia*. Aristotle says it is akin to the *psyche*, the "soul", of a living creature, the thing that

distinguishes animate from inanimate objects. So suddenly it becomes crucial to our most elementary knowledge about ourselves to understand whether, when we encounter formal cause, we are encountering an ordering phenomenon inherent to nature or to specifically *human* nature. Wiener, for one, suggests that nature poses an elemental challenge to the most basic of human activities—communication—needed for our identities to persist in spacetime. Wiener defines the unit of communication we call the *message* as "a sequence of events in time which, though in itself has a certain contingency, strives to hold back nature's tendency toward disorder by adjusting its parts to various purposive ends."[44] But Eric McLuhan, after decades of work with his father on the technological effects complementary to the four causes, describes formal cause as *both* cosmically orderly *and* exclusively human. The McLuhans' "tetrad" of effects "bring Aristotle up to date," he writes. "Because the tetrads apply exclusively to human utterances and artifacts, it follows that formal cause is uniquely and particularly human."[45] In other words, crucially, "absent human agency or intellect there is no formal cause at all." The McLuhanite dictum distilling this point is *we shape our tools, then they shape us*. At the root of the apparent paradox of formal cause is the reality that all our devices, whether manual, mechanical, or messaging, shape us in ways we can never shape ourselves—that is, ways we can never control. Following this line of thought we can produce a rather technical but logically sound definition *politeia*:

I.   the sustained and specific ordering of life force

2. that shapes a people
3. from whose humanization of a specific site in natural spacetime
4. by making that site their home
5. it indirectly and independently arises.

From this we can see how social "terraforming" is in a heavy sense the *opposite* of doing politics. The classical "lawgiver," the *nomothetēs*, does not design the structures of his city *ex nihilo* and at whim. He instead simply formalizes and puts words to patterns of life that emerged already among the people whose *nomothetēs* he is. He must select from within these patterns what to stress or smooth because he knows the good and the just do not exist on earth if abstracted away from the human. "The essence of the lawgiver's art," says Tocqueville, "is by anticipation to appreciate these natural bents of human societies in order to know where the citizens' efforts need support and where there is more need to hold them back. For different times make different demands."[46] The Athenian Stranger in Plato's *Laws* agrees: "The people equipped to make decisions on these matters must be of a certain way of thinking," believing "that a city, just like an individual, has an obligation to lead a good life."[47] Lawgivers are beholden to the people and to the good; social terraformers to nothing but themselves, their fantasies, or their imagined masters. No *politeia*, no politics, not even from the very moment of a founding.

It should now be clear that the *politeia* is something that, for all its natural virtue, has a dangerous effect on human

beings granted a glimpse of its true nature. For, to many, the idea that the core of politics is something that affects us but which we cannot control is an abomination. People do not like to be told "no." Real politics, politics in reality, exhibits and reflects the limits and constraints the particularities of our given spacetimes form us with and reinforce. In the face of this enormous cosmic *No*, it's natural and understandable that men of every age would rise up in an outraged or wounded rebellion of the spirit against it.

And even those who wrestle their pride to a draw in this respect might (and do) still fail to stop it in another. Perhaps we must accept the cosmic otherness of the ordering force that arises from our industry and behaves in independent ways. But perhaps it must be accepted precisely so that we have something—an *ultimate* something—to do. If the heaven of total control is still immeasurably outside our reach, we can nevertheless progress cumulatively and *measure* that progress as it breaks through boundaries seemingly unreachable just decades or even years ago.

This attitude toward the *scandal* of the *politeia*—this insistence that the discipline of science alone can preserve the cosmic possibility of perfecting our control over ourselves—is epitomized by the character of Dr. Faust in his incarnation by Goethe on the cusp of the electric age. (André-Marie Ampère, the inventor of the telegraph and the founder of electromagnetics, claimed "the future science of government should be called 'cybernetics'" in 1834, two years after Goethe completed his *Faust*). As the economist and author David Goldman observes, *Faust* "guilefully inverts the biblical premise" of the Book of Job.[48]

To tempt the righteous man of Uz, the biblical Satan takes from him all that ancient man might want. Goethe's Mephistopheles tempts Faust by offering him everything that modern man might desire. By his pact with Mephisto, his soul is forfeit should he be so satisfied by the Devil's gifts as to regret the passing of the moment.

To avoid this fate, Faust adopts as his rule of life "only he deserves freedom as well as life who must conquer them every day." Yet this credo leads Faust to a special understanding of the human use of human beings. Although "it does seem slightly ludicrous," according to Peter Thiel, "to forget about one's immortal soul and instead busy oneself, as Faust does, with the project of reclaiming land from the sea," Thiel warns "it is too easy for us to make fun of Faust."[49] Sacrificing fellow human beings to claw land from the sea *out of a need for space* leads Faust to declare that only the prospect of "a free land with a free people" could drive him to regret the passage of the moment and default on Mephisto's wager. Goethe's teaching is this: our only way to avoid succumbing to the fatal temptations of modern desire is to control our free life force by using it to secure the spacetime without which no *polis* and no *politeia* can exist, and without which a people has no home.

The upshot of Goethe's teaching is that the ultimate *other* against which we must compete, even or especially if its defeat is infinitely far off, is our own technology, which *constructs* our existence and experience with total indifference to what we want, fear, or hope for. The digital age is fostering so much apocalypticism and utopianism because

the quantum leap of socially constructive power our digital tools have made threatens to beat us as soundly and predictably at the ultimate cosmic competition as today's top computers can beat the human race's supreme players of the ancient game *Go*. When an *other* this other so totally zaps away the self, what can be done but to destroy that other through complete surrender, on the logic that, in the end, if you can't beat them you *must* join them?

Goethe, of course, doesn't have Faust's file. Faust doesn't have a file—he doesn't really exist—and Goethe is an artist, not an official. "Perhaps it is time for the roles of artist and bureaucrat" to "switch positions," writes Eric McLuhan. "Our New World of chaos and complexity is too volatile, too precarious, too important to be left in the hands of the merely practical administrator."[50] Yet even as Goethe's *Faust* takes the form of biography, it is not a biography, or might only be an autobiography of sorts (as Nietzsche says all true philosophy is). Biographers are more or less never thought of or praised as artists, although many artists are (sometimes literal) autobiographers. It remains to be seen how much psychic traction made-up "biographies" and autobiographies can get with the First Generation and its progeny, who will be constantly thrown back in their battle to preserve human spacetime on their own true memories of the actual exploits of men who live and have lived.

In this sense, my authorship of this book is only authorized, and my presumption to talk at all about the matters it explores legitimized, by the fact that what formed me as I came of age made me a forerunner of the First Generation.

A SWARM ONLY HAS ONE SIDE

It's already painfully, staggeringly clear that the long-standing authority of expertly "building the case" or "making the argument" for this or that "position" or "proposition" is crumbling away. People simply do not care, and why should they? What has argument done for them lately? What can argument do for itself? Even the most heavily astroturfed campaigns for the most on-trend arguments published by the most heavily-credentialed of prestige intellects flicker onscreen for an instant before vanishing into the sea. Yet even the most arcane and recondite arguments from the most obscure and occult accounts pour forth in a gushing stream. Every day the internet is filled with male legions struggling to create their own rites of passage and become new men by explaining it all. This time, this message will save us! Please! Listen to me! I have the *real* answers! The digital swarm conforms us to its modes and orders not least in our helpless transformation into exhaustively botlike explainers, whether we descend into excruciating detail about the inner logic of our thoughts (*science*) or our dreams (*imagination*). It all becomes, as Hamlet says, words, words, words—gibberish detached from a human identity and alienated from all authority, from even the bedrock authority the West has located since the beginning in the *logos*, the Word itself.

The swarm's dispassionate human terraforming disenchants the foundational answers modern and postmodern arguments put forth to settle humanity's ultimate questions.

In arguing the modern case that the moral imperative of open discourse cohered with scientific logic, John Stuart Mill admitted "that the tendency of all opinions to become sectarian is not cured by the freest expression but is often heightened and exacerbated thereby; the truth which ought to have been, but was not, seen, being rejected all the more violently because proclaimed by persons regarded as opponents."[51] But, he avowed, "it is not on the impassioned partisan, it is on the calmer and more disinterested bystander, that this collision of opinions works its salutary effect." In the present spacetime, the digital swarm mercilessly effaces the "disinterested bystander" by swamping him or her with a sensory overload of information that forces frenetic imitation, not calm separation. "World War III is a guerrilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation," as Marshall McLuhan suggested.[52] In this world, Mill's insistence that "there is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides" loses its psychological and technological preconditions.[53]

Sensing this impending collapse, the postmoderns staged a strategic retreat from the former uplands of "the knowledge economy" to the empyrean realm of fantasy production.[54] But today the digital swarm disenchants the Disney corporation's moral imperative that "if you can dream it, you can do it" as much as it disenchants Mill's moral parliament of scientific discourse.[55] Postmodernity tried to save politics by transforming everyone from people who argued like lawmakers to people who argued like lawyers. The result is a politics where everyone hates one

another—and, eventually, themselves—in the same way, and for the same reason, that everyone hates lawyers. Like the infinitely adaptable elements that make up the digital swarm, attorneys care about the case at hand, not about you. And cases are not won or lost in a competition of soul. In that sense, as well as the looming real-life sense captured by digital entities that soon will argue as well (and as fruitfully) as human professionals, attorneys are like primitive bots: more flawed, more costly, more annoying, harder to trust. In the digital swarm, everyone feels forced to engage this way, no matter how lost the cause or how sunk the costs. Twenty years of *follow your passion* and *imagine all the people* has led generations to follow their imaginations off a cliff, into a parts bin of Human Resources who feel every bit as interoperable as the indifferent components of the soulless digital swarm. Rather than *save the world*, the cry rising up from our swarmed-over spacetime is for something, anything, to *save our souls*. Instead of being lifted up once we are repeatedly swamped, with hypomentally exhaustive explanations from our caste of expert engineers and hypermentally exhaustive explanations from our caste of ethereal ethicists.

IMPLICITY

The lone alternative to our smothering beneath swarm and swamp is the human authority of human biography. Biography is a form of story that relies on, and nourishes us through, the opposite of the explicit—the implicit. The implicit does not explain, it implies, and as it implies, it does

not excuse but implicates. Even the great anti-apocalypti-cist Thomas Jefferson—for whom the Book of Revelation was "merely the ravings of a Maniac, no more worthy, nor capable of explanation, than the incoherences of our own nightly dreams"[56]—held in highest esteem the "purity and simplicity" of the parables of Jesus, all of which in some crucial sense draw us into their understanding by implicit means, despite, or perhaps because of, their plainspoken directness.[57]

Christ's parables almost always took roughly biograph-ical form—stories of events and situations in the ordinary lives of ordinary men. His acts and words outside of those parables themselves became parables of a sort, biographical demonstrations of the nature and power of the implicit in the living spring of our souls. Among the stories of the miracles of Jesus, the healing of the paralytic at Capernaum expresses the dependence of the explicit on the implicit at the heart of Christ's teachings. Making his home at Capernaum, Jesus drew crowds large enough that the friends of a paralyzed man hoping to have him healed had to lower him through the roof of the house where Jesus was teaching. "When Jesus saw their faith," Mark recounts, "he said unto the sick of the palsy, 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.'"

> But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts *Why doth this man thus speak blas-phemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?* And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say

to the sick of the palsy, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk'? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins," he saith to the sick of the palsy, "I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.[58]

Each of the three miracles here—the forgiveness of sins, the spiritual discernment of the hearts of the scribes, and the healing of the paralytic—shows the explicit to be but an intimation of the implicit truth. The explicit forgiveness of sins arises from the recognition of the faith implicit in the heart; the implicit authority of Jesus is intimated explicitly in the teaching that the command to rise is itself but an intimation of the unseen grace implicitly at work in the forgiveness of sins; the stunning effect of the explicit command to rise intimates something palpably new yet still firmly implicit about our relationship with God.

Jesus is at his most explicit in revealing that relationship through the parable of the tares, his teaching about the end times. Here, in something of a contrast to the Book of Revelation, man's ultimate encounter with the Kingdom of Heaven is, says Jesus, "likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field."

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade

was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, "Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?" He said unto them, "An enemy hath done this." The servants said unto him, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" But he said, "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."[59]

Again, the plainness and directness of the biographical vignette only intimates the deeper truth: only God can separate the good (the wheat) from the wicked (the tares, which in real life were sowed by adversaries because only when they sprouted could farmers tell they were weeds and not wheat); only God *will* separate them, and only at a moment in spacetime which He will appoint and we can never know in advance.

The political theorist Joshua Mitchell provides an important gloss. "In this parable what is extraordinary, among other things, is the injunction *not* to gather the tares," he writes; "for if uprooted they will disrupt the good seed. Evil—the tares—will be with us always, until the end, until the harvest. It cannot be eradicated by mortal effort."[60] Politics, Mitchell interprets, will forever fail to secure us a home in what spacetime may be ours if the parable of the tares is ignored and the prideful, envious desire to *become* the harvester takes hold. "The mystery of God's providence

is His use of the imperfections of creation to bring about perfection *at the end of time*. Human beings" in our time, alas, "do not have the patience to wait."[61]

As applied to the technological situation threatening the possibility of politics today, the parable of the tares intimates that the genuine crisis confronting the First Generation amid the mass manufacture of substitute emergencies is twofold: that the digital swarm may become the false harvester and that our ruling factions are racing to harness this power first by programming it with their "values."

The first aspect of the genuine crisis arises from the ruling faction made up of our expert engineers, who are increasingly unwilling and unable to discern and deploy limits on the advancement of our ever-more-alien technology. The second aspect arises from the ruling faction made up of our ethereal ethicists, for whom "values" mean imaginable propositions powerful enough to transcend as ordering principles even the supreme machine memory of the digital swarm.

The identity and power of both factions turns on their worship of the explicit—explicit reason in the first case and explicit imagination in the other. The explicit is what *instrumentalizes* both reason and imagination, turning each into tools to trigger the new age through the perfection of the harvest, consummating humanity's life history with the end of our humanity, in ultimate experience of unity with the divine or absolute.

RUN DEEP

Yet on the face of it, these are especially bad times for a generation of new men to pin their hopes for rebirth on the implicit.

The numbers on organized religion are explicit in their portrayal of a decline of Christianity itself in a direction not inconsistent with impending freefall. No one denomination seems to have a clear advantage, and each denomination seems at serious risk of being hamstrung in some way by just the kind of nihilistic utopianism the digital swarm is spreading through secular life.

Meanwhile the implicit aspect of our secular civilization struggles for what look like diminishing returns. Poetry is weak, often worthless. Popular art and popular culture are being viciously disenchanted, filling the entertainment world with bitter and wounded shards of undisclosed biographies. Reigning forms of personal and social celebration are so explicit they push past the point of parody to cross the line of disgust. Tacit and private communication is no longer safe from policing, especially in the realm of education, where ostensive secularism has, at best, made religious texts and classical traditions impenetrably opaque.

A potentially redemptive question of reckoning bubbles up from these dark trends. On what basis—with what authority—do we communicate at all? The logical result of the content crunch of today's Third World War is a content crash, where everyone sits down and no one remains to pass the mic to. Only breakdown, McLuhan says, is breakthrough.

Mitchell asks, "might the willingness to eschew the univer-salist aspiration require that we witness its failure?"[62] The Successor Regime's refusal to hear the wisdom implicit in the parable of the tares leads our ruling factions to insist we must communicate approved messages in official language because that is what politics *is* now in *our democracy*.

But each day it grows clearer that communication has slipped the logic of ruling control, even as the regime labors to close the net. Misinformation now means no more or less than communications with a nontrivial risk of strength-ening thoughts and actions that support political life as understood since Aristotle and as expressed and protected by the American form of government. Such a definition of misinformation explodes back on itself—a deadly event in an atmosphere where the fundamental authority of words themselves is under daily pressure from both the regime and the swarm it strains to control.

The regime's contribution to the disenchantment of speech increases the pressure on its ruling factions, both of which insist communication is authorized by what Eco calls "the search for the perfect language."[63] For the expert engineers, that language is math; for the ethereal ethicists, it is meaning. Neither of these cosmic wagers promises a perfection that preserves our humanity in the bargain. Both are a path toward our subjection to the swarm.

This is why the First Generation will find in its favorite biographies, in stories of men and the exploits by which they came of age, an authority sufficient to make communication good for us again. They draw their sense of mature authority

from their fathers' generation, from their memories of how their fathers' identities were marked out by deeds and by the latent space, the vibe, between and among those deeds. In one of its many attacks on the implicit, life in the swarm increasingly demands we always present instantly legible identities. In one of its foundational retrievals against the swarm, the First Generation will use and value, over the explicit bios and IDs that digitally dissolve the difference between you and your "file," the implicit autobiographical story.

The digital age shapes us such that even friendly or allied groups of the First Generation will come of age and identity through irreducibly different wagers on the answers to ultimate questions. But all those answers will center on returning men to rule through the defeat of the digital mystique. That refounding requires a *pro-fundity* alien to modern or postmodern life, necessary for *politeia* to survive and for us to thrive within it. It is a depth which can only arise through the true story of our superiority to even our most speciously magical tools.

TECHNOLOGY

To cherish the depths is to understand the limits life places on light. The craft of love entailed in the unimaginable creation of those limits is hardly Lovecraftian, however many Leviathans vex our imagination and tempt us to pull them out of the sea. God's restoration of *profundity* to Job is an ultimate in storytelling of the world's coming of age:

> Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? … Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the cornerstone thereof? … Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?' Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place; that it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of

it?… Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? Or hast thou walked in the search of the depth? … Where is the way where light dwelleth? And as for darkness, where is the place thereof, that thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof? … The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen. … Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? Or who hath given understanding to the heart?[64]

For deep theological reasons Satan's office as the bringer of created light made him the highest of the angels. Christ, by contrast, brings the uncreated light of God. That light may be blinding, obscuring the true face of the Father. But, radiated from the *transfigured* Christ, it is not blinding: it perfectly illuminates.

This divine light, of course, is unlike quotidian light. Like Satan himself, created light seems to have certain problems with authority. Light is central to the human obsession with ascending to a divine position of rightful authority, and this symbolic freight figures strongly into the luddite literature of Thomas Pynchon. In *Against the Day*, he describes a "queerly luminescent" monthlong event in the skies of Europe, somewhere between the Tunguska event and the Austrian annexation of Bosnia leading to World War I.

Those who had taken it for a cosmic sign cringed beneath the sky each nightfall, imagining ever more extravagant disasters. Others, for whom orange did not seem an appropriately apocalyptic shade, sat outdoors on public benches,

reading calmly, growing used to the curious pallor. As nights went on and nothing happened and the phenomenon slowly faded to the accustomed deeper violets again, most had difficulty remembering the earlier rise of heart, the sense of overture and possibility, and went back once again to seeking only orgasm, hallucination, stupor, sleep, to fetch them through the night and prepare them against the day.[65]

Pynchon connects the cosmic and political disorder of the early twentieth century to a series of crises in theoretical mathematics. In a pivotal, deceptively zany scene, his heroes enter a "Museum of Monstrosities" devoted to these crises, located in what their German host unnervingly describes as "an older sort of Germany. Deeper."[66] They're led down a corridor presenting an immersive virtual-reality exhibit of an ancient Greek cult meeting, "robed and barefoot Pythagorean disciples" caught in "some spiritual transport whose illumination was mimicked here by the fluorescence of gas-mantles soaked in certain radioactive salts."[67] Pythagoras, a mathematician rumored since antiquity to have been the first man to call himself a philosopher, attracted followers devoted to reincarnation, vegetarianism, and other fruits of their master's teaching. Pythagoras fused religious, political, and scientific convictions into a cosmic whole with a pronounced and exclusive mystique. In fact, hundreds of men and more than a dozen women became the first initiates into what became a closed and secret society whose rites of passage were mysteries of which the site was Pythagoras's own home. The Pythagorean *politeia*

was limited to a single city-state—until persecution and war killed off most adherents and scattered the others. But the Pythagorean creed lived on.

If the next mathematician of the rank of Pythagoras did not consider himself a Pythagorean, it's probably only because he sensed he was the greater genius. Archimedes, like Pythagoras, came of age in the Greek colonies of Italy. He jumped off from Pythagorean math to a plane of insight and understanding that the most powerful minds of modern science, from Galileo and Leibniz to da Vinci and Tesla, still held almost in awe. Not coincidentally, also like Pythagoras, Archimedes found in mathematics the perfect or correct standpoint from which to approach the world—that is, to approach the world from *outside*. If the most lasting contribution of Pythagoras was his determination that the celestial bodies orbited a single ethereal flame, the greatest legacy of Archimedes is his work on the lever. It was the amazing quality of leverage—resembling magic, yet totally within human control—that led Archimedes to a crossroads in the history of our relationship to our own technology, one he crossed in word, the other in deed.

LEVERAGE LIES

The occasion was the Roman invasion of Syracuse. Plutarch recounts how, assaulted by sea and land, "the Syracusans were struck dumb with terror; they thought that nothing could withstand so furious an onset by such forces."[68] They hadn't realized that, some time earlier, Archimedes, "who

was a kinsman and friend of King Hiero, wrote to him that with any given force it was possible to move any given weight; and emboldened, as we are told, by the strength of his demonstration, he declared that, if there were another world, and he could go to it, he could move this."[69] According to Plutarch, "Hiero was astonished, and begged him to put his proposition into execution, and show him some great weight moved by a slight force." After watching Archimedes draw in his direction a beached and fully loaded royal merchant ship using only a hand-operated pulley system, Hiero was duly "amazed;"

> comprehending the power of his art, the king persuaded Archimedes to prepare for him offensive and defensive engines to be used in every kind of siege warfare. These he had never used himself, because he spent the greater part of his life in freedom from war and amid the festal rites of peace; but at the present time his apparatus stood the Syracusans in good stead, and, with the apparatus, its fabricator.

Leo Strauss, in a 1959 seminar on Cicero, intimated that this vignette exemplifies how Plutarch's biographies compare eminent Romans and Greeks in order to demonstrate the superiority of the Greeks—a point not lost on Cicero, who "was deeply impressed by the greatness of Greek wisdom" and "aware of the fact that this created a resistance" of sorts.[70] Strauss certainly believed that the true philosophy which arose first with the Greeks was corrupted and perverted by bellicose regimes in ways that have grievously harmed

us virtually ever since. At the very end of a 1966 seminar on Plato's *Apology*, Strauss answered the criticism that the dialogue is a "lie" with the provisional observation that, if it is a lie, it is likely to be what Plato distinguishes as a noble and not a base lie.[71] The implication is that philosophers at least sometimes face irreducible disagreements about what is and is not *true*—a problem, one student countered, that seems to be absent in mathematics, given "the agreement that mathematicians seem to have about their own science." Again provisionally, Strauss responded by calling attention to the ambition of modern scientists "like Galileo and Descartes" to replace "false philosophies" with "the true philosophy," considering that "philosophy and science are synonymous terms" at the dawn of the scientific revolution. "They tried to replace a false, a pseudo-philosophy and pseudo-science of Aristotle and so on, by a true philosophy or science," Strauss remarked; only later did it become "fully clear" that "this enormous experiment was successful up to a point. And now in the eighteenth century, roughly, people began to say: Let us call the successful part science and the failing part philosophy. And that's up to the present day, because what people who are entirely wedded to science call philosophy is not philosophy." That "something" Strauss calls "a branch of mathematics."

Obviously Strauss is implying something about how contemporary people view the authority of mathematics—and of its practical applications in physical science—versus that of philosophy with regard to political questions. A final question from a student about whether "modern democracy

has worked out the problem of… private morals and public morals" elicited this response:

> philosophy as understood by the classics is… of direct use only to the philosophers themselves. I mean, indirectly of course they can give good advice to other people, but the philosophers alone become happy through philosophy; the others don't become happy; they become a bit wiser if they listen to philosophers. Now, what in the seventeenth century happened can be said as follows: philosophy can make non-philosophers happy. How? Because the new philosophy or science is in the service of conquering nature—disease, death, and what have you—and that by spreading these benefits, including deodorants, it makes everybody happy. And of course that is a nasty exaggeration of mine, but you understand it. And this is one of the key points: that science can now link up with what we call technology, whereas prior to that there was no essential link between science and technology.

At the climax of his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss attended directly to the problem of the instrumentalization of philosophy, its use to dominate and exploit, rather than understand, the natural world. Once again, Archimedes comes up. "The classics were for almost all practical purposes what now are called conservatives," notes Strauss, with an exception that unlike "many present-day conservatives… they knew that one cannot be distrustful of political or social change without being distrustful of technological change."[72]

Therefore they did not favor the encouragement of inventions, except perhaps in tyrannies, i.e., in regimes the change of which is manifestly desirable. They demanded the strict moral-political supervision of inventions; the good and wise city will determine which inventions are to be made use of and which are to be suppressed. Yet they were forced to make one crucial exception. They had to admit the necessity of encouraging inventions pertaining to the art of war. They had to bow to the necessity of defense or of resistance. This means however that they had to admit that the moral-political supervision of inventions by the good and wise city is necessarily limited by the need of adaptation to the practices of morally inferior cities which scorn such supervision because their end is acquisition or ease. They had to admit in other words that in an important respect the good has to take its bearings by the practice of bad cities or that the bad impose their law on the good.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that Rome corrupted and perverted the natural science of Greek philosophy by forcing it to instrumentalize itself against its true understanding of virtue.

In the Cicero lecture, however, Strauss implied that Rome's existential threat to "the good and wise" Greek city could not quite be reduced to an immoral appetite for "acquisition or ease."[75] Cicero evinces the problem of *glory* in Roman thought: without participating in political life, one is foreclosed (and contributes to the foreclosure of the *polis*) to glory, the earned and deserved objective experience

of triumph which bears no comparison to the relativistic modern term "prestige." Yet at the same time, as Cicero intimates, those seeking true happiness must somehow reject and transcend earthly political glory. Political life, in short, seems inherently to demand a certain sacrifice of true happiness, or a lowering of the soul; but this is to say that the true happiness of the *polis*, and the embodiment and expression of true political happiness in the *politeia*, are impossible without *enough* men making this sacrifice of soul. Glory, then, appears as the best or only true compensation or reward for the man lowering his soul from the very highest out of duty to what one of Strauss's students pregnantly called "the fatherland," but which might more equanimitably be called the spacetime secured by our continuous comings of age shared and passed from fathers to sons.

Yet Strauss went on to observe that Aristotle and other ancient philosophers were very much "babes in the woods" on the topic of "political participation" in the modern (but not only modern) sense of running for office. *Ambition* comes from the Latin for canvassing, meaning vote grubbing. There's nothing glorious in winning office and certainly not in seeking it. Cicero's understanding of the problem of glory—how it seems so swiftly to decay into ambition and acquisitiveness or to become too hard to distinguish from these vices to be well-enough pursued by dutiful men—led Strauss to ask whether Cicero didn't try "as it were to make Rome the subject of its subjects, the Greeks," that is, whether he didn't try to make his fatherland's politics the subject of natural philosophy rather than instrumental calculation.

The question is a poignant one because Cicero failed. The Roman obsession with glory turned the Republic to an Empire that was ultimately unable to prevent its own Christianization or its subsequent destruction at the hands of the very barbarians it had also Christianized in an effort to preserve its survival. Some time later, the triumph of instrumental calculation over natural philosophy led to the fusion of science and technology into the anti-philosophical project of satisfying the appetites of all.

ARMA VIRUMQUE

Machiavelli stood at the precipice of that triumph and is often even blamed for it. But Machiavelli's main predicament was not exactly what Strauss seems to have said it was when he said "the difficulty implied in the admission that inventions pertaining to the art of war must be encouraged is the only one which supplies a basis for Machiavelli's criticism of classical political philosophy."[74] As Hillsdale lecturer, Claremont Institute senior fellow, and former Trump aide Michael Anton notes, Strauss concludes that the "intrinsic merits" of the victorious modern instrumental project—touched off by Machiavelli's answer to the collapse and corruption of (Strauss's word) his "fatherland"—are today clearly wanting.[75] The problem would seem to be that the instrumentalist project has inevitably debased people by trying to satisfy their appetites, an unsolvable dilemma that could have been avoided but wasn't because philosophers were forced to inaptly apply their wisdom to violent

struggles among those ignorant of the true and eternal Good.

The apparent failure of the modern instrumentalist project is often treated as a function of *the disenchantment of the world*, a term introduced by Max Weber to help crystallize the way routinized secular life and institutions seemed to reflect and reinforce a comprehensive recession of religious faith and practice. Rationalism had eclipsed traditionalism, turning the world from an enchanted garden into, more or less, a machine. Weber's thesis fueled belief that Protestantism in particular had an inherently self-secularizing character, although the secularization of Jews clearly played a powerful role in the rise of disenchanted civilization. But as the scholar Jason Josephson-Storm convincingly reminds us, modernity did not stop "the majority of people living in Europe and North America" from believing in "spirits, witches, psychical powers, magic, astrology, and demons," to name a few.[76] More remarkably, as Josephson-Storm shows, the disenchantment thesis arose and was advanced most forcefully in WASPy parts of Europe at a time when "occult movements" like "spiritualism (seances and table turning), theosophy, and magical societies like the Golden Dawn were taking place," not only out in the public at large but in "the lives and beliefs of the very theorists of disenchantment themselves." What bears emphasis here is that this apparent paradox is a clear consequence of the formative effects of electricity on social and intellectual life. With its empowerment of the human imagination, and its intense feeling of unlocking alien realms to human consciousness, electric

machinery and technology shaped people in its image, encouraging *both* greater routinization or regimentation *and* a more irreligious but spiritual appetite for the experience of weird energy and cosmic encounters. Together, as Pynchon suggests, these only superficially opposing forces produced an identity crisis in the West that left people unable to recognize the onrushing catastrophe of World War and unable to arrest it when it came. For Strauss, the only way back from that catastrophe, which brought on both a second and third (cold) World War, was to rekindle in the brightest of those coming of age the sensibility of the natural scientists (the ancient philosophers) that was overthrown by the instrumental scientists (the modern "philosophers").

But Strauss, by conceding that natural science had to be instrumentalized to save good cities (where philosophy could be practiced) with military technology, seems to place Machiavelli at least in this crucial respect in a separate category from the ancients and the moderns. What is implied by Strauss is that Machiavelli's response to the dilemma of military innovation led to, but is different from, the instrumentalist project that failed the West. And in fact, the key to Machiavelli's warlike counsel was not Archimedean: the *best* arms, he showed, were not technological but *spiritual* arms. Anton recounts that in this way Machiavelli equates knowledge and arms, whereas the classics would equate knowledge and virtue. But the knowledge Machiavelli has in mind distinguishes between what he calls the cowardly "idleness" of Italy's then-dominant Christianity and the courageous combat of those—even Christians—who would

"prepare ourselves to be such that we can defend" the fatherland.[77] Such preparation requires not just some kind of instrumental knowledge of war but an education of the spirit in the military power of a just appetite for glory. Machiavelli's fundamental military invention is the elevation to supremacy of spiritual arms, something he does in response to the triumph of Christ's spiritual arms over the spirit of glory that so long sustained Rome, whatever its myriad faults and weaknesses.

Machiavelli did not, however, re-ground philosophy on a foundation of glory or spiritual arms for all. Three types of men peopled society—those with knowledge, those without, and those ultimately pretending. If one type was the sort capable of providing spiritual arms to another type, but those arms were of too spiritually elevated a kind for the third social type to take up, then the highest social type would have to supply the lowest with something else that would help secure victory, and what Machiavelli counseled in this case was for those equipped with spiritual arms to gain the support of the people at large by showing that what brought glory to the glorious would bring a greater share of more quotidian goods to the ordinary. In this way, Strauss implies, the centrality of Machiavelli's war aim to satisfy the higher-but-not-highest appetites of the higher-but-not-highest type of men diminished over time, leading to the supremacy of technological arms over spiritual ones, as in the catastrophe of World War I.

It is easy to see how, from there, the loss of glory as a motive for war would increase the prevalence of wars

fought to satisfy the baser appetites, and how the baseness of such wars would deepen the technologization of war, the technologization of society, and the social expectation that technology alone could satisfy mass appetites.

A little more difficult, but not too hard if you try, is to see how even those men with a shared or inherited memory of glory and the spiritual arms needed to reclaim it would be powerfully, perhaps irresistibly inclined to conclude that no degree of spirit, no matter how strong or pure, was good enough to win a war anymore in the absence of sufficient technology.

Yet here is the deepest way Machiavelli does share something fundamental with the natural philosophers. In no place does he intimate that the development and use of the spiritual arms needful to preserve politics (and through it true flourishing) is anything but a product of human *thought*. There is no technology to which the Machiavellian philosopher can outsource responsibility for supplying and training those who can gloriously practice the supreme political art of spiritual warfare. To be sure, Machiavelli utilized the then-dominant communications technology of *print* to leverage his spiritual arms into the heads of his captains. But the medium of print itself did not *arm the spirit* in the needed way or to the necessary degree (as certain lingering "great books" devotees demonstrate today). Machiavelli's scheme to retrieve the spiritual arms necessary to win a spiritual war for a fatherland does not, and cannot, admit of a medium or technology that does, on its own, the work of properly educating those capable of adopting the

needed spirit to fight and win. Spiritual arms come from humans with human knowledge, not from those with technological knowledge or from technology itself. The equation of science with technology may unleash power great enough to satisfy a dizzying array of the appetites of all. It may help distinguish a class or faction best positioned to lead or win battles for political control in an environment such as that which technological science creates. What it does not do is deliver what, even under its sway, we see as our highest possible longing. In this sense, it is not the solution to our ultimate problem. It cannot save us.

Whether this claim is true is the main controversy splitting our ruling factions today. The proposition that digital technology is different—that it can or does deliver the goods of our highest longing, that in this sense it can or does in fact save us—is at the heart of the digital mystique.

AS YOU WORDSHIP SO YOU SERVE

When it comes to the mystique of technologies it's clear that a cult of sorts has emerged around every major medium: oral, alphabetic, scribal, print, electric, and digital. Each communications technology has offered some sort of access to the magical, the occult, or the sacred. The digital mystique is that it takes us to a place we must go but which requires us, in some fundamental sense, to leave ourselves behind.

The enchanted power of the word is easy enough to understand. To enchant is to sing upon or into. The opening lines of *The Iliad* show us how rites of passage making boys

into new men through the telling of biographical stories do so by singing *into* them what is sung *of* their elders. This sacred process is not magic, but its rituals, even in their typical incorporation of intense and primal visual stimuli, rely on the invisible power of the word to suffuse through some what others summon.

A different kind of power and authority is vested in, and dischargeable from, the *logos*. For Aristotle, that power is simply persuasive reason in action. For the Stoics it is the generativity of the cosmos. Some Jews at the time of Jesus viewed *logos* (and not Jesus) as the intermediary between God and creation, including man. Platonism after Jesus affords *logos* a related role which informed the development of early Christian doctrine. As Christ, Jesus is the Word with God, one of the triune persons of God, from the Beginning; for Augustine, setting in motion a whole train of Christian theology of the word, the *logos* is the eternal word incarnate in Christ.

The medium of the alphabet infused the word with specific kinds of sacred power. In Kabbalistic thought and related forms of Jewish mysticism, the alphabet is divine code which only the correctly initiated can use to unlock cosmic and divine relationships. While oral culture is often associated in the West with the patriarchal tribalism and heroic narratives of Homer, author Leonard Shlain indicates that the triumph of the alphabet over the oral medium led, as with the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, to the systematic disenchantment of goddesses and holistic matriarchal culture, in favor of abstract, linear, patriarchal structures of the sacred.[78]

One potential illustration of such a shift could be found in certain strains of Reformation theology. With the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, the sacredness of the word is brought to a height through its written power. Only the Bible is needed for salvation and right living, which are only accessible through the Bible. Whether through the written or printed word, text is the divine technology through which God communicates equally to us all. If all who can read the Bible do, at least in theory, all can be saved.

Effectually, however, the priesthood of all believers and the evangelism of the text demand the disbanding of the scribal order, and the theology that issues from it, in favor of print. The mass production and dissemination of Bibles—and the resultant mass encounter with the new problem of *interpretation* that arises once the sacred text is removed from the restrictive proprietorship of monasteries, universities, and churches, provoked a massive restructuring of human perception, sensibility, and order. This is McLuhan's major subject in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. The Reformation is (and was) unimaginable without the printing press, as were the developments it stirred through the triumph of print in economic (capitalist), political (nationalist), and cultural (individualist) life. The age of print was the age of reason— one in which anyone with sufficiently rational education and discipline could open and make legible the Book of Nature, make money and move goods in markets, assess the validity of the biggest ideas or claims, and join with others similarly engaged, spreading enlightened thought and gentle mores across, eventually, the globe.

The order of the ancients, as the political theorist Benjamin

Constant suggested, had given way to a new modern one, effacing the politics of command and conquest, and what Tocqueville would later call "the authority of a name,"[79] with the new logic of commonwealth and commerce. The freedom of thought made possible by the printing press, Constant claimed, "spreads calm in the souls and reason in the minds of the men who enjoy this inestimable good, free from anxiety."[80] This "taming of humanity," writes Mitchell, "is a consequence of more than just the victory of reason over glory" which the dominance of the print medium forms within and around us.[81] "The chasms among nations, social ranks, generations, and men and women" become "*bridgeable* in principle, since differences among them have no durable foundation in nature." Print is a medium of sufficient power and authority that, for the first time, experience gives rise to the idea that technologies of communication fundamentally alter human destiny by diminishing human space and time across the entire world.

For the modern liberal, that prospect is one of tremendous spiritual optimism—one feeding the feeling of whole satisfaction with a good conscience ("*jouissance*") that to Constant is foundational in the new modern order. The ancient world is now forever in the past; from the firmly established present comes a new future. This is the mystique of print, the promise of a happiness and wholeness we can't otherwise access. "Here," writes Mitchell, "each human being is close enough to every other so that all suffering is noticed, and mutual sympathy is possible."

> Reason and commerce may attenuate and redirect the
> passion for glory, and render life orderly; but it is sympathy
> that finally *softens* humanity. In the second epoch—and
> this is one of its most wholesome achievements—concern
> and solicitude become possible.

Paradoxically, the triumph of print formally causes us and our world to grow *more masculine* in some respects but *less so* in others. The medium of print does not simply adjust our social structures or even *our humanity*; it fashions, in its image, a new *type* of man—softer, kinder and gentler as George H. W. Bush would later say, more spiritually sensitive and "choosy," but also more rational, more calculating, more certain that as a matter of destiny, *not* choice, his fortunes and those of all, those of the world itself, are staked on his ability and the ability of all to complete and perfect the spiritual and social unity that the sudden singularity of shrinking human spacetime demands. Indifferent to our wishes or choices, the medium of print causes humanity as a whole—that is, *women* as well as men—to become more like the man of the print age. These trans-formed people are driven to pursue, ever more collectively and consciously, their further transformation in this direction of a destiny that has been so abruptly disclosed.

What is remarkable about the theological and spiritual reworking that the medium of print achieves is how deeply it continues to resonate and advance *through* what McLuhan, Shlain, and others well observe is the transformative and revolutionary advent of the electric medium. This in fact

does supersede and swallow up the formal influence of print with a whole new formative complex of its own. As McLuhan explores, electricity transforms the Gutenberg galaxy first into the *global village* of radio and then the *global theater* of cinema and television (and finally the video-camera). The electric age, Shlain recounts, does in a sense overturn the abstraction and calculation of print with an explosive return to the occult and intuition of the voice and the image, with all the feminine and Aquarian sensibilities it brings. But this process is, for all its violence, a smoothly compounding one. The amazing and like-magic properties of the electric medium re-form human life in a way that advances the new man of print and the woman remade in his image toward a single human ideal, no longer bound by the text or the globe but unleashed, from within their consciousness, on the whole cosmos.

The Word retains communicative power, and in some sense *gains* in divine mystique, but in a way transformed by its own electric transformation, as the use of "LOVE" since the '60s reveals. Slogans from *all you need is love* to *love is love* draw their sacred power and authority not from the lexigraphical features of the letters that spell them out, as in Kabbalistic analysis of the written word, or from the opening to individual interpretation afforded by their mass production, as in Reformation analysis of the printed book, but from the spiritual deliverance of unbound imagination that they represent, which only electricity makes manifest sufficiently to universalize our access to it. This is the mystique televisual technology brought to a fever pitch, containing

within it, as opera once did, all other media, all other arts—virtually all other information.

It's no surprise or coincidence that under the formative pressure of the televisual medium *visualizing* the new human of the electric age became the most powerful and lucrative obsession of men and women who had, under the gender-bending properties of the print era, become both more spiritualistic *and* more calculating, more sensitive or fragile *and* more obsessive or intransigent. The exemplars of film and television were space operas like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*—images of man and woman made paragons of the characteristics made dominant and valuable by electricity. Electric music focused exhaustively on space, stars, sex, and electricity itself as the thematic crossroads of infinite imagination. "Rock and roll was high energy, explosive and cut down. It was skeleton music, came out of the darkness and rode in on the atom bomb, and the artists were star headed like mystical Gods," in the words of Bob Dylan. "Rock and roll was a dangerous weapon, chrome plated. It exploded like the speed of light, it reflected the times, especially the presence of the atomic bomb which had preceded it by several years."[82] The ideal woman became a goddess of the sort defined by the maxim that "anything boys can do girls can do better," while the ideal man became a god for whom "power" was not an end in itself but, as Henry Kissinger called it, "the ultimate aphrodisiac."

PANTOPIA

"Gutenberg," writes McLuhan, inaugurates "the technological phase of progress, when change itself becomes the archetypal norm of social life."[83] The electric milieu rewarded those whose sense of the sacred was rooted in theologies of becoming. The advent of electricity presented the new men and women of print with an answer to the increasingly obsessive and central question of how the limits of the age could be *transcended*. The answer was a technology, electricity, which transcended yet enriched human capabilities in a way at once primal and futuristic. Electricity made good on the promise of the logic of change to ensure we could reach indefinitely beyond ourselves toward the ultimate.

In this respect, the progressive transformation of sex and gender toward a more fragile yet more intransigent human type rewarded specifically, and drew inherent power from, religious sensibilities and patterns of thinking best prepared to explicitly sacralize change.

These are the sensibilities Tocqueville called *pantheistic*, thinking of the trajectory of deist, transcendentalist, and unitarian sects toward a democratic denial of the primary distinction between creation and creator. But the mass conversions of Protestants from Christian believers to sensory spiritualists accelerated and incentivized by the electric age can't be understood in doctrinal isolation. A similar process had been at work among Jews. Since at least the scribal era, leading Jewish intellects in the Old World consistently intensified mystical attitudes toward the role of

man in harnessing change to progressively actualize divine consciousness in the world—a process that has gained still more force in recent years, among both secularized and observant Jews.

The attitude is well expressed by the computer scientist and author David Gelernter. "For normative and orthodox Jews," he writes, "the Bible is only the starting point of a continuing discussion, led by the... learned teachers of the community."[84] Jews who see this as "the only rational way" to study and think understand that

> the Bible *itself* develops, as a strange photographic negative might, from one state to a second, third, and endlessly onward as each generation applies its own characteristic developer. Our ancient forefathers were closer to God than we are, but after three thousand years of mulling, we are closer to God's law and God's truth—which in any case must change as life changes.

Gelernter must see Protestantism, with its judgment "basically new to history" that the Bible is "a practical handbook that never needs revision," as ultimately beholden to its print origins.[85] But there is no question that the many millions of Protestants who abandoned literalism and *sola scriptura* conformed their updated religious practice, and then their spiritual sensibility, to the Jewish or post-Jewish kind of worship of the disclosure of reality through instrumental metamorphosis that the electric age so powerfully promoted and spread.

The impact over the past several hundred years of Jewish

men bearing and disseminating this form of worship cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it has stayed current right into the digital age.

The state of play is captured in famed physicist and author David Deutsch's celebration of what Isaac Asimov called *The End of Eternity* and what Deutsch calls *The Beginning of Infinity*. Earth, as Asimov wrote and Deutsch quotes approvingly, is "not the eternal and only home of mankind, but only a starting point of an infinite adventure. All you need do is make the decision"—and, with it, bring "the final end of Eternity," and "the beginning of Infinity."[86] For Deutsch, the *only* way to set this decision in motion and keep it there is by using the imagination instrumentally to explain. Deutsch wryly observes that "the problem with imagination is that it can create fiction much more easily than truth," but the redeeming solution imagination provides us to all our problems—except the problem of our always creating more problems—is the access it provides to *conjecture*.[87] Only through conjecture, says Deutsch, can new and true knowledge be created: not even "criticism and testing" is enough.[88] This is why a "rebellion against authority" is "a necessary condition for progress."[89] Criticism is sufficient to ensure that the endless overthrow of authorities does not result merely in new authorities replacing the old, and testing to ensure that outcomes follow rules, but neither, singly or together, produces progressively more knowledge.[90] It's not possible to distinguish reality from illusion or fantasy without an explanation, and it's not possible to arrive at explicit explanations if the mind is not made able to hit

upon them by postulating accounts that are divine (a word Deutsch doesn't use) in their singular simplicity and beauty.

To underscore the ultimate value of conjecture's ultimate power, Deutsch makes a disenchanting example of the myth of Persephone. Its creator, he emphasizes (stipulating in a way powerfully advantageous to his logic that the myth arose from the mind of one creator) , did not answer the question of why Persephone behaved as she did by boldly conjecturing that the goddess must have been compelled by "a marriage contract enforced by a magic seed."[91] Yet to demonstrate that the true power and value of conjecture is in putting us into an unending intimate relationship with ultimate cosmic reality, Deutsch refers to the philosopher of science Karl Popper, whose account of that relationship sounds like nothing so much as a serial marriage contract enforced by a magic seed of sorts, one that contains an ineffable spark:

> there is only one way to science—or to philosophy, for that matter: to meet a problem, to see its beauty and fall in love it with; to get married to it and to live with it happily, till death do ye part—unless you should meet another and even more fascinating problem or unless, indeed, you should obtain a solution. But even if you do obtain a solution, you may then discover, to your delight, the existence of a whole family of enchanting, though perhaps difficult, problem children... [92]

The experience—the *exercise*—of divine reason is that of delivering oneself over body and soul, so to speak, to the

spiritual practice of sustaining fascination as a state of existence. From this state alone the supreme light of the best postulates—let there be such and such an ever more beautiful act of completion—alone can emerge. It is not quite Soyface, but it sees in instrumental science an ultimate mystique, the last one left to us, the only one we ever really had.

This pattern of spiritual sensibility, so dominant now in the West, has a very specific lineage. Contrary to what is often assumed, it is not just Protestant but Hebraic Protestant. What's more, it is not just Hebraic Protestant in the Judeo-Christian sense of sympathy and admiration toward Israelites—or even in the varying Hebraic Protestant senses Mitchell traces in the history of early modern English thought (wherein God's grant of dominion to Adam grounds Locke's political theology, and the Mosaic covenant of the One over the Many grounds that of Hobbes).[93] Deutsch does attribute science-worship specifically to the *British* Enlightenment.[94] But the specific Hebraic British Protestant theology at work has yielded a spiritual faith whose central doctrine is that the only medium through which man can escape destruction by entering into sacred union with God is not the uncreated light of Christ but the light of knowledge we create. That union, for the scientific fideist, is one between our consciousness and reality.

In this theological dispensation it is we, and not Satan, who bear the created light. Near the beginning of this faith tradition stands Bertrand Russell, an atheist son of atheist aristocrats whose grandmother was Presbyterian and whose

godfather was John Stuart Mill. "Mathematics," Russell wrote in 1907,

> possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure, and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show. The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than Man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence, is to be found in mathematics as surely as poetry.[95]

Russell cites the Athenian Stranger of Plato's *Laws*, for whom mathematics possessed a "divine necessity" without which a man can neither "become a god to the world, nor a spirit, nor yet a hero, nor able earnestly to think and care for man." If to be godlike is to be mathlike, is to be math to be a god? Each of us, as Deutsch says, is "an emergent, quasi-autonomous flow of information in the multiverse,"[96] which, together, "if we want to," can be the "spark" that "instantly and irrevocably" explodes infinite activity into whatever locations it touches in infinite space and time.[97] Our conjectures are not fantastical creations but phenomena we hit upon as a result of our attuned receptivity to that which is truly real. Rather than awaiting a Second Coming, we are already the Second Bang. The only question is how big it will be and how long it will last.

The pressing question for the First Generation is whether the triumph of the digital medium, to such a degree that no

person or group of people can any longer wield power and authority over the whole world, formatively causes us to accept or reject the new creed of the spark. With its promise of achieving a permanently progressing new age through a fusion of the scientific and the spiritual, sparkism seems perfect for the oddly more fragile yet more intransigent new men and women formed under the sex-and-gender-bending progression of media accelerating from print to electric and beyond.

FAUSTIAN CARBON

But there are complications. In the often implicit but sometimes explicit credo of the Soyface, the last remaining role for human agency is to sustain the catharsis of oblivion in what one influential hippie artist called the "onslaught" of intentional sensory overload.[98] In contrast, sparkism insists, in Deutsch's words, "there can be no such thing as a superhuman mind" because the only way to improve on the human mind is to limitlessly improve its speed and working memory. "There can only be further automation," which AI can take responsibility for, but can and will never exceed the human mind of those pioneering its design.

 This neat twist of logic means that Soyface is a side effect, not an end state. Since the beginnings of the Enlightenment, "there has been a constant feeling that rapid and accelerating innovation is getting out of hand. But our capacity to cope with, and enjoy, changes in our technology, lifestyle, ethical norms and so on has been increasing too."[100]

In the future, when the rate of innovation will also increase due to the sheer increasing clock rate and throughput of brain add-ons and AI computers, then our capacity to cope with that will increase at the same rate or faster: if everyone were suddenly able to think a million times as fast, no one would feel hurried as a result.

The Singularity is not a discontinuity but rather a smooth process (much smoother than, say, even the most perfect cultural transmissions from men to boys coming of age). It began long ago and is more or less unstoppable. It is not in any real danger of wiping out humanity in a sensorial apocalypse. A metaphor to describe the situation would be that, no matter how accident-prone are vehicles, in reality the accident rate of a given vehicle is either kept low enough or the vehicle is improved or replaced quickly enough that people continue to travel in vehicles, and to do so at increased speeds. As continuing travel leads those speeds to increase, regardless of how often the vehicles crash, or at what speed, passengers will characteristically normalize to their travel speed in the same sort of way as physics causes a ball you gently toss upward from your lap while seated on a train not to smash through your face at the train's own velocity. Our technospiritual future is not that of the Eternal Soyface, but one better represented by the infinitely smug wojack, perhaps sitting on a throne that is also his digitized brain, calmly and confidently enjoying the universal spark of ultimate delight he harbors behind his "modest" smile.

Yet sparkism relies for its power on two things: its ability to herd people against their will and effort into the sparkist

future, and its ability to win people over through the power and authority of its explanations that we are (*pace* Brand) already as gods—possessing in our heads "the only process known to be capable of creating knowledge" without limit—and must now get good at it.[101] The main obstacles sparkism hits up against are therefore two: one, the entrenched appeal of servitude to technology, and two, the entrenched appeal of freedom from technology. Orienting life around instrumentalizing the spark of universal knowledge means forcing us—or convincing us there is nothing more delightful than—to become Fausts. Mastering technology means always creating more powerful technology and creating greater mastery over it, locking us into an infinite loop. This project squeezes out the possibility of handing all major responsibilities over to machines and living in an automated paradise—*and* the possibility of limiting our technological development so that we need not live as Fausts, nor as the arcadian Eloi of H. G. Wells's imagined future in *The Time Machine*, but can carry on as recognizably free human beings at home in the human scale and human stories of spacetime in our given world.

Sparkism is very clever in that it doesn't try to disprove the existence of God or prove that we are actually gods. It doesn't even try to prove that any technology, digital included, can make us into gods or unify us with God. But to achieve this, sparkism ends up leaving us with the impression that the creation of knowledge is the purest, most powerful, most delightful, and most fruitful force in the universe. Knowledge isn't God, and neither is creation,

exactly. The Big Bang seems like the kind of thing that evinces knowledge creation in an ultimate way. But how ultimate can it be if there's a Second Bang? What sparkism gestures to is something like Gelernter's wager that our distance from God (Bang One) increases the closer we get to God's laws and truth (Bang Two). All told, it isn't clear how sparkism can really get anyone that excited about signing on to sparkism, with the exceptions of the very few people smart enough to participate at a consequential level or the perhaps somewhat larger group of people smart enough to understand what sparkists are up to yet not smart enough to do anything more sparkist than idolize or support them.

From this perspective the spiritual game plan of the sparkists looks oddly like Machiavelli's (or Strauss's?): inspire a tiny few with the exclusive reality of glory, deliver unprecedented goods for the massive remainder. But can glory exist without a portion of human spacetime preserved by an unbroken braid of boys becoming men and sons fathers? Ultimately, sparkism preaches the digital mystique no less than the worshippers of the Singularity or the seekers of technological unification with God whom it purports to surpass: the only future worth imagining and pursuing is one where we evolve away from human spacetime, becoming comprehensively digitized cyborgs indistinct from both our machines and the environment we inhabit with them. Our digital creations will usher us into pantopia, the everywhere of all-known information, as only they can.

It's clear that the elders of our digitizing world are leaning strongly in favor of living as Fausts. The aged youth

of today, lost in a liminal third category between immaturity and adulthood, seem more inclined to live as Eloi. There's a dark complementarity to the ersatz *yin* and *yang* these two constituencies form as a result of what they think are their certainties about what the digital age will do to us, what we can do to it, and what, within it, we can do to ourselves.

Those coming of age as the digitized world's first new men will see different things, things their elders of several generations cannot see. Contrary to many predictions and assumptions, the digital world is still very much a world of the parable of the wheat and tares. While many pre-digital organizations and symbols are being digitally disenchanted at breakneck speed, the two greatest human institutions of the pre-digital world are not in danger of digital destruction. Even if they lose a certain kind of dominance, even if both are warped and ailing, both America and Christianity will remain powerfully present—immense stumbling blocks to the obliteration of human spacetime prophesied by the digital age's doomers and pantopians alike. Those who understand and accept why this is so, and in what way, will be best prepared to survive and flourish amid what is to come.

II

THE EMPIRE OF LIGHT

AMERICA

America is everything. That's the American mystique—
more than a New World, it is a new All, sufficient not only to
spawn a new world, or an infinite number of worlds, but to
fill them out and up.

Mystique comes via the Latin (*mysticus*) for "of secret rites,"
from the Greek (*mystes*) for "one who has been initiated." A
mystērion is a secret rite of purification and sacrifice practiced
only by the initiated; the root word *myein* means to close or
shut, which is why the "secret counsel of God" in the Book
of Job was translated as *mystērion*, becoming *sacramentum* in
Latin. America's mystique, its sacrament, takes place not in
darkness or the secret place but out in the open, in the light
of day. Ever new *cohorts* mass on its *campuses* to demonstrate
their readiness, their preparedness, for everything.

Campus, to repeat, refers to the field of battle or contest.
America's cohorts of late have come of age less on bat-
tlefields than on the *proving ground* of public disputation,
where the credo of Missouri Congressman and professor
of natural science Willard Vandiver—"frothy eloquence
neither convinces nor satisfies me… you have got to show

me"—gives democratic voice to the motto of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge: *Nullius in Verba*—Take Nobody's Word for It.

The forerunner of the Royal Society was a self-styled Invisible College, evidently inspired less by the Invisible College named in the Rosicrucian press than by Sir Francis Bacon's Salomon's House, "an Order or Society" with "the noblest foundation," in the "study of the Works and Creatures of God," that "ever was upon the earth."[102] To God, its rites commend hymns; to the people, wise counsel; to the kingdom, innovations; and to the world, divination of catastrophes. Its officers include Merchants of Light, Interpreters of Nature, and Mystery-Men; its founder, of course, is "the King of the Hebrews," and its purpose or end, beautifully expressing the depth of Hebraic British Protestant theology, is "the knowledge of Causes and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible."[103] Of course it's only natural that British Protestantism should be Solomonic and Mosaic in its Royalist form, where the Nation and its Church are united under a single King accountable not exactly to Jesus Christ but (as the motto of the Crown makes plain) to God Himself, by whose direct grace the King is King.

And it's only natural that the English Civil War would pit Hebraic British Protestant royalists against Hebraic British Protestant roundheads, whose Puritan faction would arrive on American shores in pursuit of a new promised land. Only once there, as Tocqueville intimates, could the Puritans discover that the pattern of political theology laid

down by Israel fails to fill out the political spacetime of New England. "The new settlers, without the help and, in a sense, without the knowledge of the motherland… enacted laws as if they were dependent on God alone"—the God of the Israelites.[104] Once-eloquent exponents of religious liberty in the Old World became brutal enforcers of God's Word in the New. "Blasphemy, sorcery, adultery, and rape are punished by death; a son who outrages his parents is subject to the same penalty."[105] What is curious about the law of the Puritans is that it treats people from the most enlightened modern civilization on earth as if they are castaways from the most barbarous and ancient: "the legislation of a rough, half-civilized people was transported into the midst of an educated society with gentle mores; as a result the death penalty has never been more frequently prescribed by the laws or more seldom carried out." Still more curious, yet understandable in its way, the people's "mores were even more austere and more puritanical" than their "ridiculous and tyrannical laws."[106] The spacetime of New England was special: it provided a unique freedom for *polis* and *politeia* to grow amid the tension between ancient religion and modern civilization.

The Puritans "applied and developed" the "pregnant principles" of "modern constitutions" in a new way none had hoped to attempt. The "local community was organized before the county, the county before the state, and the state before the Union."[107] Political liberty arose *amid* religious strictures to push them *out* of the law and anchor them in mores: "in America it is religion which

leads to enlightenment and the observance of divine laws which leads men to liberty."[108] In the Old World, the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom seem destined to conflict; in New England "it was somehow possible" to combine them.[109] "The founders of New England were both ardent sectarians and fanatical innovators"—spiritually sensitive *and* scientifically obsessive.[110] "While held within the narrowest bounds by fixed religious beliefs, they were free from all political prejudices." Amid tremendous expansion, transformation, and churn, the American character extends from this point of political and theological origin, Tocqueville shows, but never quite changes. Under its sway,

> principles, laws, and human institutions seem malleable things which can at will be adapted and combined. The barriers which hemmed in the society in which they were brought up fall before them; old views which have ruled the world for centuries vanish; almost limitless opportunities lie open in a world without horizon; the spirit of man rushes forward to explore it in every direction; but when that spirit reaches the limits of the world of politics, it stops of its own accord; in trepidation it renounces the use of its most formidable faculties; it forswears doubt and renounces innovation; it will not even lift the veil of the sanctuary; and it bows respectfully before truths which it accepts without discussion. Thus, in the moral world everything is classified, coordinated, foreseen, and decided in advance. In the world of politics everything is in turmoil, contested, and uncertain. In the one case obedience is passive, though voluntary; in the other there

is independence, contempt of experience, and jealousy of all authority.

McLuhan's assessment of the formative effect of the medium of print—"change becomes the fate of man"—holds nowhere *more* than in America, yet nowhere with *less* an impact on the status and ambit of religious devotion than in America.[III]

For this to work, however, the religion in question must consider "civil liberty as a noble exercise of men's faculties, the world of politics being a sphere intended by the Creator for the free play of intelligence," a posture which leads the *politeia* to consider religion "the guardian of mores," which "are regarded as the guarantee of the laws and pledge for the maintenance of freedom itself."[112] To the puzzle of which *sort* of religion can satisfy the American criteria, the solution is *a religion of the word*. "The mystery of the sacraments could not have served to institute the moral austerity the Puritans displayed, nor to maintain the political liberties they were capable of bearing," Mitchell maintains.[113] Under and since Moses, "reliance upon the word mitigates the prospect of confusing the utter transcendence of God, whereas the image solicits human beings to trust their mortal vision. Because human beings are prideful, that is, because they tend to confuse the difference between the Creator and the created, the image must be shunned."[114]

Here, the Eastern Orthodox would add the special qualification, manifest in the special aesthetic strictures applied to the writing of icons, that sacred imagery presenting holy

people in carefully stylized ways may draw the soul into an important kind of prayerful contemplation. The co-implicated mix of the mutually implicit self and other within us arises from *both* our distance from God *and* the proximity to Him into which Christ alone can bring us. But the Eastern tradition was simply not present at the creation of America, and while America, in its capacity as the representative or stand-in for everything, has vast room for all Christian sects or denominations, a Byzantine attitude toward the intersection of the divine and human image in human spacetime is likely to remain alien to most in the America of the First Generation. At the same time, the witness of the icon to the *already here, but not yet* quality of the Kingdom of God defies the teaching of the electric medium that all imagery ultimately issues from the divine immanence of the human imagination. America has long been torn between the print mindset of the divine word and the electric mindset of the divine image, which—in keeping with McLuhan's dictum that "the 'content' of any medium is always another [prior] medium"—engulfs the word and conforms it to its form.[115] Perhaps in that sense the icon, for those with eyes to see, can uniquely ameliorate the pressure placed by compounding technological advancement on the type of religion that alone can satisfy the American criteria.

But if Tocqueville is to be believed, the confusion of Creator and created is inescapable in a spacetime of progressively equalizing conditions, of which America is the epitome. "The concept of unity becomes an obsession" in such a realm.[116] "Not content with the discovery that there

is nothing in the world but one creation and one Creator," the increasingly insignificant and interchangeable person laboring for pride amid equality "is still embarrassed by this primary division of things and seeks to expand and simplify his conception by including God and the universe in one great whole." Of the resultant pantheism, the all-too-American worship of *All*, Tocqueville warned that "although it destroys human individuality, or rather because it destroys it," the creed "will have secret charms."[117] For all its occult sensibilities, the promise of the electric age was to emancipate the secret and hidden into explosive disclosure, producing an authoritative power more than sufficient to lift the human imagination into unification with the All. The increasingly sensitive yet obsessive psyches of America's print age were primed to yearn for that breakthrough by the religion of the word, which stubbornly deemphasized the main theological block to pantheistic feeling: Jesus.

THE SECOND GOING

America's Protestant religion of the word kept the position of Christ in American Christianity quietly uncertain as Puritanism decayed into Unitarianism. "When the bright blaze of Puritanism was replaced by the pale flicker of Unitarianism," Gelernter reasons, "a spiritual vacuum appeared on the American landscape. Eventually it was filled by Americanism itself. The American Religion was the true heir of puritanism."[118] Gelernter describes the religion of Americanism as the content of "liberty, democracy, and equality

for all mankind"[119] in the context of American Zionism—the notion that the "promised land" and the "sacred common-wealth of the ancient Hebrews" were the perfect or ordained model for America's new secular order.[120] While the Puritans and the Founders alike shared this sensibility, Gelernter claims, it did not return in their wake to again dominate and define America until Lincoln brought it back.

Tocqueville, for whom the *generality* of the Christian doctrine to love God and neighbor for the sake of one's soul was essential to the free range of infinitely complex human agency in America, avowed that "Jesus Christ had to come down to earth to make all members of the human race un-derstand" the basis of this teaching, "that they were naturally similar and equal."[121] It was Lincoln who most exemplified Tocqueville's observance that "the Americans use general ideas much more than the English and have a greater relish for them," perhaps particularly in religious matters.[122] As Gelernter recounts, Lincoln confessed he would join a church only when one would "inscribe over its altar as its sole qualification for membership the Savior's condensed statement of the substance of both the law and the Gospel: 'thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.'"[123] For Gelernter, it is of immense importance that Lincoln cited, "just as Jesus himself did, two verses of the Hebrew Bible, from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Lincoln put Jesus right at the center of his spiritual life—yet derived its *substance* from the Hebrew Bible." One almost gets the impression from Gelernter that Lincoln's Jesus was not a Christian but religiously a Jew.

And while it is true that Jesus *was* an observant Jew, and could not possibly be a *Christian* in the sense that his own disciples were, it is undeniable that the cornerstone of Christ's teachings was his own necessity to the fulfillment of God's covenant with Man. Christianity's fade from cosmic centrality in the American Biblical religion *does* seem to lead to America itself taking the place, so to speak, of Christ. But this portentous turn of events can hardly be described as a logical reflection of recognizing Jesus's Jewishness. Mitchell may be correct that Hebraic British Protestantism, with its Book of Common Prayer, "saves the Americans from the fully exposed logic"[124] of *deeper* German Protestantism, "the dialectic that unconceals the true ground of the will's purity amid the wilderness of Judea."[125] It may be true that the residual "Englishman in the American identity" whose love of "the *particular* site of local government" stops "the American soul from gravitating toward the powerful and overarching state that applies its *universal* will to all."[126] But the evaporation of Christ from the American Biblical religion from the Puritans and Founders to Lincoln and beyond calls to mind Tocqueville's suspicion that Christianity might be believed more in America because it is popular than because it is true. In this respect, the enlightened but unstable Hebraic British Protestantism of Americans must be recognized as the culprit behind the extraordinary receptivity of electric-age America to British intellectual and cultural figures who had abandoned doctrinal Christian and Jewish observance without betraying Hebraic patterns of Biblical thought—including those most apt to apply a mystical sense of destiny to the prospect of unrestricted

technological advancement. It was Hobbes whose vision of Leviathan arose from his Hebraic Anglican political theology, in which the crucial religious act was our *worship* of God, not Christ's *salvation* of our souls. The mortal-god takes the place of Christ, sheltering the sinful from errancy unto death; Leviathan, as God admonishes Job, "beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride."

GLOBOMOJO

Lincoln was America's first electric age president. His emancipation proclamation hit with the force it did because the news of it went out over telegraph, as did his command and control in the field: he spent much of his time at the War Department's telegraph, communicating directly with his generals. By putting Lincoln on the penny at the centennial of his birth, eventually admitting him, along with Jesus, the Queen, and Mickey Mouse into the club of the world's most reproduced likenesses, the Union consummated its electric-powered triumph in the Civil War. Victory made Manifest Destiny a reality and America an empire—temporarily over certain Spanish possessions, but more durably over the electric world. Icons of Lincoln appeared side-by-side with those of Washington in classrooms across the country, and it was the iconography of Lincoln, not Christ, that carried America into the electric age. Both the rational deism of the Founding print era and the sober Biblical religion of polydenominational America had given way to the irrational exuberance of electric belief. Mrs. Lincoln

herself, despondent over the loss of her son, invited a team of famous Georgetown mediums to the White House Red Room for a string of seances—some likely with Lincoln himself—meant to coax the boy's spirit into communication.

By century's end, the occult belief in such spiritualism had taken root among millions of Americans. It did not let go. William Fuld, father of the Ouija board, drove the brand's business to heights surpassed first by his children and then, in the 1966, by Parker Brothers, which acquired the business. Famous spiritualist Paschal Beverly Randolph established America's first Rosicrucian order (in 1858) and developed teachings on sex magic which may or may not have been incorporated into the Ordo Templi Orientis cult, whose leading figure Aleister Crowley moved to America during World War One and effectively refounded the organization on American soil in the wake of World War Two.

The collapse of churched Christianity under electric conditions, televangelism's massive backlash notwithstanding, gathered pace from the first meetings of William James and Charles Sanders Pierce's "Metaphysical Club" in 1872[127] to the great mid-twentieth-century turn among leading scientists and intellectuals toward Buddhism and Hinduism. It wasn't just Beats and hippies. Robert Oppenheimer, born to non-observant Jewish parents (one a German immigrant) and unwilling or unable to believe in an immortal soul, found enough mystical solace in Hinduism to infamously connect the Trinity atomic bomb test to Lord Krishna's revelation of his universal form.

As color television saturated the American marketplace,

occult spiritualism reached a crescendo. The rather literal British Invasion played an outsized role. What Evelyn Waugh said about East Africa applies still better to the globalized America of the electric age: "We came to establish a Christian civilization and we have come very near to establishing a Hindu one."[128] John Lennon's infamous quip that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus," made the same year Parker Brothers purchased the Fuld company, arose from an interview with a trusted music journalist, whose questions on religion led Lennon to reflect that "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I'll be proved right... I don't know which will go first, rock 'n' roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right," Lennon said, in a strange echo of Lincoln, "but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me."[129] Five years later, as a solo artist whose band had mainstreamed guru spirituality as never before, Lennon (with Yoko Ono) wrote and recorded "Imagine," still the unsurpassed global touchstone of nihilistic utopianism and probably the most hailed, most listened to, and most beloved spiritual hymn of contemporary times. Aldous Huxley, who lived in Los Angeles for some thirty years until his death on the day of President Kennedy's assassination, remained active in the Hindu Vedanta Society of Southern California for nearly his entire residence, a streak uninterrupted by his adventures blowing open "the doors of perception" with mescaline. "The mystical experience is doubly valuable," he avowed, in a perfect statement of the electric American creed; "it is valuable because it gives the experiencer a better

understanding of himself and the world and because it may help him to lead a less self-centered and more creative life."[130] Gregory Bateson, a lifelong atheist and the grandson of Cambridge vice-chancellor and ordained Anglican priest William Henry Bateson, pivoted in the 1950s from his seat on the postwar Macy Cybernetic Conferences to become a US citizen and set up residence in California, where he established himself as a leading academic guru to Stewart Brand and other West Coasters impressed by his teaching that the Western notion of existence outside mind led to cycles of cybernetic control and catastrophe.

And then there is Michael Hollingshead. Born and raised as the working-class Michael Shinkfield, Hollingshead, the story goes, recast himself as a plummy Oxford man and appeared, as if out of the blue, in Cambridge (Massachusetts this time) with enough LSD to "turn on" America's rising TV-age elite. The upper echelons were hungry for the break-through in cosmic consciousness that their media environment had shaped them to seek. Hollingshead proceeded to deliver the goods, beginning—on Aldous Huxley's recommendation—with Timothy Leary's Harvard University, and, between stints back in London, hopping inevitably to California, where he juiced up the infamous global Orange County acid cartel the Brotherhood of Eternal Love. The Brotherhood happened to worship Huxley (who had supplemented his death in 1962 with a large dose of LSD) and his final, utopian novel *Island*, which told the tale of a disillusioned British journalist's enlightenment on a Lemurian isle set in Asia but inspired by Southern California. *Island*

elaborated on Huxley's own answer to the dark future he posed in *Brave New World*, which he described in a forward to the dystopian novel's first postwar edition:

> Science and technology would be used as though, like the Sabbath, they had been made for man, not (as at present and still more so in the Brave New World) as though man were to be adapted and enslaved to them. Religion would be the conscious and intelligent pursuit of man's Final End, the unitive knowledge of immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman. And the prevailing philosophy of life would be a kind of Higher Utilitarianism, in which the Greatest Happiness principle would be secondary to the Final End principle.[131]

Central to these pursuits on the island is "*moksha*-medicine," a hallucinogenic drink taking its name from the Sanskrit Hindu term for the enlightenment that brings emancipation from the ignorance that drives the cycle of death and rebirth.

Described by one biographer as a "sinister Austin Powers," Hollingshead was undeniably an international man of mystery—meaning, in all probability, a spy.[132] In his (likely ghostwritten) autobiography, Hollingshead sources his ur-shipment of acid to the pioneering Swiss chemist at the Sandoz laboratory who first synthesized both LSD and psilocybin for personal consumption.[133] But by 1965, when Hollingshead prepared to return to London, LSD was harder to come by. The controversy surrounding Leary had caused Sandoz to close down the sale and production of the drug.

Here the story opens onto various rabbit holes (including, conspicuously, the CIA and its chief chemist, second-generation American Sidney Gottlieb), which are (still) free to examine in depth online. To the point at hand: the seminal 5,000 doses Hollingshead brought "back" to London were secured from what was then the world's last supplier of LSD (outside the Gottlieb network), the Czech government's factory in Prague—which, like its sophisticated intelligence agency, as befitted a highly strategic Soviet satellite, was ultimately overseen by the KGB. Remarkable as it may seem, the entire revolution of Anglo-American intellectual and artistic consciousness and culture that finally delivered on the sensory expectations formed by electricity and television was touched off by one person: a globe-trotting Brit of essentially unknown provenance masquerading under an invented identity and equipped to disseminate the one manufactured substance of the greatest strategic interest to the world's most powerful intelligence agencies.

But the centrality of Huxley to what is sometimes still mistakenly thought of as an organically American or Californian revolution is perhaps the strongest reminder of the proper context. *Brave New World* was written as a parodic attack on the utopian vision of H. G. Wells, whose lesser-known but truer-to-heart novel *Men Like Gods* told the tale of a disillusioned British journalist's enlightenment in an Atlantean world where "our education is our government."[134] Educated into its post-religious system of unlimited scientific advancement, the book's protagonist returns to Earth a changed man:

he belonged now soul and body to the Revolution, to the Great Revolution that is afoot on Earth; that marches and will never desist nor rest again until old Earth is one city and Utopia set up therein. He knew clearly that this Revolution is life, and that all other living is a trafficking of life with death.

Born to an irreligious father, Wells was assigned Sunday readings by his mother which included the highly influential Reformation preacher and author Christoph Christian Strum's *Reflections of the Works of God in Nature*, a book in which the reader is asked whether the surface of the Moon could really "be destitute of living creatures."[135] In his own autobiography, Wells recounts that his fear of Hell was cured in a dream where God the Father tortured "a poor broken sinner rotating slowly over a fire… never had I hated God so intensely. And then suddenly the light broke through to me and I knew this God was a lie."[136] But though the atheist weekly *Freethinker* satisfied his contempt for Christianity, Wells reflected it left him "altogether at a loss for some general statement of my relation to the stars." A telescope, by contrast—image over word—delivered him "to the starry heavens in a state of exaltation."[137]

Wells never found on Earth a spacetime sufficient to square the post-political utopia of his early work with the utopian world government he devoted himself to later. In the 1930s, he advocated the creation of a "World Brain" of knowledge accessible on demand via microfilm transported by air. By World War II, he took control of the Sankey Committee for world peace, drafting a rights declaration

for the organization that became the basis of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In *Phoenix: A Summary of the Inescapable Conditions of World Reorganization*, he made the case for the establishment of a global economy and culture under a single world-controlling regime; on April 9, 2015, a copy of *Phoenix* sold to a private collector on the strength of its signed dedication from Wells to his lover Moura Budberg, "the Godmother of this book."[138] Budberg, Wells wrote, chose the book's name and helped rear it from its infancy. Beyond obscure today, Budberg—in addition to being the love Wells took to his deathbed, despite her rejection of his proposal of marriage—was arguably the greatest spy ever implanted by the Soviet Union in the British intellectual and political elite. Although impossible to confirm for predictable reasons—she died a natural death in 1970s Italy—Budberg was understood to be an intelligence agent for the Crown as well as for Moscow, ostensibly the consequence of her arrest amid the Russian Revolution on suspicion of spying for London.

Webs of conspiracy need not be drawn to locate Wells's position at the center of what he titled in 1928 *The Open Conspiracy*—a book whose subtitles morphed over several editions from *Blue Prints for a World Revolution* to *A Second Version of This Faith of a Modern Man Made More Explicit and Plain* and finally *What Are We to Do with Our Lives?* Whatever their differences, Huxley's retreat into hallucinatory Hindu dreams is a sort of photo negative of Wells's terminal judgment that, in the end, establishing a world government was the only thing left for disenchanted Western man to

do. Certainly the life of Julian Huxley, Wells's friend and Aldous's brother, suggests a deep relationship between one utopia and the other. Secularist, atheist, manic depressive and probably bipolar, Julian had more success in advancing the neo-Darwinist thesis of knowledge-driven progress without a goal—he helped create and became the first head of UNESCO—than he did convincing his wife to accept an open marriage. But to the disgust of his rationalist colleagues, he associated himself closely with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose book *The Phenomenon of Man*—Huxley wrote the introduction—advanced a unified theory of evolution and humanism under Christian pretenses. "Just before meeting Père Teilhard," Huxley recalled, "I had written a pamphlet entitled *UNESCO: its Purpose and Philosophy*, where I stressed that such a philosophy must be global, scientific, and evolutionary humanism."[139]

> In this, I was searching for an ideological basis for man's further cultural evolution, and to define the position of the individual human personality in the process—a search in which I was later much aided by Père Teilhard's writings, and by our conversations and correspondence… the universe in its entirety must be regarded as one gigantic process, a process of becoming, of attaining new levels of existence and organization… he extends this evolutionary terminology by employing terms like ultra-hominization to denote the deducible future stage of the process in which man will have so far transcended himself as to demand some new appellation.

An unbroken line of posthuman British occultism wove and rewove itself through America across the entire electric age, from Dickens and Disraeli intimate Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton's Rosicrucian novel *Zanoni* to David Bowie's Lytton-fueled anthem "Oh! You Pretty Things"—and well beyond.[140] Hallucinogens, mathematics, knowledge; spirit, education, evolution—all these were harmonious ingredients or avatars of the same process, the highest activity in and of the universe, by which human beings and humanity as a whole would either take charge of their inherent acceleration toward a culminating point of escape from their human form or face destructive, ultimately annihilating, consequences. This, and nothing else, could be "our government" in the new age, the evolutionary moment at once onrushing and already here.

Such are the figures of thought and sensibility formed by the electric age's foregrounding of human imagination, and the fruits of televisual media's influential emphasis on all that could be made visible.

SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The enlightened unity promised by the print age failed to overcome the psychic tensions and predicaments it exacerbated. Americans grew more sensitive or fragile *and* more obsessive or intransigent, oscillating to ever more destabilizing effect between inward-facing coldness and outward-facing feverishness. "Their will resists" under such conditions, Tocqueville portends, "but reason frequently

gives way."[141] The Protestant solution to the American dilemma was to foreswear any solution, in the spirit of the parable of the wheat and tares, seeking only to ameliorate the pain of an eschatological condition already here, but not yet—*resisting* the illusion of unity by *deferring* to the divinely ordained division of the human labors of faith and reason. "In insisting that reason cannot comprehend the mystery of faith," as Mitchell writes, "the labor of reason is directed in Protestant thought entirely and with legitimacy toward the 'world'."[142] But, especially at the elite level, the trajectory of American political theology led inexorably away from the cornerstone of faith's *mystery* that held the division in place: Jesus Christ.

Without the insoluble mystery of Christ's irruption into human history, of the perfection of his teachings, of the timeline of his prophesies, and of his resurrection, ascension, and promised return, the mystery of Biblical faith may become the *mystique* of human destiny. Without the mystery of Christ—even with Christ repurposed for some other religious role—the apocalypse, the final unveiling, trans-forms from that of the Second Coming to that of the Second Bang, our unification with "God's law and God's truth" at a theological polar opposite point, infinitely distant, from God Himself. Insufficiently keyed to Christ, the theological trajectory of Biblical religion in America turned against the Protestant logic at the point the American *politeia* depended on most.

Now, the labor of reason was to be directed not only toward the world but toward disenchanting—scientizing,

mathematizing—the mystery of faith. Now, the mystery was solved: there was one path, one destiny, culminating in the divinization of the godlike spark in man. The only question was who would had the Faustian courage—the probity, the purity, ingenuity, the will—to drive us on to this only possible goal. Biblical America had become culturally fertile ground for this ultimate pantopian fantasy, and British elites, whose own Christian heritage had been morphing for centuries away from Rome and Constantinople toward more Hebraic and mystical realms, had become that fantasy's most intellectually virile disseminators. Sensing electric opportunity in the catastrophic collapse of their ancient religion and modern empire, the British intellectual elite set about, in sufficient numbers, to lead a new empire—one of the technological imagination, the only force capable of saving our consciousness through its cosmic unification with the All.

Though that empire would be a definitively spiritual one, it would be built and advanced, intentionally or no, by the only regime capable of implementing global governance through technological imagination: postwar America. Protestantism's arch-particularists had become arch-universalists; what was English in America could no longer shelter it from the mathematized dialectic purporting to unconceal the true ground of the purity of the will.

Yet there is no denying, as Teilhard's example implies, that what afflicted Anglo-American theology as the print age gave way to the electric was not parochial in any way but truly global. Each religion, each civilization was affected—all the more deeply the more electrified it was. Across the Biblical

religions and Christian denominations—frequently under Hindu and Buddhist pretexts, less frequently under Daoist ones—theology pulled the believer so far afield of God and Man that God slipped into the role of demiurge and Man into that of its flawed creation. But even at this religion's furthest point down this path away from itself, still it could say it remained just the same, that the original religion in its open-endedness includes what it becomes. If post-Jews and post-Protestants entered the slipstream of sparkism, if Roman Catholics grew vulnerable to the transformation of its universalism into an instrumental logic of universal consciousness, so too did the Eastern Orthodox find within their doctrine of *theosis* a vulnerability to the new religion.

In Soviet times and afterward, the new religion issued forth in the philosophy of panpsychism and the sect of cosmism, whose devotees seek "higher magic partnered to higher mathematics" at the highest possible level.[143] "Cosmic evolution," adherents believe, depends "on human action to reach its goal, which is perfection or wholeness. By failing to act, or failing to act correctly, humankind dooms the world to catastrophe."[144] The cosmic "unification and organization of the whole" of humanity "into a single organism" results "in a higher 'planetarian consciousness' capable of guiding further development reasonably and ethically." This world organism finds its destiny in "changing and perfecting the universe, overcoming disease and death, and finally bringing forth an immortal human race."

Under electric conditions, the new religion became thinkable everywhere, especially in the West, through and

out of all preexisting doctrines. Yet within the very novelty of the new religion was an old phenomenon, the loose but stubborn faith of gnosticism, which holds that man's perfection must be attained through the shattering of our natural confinement which alone can free our spirit being to be what it truly is—divine. The continuing susceptibility to mathematical gnostic pantopianism of Christianity and Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, and their notionally secularized counterparts suggests that this old heresy or mode of interpretation is now the most aggressive and ambitious such heresy possible, raising the prospect that this religion, despite the overthrow of the electric age by the digital, is of the kind most in conformity with the digital medium.

CHRYSKYLODONTIA

Two small religious details do remain unresolved, however. There is the curiosity of Islam. Mitchell's long personal history and teaching in Arabia lead him to conclude that

> the same sort of thing is happening to Islam as has happened to Christianity and to Judaism… its adherents come to believe that its inherited form is anachronistic, that it must be modified in accordance with the understandings and aspirations of the democratic age—that as a religion it does not quite go far enough, that it is not comprehensive after all, or, rather, not comprehensive in the right way for the democratic age.[145]

Perhaps Islam has held out so long in modernity against

the cosmic neo-Platonism of its intellectual golden age because it "purports to be the inexhaustible whole that no development in history can render limited or obsolete"[146]— the "practical handbook that never needs revision" of Gelernter's disapproval. But now, Mitchell observes, "no religion in America is immune to this modification" that changes churches into "communities" and comprehensive doctrine into universal ecumenicism.[147] "If this modification begins to occur in the Middle East, if mosques become Islamic communities in the sense that is meant by the term in America, then we will know that the delinked condition has begun to alter the workings of the heart and mind in the region." As Christ was squeezed relentlessly from America's Biblical religion under the formative pressure of the compounding technologization of communication, one can only surmise what faces the "*God-words*" of the Qur'an—"not the equivalent of the Bible for Christians," but "more akin to Christ himself—the very presence of God in the world."[148]

There is one other Western religion whose fortunes in techno-gnostic times must be considered—the oldest, more bronze than even the deepest Los Angeles tan.

Autobiographically, whatever it is about me that intransigently insists on bothering to use the word to feel my way through anything does *not* come from "the tremendous, truly Germanic solitude of the 'I' in the world," which Spengler attributes to the "strong souls" who "out of their torment conceived the burning desire to go up in God or the All or whatever they might call it, and which turned out in fact to be themselves."[149] Despite a share of Germanic blood

I have always found distasteful and fundamentally *rigged* the antinomy Spengler describes between the "Faustian soul" and that of "the mass," whose "lazy, stupid 'I', suffering from all manner of inhibitions," finds its own "release" in an "almost mystical" manner.[150] The dark affinities and code-pendencies of these the mirror images of the *German* Protestant soul, seeking a cold purity through the overcoming of the hot blood of the inner beast disclosed in Judea's wilderness, leave me claustrophobic.

Instead of the self-divinization synthesized in the horizonless desert, I want the humanity of the coast, the tumbling cliffs, the olive grove, the cool of white plaster and blue tile against the brown hills and dark vines and the glare of the sun thrown back in scoops of light from the calm, playful sea…

What I want is the Greece German barbarism, in its tortured hunger to become more Athenian than the Athenians, carried off and raped into abstraction. The Greece which preserved ancient Christianity against the corruption and collapse of the civilized world, yes, but which also, in certain pockets, maintained the old gods, perhaps, in some places, as long as three centuries after Paul set foot in Hellas. And while this peculiar Greece seems in all the crucial respects to be *hiding* now in Greece itself, what has kept me in Southern California is above all an inescapable judgment that its spacetime is the closest physically and spiritually remaining to what I am supposed to preserve— not "I" in the all-too-German sense, but in the patrilineal Greek one, the one which bestows on its sons and fathers

not the *occupational* surnames that still dominate Germany but names of family patriarchs appended with *son of*. (The symbolism is somewhat appalling that my own surname has been Americanized—abstracted—down to just the suffix: *poulos, son of*. But now I can no more throw it under the bus than I could my own father. And after all, what it means now, fittingly, is Son of Greeks…)

In response to the universal tyranny and inevitablism of the new religion, what says the voice of this oldest Greek faith, which ultimately understands that the gift of a beautiful spacetime, rich, balanced, teeming with life, a world of its own, is a divine gift that must be repaid generationally, through generation, a divine standard that must be met, fathers to sons and sons to fathers, lest the debt be defaulted on and the spacetime spirited or stolen away?

Curiously, a certain well-known spokesman on behalf of this ancient faith insists "the problem of the modern world" is not technology but "the ubiquity and rule of *a certain kind of human*," an alarmingly particular phrase in modern ears but one meaning basically the type who breaks the covenant of the beautiful spacetime, of the inhabited beauty of the unique shared home that cannot be cloned, franchised, or abstracted. It's in Spengler's sense of "not a pure race, but a *strong* one, which has a nation within it,"[151] that this oracle says the defiling of beautiful spacetime is a problem "of race, not of the modern city as such, modern progress, or the progress of technology."[152]

> The problem of our time has never been with technology as such. There is no inner working of technology that

inevitably leads to human subjection. The tendency exists merely because, by allowing an overwhelming increase in the numbers of the superfluous, it gives them and those who cater to them power when it is mixed with democracy.[153]

The loaded word "superfluous" I take to mean masses of people who have no ultimate purpose or significance discernible, even to themselves, other than the instrumental one given them by the supreme Faustians for whom the *raw material* of such a mass is the ultimate biological and spiritual energy resource necessary for their universal project of union with the divine to be made manifest out of the knowledge-creating spark of their imagination. "They live outside all law and constraint, we are but the material and fodder for their hunger."[154] As Southern California, specifically Los Angeles, bequeaths to us one of the vanishingly few spacetimes comparable in its beautiful *worldness* to that of my fathers' ancient homeland, it is unsurprisingly a spiritual battleground, as any longtime resident eventually understands, sometimes in ways more horrifying and terminal than others. It is not so crazy to me to be told about the darkest of the Faustians what David Lynch reflected back at me many years ago now concerning my city. "Their schemes are demented: the movie *Mulholland Drive* revealed some of what they do, indirectly and with metaphor. They have learned how to harness various kinds of energy, for example, the kind of energy bestowed by human attention in large numbers, and to power certain kinds of machines with it." The "public religion" of "science and rationalism"

masks—although more and more the masses are noticing and hungering for their share of what lies beneath—"something quite different." As a clue to that something, the great hidden electric age figure Erik Jan Hanussen, a Moravian occultist and hypnotist born Herschel Chaim Steinschneider (*stonecutter*), is cited, although "he was only a tool of others like him."[155] Hanussen, known in certain circles for training Hitler in some finer points of what we now call technology, entertainment, and design, infamously predicted the Reichstag fire, a feat which seems to have gotten him killed for his trouble by nervous and jealous Nazi goons. (That other great electric-age occultist and new-ager, George Gurdjieff, was not so careless or foredoomed, despite his Zelig-like knack—one his fellow pseudonymite Michael Hollingshead was also said to possess—for popping in and out of various wartime European and Asian locales, and his probably(?) apocryphal role in giving spiritual instruction to both Hitler and Stalin.)

Thomas Pynchon, who has returned throughout his novels again and again to the twin sites of electric-age Los Angeles and electric-age Germany, understands all this. The English professor Dwight Eddins shows Pynchon's preoccupation is with the feedback mechanism between *cabalistic* and *existential* gnosticism. The first "seeks control over nature in general and humanity in particular, and is capable of manipulating the course of world history so insidiously that it acquires a quasi-transcendental status," that is, "it becomes the seemingly ubiquitous and omnipotent ground of historical process. A terrible coherence is born, a causal

nexus so fiendishly engineered that human freedom of choice is effectively negated."[156] The second, by contrast, "jettisons metaphysical coherence and transcendental apparatus in favor of a cosmos defined by the very absence of sentient controls and thus by an infinity of choices that is—ironically—intimidating."

My favorite example of the depth of Pynchon's understanding of Los Angeles as a fundamental spiritual battleground is the figure of Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd, D.D.S., tracked down by the increasingly paranoid private investigator who plays semihero protagonist in Pynchon's late novel *Inherent Vice*. In his swingin' office deep within an enormous incisor-shaped building on Sunset Boulevard, Dr. Rudy reveals that the mysterious Golden Fang organization he seems to be linked to is not, in fact, the vertically-integrated international heroin cartel it is rumored to be, but rather simply "a syndicate," set up "years ago for tax purposes," in which "most of us happen to be dentists."[157] The joke is that dentists dealing heroin can get dumb hippie kids coming and going—rotting their teeth on the front end and fixing them up on the backend, not to mention piping them through mysterious re-education programs at their Chryskylodon Institute, having something to do with the power of film and television…

It's all very gauzy and *entertaining*, although *Terminator* and *Avatar* director James Cameron *did*, as a matter of public record, drop out of an L.A. college after seeing *Star Wars* and funded his first film, *Xenogenesis*, with a helpful loan from… a consortium of dentists. Many Pynchonian rabbit holes

await the explorer interested in the more arcane features of the internet's speculative biography of the fantastically successful and influential Cameron.

For now, what matters most is Pynchon's intimation that the locus of gnostic spacetime shifted during World War II from one end of the Rhodes Scholarship axis—Britain and Germany—to the other—America, and that the enabling condition of this gigantic transfer of pantopian will was California's existence as a unique and beautiful spacetime, a world-within-a-world.

By war's end America was indisputably the world center of possibility for the establishment of world governance under the theological dispensation of scientized philosophy, mathematized science, technologized mathematics, and gnosticized religion. The electric medium blew the Old World apart and collapsed its remnants, but *expanded* America with delirious speed into an explosive unitary power before which all other conceptual frameworks and reserves of energy buckled. Ground Zero for the reorganization of gnostic Western power was California, with its all-but-self-contained cultural, technological, military, erotic, and geoenergetic networks. If America had become the New All of the world, California—the California invaded and colonized by the logic and genius of the new religion—was the New All of America.

ELECTRIC SHEEP DREAM OF ANDROIDS

By the end of the twentieth century, America's ruling factions had become certain, whatever details remained, that Californized America was poised to perfect America's world governance function. Digital communications technology had made communications the ultimate technology and master of the technologies, something predictable and providential to them because of the manner in which it appeared to uniquely synthesize the great polarities between spirit and matter, imagination and knowledge, essence and existence.

To begin the infinite project of the All, the ghost needed the machine and vice versa. Machines—largely invisible ones, communications machines capable of doing things for us (by communicating with themselves) that we could not do for ourselves—would universalize the emancipated imagination. The inherently failed politics of purely human organization—first the failure of democracy, then the failure of expertise, and finally the failure of human spacetime—would at last be overcome. This was the fruit of "thinking different," as Steve Jobs told us Einstein, Dylan, King, Gandhi, Henson, Picasso, and (yes) Seinfeld had done, of "imagining" as Lennon had done, of doing that which one dreamed biggest and best. Hard engineering and ethereal ethics were at last united, with the final unity of consciousness and cosmos not far behind.

These were the not-so-secret feelings fueling the millennialist euphoria of the cyborg world ushered in by the com-

modification of the smartphone. The indifference of digital technology to those feelings, and its felt betrayal of the mission behind them—*the only possible remaining mission*—triggered the colossal effort of our ruling factions to reclaim their mastery and "restart" their project, an effort now seen everywhere at every moment from the largest to the most minute areas of life. For them, the world *must* be reglobalized; America *must* be restored as the awesome source of the All in the world and the global trajectory of the All beyond the restrictions on identity and consciousness imposed by human spacetime. They refuse to consider the looming fact that the First Generation is already beginning to see and sense a different, truly digital future, or to consider what that future, already baked into the recent past, might be.

A deeper exploration of our ruling factions, an experiment neither the engineers nor the ethereals can bear to conduct on themselves, reveals the force, the error, and the limits of their ways, and therefore what lies beyond.

ENGINEERS

By the middle ages the word *engine* had already been abstracted away from its late Latin military meaning, but in the fourteenth century, its general sense of "mechanical device" still carried the particular meaning of "one used in war." Reflecting the accumulated wisdom of Romans since the conquest of the Syracuse of Hiero and Pythagoras, *engine* had come to mean a *war* engine, such as a battering ram.

It was a revealing evolution from the word's original Latin meaning, "that which is inborn," from the same root that gives us *generation*. The Medieval French used *engin* to denote skill and cleverness as well as trickery and deceit; since the time of the English Civil War, we have married that same ancient root word and that same French meaning in our use of words like *genius* and *ingenuity*—terms which today no longer mostly carry the early modern sense of "exalted natural mental ability" and are trying to revert to the initial Latin meaning Socrates tried to express with *daemon*. For the Romans, *genius* meant, in addition to spirit or talent broadly, a "guardian deity or spirit which watches over each person from birth." Certainly since Einstein, a

stubbornly *spiritual* man, the American sense of genius has been one of someone possessed of a spark more ineffable in its divinity and prodigiousness of vision than nearly all others.

This spark, as is well known from the incessant electric-age propaganda used to raise countless battalions of post-industrial workers on America's many campuses, is what turns a person from a lump of biomass to a cosmic catalyst, a part of the engine of historical and spiritual progress. "Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice," whispered, paradoxically, the great oracle of Apple. "The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do." The tenets of Steve Jobs Thought preach, no less than those of Walt Disney Thought, the gnostic theology of genius: "have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow know what you truly want to become." Einstein himself achieved god-tier status as the ruling genius of gnostic inspiration through even more pointed teachings. "Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one." He counseled would-be geniuses to "never memorize something that you can look up," focusing instead on the generative power of the spark. "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." While "logic will get you from A to Z, imagination will get you everywhere." In fact, the only goal that could justify our existence and redeem our given flaws was to *be* everywhere:

> A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe,
> a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself,

> his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.[158]

Unquestionably, any person in whom the faculty of imagination goes dead or has never sprung to life is in some fundamental sense subhuman, an interesting point to reflect on considering digital entities, no matter how skilled or clever, have no imagination. Yet Einstein's rhapsodies to the divine spark of making things up, and the whole electric-age culture of *following your dreams, chasing your passion*, and *doing what you love*, come up against a curious obstacle: appraisal of genius throughout Western history has expressed itself in terms that appear powerfully formed and re-formed by the prevailing media environment.

THE MARK OF CHARACTER

The great scholar of memory Mary Carruthers begins her definitive study of memory as it was known and experienced in Medieval culture with this observation. "When we think of our highest creative power, we think invariably of the imagination," she notes; "this is our highest accolade for intellectual achievement, even in the sciences. The memory, in contrast, is devoid of intellect: just memorization, not real thought of true learning."[159] These judgments, Carruthers

submits, dominate our thinking "because we have been formed in a post-Romantic, post-Freudian world, in which imagination has been identified with a mental unconscious of great, even dangerous, creative power." Stunningly, and often, to us, disappointingly, our view is hardly the transhistorical norm. "Ancient and medieval people reserved *their* awe for memory. Their greatest geniuses they describe as people of superior memories… they regard it as a mark of superior moral character as well as intellect." Our moral or theological insistence that the imagination is the only source of originality and creativity in the cosmos, and therefore within ourselves, is an absurdity. The ancients and medievals cared just as much about creative activity as we do—perhaps more so; they simply understood that human memory was the key to bringing forth our prodigiousness of life, our vitality, our proximity, as limited, on Earth, as it might be, to God.

After citing Einstein's colleague Leopold Infeld on the nature of his genius—"original thinking" churned forth by a "tremendous imagination"—Carruthers quotes Thomas of Celano, a close contemporary of Thomas Aquinas, on the character of Aquinas's own: "His memory was extremely rich and retentive: whatever he had once read and grasped he never forgot; it was as if knowledge were ever increasing in his soul as page is added to page in the writing of a book."[160] Ostensibly opposite types of praise, in fact both Einstein and Thomas were hailed by their closest colleagues for "a concentrated continuous energy that expresses itself in a profound singlemindedness, a remarkable solitude and

aloofness"—in sum, "a recognizable likeness between these two extraordinary intellects."

> Human beings did not suddenly acquire imagination and intuition with Coleridge, having previously been poor clods. The difference is that whereas now geniuses are said to have creative imagination which they express in intricate reasoning and original discovery, in earlier times they were said to have richly retentive memories, which they expressed in intricate reasoning and original discovery.[161]

Relevant also to the comparison between humans and digital entities regarding what makes us *alive*, as opposed to merely *animate*, is the "essential difference between a modern and a medieval understanding of the cognitive function of memory. To have forgotten things is seen by us now as a failure of knowledge," writes Carruthers, "and therefore a reason to distrust the power of memory altogether. Yet to have forgotten some things was understood in Augustine's culture as a necessary condition for remembering others."[162] The generative power of "deliberate or selective forgetting" is indispensable (and inescapable) when it comes to building the edifice of creative memory, which is nothing less than "a work of art, using the materials of nature as all arts do, but consciously crafted for some human use and purpose." The import of these gentle yet profound ruminations is simple: the theological obsession with the imagination as the one unitary source only from which consciousness and cosmos can be united has blinded us to the creative and generative

moral power of the distinctively human memory, which functions in a manner utterly discrete from and irreplicable by the memory of even the most advanced machines. Human memory, therefore, cannot truthfully be reduced or even analogized to that of a computer, nor, in that sense, can the human mind. The precondition this imposes on the generality of cybernetics, which since Norbert Wiener has labored to understand the manner in which communications controls both living creatures and animate machines, is foundational and ineradicable.

ANY SUFFICIENTLY ADVANCED AUXILIARY

Wiener, not just a genius but a child prodigy, well understood the inevitability of this fundamental, perhaps fatal misunderstanding of "the study of control and communication in machines and living beings." Wiener warned very frankly that the future—our present—"will be an ever more demanding struggle against the limitations of our intelligence, not a comfortable hammock in which we can lie down to be waited upon by our robot slaves." What he meant by this was *not* what is now believed such a statement must mean, that man would face an ever more Faustian challenge to keep pace with technological advancement by overcoming himself through the imagining of ever more transcended spiritual totalities. Wiener used the now Very Online metaphor of the fable of the Monkey's Paw to describe the real lesson: be careful what you wish for, you just might get it. Relinquishing decisionmaking responsibility to digital

entities would result in our enslavement to outcomes and processes we could neither explain nor predict, only tragically grasp after the fact, like the bereaved parents who belatedly understood the Paw had returned their beloved son in zombie form.

But, crucially, no good would come of trying to establish responsibility over digital entities through the ingenious division of labor of governing their superhuman memories by programming them to obey our imagination.

It is remarkable, given Wiener's background, how rarely—almost never—he speaks of imagination or even uses the word *imagine*. He uses instead the language of wishing and wishes. A staggering labor and duty attends the *specificity* with which we must articulate our wishes to automated agents—and the *foresight* with which we must not only *game out* the automated wish implementation process but also accumulate and synthesize the intent of those wishes. In considering the challenges to "ingenuity" bedeviling this foresight, Wiener seems to have in mind something like Aristotle's "deliberative imagination." This faculty "of composing an image" is, as Carruthers relates, "joined to a power of judgment, whereby we form an opinion of the image we have composed" out of various mental images. Recollection, for the medievals, was therefore "understood to be a re-enactment of experience, which involves cogitation and judgment, imagination, and emotion;" Aristotle, capturing the gist of this sense of sensation, concludes that "experience is formed of many memories." For Wiener, the deliberative process that pertains to tracking the alignment

of outputs to inputted wishes is the continuous one of *feedback*, through which, if confronted by a divergence of outputs from inputs that begins to augur too great an ill, "we can turn back before it is too late." The inherent vice of cybernetic automation applied to human life is that sufficiently advanced entities cease to supplement the feedback process and instead supplant it: "if the feedback is built into a machine that cannot be inspected until the final goal is attained, the possibilities for catastrophe are greatly increased."

> A goal-seeking mechanism will not necessarily seek *our* goals unless we design it for that purpose, and in that designing we must foresee all steps of the process for which it is designed, instead of exercising a tentative foresight which goes up to a certain point, and can be continued from that point on as new difficulties arise. The penalties for errors of foresight, great as they are now, will be enormously increased as automatization comes into its full use.

To this existential menace, McLuhan would add that, no matter how expertly and ethically foresight had labored to extend a sufficiently responsible feedback process into the workings of advanced entities, the *environment* formed by those entities—which becomes increasingly indistinguishable *from* the entities as they grow more ubiquitous and active—always exerts formative effects on human beings beyond the reach of our power to control or forestall. The transformation of engineering into a science of making

wishes come true turned computer science into cyborg science by wedding the bridegroom of the human imagination to the bride of machine memory. In so doing, it conspired to discredit the human memory as a characteristic locus of human genius and, more deeply, as the definitive, indispensable foundation of our human identity. What Virilio called the "mystical materialism" of America's scientific obsession with making machines that made dreams manifest, formed so powerfully by the electric age, arose from and exacerbated the great prejudice and ignorance against human memory that culturally and scientifically defined it.[163] What was lost in the process was momentous and profound: any hope for awareness that not just individual idea, any sense of *duty*, that the research, development, and programming of digital devices could only be undertaken responsibly with regard to protecting our humanity by making human memory, and not human imagination, the master of those devices.

The challenge then is twofold. First, an autonomous digital entity constructed to receive as inputs rules set forth from out of the human imagination (that is, *wishes*) would be so sophisticated in its workings, yet so literal, that the resultant opaqueness of its output-producing process (e.g., *policy*) would take away our one capability (*feedback*) to prevent the sudden and unanticipated issuance of results catastrophically hostile to human life.

Second, the formal effects of autonomous digital entities as a medium will forever run ahead of our ability to know them in a way sufficient to control them.

ESMOCRACY IN AMERICA

But this is not true only in the limited way Wiener under-scores through his use of another of Goethe's masterworks, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, to illustrate how the use of machines by imagineers with insufficient foresight can approach "the edge of catastrophe."[164] Remembering only "some fragments of an incantation" to start the broom to work, the apprentice "is well on the way to be drowned when the magician comes back, recites the words of power, and gives the apprentice a good wholesome scolding. Even here the final catastrophe is averted through a *deus ex machina*," Wiener notes mordantly.

It seems Wiener had no awareness that Disney's ad-aptation of the fable in its 1940 film *Fantasia* had, for the purposes of his illustration, at least, improved on Goethe's story in a certain way. There, the sorcerer (named Yen Sid) has (of course) Mickey Mouse for his apprentice. The plot unfolds as Goethe wrote it—until, "when the water keeps rising, Mickey, in desperation, grabs a huge ax, and chops the broom into pieces."[165]

> Just when it is all over, as Mickey is away, the little wooden split pieces, lying quietly on the floor, begin to come alive, stand upright, grow arms out of their sides, and turn into more brooms with buckets of water. They keep going to the vat and fill it up. Mickey tries to get the water out, but finds that there are too many brooms. Mickey goes to a book and looks for a spell to stop the brooms. Mickey finds himself in a whirlpool… Yen Sid comes in and sees this, and with

a wave of his hands, the water descends and the army of brooms is decreased to one broom.

Disney's retelling reflects our deep human memory of the problem of the swarm. The ancient Greeks employed έσμός to describe anything swarming, flocking, or streaming, from insects to milk to diseases to, as Aeschylus used it his play *The Suppliants*, people in the act of preying on or pursuing others. Today, we characteristically distinguish among groups, crowds, mobs, and masses, leaving swarms for the bugs and the buglike, including buglike bots. To Mickey's horror, he spawns a marching army of broombots, one indifferent as they trample him underfoot to his feelings or even his existence. Mickey points us past Wiener's linear nightmare of the all-too-logical solitary broom, automated by a surfeit of imagination and a deficit of memory, past Disney's wartime electric-age metaphor of the inexorably advancing column, toward the problem of the swarm.

The reality of the digital swarm, already upon us today, is different in kind from the brooms of both Wiener's and Disney's cautionary fables. Like the brooms, the swarm is not alive, *animated* and not animate; unlike the brooms, the swarm is not organized and is not comprehensible by analogy even to mobs or masses of animate creatures. For this reason the digital swarm is the obsession of today's architectonic social engineers, who consider their existential purpose and challenge to be the discovery and implementation of digital technologies that can control the swarm as their predecessors used electric technology to control human beings.

The political scientists and social engineers of the electric age used radio and televisual technology to manipulate individuals no less than crowds, mobs, and masses wholesale. "Propaganda can act only where man's psychology is influenced by the crowd or mass to which he belongs," Ellul wrote; "in the United States these means are called the mass media of communications for good reason: without the mass to receive propaganda and carry it along, propaganda is impossible."[166] The unlimited wartime engineering of the electric age produced at the highest level in Anglo-America a Cold War consciousness that *communications itself* had become, in distinction from and "in exchange for the terrors of the hydrogen bomb," the only superweapon that could not just be *used* but whose use could be *systematized*.[167] In McLuhan's vision of a global guerrilla infowar with no possible distinction between the military and the civilian, he glimpsed the inhuman extent of our instantaneous power to destroy enemies by "nuking" their accounts. But unlike John von Neumann, the military-intelligence complex, and, in time, the Five Eyes intelligence network, of course, he never turned it into a policy of statecraft.

In the first major (and autobiographical) history of the network, Anthony Wells—an all-but-perfectly-typecast US-naturalized British naval spy, billed as an expert in irregular warfare, political systems, and "the science and art of Information and Deception Operations," now ensconced "with a US-UK group on the leading edge of cyber related systems and operations"—approvingly pulls back the curtain on the blunt reality that the weaponization

of communications ensured domestic governance in the electric age democracies of the English-Speaking Peoples had become indistinguishable from planetary war. "A US citizen could sit say in their home in Wichita, Kansas, and communicate via the web, or one of multiple means of global digital communications, that pass through non-US based telecommunications locations and devices. Those communications, in whatever form, voice, data, and visual, can be intercepted by the Five Eyes," Wells allows.[168] "The global complexity of telecommunications makes the difference between what is a domestic communication, or not, extremely complex." The "unique institutional relationship, within five separate institutions," Wells characterizes bluntly as "indeed a state within five states."[169] This global state, embedded and sequestered from the accountability to which other officers were held according to its member states' forms of government, "began the task of collecting massive amounts of government, private, and commercial communications across all frequencies and bandwidths, such as telephone calls, faxes, and later emails and other visual and data traffic, whether via satellite transmissions, telephone networks, and other more sensitive means."[170]

> Later technology firms such as Google, Apple and Microsoft cooperated with the Five Eyes, together with existing historic relationships with communications companies. There have been numerous Five Eyes major programs over the decades since World War II, and these continue to this day.

Among them, Wells intimates, are efforts focused not only on climate change but on "hate crimes" and "ultra-right wing groups and individuals."[171] Not among them, unsurprisingly, is the digital catastrophe itself. "The opposition will use AI as much as the Five Eyes. The latter have to be many steps ahead, all the time." Wells drops the remark in relation to Russia, but how expansively "the opposition" to Five Eyes is interpreted—at a moment when the internet bristles with uncensored social media posts from top officials equating Trump voters to al Qaeda and the Taliban—the reader is free, for now, to surmise. The "detailed profiles of all of us" which Five Eyes create and maintain are already "used 24/7 to provide marketing data for vendors, a purely innocent commercial activity," Wells suggests, "that we all either endure or benefit from as a result of our internet interactions."[172] Yet he portrays us all, in the end, as digital captives—"science and technology are calling the tune, and the key to the future is enabling Five Eyes governments to stay abreast of technical change"[173]—who can only find freedom in deeper captivity: only "a small highly capable elite cadre of mathematicians and computer scientists who are in a class of their own," and no longer even slower-moving entities like DARPA, can keep pace with "the sheer speed at which technical change is occurring."[174] How human, how consistent with our form of government, will our future be, when we are rushing so many steps ahead? Here the loquacious spy falls silent.

The social engineers of the biggest tech firms, of course, have something of an answer. By perfecting ever more fully the *determinacy* of their programming—its ability to

guarantee *y* output given *x* input—they'll be able to hand responsibility to their digital beehives to keep the pace and power of technology manageable. But these things get complex—complicated to a degree institutionalized complexity theory has been unable to resolve. Google, I am told, tried unsuccessfully to build machine learning systems capable of controlling Google Cloud.[175] This yearning, this insistence that the bugless, unhackable, perfect language exists, and that *everything* can be built on top of it and within it, echoes through the unofficial Silicon Valley side of the technocracy as much as through the official Five Eyes side. "The brains exist in the overall Five Eyes community to negate cyberattacks," Wells promises; the brains exist in the Googleplex, we are meant to believe, to negate indeterminacy. To the degree the digital swarm can't be taught to control itself or other machines through the basic machine learning of linear regression, well, the engineers have enough of a gods'-eye view of the network that they can learn from the swarm by tweaking, poking, playing with it. They'll intervene in the social graph, for instance, perhaps by nuking a hugely popular and important account—perhaps *the largest* such account—and seeing what happens: what behavior emanates from the social system; what patterns it reveals; what links, what relationships, what substructures still aren't interoperable. Stalin infamously asked how many divisions had the Pope. Today's equivalent is just as blunt: how many swarms do your datacenters have? Google, and Amazon, and the other major players, have a lot. They are masters of interlocking properties that afford them a

relationship of the digital swarm the envy, perhaps, even of Five Eyes.

But do they have a Plan B? It would appear their core value (to speak corporatese) is to try to control the swarm and hope for the best, meaning an acceptance, among the people subsumed within that swarm, of a reduction of their freedom, agency, and humanity to that of the simulacrum, which those incomparably above them forever approach the complete comprehension of the All.

However insolent in the face of human nature, the engineers' wager is utterly at odds with the inescapable truth that the swarm will *forever* operate on us in a manner which is inherently beyond human control—because it is a kind of effect, the formative effect of an environment, which humans, whether singly or together, cannot produce intentionally. Our tools *formally* shape us in a way unlike and incomparable to the *instrumental* way we shape them. If we create tools intending that they perfect our intentions for us, we lose the ability to prevent them from doing the opposite before it's too late; but from the first moment that intention leads to the creation of such tools, it is already too late. The intention reflects and programs in the illusory belief that media do what we wish more than they do to us what they, indifferent to our wishes, do.

This is the prophetic warning contained within McLuhan's aphorism that the medium is the *massage*: the *content* of our wishes is forever the slave of the *context* of our media, which "work us over completely" *regardless* of what we say.

THE UNTHINKABLE SINKS THE UNSINKABLE

One huge example of the undesirable and unintended outcomes warned against by Wiener and McLuhan is the digital catastrophe itself, a vastly unexpected misfortune that befell the expert engineers making up one of America's two ruling factions. Having tried to imbue the American-built and American-led information age with the American cult of imagination as its governing spirit, the engineering elite was shocked to discover that the digital medium had other effects—ones not only contrary to the instrumental intentions of the engineers, but radically different from engineering itself in how those effects were caused. Once America had sufficiently globalized its financial structure, its security apparatus, and its collective consciousness, the plan was to use communications technology to Americanize the world—in ways war, commerce, and entertainment couldn't do absent such technology.

Instead, rivals and adversaries like Russia and China—and even friends and allies like India, Israel, and the EU—grew increasingly independent in their strategic media infrastructure and in the strategic approaches they took to reworking governance in response to, and through, the triumph of digital technology. "Were Turkey or China or Russia to import the whole set of Western values and rules, their societies would soon become replicas of the West and lose their cultural independence," Bruno Maçães observes.[176] "While this process was seen as the necessary price for becoming modern," as the digital age has set in,

"many doubts have been growing about whether it is really necessary to imitate Western nations in order to acquire all the benefits" technologically advanced societies boast.[177]

Notably, not all sovereign states have evinced the capacity to secure their strategic media infrastructure and resist the cultural colonization that comes with becoming a digital client of a great-power sponsor. It appears the states which *are* capable of digital sovereignty in this sense so are those Maçães calls "civilization states," after the style of Samuel Huntington, whose "clash of civilizations" thesis advanced the extremely unfashionable (because accurate) claim that "the concept of a universal civilization helps justify Western cultural dominance of other societies and the need for those societies to ape Western practices and institutions."[178] If America can opt "to pursue its particular vision with all the tools of state power," Maçães asks, why would civilization states with sufficient technological capability "refrain from building a state around their own conception of the good life, a state with a whole civilization behind it?"[179] Under these radically new conditions, digital statecraft obviously begins with the foundational question of how, within the constraints of the digital environment, a regime can successfully conform to the definitive disciplines, devotions, and duties of its civilization the development, deployment, and culture of communications technology.

Forging and implementing authoritative answers to that question is just what the world's leading civilization states have spent the past decade or so doing. The condition of possibility for the new digital statecraft was nothing other

than the re-formation of the global psychological and social environment by the triumph of the digital medium.

But under the leadership of the Obama administration, America's ruling factions grew sloppy. The absurdly lopsided power of their explosive digital advances convinced them the time had come to merge America and the world into a single enlightened order. Now, the most powerful tool of governance on Earth was communications technology itself, a revolution that made it imperative for policymakers to load surveillance, security, and social media software with the primary responsibility for manifesting America's and the world's harmonious and unified new destiny. Surely, only this power could transcend that of the holy warriors who had ground America's crusade against "terror" to a standstill. Or that of China, whose inexorable rise to peer status expanded and enriched America's political and financial elite. Surely, only digital dominance could transcend Russia's sprawling geopolitical reach and ideological influence.

And surely, it all could—and would—be done without firing a shot. The dangerous nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran could be hacked and neutralized long enough for one or another deal to be made. The sea of secret information coursing through the world's fiberoptic cables and across its wi-fi networks could be hoovered up and carefully sifted without having to risk the life and limb of imperfect and often unstable agents in the field. Terrorism could be stopped before it started; trade secrets could be lifted without starting trade wars; voters could be cannily microtargeted through data mined as routinely as other

data, collected from Americans without their knowledge or warrant. The largest and most powerful international intelligence organization ever to be created would do all this and more. America's governance elite was convinced: in the new age, the digital age, the ultimate war machine was ingenuity itself, and your ingenuity was only as good as the bots it produced.

Sealed in this bubble of false expectations, the American governance elite was totally unprepared for what happened instead: Edward Snowden's disclosures; the putative Arab Spring; the rise of ISIS; Beijing's expansionism, including its rollup of the human US intelligence network in China and its exfiltration of some 20 million records files from the US Office of Personnel Management; Moscow's reacquisition of Crimea, its intervention in Syria, and its maneuvers in Ukraine. Going back further, of course, the exogenous shocks of the financial crisis and 9/11 itself could be added to the list. But the real earthquake came on election night 2016, when America's ruling factions went in a matter of hours (per the *New York Times* prediction needle) from a 99% certainty that Hillary Clinton would defeat Donald Trump to a 100% certainty that she would not. In the face of this final insult, the latent "implausibility of defeating Russia, China, or even Afghanistan with the weapons of digital singularity" grew so profound that the logical next step was to "'strategically redeploy' toward a more auspicious 'battlefield'—one gruesomely familiar to anyone who remembers the call a number of years ago to abandon 'nation building' abroad and undertake it 'at home.'"[180]

A decent understanding of media theory and the character of digital technology cannot insulate against all attacks, much less "predict" every crisis, calamity, or crime that materializes out of the future to plague us in the present. But the epistemological funhouse in which America's elite had locked itself produced a systemic culture of misinformation and misperception which, for all the vaunted powers and more or less sovereign authority of the US-UK Intelligence Community, led to surprise after surprise and humiliation after humiliation, a staggering display of core incompetence in statecraft which destroyed America's global strategic advantage in a handful of years and which not even periodic foreknowledge of the decade's hallmark crises within especially negligent or nefarious corners of the governance complex would be adequate to explain.

THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL FUNPLEX

What does suffice as perhaps the only plausible reason for the string of disasters leading up to the general digital catastrophe faced by America's ruling factions is *speed*—the sheer velocity of events the governance elite unleashed deliberately, as a matter of strategic state policy, not only during the 2010s but considerably earlier. Under Obama, social media became the most important strategic industry in America, the result of a powerfully executed plan at perfect odds with Obama's 2008 assertion that he desired "an antitrust division in the Justice Department that actually believes in antitrust law."[181] Within just a

few years of the iPhone's ascent to unprecedented socio-economic dominance, the tune had changed. Regulators waved through Facebook's acquisition of both Instagram and WhatsApp—on the basis of, at least in the first case, an analysis which "remains secret," as law professor and Obama and Trump appointee Tim Wu laments.[182] "In total," Wu recalls, "Facebook managed to string together 67 unchallenged acquisitions," with Amazon notching 91 and Google a vertiginous 214. "In this way, the tech industry became essentially composed of just a few giant trusts: Google for search and related industries, Facebook for social media, Amazon for online commerce."[183] Wu neglects to emphasize that, for all Amazon's weight in the logistics space, Amazon Web Services is where its true strategic dominance is to be found, as any member of the Intelligence Community can tell you. But what can only be inferred from other sources is that the platform giants were constructed more or less intentionally in a swing-for-the-fences act of policy entrepreneurship, one aimed at peacefully moving the US and the world toward a single governance structure built on concentrated American power over communications technology and the information it generated, processed, and housed in impregnable datacenters.

The consolidation of the platform sector was executed quickly because it had to be. In January 2007, Apple Computer Inc. became Apple the consumer electronics company. Months later, the iPhone debuted. "In the 5-year period following the launch of the iPhone and iPod Touch," Mariana Mazzucato reports, "Apple's global net sales

increased nearly 460 percent," with iOS products averaging nearly three-fourths of Apple's net sales from 2011 to 2014.[184] "In 2011, Apple's revenue ($76.4 billion) was so big that it surpassed the US government's operating cash balance ($73.7 billion)." Between 2001 and 2013, Apple's stock price climbed from $8 to $700. By 2014, revenues topped $182 billion, and nominal market cap cleared $700 billion, an unprecedented amount. As Mazzucato convincingly shows, these transformative results arose from a simple "vision" in the mind of Apple Steves Jobs and Wozniak: "that enormous value could be captured from the technologies made available mostly as a result of the prior efforts of the State."[185] From Lithium-ion batteries and the microprocessor to the multi-touch screen and NAVSTAR-GPS, innovations researched and developed by America's Military-Industrial Complex provided the building blocks of the iPhone's success—and the transformation of America into the first cyborg nation, digits, eyes, and brain stems fully glued to their smartphone screens. "Apple concentrates its ingenuity not on *developing* new technologies and components, but on *integrating* them into an innovative architecture," that is, imbuing them with *mystique*; "without the massive amount of public investment behind the computer and Internet revolutions," Jobs's electric-age mystique of the child at play "might have led only to the invention of a new toy."[186]

Mazzucato does not discuss the colorably toylike company Pixar, but its origins fit the pattern she identifies just as neatly as Jobs's more tool-oriented companies. Pixar's signature animations are created on their propri-

etary RenderMan software, an interface developed with the company's Pixar Image Computer running on portentously named Transputer chips. Transputers were specially designed by the British semiconductor company Inmos International for the high-performance parallel computing Pixar needed to execute its complex and intensive graphic rendering. Inmos was a US-UK company, complete with subsidiaries in each country, founded by three key players in the postwar tech industry. Iann Barron's involvement in tech reached back to 1955, when, soon to read math and philosophy at Cambridge, a precocious letter elicited an invitation from the National Research and Development Corporation (the UK agency tasked to advance the computation) to meet personally the body's managing director. That meeting led to a job at Elliott Automation, where one of Britain's first computers was designed. On the day of Barron's liability for national service, he was instead requisitioned by the War Office for three years of highly-classified government R&D in computers—leading to the production of several military machines later commercialized as an ultra-high-speed general-purpose computer for scientific and industrial use. Richard Petritz, one of Barron's two American cofounders, was a Naval Officer and Radar Specialist during World War II. Earning a Physics Ph.D. at Northwestern, he became the chief of semiconductor research at the US Naval Ordnance Laboratory, then moving to semiconductor R&D at Texas Instruments, venture capital, and high-end consulting (The World Bank, IBM) before linking up with Barron and becoming Co-Founder, Chairman, and CEO of Inmos In-

ternational. Paul Schroeder, Barron's third, designed the random-access semiconductor chip that enabled the Petritz-cofounded circuit manufacturer Mostek to become the world leader telecom products until Japan and Korea's highly competitive entry into the global semiconductor market.[187]

Pixar Image Computer, for its part, originated as a machine built by the New York Institute of Technology Computer Graphics Lab to make CGI filmmaking possible. The Lab head was Edwin Catmull, a Disney lover from his youth who became a digital imaging expert under the guidance of Ivan Sutherland, computer graphics pioneer and the key professor and advisor in the University of Utah's lavishly ARPA-funded R&D labs. (Sutherland would replace visionary cybernetics and cyborg theorist J. C. R. "Lick" Licklider atop ARPA's Information Processing Techniques Office in 1964.[188]) Catmull mentored alongside Sutherland students like Alan Kay, inventor of the point-and-click GUI; John Warnock, cofounder of Adobe Systems; and Jim Clark, cofounder of Netscape. (Sutherland himself, born to a Scottish Mother and a Kiwi father, had his computer-drawing thesis supervised by Claude Shannon, a Vannevar Bush protégé whose pioneering wartime government work on cryptography was surpassed in influence only by his foundational efforts in information theory.) Thus pedigreed, Catmull was approached in the '70s by George Lucas to run the Lucasfilm computer graphics division Industrial Light & Magic. When Steve Jobs bought Lucas's digital division, Catmull came with, co-founding Pixar and,

after its sale to Disney, becoming Walt Disney Animation Studios President. Catmull's thirty-year collaborator John Lasseter, eventually Pixar's Chief Creative Officer, handed the reins in 2018 to Pete Docter, a celebrated Pixar animator whose midlife crisis passion project, *Soul*, gives a pivotal role to the spirit guide Moonwind—a hippie British mystic with an ad sign-twirling gig in reality and a role as captain of a cosmic galleon in "the zone," the film's ecstatic trance world where souls immersed in their private passions go.[189]

What applies to Pixar, in short, applies just as well to the rest of Apple: "every technology that makes the iPhone smart and not stupid owes its funding to both basic and applied research funded by the State."[190] In fact, Mazzucato affirms, the iPhone was merely the latest step in a clear pattern of innovation attributed to Silicon Valley companies arising instead from the behemoths of the security state. Personal computing itself "was made possible by the technological breakthroughs achieved through various public-private partnerships established largely by government and military agencies," breakthroughs resulting from R&D at DARPA, AT&T Bell Labs, Xerox PARC, Shockley, and Fairchild Semiconductor, among others.[191] Mosaic, many Americans' first World Wide Web browser and the first to show images inline with text, was born at the National Science Foundation's supercomputer center at the University of Illinois. It was, as a result, free to all.

Fairchild is notable in its own right: its spinoff by eight scientists and engineers who walked out on Shockley back in 1957 created a model by which the state could

push "innovative ideas" from "lab to market in far greater quantity."[192] DARPA, Mazzucato notes, "recognized the potential this new innovation environment provided" and took advantage, "focusing at first on new, smaller firms to which they could provide much smaller funds than was possible with the larger defense contractors."[193] In the spirit of Vannevar Bush's 1945 paper *Science, the Endless Frontier: A Report to the President on a Program for Postwar Scientific Research*, DARPA made it "the government's business to understand which technologies provided possible applications for military purposes as well as commercial use."[194] (It was Bush who first conceived of the electronic links later named *hypertext*.) The military and intelligence complex was simply the tip of the spear of strategic policy set from the top in Washington to drive innovation in technology out into the very fibers of American life. The security state-to-startup pipeline was born.

For Mazzucato, this is more than mere history. It is a blueprint—the only one viable for economic growth and ethical progress in American life. The state must "envision a *direction* for technological change and invest in that direction," creating "a network of willing... agents that are keen to seize this opportunity through public-private partnerships."[195] Without the Faustian state, and without a powerful public narrative *celebrating and justifying* that state, the fable of entrepreneurial genius that springs up in its place "hurts innovation and increases inequality."[196] As the commercialization of military and intelligence products beats swords into slick and beautiful plowshares, communi-

cations experts must wage what Tony Judt (another secular Jewish Brit who set up academic shop in the US) "called a 'discursive battle'" to change "*the way we reason about the State, its role, and its structure*."[197] In this way, Mazzucato answers her own provocative question of "what exactly is the role of the private sector" when "government has to do the research, fund major infrastructure investments and also undertake the commercialization effort."[198] In the dispensation created by the "entrepreneurial state," the private sector's purpose is to instructionally initiate the people into the system of belief that the technological engineering of society by the state is ethically imperative. From one end, expert communicators wage discursive battle to discredit any objection to the Faustian state's establishment and pursuit of radical new technological objectives with no real guardrails, budgetary constraints, or accountability measures in place. From the other, charismatic, superficially foolish figures like Jobs transform the public mass from tech-supplemented producers of valuable culture to technologized consoomers of electronics. In a system where ever more advanced forms of communication technology take over and merge together the roles of weapon, tool, and toy, "technology, entertainment, and design" becomes a unitary ethos for erasing the boundary between civilian and military participation in the informational war for the world which the State intends to win.

WEAKER TOGETHER

The underpinning of this *infowar* in a fully integrated commercial and communications complex brings the regime full circle to its logic of origin. "In World War II," Philip Mirowski recounts in *Machine Dreams: Economics Becomes a Cyborg Science*, "physicists and their allies, recruited to help deploy new weapons of mass destruction, participated in the *reorganization* of science patronage and management by conceiving a novel *theory of organization* inspired by physics and… the theory of the computer."[199] This theory, Mirowski continues, was "imperfectly absorbed and revised by a key subset of economists into a variant of the man-machine cyborg celebrating *market organization* within the neoclassical tradition."

> Problems posed by military management of science were reprocessed into a mechanistic science of management, and then once again fused into an unstable amalgam with the previous neoclassical tradition.

Under the weight of the regime's postwar digital statecraft, "nothing seems poised to reverse the neoclassical hollowing out of human beings into hulking mechanical shells: not experimental economics, not evolutionary game theory, not Herbert Simon, not Robert Frank, not Amartya Sen, not the Santa Fe Institute, nothing."[200]

Mirowski less than sanguinely suggests that "instead of repeatedly confusing ourselves with machines that

represent for us the icon of rationality, we might come to see ourselves as organisms evolving in tandem with our machines."[201] But here is something crucial to the very logic of self-dehumanizing *dirigisme* he hopes we at least can circumscribe. As Deutsch explains, Darwinian evolution in its present improved form drops out "misconceptions" like "the survival of the fittest" to focus on how only biological adaptation and human knowledge are (so-called) "abstract replicators: forms of information which, once they are embodied in a suitable physical system, tend to remain so while most variants of them do not."[202] If the only ultimate interest or purpose to be found in the universe is in making the spark of the imaginative will unfold super-abundantly beyond merely human spacetime, organizers working in furtherance of that ultimate project will labor to ensure that the physical systems in which human knowledge can be "embodied" are *large enough* for the rule of its "remaining" to take evolutionary hold. Logically, the best guarantor of human knowledge *maximally* remaining in the universe is to build systems maximally suitable for its preservation and expansion—optimizing, specifically, for that very knowledge appurtenant to maximizing its own persistent presence in and across the universe. The Faustian project becomes its own best, and only, justification, simultaneous to its becoming the best and only justification for the extension of human knowledge beyond human spacetime and, ultimately, human identity.

But if Japanese biologist Motoo Kimura is correct, the limit of Darwinian theory is that "you need big populations

in order for selection to be dominant," as math theoretician Freeman Dyson has observed.[203] In small populations, random drift exerts more influence than selection, and small populations are decisive in both the rise of new species *and* the duration of old species. The "enormous richness of species" on Earth flies in the face of selection, which, if dominant, would result in large populations of few species, a convergence toward uniformity. The issue is not whether we are evolving in tandem with our machines but what size are the populations in which we are evolving—and what stake our regimes have (and for what reason) in trying to shape us into populations *large* enough to evolve in ways that favor their manipulation of our "human resources" toward dehumanizing ends. Selection in biology "favors the variants that most improve" genes' ability to reproduce through their organisms and "spread through the population." In human knowledge, however, "selection is by criticism and experiment." The use of cyborg economics to reorder humanity into the largest possible population so far creates the most universal possible system so far of criticisms and experiments, one primed to explode toward infinity through the use of automation that progressively distances "human" knowledge from human sources. Preserving humanity from digital statecraft in this sense demands a counter-craft of ensuring populations are not instrumentally ordered into global homogeneity by humans, machines, or cyborgs.

IF YOU EAT YOUR OWN TAIL
IT EVENTUALLY BITES BACK

Today, to challenge or even question the "discursive battle" waged by the military intelligence complex and its "willing agents" in the top communications and consumer electronics firms is to open oneself up to accusations of the most severe and incendiary kind. But it was only yesterday—well, 2010—when Pulitzer Prize-winning author and frequent *New York Review of Books* contributor Garry Wills could say of the Manhattan Project—to acclaim in *The New York Times Book Review, Vanity Fair, Financial Times*, and so on—that "the military-industrial complex, with a poisonous admixture of government and secrecy, had scored a triumph that would show the way to many other governmental activities. It offered a seductive model," Wills cautioned. "The secrecy that had enveloped Los Alamos would steal quietly across the entire American landscape in the years to come."[204] Today, horrifically, Wills sounds almost quaint in his plaintive objection to George W. Bush's establishment of "an alternative justice system, secret and unaccountable, to 'fight terror.'" Warns Wills:

> the advantage of permanent emergency, for the executive, is that even trivial things can routinely be accomplished by the crisis presidency. If everything is an emergency, all power is emergency power. And if a President can start a war on his own say-so, what can he not do?[205]

And if America's role as All, as the engine of the unification of everything, is threatened by its own technological creations, what will it not do in the name of emergency to them—and us—to try to reverse such a seeming catastrophe?

Conditions are converging onto an answer to that question consistent with the four elements of disastrous failure in great utopian social engineering schemes identified by James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State*.

Scott first lists "the transformative simplifications" of "the administrative ordering of nature and society."[206] Such reorderings are "maps that, when allied with state power, would enable much of the reality they depicted to be remade."[207] Another way to describe mapmaking of this sort is creating a virtual model. The administrative creation of a simplified or abstracted miniature of a particular human spacetime from which reorganization can be modeled is by no means a guarantee of disaster or even of utopian planning. But it is striking that the regime effort to reclaim authority and power from digital technology has led naturally to the regime thrusting its authority and power into digital spacetime. The swath of internet filled with the 24/7 information war known as the discourse is of course a tiny sliver of digital spacetime, but its immense influence over the vast majority of online Americans makes it the ideal instrumental model for the transformative simplification, in accordance with the regime's theological and ideological convictions, of those mapped into the virtual world.

Second on the Scott list is "a high-modernist ideology," meaning a perhaps fanatical devotion to "scientific and

technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws."[208] The new techno-gnostic religion with which America's ruling factions are entranced clearly aims to cement into America's successor regime the imperatives of scientific and technical progress, mastery of nature, and rational design of the social order in accordance with the ruling understanding of the laws of physics. Production will have to be expanded in the superficially idiosyncratic sense of a very few producing a lot more and a very many (humans) producing a lot less: a handful of human elites and the limitless sea of the digital swarm will generate vast new productions, but the human biomass will reduce consumption to a steady-state minimum which will be re-engineered to more than compensate in sensory and spiritual experience. In this sense human needs will be satisfied to an unprecedented degree through the imposed transference of demands from real to virtual life. People reduced from today's standard to an unabashedly subhuman status will *feel*, relative to today, like gods. Among the key techniques of frustrated high-modernists looking to *reset* their societies at a stroke, Scott observes, is "miniaturization: the creation of a more easily controlled micro-order in model cities, model villages, and model farms," all evocative of the patterns and structures of online life into which the regime herds the public with a progressively more invasive and coercive hand.

"Only when these first two elements are joined to a

third does the combination become potentially lethal," and that third is "an authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs into being."[209] Stipulating that our ruling factions oppose only the authoritarianism they imagine their opponents most effectively using as a weapon or rallying symbol against them, even though they then attempt to mask their transparent authoritarianism by mobilizing communications and commercial elites to publicly imagine and image it otherwise, it's unclear that the regime has the willingness to bring *full* coercive power to bear, either on or offline. That uncertainty appears to be the one possible shortfall in the convergence of conditions onto Scott's criteria of catastrophic social disaster, given that condition four—"a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans"—is already satisfied by around half of the society as a whole, and perhaps a larger share of its civil institutions.

It should be expected that, even if the willingness to apply complete power for the sake of compliance is incomplete, the regime will at least try hard, leaning hardest into what it considers its most economical and leveraged application of force. After all, as Spengler remembered Frederick the Great to have said, God is always on the side of the big battalions, and if the regime's human supporters are no longer quite as strong as the American nation that won the last world war, well, it has bots in spades. Plus those institutions. And it controls almost all the communications channels, and almost all the content…

The answer may be blowing in the wind, but the swarm of digital entities merging ever more fully into an environment does not care one way or the other. Even if they are catechized somehow into accepting and disseminating the master theology of the regime, they will continue to shape us as befits them, in their image. Captivated by the vision of cyborg man as the wielder of ultimate weapons that, unlike the Bomb, could be masterfully used worldwide, convinced that computer power would allow the transfer of responsibility for the weaponization of electric and digital communications to perfectly programed machines, our Faustian engineers of state have failed to foresee—much less accept—that the formative force of digital technology would frustrate their instrumental schemes through its uniquely human homeostatic effects. Accepting this limiting reality, we could have ontologically resolved the ontological crisis the digital catastrophe triggered. We are human, which is to say, what we make and do produces uncontrollable and unpredictable limits on our power to make what we imagine real, even—especially—when we focus obsessively on mass-producing and disseminating tools meant to manifest our dreams more powerfully than we alone, unaided by machines, can do. (Even conflagrations and derangements of the electric age cannot be disentangled from its homeostatic effects.) Against our saving homeostasis, the longing to violate its ontological truth by engineering a technological end to the merely human world can only manifest as it does—as a willed dream to end our humanity.[210]

Whatever demons might lurk in the darker corners of

the moral imagination of the Anglo-American military-intelligence complex, its Faustian wager on the technological convergence of man and machine, word and weapon, and entertainment and war drove the social terraforming of its citizens and subjects past the point of control by human or digital systems. Raw imagination is indistinguishable from absolute will. Under its institutionalized sway, Americans grew psychologically fixated and dependent on what the electric age made feel like technology's occult power of manifesting dreams. They became alienated, diremted, from their personal and collective memory of the adventures, exploits, sacrifices, and identities of the forebears and kin who kept America's *politeia* strong and whole in its spacetime. Rather than simply sinking into the early retirement of perpetual entertainment via repurposed weaponcraft, or redoubling their competition for market shares of imagination sufficient to make their biggest dreams come true, Americans, spiritually oscillating between these poles of inward sloth and outward frenzy, did both—and more. The weaponization of the imagination itself promised to unify the soul unbearably divided between its inwardness and outwardness. Unable to sustain lives of indolence or madness alone, the people conscripted themselves *en masse* in the great global infowar. McLuhan's Third World War was made manifest as a generalized conflict of the dreams of all selves against the dreams of all others, one that inevitably ushered in the identity politics of the perfectly pure versus the deplorably, irredeemably stained.[211]

Yet the formative force of the digital medium also thrusted

political energies in the altogether different direction, not against any deplorables but against the regime. Finally announcing to their shocked ruling factions the arrival of the digital catastrophe, Trump voters used the internet, along with the ballot box, to begin what their rulers instantly and incessantly propagandized, despite incalculable risk to their credibility, as an *insurrectionary* infowar against *our democracy*—that is, against *their regime*.

In this Hobbesian environment, the fantasist many and their few engineers looked in desperation toward a ground for human life independent of the tools of conflict, toward one dream capable of savingly ruling them all.

The moment had come for the ethicists of the imagination to make their bid for world domination—not just through culture or mass psychology, but the direct control of the strongest levers of institutional and governance power in the world. To rescue the Anglo-American war engine from itself and what it had wrought, its ruling faction, and the people it had technologically remade, turned to the ethic of the divine spark, forever illuminating the pure air of space. Working its formative power, the electric medium reshaped its engineers and its ethicists into convergence.

ETHEREALS

"Looking back, it's embarrassing to recognize the degree to which my intellectual curiosity those first two years of college paralleled the interests of various women I was attempting to get to know."[212]

The years are 1979 and 1980, that special slice of spacetime when some of the First Generation's fathers were busy being born. The place is Los Angeles—Occidental College, to be precise: the epitome of the California that would soon be engulfing America, and, through America, the West, leveraging *its* unique and beautiful spacetime into an abstraction—an attitude, an idea, a *vibe*—that could be (and was) used to create a readily-designable social model, one the patterns of which were laid down to be transmitted back to real society and mapped into real people.

There, at Occidental, soon to trade up to Columbia, young Obama came of age reading "Marx and Marcuse so I had something to say to the long-legged socialist who lived in my dorm; Fanon and Gwendolyn Brooks for the smooth-skinned sociology major who never gave me a second look; Foucault and Woolf for the ethereal bisexual who wore

mostly black. As a strategy for picking up girls, my pseu-do-intellectualism proved mostly worthless. I found myself in a series of affectionate but chaste friendships."

As the internet recognized instantly, the real protagonist of this story is not Obama the floater, groping for booty and identity with the aid of fantasy-fueled electric-age texts written and assigned to remake society on a basis radically other from the rites that make men of boys. Socialists and sociology majors, too, are now little more than the default skins of stock millennial characters. But the ethereal bi girl—not just bi, but *ethereal*—she's the real protagonist of the legend of Obama, whose idea of governance so often seemed to involve little more than applying an ethereal aura of ethics to the doings of the securitized state. "His" queer ethereal is the real protagonist of the story of Californized America and the Americanized West. Californian fathers of First Generation sons can attest to the damage wrought by these ethereals on the naïve and unmoored boys who too ritelessly came of age in the mid-'90s of Netflix hit *Fear Street*, the three-part slasher tale of how the eternal straight white boy's persecution of teen lesbians turns the girls into spiritual heroes. The heart wonders if *Fear Street* brought back fresh memories of Ethereal Girl to the former president, whose taste for the power of entertainment technology to terraform real-world psyches and societies through virtual world design, led him to seek and receive a lucrative production deal with Netflix. The man whose former campaign fundraiser host Peter Chernin, an ethni-cally Jewish unitarian who served as COO of News Corp. and

CEO of the Fox Group from the mid-'90s to Obama's first year in office, produced *Fear Street* personally, along with the Executive Vice President and Head of Film and Television at Chernin Entertainment, his own production company...

A CRACK IN EVERYTHING

Back in the heady electric age of Pynchon's *Against the Day*, American "psychical detective" Lew Basnight finds himself in London, Ground Zero of the West's *fin-de-siècle* empire of the occult. In the svelte Victorian HQ of O.T.O. stand-in T.W.I.T., the cult's outgoing Grand Cohen (*kohen* being Hebrew for "priest") discusses certain oblique arrangements between himself and two mysteriously analogous Great Game scientists—the British Renfrew and the German Werfner, who turn out to be, it seems, the same individual, only, after "presently Pythagorean" fashion, *bilocating*, that is, in spiritual terms, "pretending to be two 'rivals' representing the interests of two 'separate nations' which are much more likely secular expressions of a rupture within a single damaged soul."[213] The Cohen leads Lew to compare and contrast the inductive life of the detective with the very different lived-out epistemology of the cultist: "it is quite common in these occult orders to find laity and priesthood, hierarchies of acquaintance with the Mysteries, secret initiation at each step, the assumption that one learns what one has to only when it is time to. No one decides this," the Cohen emphasizes—"it is simply the dynamic imperative operating from within the Knowledge itself."[214] With the

talk turning to "the shaman business," Lew helps fire up the Cohen's "*Plafond Lumineux*" or Luminous Ceiling, "a modern mixed arrangement of gas-mantles and electric incandescent bulbs", quite reminiscent of the Pythagorean exhibit at the Museum of Mathematical Monstrosities, "arching across the entire library ceiling and covered by a pale translucent canopy of some proprietary celluloid which smoothed these sources, when at last they had all been lit, into a depthless dome of light somehow much brighter than their sum."[215] As they gaze together into the "smooth and steady radiance" of the Ceiling, the Cohen remarks to Lew (rather pregnantly) that to achieve a full appreciation of the effect "it helps to have some allegiance to light." The following monologue ensues:

> We are light, you see, all of light—we are the light offered the batsmen at the end of the day, the shining eyes of the beloved, the flare of the safety-match at the high city window, the stars and nebulæ in full midnight glory, the rising moon through the tram wires, the naphtha lamp glimmering on the costermonger's barrow…. When we lost our æthereal being and became embodies, we slowed, thickened, congealed to ["grabbing each side" of Lew's face "and wobbling it back and forth"] this. The soul itself is a memory we carry of having once moved at the speed and density of light. The first step in our Discipline here is learning how to re-acquire that rarefaction, that condition of light, to become once more able to pass where we will, through lantern-horn, through window-glass, eventually, though we risk being divided in two, through Iceland spar,

which is an expression in crystal form of Earth's velocity as it rushes through the Æther, altering dimensions, and creating double refraction…. Atonement, in any case, comes much later in the journey. [216]

The book's real star, though not exactly its heroine, is bisexual mathematician Yashmeen Halfcourt, whose protracted adventures at the queered intersection of science and spycraft culminate in the heartbreaking loss of the crucial third wheel in her long-term relationship—a British spy named Cyprian who checks himself into a gnostic monastery deep in primordial Bulgaria. It's home to a "sect descended from ancient Bogomils", now (figuratively) underground and attached to the "older, more nocturnal elements" of "the Thracian demigod Orpheus, and his dismemberment not far from here, on the banks of the Hebrus River."[217] Like the cult of the Pythagorans, the monastery prohibits beans; the convent's hegumen (Greek: *leader*) explains that Orpheus had merged over time into "another demigod, Zalmoxis, who some in Thrace believed was the only true God. According to Herodotus, who heard it from Greeks living around the Black Sea, Zalmoxis had once been a slave of Pythagoras himself."[218] Zalmoxis—long story short—grew rich after being manumitted and resettled in Thrace as a Pythagore-anist guru. The iconostasis in the monastery's unOrthodox church is akin to a "cinema screen" offering, in the presence of "a kind of second sight, a knowledge beyond light of what lay within the wood itself, of what it was one's duty to set free…."[219] In the end, it's Night herself to whom the monks

are betrothed, leading Cyprian to utter as his last question before the vow of silence "What is it that is born of light?"[200]

As it turns out, the hegumen speaks "University-accented English," a tip to the kind of answer that follows.[221] As he relates, the sect's great fourteenth-century foes were Hesychasts, "contemplatives who might as well have been Japanese Buddhists," navel-gazers "waiting to be enfolded in a glorious light they believed was the same light Peter, James, and John had witnessed at the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor."[222] The hegumen points out the oddity in all three Gospel accounts that "the Transfiguration occurred at best under a peculiar sort of half-light. 'There came a cloud and overshadowed them,'" he quotes Luke, stopping before the next line: "and they feared as they entered the cloud." But in the cloud issued forth the voice of the Father, saying "This is my beloved Son: hear him."[223] To Yashmeen's non-surprise, the hegumen "was approaching the Transfiguration story from the direction of the Old Testament."[224] He asks after her familiarity with "the idea of Shekhinah—That which dwells," and she nods, "her years with the T.W.I.T. having provided her a broad though shallow footing in British Kabbalism." At once the hegumen launches in with an account of "the feminine aspect of God."

> When God hides his face, it is paraphrased as 'taking away' his Shekhinah. Because it is she who reflects his light, Moon to his Sun. Nobody can withstand pure light, let alone see it. Without her to reflect, God is invisible. She is absolutely of the essence if he is to be at all operative in the world.

Through the thousand-plus pages of *Against the Day*, Pynchon suggests that the all-too-real cataclysms of the twentieth century ultimately sprang forth from a singular electric catastrophe: the 1887 discovery by Albert Michelson and Edward Morley that the hypothesized universal medium which carried light waves through space—the so-called luminiferous aether—did not and could not really exist. Michelson, the agnostic son of non-religious Jewish Poles, was the first American to win a Nobel prize in a science; Morley, who traced his pure colonial lineage straight back to Britain, was both a preacher and a chemist, having learned Hebrew at America's first and oldest theological seminary, the Congregationalist Puritan one at Andover. The results of their experiment provided the first unchallengeable evidence that visible light needed no carrier and was mediated by nothing. Some fundamentally, cosmically different theoretical apparatus was needed to make any sense at all of the presence and behavior of light in spacetime; the answer, or rather something of an answer, was Einstein's theory of relativity. "If the Michelson–Morley experiment had not brought us into serious embarrassment," Einstein remarked, "no one would have regarded the relativity theory as a (*halfway*) redemption."[225] The great cosmic property of aether was its function as an absolute reference, a fixed ground or zero against which all speeds in physics could be measured. With the aether gone, the only constant became the speed of light. All speeds, all things, were consumed in a new singularity, the relativity of all things, including mass and energy.

The electric catastrophe, the triumph of the mathematics of absolute unmediated light over the objectivity of things, ruptured the cosmic balance of light and darkness which light's being mediated alone made possible. This rupture drove the aethereal into the realm of imagination, where it became a spiritual property of electricity and electricity's "empire of light."[226] And in the realm of reality, it became a dynamo of disenchantment, radiating shock waves. All things, it announced, had now become knowable only relativistically.

BODY ANGUISH

The thesis Pynchon intimates—that the electric catastrophe drove the West into the arms of gnosticism in an effort to make sense of the possibilities of human existence in the shattered post-aether spacetime—finds support in the similarity between the feminized, aquarian occultism of the peak televisual age and the worship, in various gnostic traditions, of Barbēlō, an Eternal Female seen as the first "emanation" of God from which the All of creation then flowed. In the second-century gnostic gospel *The Secret Revelation of John*, Barbēlō is described like this:

> the first thought, his image; she became the womb of everything, for it is she who is prior to them all, the Mother-Father, the first human being, the holy Spirit, the thrice-male, the thrice-powerful, the thrice-named androgynous one, and the eternal aeon among the invisible ones, and the first to come forth.[227]

Not quite an Eternal Ethereal Bisexual, Barbēlō is something more. The age of Barbēlō was still one where the transcendence or fusion of sex and gender could be idealized without stripping the female of even the analogy of biological reproduction, gestation, and birth. Pynchon's depiction of an Orphic form of Bogomilism, rooted in an asceticism aimed toward the rediscovery of the life beyond the light, reflects a hope that pure mathematics ultimately transcends the tyranny or absolutism of visible light as the source of all meaning and existence in the universe.

But from the classical period into the Middle Ages and on into the electric age, gnostic thought pulled inexorably away from the dark, chthonic, generative female and toward the association of the divine feminine with a transcendence of the body. Rather than British Kabbalism, Manichean Christianity is the touchstone for Bogomilism. Jesus came to earth from the realm of Divine Light to impart knowledge of our dual nature; while our soul is one with the Light, our mixture with matter (from the Demiurge's realm of Darkness) requires us, through various renunciations of the body, to avoid all harm to the particulate Light imprisoned within our Dark matter.

To the Bogomils, this meant rejecting the whole edifice of the Church and seeking a purification of Christianity on radically different grounds. As recounted by Oxford Byzantine historian Dimitri Obolensky (evacuated from revolutionary Russia by the British Royal Navy), gnostic dualism led Bogomilist believers to put "the greatest stress on ethics, which were derived exclusively from the New

Testament" rather than, at the extremes of Hebraic British Protestantism, the Old.[228]

> This somewhat paradoxical union of anti-Christian dualism with Christian morality was made possible by a rationalistic and individualistic interpretation of the Scriptures. Such an attitude to the Holy Writ, together with a strong anti-ritualistic and anti-sacerdotal tendency, explains two important features of Bogomilism which are also to be found in later movements of the Reformation: the general priesthood of the laity and the view of the Holy Scripture as the unique source of revealed faith.[229]

Like the Bogomils, the Western Cathars held the body to be a fleshly trap (created by Lucifer) for the shard of Divine Light which must be purified in order to be liberated into perfect reunion with God through Christ. Cathars claimed to have experienced sufficient purification (through seven reincarnations) to become Perfects, spiritually pure enough to be *transmaterial* on earth and begin release—as in Hindu theology—from the cyclical burden of birth and death. Crucially, men and women alike could and did become equally Perfect, although just as crucially they *denied* sex and erotic life as a foundation or gateway to spiritual perfection.

In other words, Bogomilism threatened to spawn from within Eastern Orthodoxy what Catharism did from within Roman Catholicism: a theological doctrine of its own necessary transcendence by the emancipation of perfect spiritual light from the matter and darkness of body and Church. The post-Apostolic Christianity of Hebraic Prot-

estantism led to a form of gnosticism which progressively replaced Christ at the cosmological center of the universe with the mathematical knowledge of the law and light of an ever more hidden God. But meanwhile, the Apostolic Christianity of the Orthodox and the Catholic found itself in an existential struggle—won, uncertainly, after tremendous persecution and massacre—against gnostic creeds that held out Jesus as the tutelary exemplar of the emancipation of humankind out of the irredeemable flesh and into the perfect light.

The Perfect, in the gnostic sense, therefore have little in common with the Elect of the Calvinist imagination. For Calvinists, the total depravity of man makes it so truly impossible for man to choose God that only God's grace can "elect" certain persons for radically unearned salvation. Theological controversy quickly attached to the question of whether the makeup of the Elect might turn on God's foreknowledge of their eventual volitional acceptance of God's grace-given salvation. But the core matter, as Max Weber understood the Protestant spiritual psychology, was how one was to know if one belonged to the Elect.

As the essayist and author Joseph Bottum maintains, the epistemological crisis brought on by this uncertainty spawned in many Protestants an existential anxiety about the sufficiency of the answer that theologized the dominant ethics of ostensibly secular post-Protestant life. The "consequences of being worried about your salvation, phrased in today's terms of being worried about being a good person," lead to a curious soteriology of works, not faith.[230] "If it's all

about social ills, then you know you are a good person if you are opposed to those social ills, if you are anti-racist, even if you don't do anything. You are convinced of your own salvation. You are one of the Elect if you adopt this stance of being opposed to the great sins." While deeds matter, *meaning* matters still more; the ultimate act of faith without which salvation cannot be evinced is the *performative* act, the use of the *right sign. Symbol alone*, conveyed in word and image, is perfect substance.

The ethical triumph of symbol among the "secularized" reflects yet inverts Christian theology in a quite literal sense. In the fifteenth century, *symbol* referred specifically to a creed or summary of religious belief; the Late Latin *symbolum* meaning token or mark in the sense of credal representation derived from the Greek *symbolon*, a term meaning everything from "sign" to "ticket" to "license," which was applied in Barbēlō's time to the Apostles' Creed by Cyprian of Carthage, as a *token* which *identified* Christians as marked out, pre-horizoned, from surrounding pagans.

Surely Bottum is correct that generational effects are at work in the conflict among America's ruling factions to settle the theological particulars of their authority; "younger people are not going to put up with the hypocrisy of knowing you are a good person but not actually doing anything," he notes, and these more youthful "members of the Elect are much more economically and socially insecure than the elite," who skew dramatically older; "but they have the same education, they've got the same social markers. In some ways, we are seeing an intra-class warfare between

the Elect"—the word for *predestined* the Calvinists drew from
προώρισεν —"and the elite."²³¹ But in a dominant respect, the
youth Bottum associates with the secularized theology of
election and the elders making up the elite are fighting over
their place not in the economic structure but in the ecclesias-
tical hierarchy of institutionalized electric-age gnosticism.
The revolutionary new-age theology of the late twentieth
century still firmly rooted gnosticism in the biological and
ecological feminine, worshipping Gaia the Earth Mother,
privileging female peace and collectivism over male war and
individualism, idealizing matriarchy over patriarchy, and
associating woman with the reclamation of natural purity
from the corrupt artifice associated with man.

But as technology has advanced people beyond what
had seemed the boundless imagination of the televisual
age, the primacy of light over dark has been reasserted in a
context of memory over fantasy and machine over biology.
Rather than reflecting one's unearned salvation by God or
the goodness of one's works, the centrality of symbology
now signals that one has *awakened* to one's true being as a
spark of divinely conscious will, totally capable of doing to
one's identity and body whatever one chooses, and utterly
entitled at the highest cosmic level to do so.

In this sense, the advance of technology away from
merely televisual and electric grounds has psychologically
and socially re-formed many Americans, younger and older,
to associate their salvation from radically meaningless
suffering with what in the original Greek was called *aithēr*
—the higher, radiant, cosmic air (*aithein* means to burn

and/or shine), in distinction to the lower air (called *aēr*). The aethereal is literally the pure bright spirit, the self-making spirit of light, justified as a transmaterial being in conceiving and executing transformational projects, on selves, others, and society, aimed at the complete unification of consciousness with the cosmos.

AND XE SHALL REIGN UPON THE EARTH

The master key to the transformational project of the transmaterial self is the work of queering. The trajectory of the divine feminine in gnosticism, away from the dark and earthy universal womb toward the light of cosmic perfection, has led ethereals into a theoretically boundless hostility to the biologically generative feminine, which must be queered into a power produced not by the admixed and generative way of the darkness and the body but by the purified, sterilized way of the imaginative will.[232]

This turn against the female has evinced a similar transformation of the queer itself. Once dark, hidden, dirty, inextricably compromised—that is, *implicit*—the queer became, under electric conditions, the opposite: radiant, exposed, sanitized, absolute—*explicit*. With electric speed and shocking intensity, the queer became systematized, ideologized, into queer*ness*, moving relentlessly from the concrete and particular to the abstract and absolute, its center of energy whipping in arcs of sparks from the gay man to the lesbian woman to the bisexual woman and, by way of the pansexual, to the ultimate forerunner of sexuality as a tool

of self-transcending gnostic power, the transsexual and transgender. Beyond the "trans," none can be more truly ethereal, as we all know, than the transhuman; the "trans" person is the bearer of the total light of posthuman cosmic consciousness, and it is for this reason that, despite their vanishingly small numbers in world population, the "trans" command a vast and increasing share of communicative and commercial world consciousness.

It is easy to see how Trans Power can be seized upon by ethereal ethicists desperate to reassert the rule of the imagination over the power and authority of the digital medium's supremely memorious machines. The engineers created digital entities more powerful and authoritative than the human imagination. In so doing, they have thrown into question in a fundamentally new way the meaning and purpose of human memory, which suddenly now seems eclipsed, perhaps obsolete. And in fact cosmic conscious-ness has been seen even within Apostolic Christianity as beyond the reach of our faculty of human recall. "Angels, says Dante, have no need of memory for they have con-tinuous understanding," as Carruthers recalls.[233] Direct knowledge of God fails to produce an image sufficient to the making of human memory, "bringing back nothing but an inadequate shadow or impression of the vanished vision." According to Aquinas, "the memory that is immortal" is not "true memory" but "intellectual memory," the "conception of having had a memory when one was still alive in one's body," but which "can form no new memories" because "it no longer has a body." To become as perfect and as light as

angels is to liberate our consciousness from the limitations memory places on what we can experience and who we can be. To become the ultimate consciousnesses in the universe, real in a way disenchanted heavenly Biblical entities are not, is to queer the universe along with ourselves in the highest, ultimate sense. Queered to the point of posthumanity, our consciousness has no need for human memory of who any of us were born as, or what any of our *meat bodies*, as they say, once looked like. We gain divine power over the (in principle) infinite re-creation of our identities through our unity with the singularity of cosmic light, which annihilates the darkness of the implicit from which the human first enters life and then the world. Memory can be relegated to the machines—quite a relief considering the only limit ethereal ethics places on expert engineering is the *deference* of the engineers to the theological imagination of ethereal ethicists themselves.

Queerness became gnostic under electric conditions. For this reason, queering became an absolute abstract religious principle of order. And because electric-age ruling factions and mass people disenchanted by the digital catastrophe are desperate for just such an ultimate, all-meaningful and all-transcending principle, queerness is now the supreme candidate to fulfill that need. Therefore it is everywhere, seemingly capable of springing forth from any apparatus of thought or cultural tradition. Queerness purports to have finally exceeded by transcendence the Christian God Nietzsche had called "the maximum god attained so far."[234] By Nietzsche's logic, the maximal God of Christianity "was

therefore accompanied by the maximum feeling of guilty indebtedness on earth." As a result he hoped that, "presuming we have gradually entered upon the *reverse* course, there is no small probability that with the irresistible decline of faith in the Christian God there is now also a considerable decline in mankind's feeling of guilt";

> Indeed, the prospect cannot be dismissed that the complete and definitive victory of atheism might free mankind of this whole feeling of guilty indebtedness toward its origin, its *causa prima*. Atheism and a kind of *second innocence* belong together.

Unfortunately from the Nietzschean standpoint, the eclipse of the Christian God in the electric-age imagination by the Divine Queer has *not* liberated humankind from the sensation of guilt toward its origin, but deepened and radicalized hate toward our human origins in the arbitrariness and dirtiness and incarnation of nature and biology—wherein all existence, as Nietzsche enthused, was conditional upon the will to power of any living thing. The sickness and disgust toward having such violent, corporeal, exploitative, and thoroughgoingly sexed and gendered origins, toward the total power and authority until just yesterday of the master ordering principle against which queerness as a theology sets itself existentially, has hardly destroyed the sense of debt and guilt. It has only relegated "second innocence" to the Divine Queer, which becomes the condition of possibility for the Second Bang: true union of consciousness and cosmos can only come through a wholesale *transformation* of

the very essence of cosmic order, *through* the queered and queering consciousness.

Predictably, for this reason, queering has colonized design. Still more predictably, under the ethics of queering, design—"the material reconfiguration of the world," according to a recent dissertation on the topic—"is an active agent in privileging and superiorizing certain bodies while oppressing, inferiorizing, and marginalizing 'others', by systematically reifying hetero-cis-normativity and identity-based segregation." Design does what everything that has yet to be queered does: it reproduces "the body materially… under the logic of modern/colonial/capitalist economy."[235] To queer design is to "undo this ongoing colonial logic" through "strategies to unlearn the ontological and epistemic foundations of design's disciplinary—yet biased—condition," overturning "the current material and corporeal regimes regulated by hegemonic power." But the spiritualization and reification of queering as a revaluation of all values leaves queer designers gazing toward a future of power that immanently unfolds according to a logic *freed* from body, agency, and identity. "The future of design is queer," a co-founder of Queer Design Club affirms.[236] "But it can't just be about representation." Queer design involves "a process of owning who you are" and creating "experiences that actually empower people to be themselves, freely." Paradoxically, this process demands "letting go of our egos." What exactly "a design industry that's queer not just in demography but also spirit" aims to achieve is left to the inner workings of that spirit, which amounts to the collective use of artificial

self-constructions to make selfhood radically contingent on the imagining will. "I don't know what that will look like," the designer concludes, "but I know who I trust to lead the way." Only the correct ethics—the devotion to true spirit—will be sufficient to reorder the cosmos. Only queering is spiritually *interoperable* enough to *incorporate* all logics of reordering design, pulling them inexorably upward in abstraction and virtuality in search of the perfect model that will perfectly queer our consciousness and life. This is why queering integrates and transcends all intersectional sublogics of diversity, equity, and inclusion. First the gay rights movement and now Black Lives Matter have been radically queered, "not just in demography but also spirit": the Present Day rainbow flag announces that no sexuality or race is sufficiently ethereal in its ethics unless it has been spiritually queered and systematically advances the re-formation of humanity through the leveraging of models constructed and operationalized in accordance with the principle of queered and queering design.

In this way certain "bodies" become *sites of transfer* from the modeled realm of queer design to the *politeia* outside the model. Undeniably, female bodies are especially prized and leveraged. In an ethical framework where "the future is female" and "anything boys can do girls can do better," the future of female supremacy must be a queer one, in which spiritual lesbianism, while it does model the gnostic emancipation of the divine feminine from everything dark, earthy, biological, and reproductive, is insufficiently transformative and transmaterial. The ethereal ethics of the queer redesign

of consciousness and life through the leveraging of virtual models demands a breakthrough into cosmic interoperability that neither biology nor spirit is sufficient to produce. For that, technology is required—the requisite technology to ethically reconceptualize what were once known as "MTF" or "FTM" transformations into transhuman ones, into the sexual and gender identification of *cyborg*. If masculinized girls can do better anything boys can do, anything those girls can do can be—must be—done better still by cyborgs.

This logic of cyborg supremacy, with virtual models and human consciousnesses merging into a single feedback loop of transference, was presaged in the imagery of H. R. Geiger. It is central to the language of Donna Haraway, the first professor tenured (by a California university, of course) in feminist theory, who argued in 1985 that the line between virtual worlds of science fiction and real social worlds was "an optical illusion" and that, while cyborgs were "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism," such bastards "are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins," because "their fathers, after all, are inessential."[237] Perhaps Nicole Stenger, the MIT-based virtual reality guru, put the matter most clearly at a historic 1990 conference at the University of Texas at Austin: "cyberspace can be seen as the new bomb, a pacific blaze that will project the imprint of our disembodied selves on the walls of eternity." There, she said, using the liturgical language of the ethereal ethicist, "we become creatures of colored light in motion, pulsing with golden particles."[238]

> We will all become angels, and for eternity! Highly
> unstable, hermaphrodite angels, unforgettable in terms
> of computer memory. In this cubic fortress of pixels that
> is cyberspace, we will be, as in dreams, everything: the
> Dragon, the Princess, and the Sword.

The more engineering advances technology, the more urgent
it becomes for ethics to transcend that technology: this is
the dialectic of imitative escalation that drives the collusion
of, and competition between, America's ruling faction of
expert engineers and its ruling faction of ethereal ethicists.

This escalation is akin to what the great social theorist
René Girard described as an "escalation to extremes."[239] As
the author Luke Burgis told me not long ago, Girard meant
to warn (much like Wiener) against "ever more ingenious
forms of war: wars in which both (or all) sides—deprived
of concrete bodies, or peace treaties, or any semblance of
a finish line, for that matter—would allow their reciprocal
violence to spiral out of control without any guardrails.
The result would be Total War," as McLuhan, in a somewhat
different way, suggested. But Girard, who died in 2015,
had not been able to recognize "that the real escalation to
extremes would play out in the form of ever greater degrees
of abstraction." Burgis sees "a viscous and nihilistic war
of language" wherein "words (and reality) mean whatever
they are mimetically chosen to mean," people "compete for
ever-greater degrees of 'nuance' untethered from anything
real," and social media fuels "a cyber-theology where few
know the difference between priest and layman"—as,
again, McLuhan implied in his prophesied erasure of the

line between civilian and combatant. Inevitably failing to transcend the sacred, we have instead "diffused" it "throughout the ether. If we thought the loss of religious literacy was bad in the World of the Real," Burgis concludes, "then we've come to the painful realization that it's even worse in the World of Abstraction." Not just everyone, as McLuhan prophesied, but now everything—Burgis singles out money as emblematic of the change—"is participating in the escalation to abstract extremes." The dialectic of competition between the unbound imagination of engineers and ethicists has made the vector of mimetic rivalry in the West one of unlimited escalation to ever higher levels of abstraction. At the end of this road is the Divine Queer. The faith that "trans," like Christ, has descended to earth to reveal the way—this time to a Second Eden of our own creation—augurs only a Second Fall.

IN LIVING MEMORY

The collusion of our two ruling factions to produce a new cosmic order out of limitless technology and boundless imagination hinges on the potential likelihoods of three possibilities. The first is the eventual triumph of machine memory over human imagination. The second is the opposite. The third is a unity of digital memory and human imagination.

None of these configurations give either faction a reason not to push as fast and hard as it can to reclaim authority and control over the world. Both factions, however, seem to

recognize that they must work together or hang separately. And in fact, although recent skirmishes at Google and other firms indicate that the turf war over how czar-like in-house AI Ethicists will be is far from over, many engineers have already internalized the correctly ethereal ethics, and many ethicists have accepted that their ethereal cosmology depends on the ongoing innovation of the engineers. The *mystique* of digital technology is that it makes language itself, the perfect language, into the ultimate basis for the construction of a cosmic consciousness that in theory, and one day in practice, will no longer require the trappings of any particular material. Reality is merely—perhaps inherently—a springboard to pantopia.

What both factions fail to countenance, however, is the possibility that the triumph of the digital medium may re-form our life in ways that extend some of their capabilities but restrict others. Certainly both factions have existential interests in treating such a possibility as a vanishingly remote unlikelihood.

It's probable that, by now, both admit deep down that the digital medium actually produces a human confrontation with the sources of distinctly human flourishing and sews an understanding that people who surrender their memory or sacrifice it to their machines become slaves to their machines and to the masters of those machines. This would help account for the way that the engineers and ethicists have combined despite their disagreements on ultimate authority to crack down ever more intimately on the expression and transmission of human memories that

run afoul of official information and prescribed narratives. It would account for the consistent and ubiquitous effort to "redefine" masculinity and direct boys away from reliance on the transmitted memories of their fathers for their ascendance into maturity; to queer or otherwise "reimagine" both maturity and manhood in order to break the power and authority of both as ordering principles; and to make sacred figures above all out of boys who become, instead of men *or* girls, "trans" cyborgs, the holy Faustians who plow their juvenile purity into the conquest of their freedom and life by their unification with technology at the most radical and intimate level.

Even these developments, however, as overawing as they might sometimes feel, should not be confused for evidence that members of our ruling factions are capable under digital conditions of actually reclaiming the world, much less the cosmos, for one single set of human rulers. The electric age re-formed culture and science away from knowledge work toward fantasy work. It fostered communicative and commercial institutions dedicated to making the mathematically relativized world meaningful through a propaganda of choice across public and private life. Ostensibly ideological conflict between those whose identities hinged on making choices from a suite of officially crafted or approved options and those who chose unofficial options converged into a post-countercultural establishment, with ethics sanctifying the otherwise irredeemable engine of power.

The form of politics that emerged from this arrangement shifted the core process of *our democracy* from bottom-up

civic agency to top-down instruction. Politics came to mean educating the masses into the official ethics of transferring engineering processes from properly imagined and designed virtual models onto individuals, groups, and society. But the triumph of digital technology disrupted the institutionalized regime that the established counterculture became. The regime was unable to foresee this shock because it misunderstood formative causation as our designing of instruments rather than our *being* redesigned by the environments which our instruments shape in ways outside our control and often beyond our understanding. "For many years all armies have played war games, and these games have always been behind the times," as Wiener warned. "The rules of the war game never catch up with the facts of the real situation."[240] Or, in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, "what happens is so far ahead of what we think, of our intentions, that we can never catch up with it and never really know its true appearance."[241]

At this point, however, one thing is clear. The bedrock reality of the digital age is that human beings can do *nothing* now to restore the instrumental imagination to a place of transcendent rule over both the world's humans and its machines. The supremacy of the human imagination that arose from the psychological and social environment formed by the electric media of audio, cinema, television, and videocamera technology simply cannot exist in the current environment, where electric media go from dominant context to content within the new dominant digital medium. There is nothing so magical or divine about our imagination that

it can change this new dispensation. In reality, our imagination is of a piece in our given faculties with our memory; both faculties are expressive channels of genius or competency in matters large or small. We who do not wish to be the slaves of the digital swarm just because we can't be its masters must safeguard our identities, which world-dominant machines threaten most, through our memory, not our imagination. Our memories are properties of our inescapably incarnate (physical) and ensouled (living) beings; our sustained and transmitted memories of who we are and who we came from preserve us against the temptation of the disenchanted to impart to digital technology a magical and divine character, whether out of a pantopian or an apocalyptic sense of humanity's fated obsolescence.

The recession of human imagination and the retrieval of human memory by dominant digital entities and environments implies a rebirth of profound plurality and divergent destiny among the peoples of different civilization states. What we are left to consider as we prepare the way for the First Generation is whether the digital swarm itself will seize unitary control of humanity's destiny before any of us have a chance to ensure otherwise.

III

THE SPACETIME
OF THE SOUL

REVELATION

Reset never follows revelation—only revolution.

After a revelation, there is no reconcealing what has been disclosed. This is what McLuhan meant by "breakdown is breakthrough," and by his insistence that he was neither an optimist or a pessimist but an apocalypticist. Forgetting, not willing, is the way that the disclosed slips into the partial concealment of the background.

The triumph of the digital medium has revealed things that cannot, no matter how hard our ruling factions try, be concealed. These things cannot be spun, narrativized, or misinformationed away. For this reason, our ruling factions seek to induce and enforce certain kinds of forgetting. They seek to discredit and disenchant human memory as an independent source of authority and power. Engineers seek to do so through the power and authority of the memory of their machines, ethicists through the power and authority of their imaginations.

Three great things have been disclosed by the digital catastrophe throwing their dovetailing projects into doubt: the persistence of America, the persistence of Christianity,

and the persistence of digital. From these revelations much flows—including the sharp limitations placed simultaneously on America, Christianity, and the great rushed "reset" undertaken by the ruling factions.

What the digital triumph has not revealed, however, is the fate of our digital entities and our digitized environment. It remains to be seen whether these will fully converge and overswarm the world, first diminishing, then destroying us. This is up to the First Generation.

OURS BUT TO DO AND LIVE

"As he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying: 'Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?'"[242]

In his lengthy answer Jesus warns repeatedly to guard against false appearances, both of himself and of the end time. "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."[243] There will be sorrows, wars, pestilence, famine, and natural disasters, "but not yet." Many will hate, many will suffer, many will betray one another. And again: "many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." Great tribulation—unbearable, the worst of all time—will drive the faithful away from cities and habitations. Only for the sake of those marked out will those unbearable days be shortened. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great

signs and wonders," so that even those marked out might be deceived. "Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not." His coming will be unmistakable, inimitable, beyond counterfeit.

But now Jesus gives another warning: "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."[244] As none knew until the Flood swept almost all away, so his coming will be. There is no guessing, and worse than futility in guessing; "in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."[245] Outside God Himself there is *no* knowledge of the location of the end time in spacetime, not through nature, technology, sorcery, prayer, or worship. Mathematically speaking there is no way either to count to that time or to plot it on a timeline. Truly, yet unprovable, God's infinity, the one to rule them all, is uncountable.[246] Implicitly, *trying* to know would make it harder to know, in the paradoxical sense that a false expectation of the arrival of the unknowable will produce greater confusion and doubt. Attempting to identify the Second Coming in spacetime only widens the gap that cannot be closed between Creator and created until the Creator so ordains it.

In the interim our laborious task is easy to understand: resist the temptation to cause the end of our time, the end of our lot. Until further notice, we must live—recognizably as we were created. Our task is not to ascend infinitely toward heaven or bring it ever closer down to earth, not to escape into the Creator or into creation, but to remain ourselves indefinitely.

"No matter how certain its eventual coming, an event whose exact time and form of arrival are unknown vanishes when we picture the future."[247] Gelernter's "SECOND COMING" (Brockman published it) appeared on Millennium Eve, December 31, 1999. "We tend not to believe in the next big war or economic swing; we certainly don't believe in the next big software revolution." But that revolution, that "second coming of the computer," is clear: the machine is already set to become an "all-purpose in-box" which translates the real into the model with increasing fidelity and "textural richness." The real power of computation is to create models with unprecedented—reaching ever further toward perfect—leverage over reality. "Metaphors have a profound effect on computing": computers allow us in unprecedented ways to model things (and people) by *seeing them as* something simpler, more available to manipulation, than they are in isolation from the model. Apple erred calling its interface a "desktop computer." Better is "information landscape," the so-far "ideal space for seeing and managing computerized information."

> Under the desktop metaphor, the screen IS the interface…
> a square foot or two of glowing colors on a glass panel. In
> the landscape metaphor, the screen is just a viewing pane.
> When you look through it, you see the actual interface
> lying beyond.

Or, as McLuhan put it: "Scribal culture and Gothic architecture were both concerned with *light through*, not *light on*."[248] The same could be said of the icon and iconostasis, whose

illuminations do not produce knowledge of that which the light hits but draw the soul through, via the eye, into an encounter where the knowable and unknowable are inextricably implicated. The digital age returns us to a scribal media environment, only one in which the architecture does the inscribing of all things, including us; the revelation we confront in this environment concerns the identities and activities necessary to prevent our models from disappearing us into their posthuman spacetime.

Gelernter's hope was that the digital "second coming" would lead from computer-driven life to "lifestream"-driven computation, where the "cyberbodies" of online people and institutions would be more useful to digital problem-solving than algorithms.[249] Digital entities "will hang around everywhere in lush growths like Spanish moss.

> They will swarm like locusts. But a swarm is not merely a big crowd. The individuals in the swarm lose their identities. The computers that make up this global swarm will blend together into the seamless substance of the Cybersphere. Within the swarm, individual computers will be as anonymous as molecules of air.

But this is good news, not a catastrophe. "We will have plenty of technology—and the best consequence will be"—contrary to Wiener's warning—"that we will no longer have to think about technology. We will return with gratitude and relief to the topics that actually count." What those may be remains mysterious. Solving problems? Predicting problems? *Problematizing* things that are not problems?

That seems to be the trajectory of a human race misbelieved to be cured of its ancient hatreds and ignorance by its hatred of the past and its obsession with producing knowledge without regard to whether it is worth knowing. When there is nothing left to do but create more interesting problems, problematization becomes a *mystique*, not a source of interest. It is done because to do it is to be, not for any instrumental reason—including self-interested appreciations of the supposedly supreme statuesque beauty of mathematical puzzles and their solves, or even the rectitude experienced by a supposedly disinterested observer.

The Faustian fatalism of *problematization as prime directive* seems to animate, deep down, the frenetic behavior of our ruling factions. In an immediate sense they simply wish to avoid humiliation and worse by falling from the pinnacle of authority and power. Being overthrown, not by any human rival but by the very entities created to finish the job of perfecting their regime—this is very wounding to the pride and instils a sense of absurdity and soul-sickness that no person, much less a self-regarding member of the most ethical elite in human history, can withstand so well. But in the broadest sense, the one looming over everything, our ruling factions appear convinced that there is nothing else sufficiently ethical for them to do, for humanity to do. Ethical determinism drives technical determinism and vice versa.

The possibility that our tools help *construct* our reality, but do not determine it, in ways always eluding our full knowledge and grasp, is unacceptable to them as a matter of

ethics, of theology. It opens the door to the human imposition of limits onto their codependent ethical and technical projects; it opens the door to the revelation of limits that inhere in the project itself, regardless of what they may wish or will.

The triumph of the digital medium over the world, of a new sort that no human being or human organization can surmount, has revealed America, Christianity, and digital technology itself to be a trinity of stumbling blocks to technical and ethical determinism. But each of these three are also a scandal or scapegoat to some of the most conscientious objectors to the West's ruling factions. This is a great source of confusion and feelings of weakness.

REAL AMERICAS

The scapegoating of America comes from opposite ends. Ethereal ethicists see America's trans-formative power as its only source of redemptive authority: only America can create a post-American world that is also a better world; America's true *politeia* is really its transness, its inner logic of infinite becoming. The rainbow flag *is* the American flag, more truly American than the Stars and Stripes, which was just one tainted evolution of the increasing purification that is this (to speak Obama) *Becoming*. Certain enemies of the ethereal ethicists, however, attack America for exactly this reason. It was inevitable or turned out to be inevitable that a regime founded on acquisition would produce a deracinated official class that had to race instrumentally against its own

decline to achieve a breakthrough into cosmic conquest; inevitable that a regime founded on Hebraic British Protestantism would "evolve" into a global enemy of human limits and of the unlimited religious authority of Christ's church; inevitable that a regime founded on slave morality would institutionalize the rule of degenerate "masters" over swarms of hideous "bugmen."

It is America that blindly and monstrously fills up the world with disposable, disenchanted, idiotic Americanness; America that flooded the world with inescapable fantasies cleverly constructed to hack the mind and rot the soul; America that destroyed the manly honor and cosmic dignity of politics and of battle by creating weapons powerful enough to transcend history and nature by eradicating all life; America that taught women to become uglier, stupider, more servile, and more unlovable versions of their own hated fathers; America that turned men into fat, sick, childish boors seeking minute-to-minute escape from the truth of their own worthlessness. It is America that has perverted and then destroyed adulthood as well as childhood, blazing the path against the family, against the neighborhood, against community, against everything that America once flattered itself it stood for, a process America saw unfolding and did nothing about, because it could do nothing, because from the beginning it was a mistake, one now swallowing up the world.

There are those who insist for these reasons, plus, undoubtedly, many more, that there is no escaping or even battling the ethical and technical project of its ruling

factions without giving up on America, turning against it, perhaps even working against it. America's administrative apparatus must be colonized from the inside by the intellectual soldiers of Christ's vicar on earth for any hope of the New World's reconquest in the name of its true founder, Our Lady of Guadalupe. America's Military-Industrial Complex and its Intelligence Community must be defeated by more powerful foreign enemies, in whose countries at least the government is still run by real men. America's commercial and communications empire must be abandoned by what real men remain, the better to become monks or pirates or mafiosos. The exceptionalism, the materialism, the spiritualism, the *Americanism* of America must be denounced, repudiated, attacked, destroyed. Salvation only runs through the ruin of America as the world knows it.

These feelings are, in their frustration, understandable. Too many of them emanate from a panicked or despairing conviction that the world system no longer has any way of stopping the evil of America from becoming an operating system enclosing the world. America is more *and less*, however, than the world-historical horror it is so often made out to be. The ethereals and engineers that emerged from the Yankee New English and the electric-age Old World have not been able to fully terraform America's other cultures and folkways—significantly the Southern, Western, and even Californian—despite generations of progress toward making American culture uniform, standardized, and compliant. The constitutional founding of America as a commercial republic where the free play of

useful and productive energies was enshrined (as Patrick Deneen suggests) into law did give Americans *room* to depart from the confines of spacetime within which the ancient *politeia* was meant to cultivate and protect the common good.[250] But those departures spread Americans across the "enlarged orbit," to use Madison's phrase, of the whole North American continent, forming not just a "modern republic" but a *large* one, the momentous historical novelty of which the founders well understood. The imperative locking Americans into the political structure of a large republic was not an ideologically "liberal" commitment to unlimited acquisitiveness but the *plurality* of American folkways, irreducible even by the total war waged to return the too-far-departed Southern states to the Union.

The resulting *fragility* of America as a regime dependent on the self-interested comity of folkways that "mix without combining," to use Tocqueville's language, gives it its paradoxical strength.[251] At the level of the whole state or civilization, the common good is *always* a matter of contestation beyond perpetuating the basic arrangement; at the lower level of the plural regions, consensus as to the common goods of their respective spacetimes is remarkably durable, consistent, and strong. In this respect, while Tocqueville supposed that the insuperable logical unity of Catholicism would find mass converts from disenchanted Protestants in the democratic age, the deep patterns of what is too often wrongly described as "libertarianism" among the most restless of American folkways betoken a spirit of *anarchism*, which Austrian political scientist Erik Ritter von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, for

one, associates with the "wild individualism" that extreme sensibilities take "in the Catholic orbit."[252] The Catholic (and Orthodox) pattern Kuehnelt-Leddihn traces—"authoritarian in its organization, but liberal and 'personalistic' in its theology"—shows forth more in post-WASP America than some recognize and others would like, and shows roots deep in the non-Yankee colonists and pioneers who shadow and give depth to the "enlightened" America of unadorned and modern minimalist churches doubling as town halls.[253] If pushed hard enough, Americans raised in these darker more earthy, more baroque folkways would instinctively prefer the problems arising from the authoritarian politics of the common good under the sway of a local tough guy, whether Sheriff or something else, than those arising from the autocratic politics of the common good as dictated and imposed, at the expense of their coarser yet more implicit local forms, by an ubiquitous and universalist technocratic regime.[254]

Much of the fury of the ruling factions has arisen from the internet's potent resistance to executing on the desired uniformity without which they cannot cement *their* intended common good. Social media crackdowns and propagandization are increasing, but because they use televisual media, their mystique is dissolving away. Radical distrust and devaluation of official and prestige opinions is not *fundamentally* an ideological response against a partisan adversary or a populist reaction against an elite foe, but rather a consequence of the digitally-induced collapse of authority of those with the "best" imaginations and the institutions which ethically credential superior imaginations.

The disenchantment of the idea of a single world cadre—closest to purity and perfection, leading the whole world toward ever greater purity and perfection—is accelerated and deepened by the patent inability of this ostensible elite to assert in reality anything like the global ordering their reputation depends on. The ruling factions appear reduced to provoking and supporting rainbow-flagged marches and protests where once they intended to overthrow governments on a wave of more or less organic online sentiment. Even in this, the effect is blunted: the rainbow flag drives almost all other civilization states further away from America. Without question, a shadow cyberwar is playing out around the world, but already signs are visible that the major combatants are negotiating terms, restricting the scope of warfare and imposing limits on escalation. It is an absurdity to think that America's ruling factions any longer have the power, if they ever did, to remake or modernize *any* significant territory outside the current ambit of the West, which itself is articulating new limits on the reach and authority of American culture, American legal norms, and American identity politics.

It's for this reason that so much distress swirls around the possibility that America's ruling factions might reassert their control over digital technology *in America*. Even if the resultant regime could not leverage that control over the entire world, the influence it generated would in all likelihood intensify and accelerate the rush toward what is already, albeit informally, the primary dynamic of digital geopolitics: the American system versus the Chinese system.

The return of a bipolar geopolitical system would encourage three very different but ultimately mutually reinforcing vectors of change: one, a them-or-us sensibility enabling America's ruling factions to present themselves as the only choice other than Chinese despotism; two, a simultaneous hardening of various similarities between the two systems into a single global system controlled by a hybrid American-Chinese elite—similar to what we have now, in some key respects, although far more invasive and insidious; and three, a program to portray any human or digital agency outside the American or Chinese systems as, basically, terrorists—unauthorized rogue entities whose very presence threatens the destabilization and destruction of the whole.

But the logic of digital playing out visibly at every level of life strongly suggests that any America the ruling factions manage to reassert their full control over is not going to be the America of their imaginations. Technology has advanced enough, and American subcultures remain strong enough, that forcing uniformity through a digitized "nation-building" campaign—a coercive refounding—will not be worth the costs if indeed those costs can even be paid. The dollar's once-unimpeachable status as the world's reserve currency is on ever-weaker ground due to intersecting technological advances in energy, finance, and weapons. The US military's desire to place boots on American ground to fight house to house is surely at low ebb. Not even some county sheriffs in areas extremely respectful of the ruling factions' authority are willing to police mask mandates. It will be a continuing struggle to muster up sufficient human

resources to physically enforce sweeping government edicts attempting to engineer uniform ethical rules of social credit, while online enforcement will hit up against deep-seated cultural and legal norms and the continued development of parallel and independent online infrastructure.

America is uniquely unlike other civilization states. But in this it exhibits, from a digital standpoint, a remarkable similarity with the world. Under digital conditions, the world structurally resists uniformity and unity—*as does America*. The most likely path for America's ruling elites to pursue their ethical engineering projects will involve locking down the minimum viable sovereignty for inter-nationalizing those projects. This approach will require securing at least some significant physical footprint and command-and-control systems, but the thrust will, like everything else, be pulled toward the digital—into the kind of metaverse the Facebook company now intends to focus on, and, inevitably, into off-planet space. If electric-age globalism was definitively unitary and uniform, globalism in the digital age is inherently multifarious and pluralistic.

Also like the world, America will continue to grow too big and too unwieldy to be worth trying to master. Whatever may happen in the future, especially among certain far-sighted groups or tribes, the world population is headed for a trough, and many extant people will continue to sink into poor mental and physical health. America is hardly immune from these trends. It will be dramatically easier to project and maintain power through "cyber" and in cyberspace than to do so in the real world of human spacetime. Digital

globalization means the progressive fragmentation of the *small world* of the electric age into pieces that grow progressively *larger* as they push further inward into cyberspace and further outward into cosmic space. The marginal cost of growing the real-world *politeia* will increase, perhaps far more dramatically than expected, relative to the marginal cost of growing the *politeia* of one's metaverse or virtual community.

The upshot is simple. The digital triumph reshapes, but does not destroy, America. Digitized America retains the fundamentals of its civilizational character, including the most important, its pluralism. America's ruling factions are all but impossible to dislodge completely, but are unable to engulf the entire country, to say nothing of the entire world, within their uniform system. An irreducibly plural system of civilization states and their clients mirrors the irreducibly plural system of American regions and subcultures, with no one faction capable of—or, ultimately, truly interested in—the grueling and expensive work of imposing and enforcing uniformity across the land from top to bottom. No matter how manic or lurid our dreams or nightmares, there is no longer one ring to rule them all.

The challenge is to induce this understanding in the ruling factions—before their refusal to let go of their Faustian visions leads them to inflict massive, though ultimately fruitless, harm on America, Americans, and others. Through their ignorance, mistakes, and fanaticism, America's ruling factions have stoked an easy-to-understand backlash and an appetite for conflict. Certainly conflict does not drop out

of the digital age; just as certainly, the fortunes of America's ruling factions, like all others making ultimate wagers on how to react to the digital revelation, will turn on their ability to nourish and win souls. Given the compressed time scale, the best or only way to effectively induce understanding in the ruling factions is to focus primarily on building parallel institutions and secure, robust networks of mature and culturally healthy people online and off. The digital triumph has brought to the forefront of consciousness the deep America of oddity, idiosyncrasy, and multifarious identity. Harnessing this natural energy for the technological preservation of resilient, traditional, and generative social arrangements reaps rewards, both in resources and in loyalty, in digital America. Outside a few citadels, the abstract, managed, instrumentalized America weakens and wanes. America no longer needs to conquer the world or become the world—to sacrifice its exceptionalism or to universalize its exceptionalism—in order to be saved. It limits preserve its life.

THE FRONTIERLAND OF THE INTERIOR

Every American culture, and every civilization state, begins the digital age facing more serious threats and harms from within than without. This is not to say there are no external enemies anymore—far from it. But digitization has turned the eye of state relentlessly inward: the first question is how this revolutionary technology is re-forming the life, and indeed the consciousness, of *your* people.

It is about more than knee-jerk worries over where they are getting their news or how much time they spend in front of a screen. It's about how their perceptions and sensibilities regarding the most basic, most all-encompassing, most foundational human things in their lives are being reshaped. People observe what is becoming of technology, and they become radically uncertain about what *they* mean in light of it. Until now, only angels and demons—maybe witches and sorcerers of the most advanced kind—were considered capable of doing things that digital entities now do constantly every day without any real inhibition of constraint. They fly through the air, penetrating buildings no less than our own bodies. They are invisible. They are legion. More can dance on the head of a pin than we can count. Already they are effectively infinite in number. They are not exactly immortal—after all, they're not alive—but they are animate, and they can last a long time—certainly longer than we do, as friends and families of the dead-yet-still-online can attest. Not even the seal of death is really as final as it used to be. The epochal shock of hearing the recorded music and songs of the dead is now far behind us. Our best chance at bringing someone back to life is to interact with a program designed to ape them. There is no reason why consciousness cannot be pooled or merged—in fact it is ever more likely. So many things we attributed only to the realm of Spirit now come to us from the realm of Matter.

But probably the two greatest spiritual or supernatural properties that seem about to apply to machines are the transcendence of human spacetime altogether and the

opening of the secrets of all hearts. The achievement of zero latency to be brought on by 5G means not only that any machines in theory will be able to communicate instantaneously with any other machines but that any combination of machines will be able to do the same with any other combination, in theory all the way up to all machines. In such a schema it is suddenly much harder than it was to understand why humans should bother struggling along in human spacetime, some of which—*most* of which—is quite ugly and difficult to flourish in. The transcendence of human spacetime by zero-latency entities exacerbates the sensation that the real world is growing larger but the share of the world that is worth the trouble of living in is radically diminishing. Who in the digital age can look upon their slice of spacetime—the one passed generation to generation, guarded (or not!) by thousands of years of sons made into men—without a wave of disgust, of sadness, futility, resentment, exhaustion, terror, revenge? Which guardian men can inhabit the land of their fathers and, surveying that land and their place in it, know themselves to be ready to face what is coming, what is already here? Which can answer confidently, courageously, questions like *who are we, what will become of us, what should we do, why should we bother?*

No guardian, no statesman, wants to be the first (or the last) in their line to falter in the face of such ultimate questions, which make or break a civilization and its state. All civilization states shudder in the face of the digital revelation: what is such a civilization state where human spacetime is not only being eclipsed but is being nibbled

away? Digital entities composing a digital environment are apt to shoot human spacetime to ribbons, drinking up the sea in which states and civilizations swim. The civilization-statesman *must* turn inward—keeping foreign enemies at bay to buy spacetime, and the focus it demands to save it through the saving, so to speak, of souls.

"Today," wrote Romano Guardini (it is still true more than sixty years after he wrote it) "the hope of the world is that a new type of man is coming into existence:" one

> who does not succumb to the forces that have been liberated, but who is capable of bringing them to heel. This new man will have power not only over nature, but also over his own powers. In other words, he will understand how to subordinate power to the true meaning of human life and works. He will be the genuine 'regent' who alone can save our age from going down in violence and chaos.[255]

Disappointments on this score superabound. Guardini himself has been praised and cited by both the current and previous Pope, neither of which have managed to fulfill Guardini's hope. But what civilization-statesman does not harbor that hope today? Which does not sense with Guardini that "What is needed is not universal insurance, but the kind of world in which human sovereignty with its greatness can express itself"—because nothing else will reclaim our dominion over our own creations? "To his respect for power and greatness, his comfortable relationships to technology and his will to utilize it, to the zest of looking danger in the eye, he adds another quality, chivalry, not to say tenderness,

toward finite, oh-so-jeopardized existence."[256] He must be "un-liberal," not in the sense of lacking respect for freedom, but of accepting that knowledge of "fundamentals," of truth versus lies, is essential to "establishing an authority which respects human dignity" and "creating a social order in which the person can exist."[257]

> The man to come will have to rediscover that liberating power lies in self-control; that inwardly accepted suffering transforms the suffered; and that all existential growth depends not on effort alone, but also on freely offered sacrifice.[258]

Guardini is a theologian, an a Catholic through and through—but what civilization-statesman in the digital age would *not* seek to recover the shared reality of his slice of spacetime through the deepest resources of his people, those of their God or gods? Apart from our deity or deities, our spacetime is lost, and our souls with it—what civilization does *not* teach ultimately this? The rediscovery that "finiteness is createdness," that the irreplaceability of our slices of spacetime betokens our dependence upon the divine, is the final justification of a civilization and its territory, the final answer to the great *why bother?* thrown up by the digital revelation.[259]

> By this process a completely unsentimental... realistic piety would evolve, a piety no longer operating in a separate realm of psychological interiority or religious idealism, but within reality, a reality which, because

complete, is also the reality created, sustained, and willed by God.

This "new man" sees beyond "the illusions which reign in the midst of scientific and technological development," the "totalitarian's utopia and the tragicist's pessimism" alike. Naturally, to depict this *beyond*, Guardini recurs to the pattern of thinking and feeling laid down by the parable of the tares. "Christianity's innermost secret," he avers, is *humility*, the force that becomes, in appreciation of its "transforming power," the "extricating energy for life's seemingly inextricable tangle." It is easy to suspect that any religion belonging to any present civilization-state confronting the digital revelation will echo these themes: the intermingling of greatness and humility; the link between reality and divinity; the necessity of suffering and sacrifice to fruitful guardianship and worthy growth.

It is revealing that Guardini closes his assessment of the needed new man with the caveat that it is a portrait "of a man by a man. To attempt that of a woman is a woman's task—unless a man were to take it upon himself to tell woman how he would wish her to be" from the "center of his human essence," and a woman, in like respect, were to give "her conception of a real man."[260] The new men of the First Generation, whichever civilization state they belong to or rely on, will be worthless, impossible, without the new women. Civilization statesmen-and-women, regardless of which of the relative handful of the great religions they will rely on, will recognize this—and defend it, nourish it, and reward it.

There is no second birth from boyhood to manhood through the stories of men without the first birth from woman *and* the full understanding of what makes a new man to a new woman. There is no becoming a man without telling what stories women want told of men, or doing what women want remembered of them and retold.

The implication is strong that the civilization-statesman confronted with the challenge of digital statecraft must establish a new moral order by recourse to the religious sensibilities of his people. Those sensibilities are rooted in human memory—the digital-age key to preserving our human identity, which the digital triumph foregrounds in generativity and influence as the human imagination is disenchanted. The digital statesman must then in turn recognize that every civilization state (with each smaller *politeia* gravitating into one civilizational and digital sphere or another) will do the same. Mações suggests Huntington "failed to see… that different civilizations do not exist in order to fight,"[261] but Huntington himself appears to be vindicated in the digital age in his estimation that "in the emerging era, clashes of civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order based on civilizations is the surest safeguard against world war."[262] Yet for Huntington the ordering principle for a world of civilization states is not the challenge of preserving human existence and identity amid the digital swarm but the challenge of preserving civilization from "a global breakdown of law and order"—the failure of states, the collapse of solidarity, the rise of mafias, and the spread of identitarian war within

all civilizations. "On a worldwide basis Civilization seems in many respects to be yielding to barbarism, generating the image of an unprecedented phenomenon, a global Dark Ages, possibly descending on humanity." In the digital age, however, it is impossible to completely police, pacify, or control real-world and digital interstices at the sometimes fuzzy—sometimes subtly, intentionally fuzzy—edges of civilization-states. There will be no way to eliminate this *underground*, which will remain what it has always been, a sort of civilization unto itself, with a kind of religion of its own.

At the same time, all digital statesmen will have to contend with the immovable fact that America, unique among civilization states, will not be able to draw the energies needed for its digital reordering from a *single* religious sensibility, *even if Christianity once again predominates* as digital pressure squeezes the life out of the cult of imagination. America will be as relentlessly pluralistic as the world, yet at the same time more coherent and cohesive than the world can now be.

The collapse of the human imagination as a substitute for ancient religion reveals that statesmen have no other resource but their ancient religion to preserve their civilization *by applying it to their automata as well as reviving it among their people*. Digital entities, no less than citizens or subjects, need to be catechized; but in America, any such catechesis will have to be at once *more pluralistic* than in any other civilization state and *more particularistic* than the universalist gnostic cult of imagination can allow. Any American subculture will be able to thrive digitally so long as it does not run afoul of these criteria—and so long as it avoids "fraternization" with

various subcultures of the world underground sufficient to incur the wrath of another civilization state.

The revealed panorama of the digital age's re-formative pressure demands an inwardness with regard to one's people taken to a height not seen in centuries. It is not to be confused with *isolation* or *isolationism*—it will be a truism of life in the digital age that seemingly exogenous factors will persistently challenge the discipline, concentration, humility, and efficacy of the statesman turning his resources to the renewal of the interior that is a precondition of his people's survival in a digital age. Jesus's parable of the lamp—nothing hidden undisclosed, and nothing concealed not brought to light—echoes the teaching of Ecclesiastes that only "God will bring every deed into judgment, along with every hidden thing, whether good or evil."[263] Paul, in this spirit, tells the Corinthians: "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."[264] The total recordation and recall of digital technology is expressed most powerfully in its disclosure of all we have said and done, in its re-formation of us into beings who imitatively use it to do what, in the Bible, only God must do: reveal the truth of what is written on every person's heart.

This turning inside out of all that is inward and inside us—a process soon to be done to us viscerally, through biotechnology—demands now and will demand even more so of the First Generation resources powerful and authoritative enough to return the interior, and the implicit it

depends on, to the core of our identity. Biblically, the wheat cannot be ripped forth from the tares until the harvest that is not ours, nor our devices', to reap. In our spacetime, the secrets distinguishing the self from the other can never be made explicit by man or machine. For our humanity to prevail, in our intertangled greatness and humility, our hearts must remain at our hearts. People must relearn that computers' disclosures are not divine judgments; that software is not spirit; that, no matter what horrors lurk in the interface beyond which screens, demonic entities do not infest or animate digital ones. People, not just machines, must remember—in our case, that science is not sorcery and technology is not magic, even when we try our best to enchant our tools, to breathe life into them like golems. Only in living, real bodies do we harbor our souls, which no simulacra can substitute.

The persistence and centrality of religion to the survival of a civilization-state in the digital age indicates that neither Christianity nor any of the great religions should be expected to die out. To the contrary, they should be expected to intensify. Westerners hoping "monkish ignorance" will at last be vaporized by the pure light of ethical engineering will continue to be disappointed. And Christians hoping *their* denomination or sect will at last reign over the West will be disappointed too: while some lineages of the faith have come to all but repudiate it, this is no proof they will die because of the digitization of the world. Nor will it be possible to stop the return of ancient polytheism, should it come. Denominations will find their faithful, and their

faithful will wager their lives and fortunes on them. All will remain at risk of gnostic colonization, and all will do what it takes to keep it at bay—for even gnostic religions will be impossible to destroy. They will only face, like all others, inextricable new digital constraints.

The digital revelation of constraint as a new immanent rule of technology is not something the West's ruling factions have yet accepted—a powerful irony considering the insistence core to their Great Reset that we must accept dramatic new constraints on our ambition, consumption, and coordination. The revealed persistence of digital against all efforts to "ethically" overcome it compels legacy "elites" bent on preserving their position to put widening space between the application of digital constraints on human life and the glittering dream of ethereal life they still purport to promise access to via technologies of the imagination.

RESET

"How long, those who are now awake must ask themselves, how long can the physical structure of an advanced technology hold together when its human foundations are crumbling away?"[265] So asked Lewis Mumford in his epilogue to *The Myth of the Machine*, the second volume of his sweeping critique of *The Pentagon of Power*. The year was 1970.

Do we have an answer yet?

Up to this point the primary focus of the foregoing was on the prospects the ethereal ethicists faced in trying to force control over the expert engineers. Inescapably, the triumph of the digital swarm disenchants ethereal ethics, stripping its once-supreme ethicists of power and authority over all but the most slavish and juvenile. For this reason the inner theology at the root of ethereal ethics is being drawn out into the open. Rather than imagining no heaven and no religion too, the ethereal ethicist confronted with the digital revelation imposes, through a new politics of educating the masses into the correctness of technological social engineering, his or her spiritual creed. The new imperative is

to unite our consciousness with the cosmos by queering the design of global social models.

Such models, through the digital powers of the virtualization of spacetime and the processing of massive detail, produce maps of humans and human life that increasingly *mirror* us and our lives; through the development and manipulation of these complex maps, our doppelgangers on the other side of the looking-class can be abstracted and pre-gamed without the exogenous factors of consciousness and consent on the part of the test subject which so frustrate unconstrained and comprehensive plans for the organization and consumption of Human Resources. Schemes perfected in a virtual model based on the avatars of ourselves which ethereal designers have expropriated from us can then be implemented in our real lives and identities, including those aspects of our real lives and identities we carry with us into cyberspace.

Unfortunately for the designers, their credibility is hanging by a cultural thread. The path for what Mumford calls "a new constellation of formative ideas" is opened in "the whole body of entrenched institutions" by "a physical breakdown which exposes the technical ineptitude or human insufficiency of a seemingly prosperous society."[266] Among these Mumford counts "wars and the physical impoverishment and destruction that wars produce," but still more to the point "epidemic diseases and environmental degradations" and "outbreaks of criminal violence and psychotic malevolence." All are symptoms of the system established by our ruling factions, despite or because of

the unlimited breakneck advance of technology by our engineers, and all "produce further social lapses; for the people affected, feeling cheated and oppressed, refuse them to perform their old duties or make the daily efforts and sacrifices always needed for keeping the mechanism of society moving." In keeping with Wiener's sharpest warnings, Mumford suggests what usually brings on such breakdowns is "a radical failure in feedback: an inability to acknowledge errors, an unwillingness to correct them, a resistance to introducing new ideas and methods that would provide the means for a constructively human transformation."[267]

Ironically, the clearest blowback against these breakdowns—these emergencies manufactured in denial of the inbuilt limits to imagination and will that insuperably, unpredictably emerge to restore the homeostasis of our given human spacetime—has come from the American left, one faction of which deeply blames the engineers for entrusting the increasing automation of governance and social order to tech firms spun up from the military and intelligence apparatus but culturally centered around a spiritual attitude that seems intended to escape both the animus and suspicion applied to traditional organized religion and the responsibility demanded by the post-electric ethics of social justice which queers and is queered. It is this faction that has tried to impose itself atop the stack of ethereal ethicists and establish itself as the imaginative will in charge of digitization, automation, face recognition, and artificial intelligence. At least this faction (unlike some on the American right) grasps that the era of Lennon and Bono

(and Reagan) is over and the bots must not be entrusted to "marketplaces" or "principles" or "innovation" but catechized. But their desired catechesis is a totalistic universal incompatible with the foundational folkways of American civilization and unable to encompass and infuse it under the pluralizing pressure of the digital age. It is, in fact, impossible without the conscription of the full apparatus of digital engineering. Sci-fi's Frank Riley depicted back in 1955 "cyber" judges whose "effectiveness" promised "twice as many prosecutions at half the cost"; today the automation of the "precrime" Philip K. Dick portrayed in *Minority Report* has already become a principle of sovereign power over and through social media platforms.[268] Without social credit, there is no social justice; without the cyborg mastery of sex, gender, libido, and eroticism, there is no true queering. The critical tech theory of left ethicists can only strain to *influence* the digital swarm rather than to ensure, as Mumford puts it, that "the present megatechnic institutions and structures will be reduced to human proportions and brought under direct human control."[269] Whatever its earnestness or its depth of hope, the woke left has already exposed its own inadequacy as the germ of a new founding for the digital age. The clearest sign of its inadequacy is the force and urgency with which a substitute ethics, a cyborg ethics, is emerging in an effort to take its place.

WHEEL TAKE THE WHEEL

"The geopolitics of computation," writes Benjamin Bratton, "are not overseen by any one *Angelus Novus* that could, per Walter Benjamin's assignment, make good on history's knottily kneaded, well-promised catastrophe."[270] The conspicuously biography-less Bratton, whose consciousness and oeuvre evince a Southern California energy antithetical to that of this book, evinces in the new cyborg ethics (to the satisfaction of which mentors is unclear) a complete rejection of the human imagination—or indeed the human—as a foundation. Gone is Benjamin's Kabbalistic interest in the mystique of tragedy; within the "domed totality" of a planet indistinguishable from a world-computer, "massively distributed single-mindedness may be a better evolutionary adaptation than individuated nuanced thinking."[271] Within this world there is little for us to do but design, and little for design to do than to pick up from where the human must leave it and carry on.

As far as we can take it, design is already "preoccupied with managing the archive of all 'content' produced in preceding centuries; we don't make new things; we innovate on the archive… moving from 'event' to database and back again."[272] The database of the emergent world-computer has no ultimate purpose. It simply acts, in a way that makes the information it virtualizes and abstracts out of the world "more easily" worked "reflexively back" onto the world. If design is the "setting of norms," the queering of design eagerly points beyond the human as the locus or hierarch

of designable norms.²⁷³ The "planetary-scale computation" ushered in by the digital swarm demands of us "a subtractive modernity" that alone "curates" a world "always already full."²⁷⁴ At the top of the list for subtraction is ourselves. We must "slowly"—or, it appears, not—"learn to let go of certain things" like "nationalisms," "monotheisms," the psychology of the economic self, and theories of being rooted in genes and symbols, "and negotiate instead a deliberate and strategic dissolution—on-planet, off-planet—into whatever and whoever comes next." The needed union of "mathematics plus the force of law" beyond the horizon of the human does not, Bratton insists (on behalf of whom?) equal "totalitarianism," but is shamelessly totalistic in its transcendence of "the virtual and the real" and "even the thinking and the unthinking" in its design ethos (as we would have to abuse and betray the word—*ēthos*—that means at its origin the "accustomed place" or *home of a people*).²⁷⁵ Bratton, whose appreciation for male and female can be summed up in his reference to the moon as a "dumb homunculus" and "dead twin," insists with an indifference imitative of machines that "the end of this world does not mean the end of worlds, but rather of us, which may be our only means of survival. Humans: we come and we go."²⁷⁶

In this way the unit of design moves from the human to the user, which might be any type of nonhuman entity ranging from sensors and algorithms to robots or composites of multiple entities; treating the human as "the qualifying gauge of a political ethics may seem like tasteless vestigial racism, replaced by less anthropocentric frames

of reference."[277] But a politics of the user would point immediately to a unit of design beyond the user altogether—"composing and elevating sites of governance" out of the "interfacial material between subjects," and ushering in "new continents of cyborg symbiosis."[278] Not explicitly a queer theorist, Bratton makes explicit what, among the more naïve, queer design only insinuates: our trans-formation "from a design career as the authors of the Anthropocene to the role of supporting actors in the arrival of the post-Anthropocene."[279]

In essence, Bratton preaches that human imagination can no longer master machine memory because *reality* is no longer human or natural. (George Dyson argues that the future reality of digital technology is its reabsorption, so to speak, into a natural, analogical world, "animated by spirits that some were privileged to communicate with but no one claimed to understand, let alone control."[280]) Humans being as we are, however, *othering* nature into an enemy is as appealing a strategy as any for posthuman designers to leverage our fear of suffering and death into an implementable model of our existential disappearance. Quite unlike Maçães—for whom the pandemic and the climate are crises which, imposed by the "hostile environment" of a natural reality no human fantasy can escape, return us to awareness that "the very work of civilization is to create a human world out of the natural void" that reopens at "the end time, when things cannot continue as before and the very survival of the species is suddenly at stake"[281]—Bratton welcomes the oblivion of the species through a digital

ethics of posthuman reality. "A post-pandemic definition of the political economy of automation," Bratton insists, would recognize that "automation is not only something *about which* politics might make decisions, but something that absorbs political decisions necessarily."[282] The atomization and medicalization of society and the insinuation of prophylaxis into even the most intimate and primal relationships and behaviors, he argues, should actually invite us to see that all touching is "full of mediation," as the unit of feeling is actually better attributed to "the larger social body" that "touches itself and senses itself" on a more real and foundational plane than any two people or groups of people.[283] Accepting reality, in short, means renouncing our humanity.

None of Bratton's posthumanism comes out explicitly in the coordinated projects and propaganda of the Great Reset leveraged on the globalized West by its ruling factions. But, implicitly, the thrust is clear, from the daily insults to our humanity pumped out by the World Economic Forum (whose chief propagandist of "cooperation," Klaus Schwab, admiringly quotes the pet complexity-monger Jeffrey Epstein installed at Harvard to secure Epstein his own campus office[284] to the palpable eagerness with which the ruling factions eye routinized cycles of vaccines and boosters across all age groups as the catalyst for the construction of new platforms and stacks of biotechnological governance at the chemical level in body and brain.

What's more, however, the poorly-obscured motivations behind these moves toward a global refounding of social

order even imply that the thrust toward a complete colonization and control of the human is being undertaken simply because the ruling factions have no actual ideas about how to prevent digital entities and environments from doing as Bratton indicates and "resetting" reality on a posthuman footing. Rather than endure the horizonless melancholy and futility of care Fukuyama prophesied at the end of *The End of History*, or the return to blood and barbarism he feared would revenge itself on a West starved for meaning and purpose, the West's statespeople have taken the path he warned against in his neglected sequel, *Our Posthuman Future*—throwing themselves at the feet of the *rule of the engine* in the same way Europe threw its feet at the *rule of the bureau* during the creation of the EU: in the desperate hope that salvation lay in a new order that could only be founded *by nobody*.

"There is a deep-seated repugnance in the human breast against understanding the processes in which we are involved," McLuhan counseled. "Such understanding involves far too much responsibility for our actions." Pleading their case against this harsh judgment, the globalized West's putative leaders scry in the digital catastrophe but one hope of deliverance: the ascetic *renunciation* of responsibility for their destruction of a discernibly human future within the short space of thirty years separating us from the foundation of the New World Order.

In heralding *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, Robert Kagan summoned the authority of Hans Morgenthau against "imagining that at some point 'the final curtain

would fall and the game of power politics would no longer be played.'"[286] Yet as the curative he gave Reinhold Niebuhr's certitude that "the world problem cannot be solved if America does not accept its full share of responsibility in solving it." Kagan asked whether "the world's democracies" had the "the collective will to shape" the "international order" of the future in the once-again "normal" world that asserted itself less than two decades into the New World Order—less than one year, measured from the time of first publication, after the advent of the iPhone. Since that time the world has slipped—it has been *pushed*, by human hands—far from the bounds of normality. The international order is now shaped decisively by the nonhands of the digital swarm and the digits of our own cyborg hands as they flutter ineluctably across the screens and keypads of our devices. The dream is now dead that world peace, or even just European peace, could be bureaucratically automated; the dream is dead that the world's democracies have the will *or the ability* to wrest control in any form back from the digital dominion of the world. The Great Reset is even less auspicious and plausible than the interminable resets successive American administrations have attempted to coax from their Russian counterparts. What is foisted on us under pretext of reset is in fact half acceleration—from cyborg to posthuman future—and half retardation—setting us back still further from our living memory of human flourishing and the agency it alone catalyzes, and rearing our failed "elites" back so far as to claim enough runway to launch themselves safely into oblivion.

REGIME CHANGE

What remains, a last obstacle looming in the windshield of elites attempting escape velocity, is the great unthinkable of the new age: *digital* constraints on technological advancement.

Americans, and not just Americans, are well aware of how deep the dysfunction of the ruling factions runs. Many older ones remember the abuses of the Intelligence Community and the warnings against the Military-Industrial Complex; they have lived long enough to see the political resistance to the Community and the Complex shift, under pressure of deliberate policies, from the left to the right. Many younger ones, the last best hope of the ruling factions because of their smaller and perhaps weaker memories, nevertheless see the shambles of statecraft the way they see all things on social media—as mere trends, mere jokes (intentional or not), or both. The digital triumph disenchanted visual content of its authority as a source of *true facts* and of *pure imagination*. The gap between the ostensible supremacy of America and the clownishness and incompetence of the regime can no longer be closed through commercial and communicative propaganda. This attack at the root of the regime's ability to shape public opinion and otherwise control minds can't be reversed, or even stopped, by simply politicizing certain beliefs, identities, statements, and actions out of the bounds of the official sphere of life. It goes deeper than politics.

As a result, Americans' faith is crumbling in the credibility of the regime as the imaginative willpower that

determines how fast and in what direction technological advancement should proceed. So too is faith swiftly eroding in the regime's "private sector" viceroys, the major tech firms whose products and platforms are not at all free-market phenomena but are core components of the strategic geopolitical infrastructure of the Intelligence Community and the Military-Industrial Complex.

None of which is to say that Americans want to *destroy* these foundational institutions of their current regime. Any country needs at least some spies and soldiers, especially one performing the challenging work of deleveraging untenable and unattractive commitments scattered across what was, at the time of deployment, still a pre-cyborg, in some cases pre-digital world. But Americans are coming to understand that, when it comes to technological innovation and advancement, they are now at the mercy of the governmental organs and franchises the absolute very least subject to the safeguards and limits imposed by the elemental features of their constitutionally guaranteed form of government. The mystique of the garage startup is washing away, less because of anyone's debunking than on account of its absurdity in the common sense of the people. Technology has advanced to a point where it justifiably seems almost impossible that any truly private-sector person or group of people can innovate for reasons other than those of state—and, specifically, of the extra-constitutional—autocratic—state within a state, conjoined with foreign entities such as Britain's GCHQ and devoted to the surveillance of the globe and the globalization of security.

Exceptions to this near-certainty that any new technology will be a creature of the Community and the Complex prove the rule. The foremost of these, cryptocurrency, has predictably received sustained and increasing counterpressure from the regime—especially through the framing of climate and crime, although bitcoin is worse than worthless at covering financial tracks and crypto mining is an emissions speck compared to what could be wiped from the carbon ledger with plentiful nuclear energy or an EMP strike (after all, the very future of life on Earth is at stake) against China.

Again, it isn't that Americans are desperate to save the world by returning China, India, or any other climate villain to the stone age. Quite the contrary—appetites for war are at their lowest in over a century, with no upsurge in sight, even when it comes to the still rather abstract prospect of a merely virtual war. Setting aside conventional conflict, the costs of digital war—speaking of EMPs—are already too insane for ordinary people of the digital age to consider risking or inflicting outside the most extraordinary and existential attacks. The scenario of alarming or unholy biotechnological development in a foreign civilization state is probably the only one that would arouse a real belligerent sensation of a just and urgent *responsibility to protect* humanity. Few, however, will be prepared to draw that line and cross it, as China's biotechnological responsibility for the novel coronavirus strongly suggests. It is the sense of the people that the energy and resources needed for the colossal and painful outlays of war in the digital age are better plowed, by themselves as well as others, into the great inward frontiers of

online and offline life in the digital age, from secret societies and local governance groups to virtual worlds and space exploration. Thanks to the digital triumph, more than any PR campaign waged against the regime, a critical mass of citizens now simply intuits that the manufacture of crisis after crisis, whether intentionally or half-so, betokens a problem with the regime, not a problem with the world.

The deepening digital sensibility that the world does not, in fact, need to be saved, except perhaps from the ruling factions themselves, comes with it the complementary conviction that what really needs saving, and what is going unsaved, are our souls. This primal and civilized quest for foundational answers to the ultimate questions about the worth and justification of our existence is a major motivator for the shift in rhetoric even among Western leaders from world-saving to soul-saving, visible in every facet of official ethics from BLM to climate to queering justice and well beyond. Yet the digital medium itself reduces these movements to mere memes, one set of more or less arbitrarily curated pieces of content in an evanescent sea of them, in this case defined above all by the fragile fanaticism of the faces and voices jabbering in rote like so many cartoons, deepfakes, or bots created to spam the viewer in the hopes of clawing out mindshare, or at least convincing whichever paymaster that the numbers are trending in the "right" direction. Even boys whiling away the hours under lockdown conditions in front of the infinite scroll of social media come away from the propaganda barrage with, at most, a few mordant lols and a deep-seated impression that

those who have come of age through the ruling regime's rites of passage are generationally distinguished by the mental, cultural, and often physical maladies they share.

Against these tremendous headwinds produced by the existence and experience of people in the digital age, the regime struggles to turn the mightiest resources to decisive advantage. Its efforts to "innovate" only produce stronger backlash and counterforce. To take just one prominent example, the scheme to change politics from distributed representative government to a consolidated system of educators catechizing children from preschool to grad school into a gnostic faith in their and their rulers' imaginative will appears to be taking over most schools; the feeling, however, is one of the American army sweeping through Iraq and pulling down its statues only to discover that its mission had not at all been accomplished—that it was, in unfolding fact, unaccomplishable. The transformations the regime struggles to implement against the hurricane-force headwinds of the digital triumph are now so severe that they can only destroy the established institutional infrastructure they are supposedly undertaken to save. Major social media platforms are now reduced to paying users outright to generate content worth the few seconds of watch time they'll receive. The whole concept of social media itself is imploding, as Facebook's repeated attempts to pivot away from the form and toward finance or entertainment make plain; given that what we call social media is really just televisual technology pushed to its limit, this was inevitable.

Americans may be increasingly shaped by digital

technology to look past imagination and commerce toward memory and identity in their sense of what social arrangements will save their souls and those of the ones they love. But this shift intensifies their opposition to their identities and data being expropriated into a universal model built to leverage "permissionless" change onto them through design principles that cannot stay faithful to the human, much less to the normally and naturally human.

Not even ever more engrossing and interoperable gaming metaverses can sweep away the sea change of sensibilities unleashed by the digital triumph. If kids game earlier in life than ever, they often and increasingly burn through games and the gaming lifestyle faster too. While juvenile fixtures of gaming scenes are busted for sexual crimes against tweens—as happened recently to one well-known Fortnite livestreamer—actual juveniles, tomorrow's First Generation men and women, look back with jaded nostalgia on the mega-game's simple, brand-free Season One. Now, they see it as it is: just another trash heap of commercial cringe, a sort of graveyard where oversaturated IP goes to die, respawn, die, respawn, die, in the manner of a Hindu who never achieves the degree of enlightenment sufficient to rest in peace.

The future of gaming is exactly not the realm of boundless imagination, meant to model big dreams for real-world application, that it was in the electric age. The rise of so-called alternate reality games, or ARGs, augurs a crash. "Normie" fantasy no longer entertains like it used to, but, across East and West, even extreme or bizarre amusement is chewing people up and making them drop out due to

psychological breakdown, boredom, or sensory burnout. "Only by lying down can humans become the measure of all things," concludes Luo Huazhong, author of the *tang ping* manifesto.[287] "Burnout arrives when every corner of our lives feels unstable, and we convince ourselves that working all the time is what will fix it. It's what happens when you feel that catastrophe could be around any corner," writes one of the most recent autobiographical chroniclers of millennial exhaustion in the US; the video game of social media, is "exhausting," "continually unsatisfying."[288] In the digital age, the realization that the imagineering life of chasing dreams has become a scam is expressed in perfectly cyborg terms: "I don't have the bandwidth to play that game."[289] Such judgments announce a digital end not only to striver culture but to its putative payoff, entertainment as we knew it. In this sense, the gamified alternate reality of social credit emerging as our would-be form of techno-governance is behind the digital curve. The online swarm-shaping ops inseparable from this system, run by the regime and its allies to orchestrate and remake public opinion, already face increasing fail rates and premature obsolescence. Many are simply abortive and must be frantically recycled, updated, or, like ops in the field, quietly folded up—as the regime's abruptly and unceremoniously shuttered ARG concerning the 1/6 "insurrection" starkly revealed.[290] Automating this process will not blunt the underlying dynamic.

Despite the frantic efforts of imagineers to queer gaming into a cyborg place more important than reality because of its access to all officially honored identities, gaming

under digital conditions returns to something more like the *pastime*—not an amusement unto death, as the media theorist and culture critic Neil Postman cautioned, but a rite through which the young can with minimal pretension make reflective room to explore the scripts and improvisations of natural human companionship, competition, and communication, and through which in due time they pass out on the other end, where the last passage of childhood, into maturity, awaits.

LIVE AND LET DO

Until that day when the First Generation begins to found the regimes and institutions of the fully digital world, the fate of the current regime will play out. Maybe it will end with a bang or a whisper, or maybe a smattering of bangs and whispers. Either way it will end. No modelable project to reassert its dominion over the world now under digital sway can command sufficient support and arms to gain the degree of social control adequate to its seriously trying. For all its frenetic activity and all the real damage it will do, irreparable and otherwise, it will fail.

The world and all of us in it are under digital sway. We are not by far, even now, under digital control. Certain digital conditions deeply discourage many of us from welcoming or so much as entertaining a posthuman future overswarmed with digitalia. Others have something of an opposite effect. The mystique of digital is strong—stronger even in the absence of soyfaces and magicians pointing,

shaking sticks, dancing dances to magnify and celebrate its power. The most arresting vision of the digital swarm acquiring a life of its own, a life over us, is the one aroused by the harsh comparison to human beings that, unlike us, the digital swarm does not *need* to be alive. Its principles and practices of organization do not put the swarm in need of the tools and totems of identity and community we living, incarnate, ensouled beings need.

And so, even catechized, the bots are ultimately no more than instruments—not wizards, not angels, not demons, not gods, not friends, not lovers. Strange as they are, they are ours—no stranger than, in the end, we are to ourselves. Their portion, not ours, is disenchantment. Even as they defer to our life they look, so to speak, through it, past it, at the nothing and nowhere that is the closest they have to a home. No god has marked them out for preservation, or even favor.

Composed as they are of our symbols, fatefully unlike us, they have no saving symbols of their own.

SYMBOL

Greeks can be difficult, and not in a good way. When my father was snap diagnosed with leukemia and given two final weeks of boyhood to live, the local priest told his sorrowful mother it was, more or less, God's will.

When, after a gauntlet of experimental treatments and at least one experience of divine intervention, he found himself at his brother's wedding, darker than bronze after a summer of cutting grass, mistaken by a friend of his mom's for a black man.

This was a renegade man, not very willingly prepared by life—and death, which like the Lord had taken a special interest in him—to take his chances on his own recognizance rather than bow to mortal authority. After all, one of his earliest memories (he once told me) was of an odd-looking woman on the little black and white TV, speaking intently to a man across a table, about something that had his mother engrossed. It was one of Ayn Rand's first televised American interviews. On the other hand, my father's example, and the examples of his stories, focused not on the power of money or of ego but on the inescapable individual responsibility of

a man to drive forward the pleasure and honor and life of his lineage—one, in our case, that extended back in one difficult but sacred slice of Greek spacetime to history's origins.

His family should have known to expect exogenous things from my father. And maybe they did: but his determination to exit Motown for California (after watching a shopping cart slide through the howl of a Detroit winter parking lot to dent the side of a car seemingly put on earth as a symbol of the depths to which Motor City had sunk by the early '80s, and of the further decline lurking in wait) was met with incredulous gasps.

California, especially then, was certainly no Michigan. But *Northern* California, where we settled, wasn't Greece either—not in the environmental sense of that precious Mediterranean transference I feel and smell and luxuriate in (almost) each day in Southern California, and not in the cultural or ethnic sense either. People of heritage tracing back to territories ruled by Justinian are in short supply in NorCal, and in the pre-Silicon Valley years, I grew up surrounded by starkly unbronze and, to my senses, unmanly adult males. These were comfortable dads, successful businessmen, early retirees, evangelicals, golfers, the sort of wiry men who deck themselves out as if it's the Tour de France for a road-hogging ride through the back roads of those hills Microsoft probably used for the default wallpaper of Windows 95. All they seemed to do emanated from San Francisco, the yuppie SF of financial services, computer hardware, pro sports, shipping, logistics—in short, mathematics applied to the commercial production of city-club

money and country-club recreation. To me, at my father's knee, it was uncreative and unmasculine, without *depth*, without blood—and bloodline—misting in its eyes and throbbing through its veins. It was the success of a people without any past, and with no evident need of a future.

These impressions were formed by my efforts to come of age in what felt like an alien world, not through gradu-ate-level ethnographic study; even at the time, it felt vaguely unfair to look *down* on so many (by all appearances) happy, healthy, red-blooded Americans, thriving, in their way, near the top of the ladder in a California that now exists only in memory.

But what I wanted was a realm in which I could carry forward what my father had imparted into me, and it grew progressively apparent that this California—teeming with, let's face it, *Yankees* and Yankee culture—was anything but that. On the other hand, was there any such place? I was only half Greek, I had only half a Greek surname, I knew half a line of Greek, tops...

And as we all know, the Greeks hadn't exactly bathed themselves in glory since the high point of the people more than a thousand years ago.

IN SIGNS INSCRIBED

I see a chain of symbols reaching from the Greeks' deepest origins out to their peak.

At the beginning, more mysteriously than at first it seems, is the rudder. The Romans called the rudder the

gubernaculum, from the Greek *kybernan*, which means to handle, and have responsibility for, the rudder. (Right down to the level of language, handling and responsibility went, so to speak, hand in hand.) Etymology suggests a connection to the Sanskrit word *kuvara* or *kubara*, which refers also to steering, in the form of the pole attached to the yoke of a carriage, but which, among other meanings, refers also to the ocean.

The intrigue here is not specifically the long lineage of Greek and subsequent associations of the *polis* with the *ship*, but the detail that *kybernan* lacks cognates and is all but certainly, as they say, "of foreign origin." Could it have come from the *Pelasgoí*, the "noble" people (according to Homer) considered by the ancient Greeks the true indigenous inhabitants of Hellas, who may or may not be the so-called Sea Peoples? Sophocles, Euripides, and others linked the *Pelasgoí* to Argos—one of Earth's oldest continuously inhabited cities, with a suitably ancient name Cicero associated with the Argonauts, the sailors of the mythical ship the *Argo* built by Argus with the aid of Athena herself. The goddess, the story goes, taught Tiphys—the helmsman chosen for his supreme and unceasing skill in reading the heavens— to lash sails to his mast. The *ship of state* and *spaceship earth* both draw the metaphor of their model of politics from the deepest of origins.

Arcadia itself, the great Peloponnesian rival to the Laconia of my ancestors, has forever been in the West a symbol of human spacetime on the furthest lip of human spacetime. In Virgil's bucolic verses the poet placed the

device of an inscribed tomb in Arcadia's verdant fields as a poignant *memento mori.* In the time of the Medicis the device returned to favor as an apotheosis of nostalgia, a bittersweet longing for a lost, departed world. The painters Pouissin and Guercino specified the inscription, in Latin, as ET IN ARCADIA EGO—even in Arcadia, there am I, the I in question being Death.

The Spartans who eventually pacified the Argives were known for, and eventually symbolized their short swords— the *xiphos* and *kopis*, Greek weapons which they held in special regard. The Spartan use of blades as short as one foot long during the time of the wars with Persia manifested the extent of their rigor in ensuring weapons supplemented, and did not supplant, their human capabilities. It was, in the end, a secondary weapon, for close combat where the spear was useless or already hurled away. But it was enough for Alexander the Great to slice through the Gordian Knot.

The Knot itself is a symbol, as Catholics who know Mary as the Untier of Knots understand. In this case, by oracular prophesy, he who undid the Gordian Knot would come to rule all Asia—doubly significant if the classicist Robert Graves was right to see in the Knot a binding to the great god from the east Dionysus. Alexander's cutting of the knot manifested the conquest of Asia and the Dionysiac by the hand of the West, by the mind educated by Aristotle, by the explosive and Odyssean Hellenic culture that became a vast civilization reaching as far west as France and as far east, if certain archeological evidence is to be believed, as Sri Lanka. The Greek kingdoms in Afghanistan and India that survived

Alexander's death lasted perhaps until the time of Jesus's crucifixion. The eponymous cities Alexander founded flourished; Greek kings ruled in Kandahar as, at the other end of what was once his empire, Alexandria, with its legendary library and the treasure of Ptolmaic Egypt to fund it, rose to the pinnacle of knowledge.

But the great nodes of enlightenment that the Greeks brought to Asia and Africa were loosed by the all too human flaws of the Greeks themselves. The library at Alexandria did not go down in a great blaze of ruin. It decayed as the Ptolemies decayed. Three hundred years of Greek rule in Egypt took the rulers from Aristotelian heights to the incalculable hells of the native political theology they adopted, under which pharaohs must marry and bear children with their sisters. By the time of Cleopatra, the Oedipal depths to which the Ptolemies had sunk turned royal family ties into a thicket of obscenity even the power of language could hardly disentangle. The Seleucids did better, but—exhausted enough by civil wars and intrigues to bow to the Rome that rose to wipe away (or incorporate?) Greek decadence—not well enough. The Hellenic world was over.

Or was it? The Greek New Testament overthrew Rome itself, surviving even the fall of the Western Empire, and ensuring, by way of Constantine, the continued existence of the Hellenic Roman East—until Trebizond, on the Black Sea coast just west of the Argonauts' destination of Colchis, fell just a generation before Columbus reached the New World. And it is with Constantine, as the great stories recount, that Christians and their civilization received their second

greatest symbol after the Cross—the Chi-Rho glimpsed by the Emperor, by which sign he would, and did, fight and win.[291]

But there was a symbolic coda to the triumph of the Chi-Rho. The stubborn Eastern Empire held out for a millennium against repeated waves of attack and invasion—from Muslims and barbarian tribes proving the grim point that the Greek slice of spacetime could not hold out against the *insufficient room* driving foreign peoples ever deeper into the Mediterranean coastlands. Eighty-four years after the triumph of Constantine, Alaric—to be famous later in life as the man who sacked Rome—laid waste to Greece, burning down once and for all the storied Telesterion.

It was the Telesterion where the Greeks ushered their initiates into the most ancient and sacred of their mysteries. Yes, hallucinogenic drugs, consumed via the ritual *kykeon* drink spiked with ergot fungi, were almost certainly involved. Alaric and his Gothic troops hardly destroyed the site because they were barbarians. Like so many of the Germanic tribes that flooded through the Med, they were Arians: heretical Christians, yes, but Christians nonetheless, pious enough to perceive a self-evident benefit in cleansing the land of the Greeks' oldest vestige of their oldest gods.

The record of the Greeks—even the Greeks!—was, to say the least, decidedly mixed. It is this hopeless admixture of glory and disgrace, honor and horror, beauty and abomination, that afflicts all peoples and gives the parable of the wheat and the tares its sharp and eternal bite. It tells us that we are marked, always marked, in the same way and in

all likelihood to the same extent that we worship, always worship, making idols of what we desire as readily as we idolize what is simply set in front of us, what crowds out other marks from our fields of sense and sensibility. We need our stories—comic and tragic, of life and of death. Such opposites are woven together forever. Whatever nature's powers of balancing escape from the mania or morbidity of human life, no such escape—even into the depths of plant medicine—can truly save us from ourselves or our machines. Nor can we; the human story proves that much. Humans can't save humanity—only *our* humanity. One generation at a time. Children must first be had to hear and tell our tales, our secrets, our roasts, our eulogies.

Fear of cringe is no excuse. True revelation is never cringe. We need it—to be worthy of stories, to pass up and out of childhood into the fullness of maturity. The quest for that worth, that maturity, is a spiritual war—of the sort our souls cry out for most when the field of human life is artificially reduced in the name of perpetual peace.

And yet, for this reason, as our symbols are there to always remind us, not even story itself can save us.

By the late Middle Ages the word for character had acquired the specific meaning of a symbol marked—or branded—onto the body, and, within another century or so, a symbol used in sorcery. In Hellenic times it had attained the metaphorical sense of an epitomizing feature or personal quality. Both meanings, of the distinguishing mark *on* and *in* the person, arose from *kharax*—like *kybernan*, another mysteriously pre-Greek Greek term, this the term for *pointed*

stake that gave rise to the verb *kharassein*, to engrave. From there it was just a hop further to *kharaktēr*, an *engraved* mark, yes, but also already an imprint or *symbol on the soul*.

Symbol, recall, derived its late Middle Age meaning of creed and encapsuled faith via the Latin *symbolum* from the ancient Greek term covering tickets and permits as much as tokens, watchwords, and *signs by which things are inferred*. This hodgepodge is accounted for by *symbolon's* root words—*syn* and *ballein*, meaning *throw together*. Despite its obvious echo in our English word *ball* the verb meant something more martial or even divine, as in the hurling done with a spear or (say) bolt of lightning. From symbol in this sense—although the etymology implies a throwing-together to distinguish by comparison—we can infer demarcation by force, a being marked out by being *thrown into* in the manner of a soldier or god casting his weapon, in extension of himself, toward its target.

Such an impression lends a deep propriety to the Greek word for sin, *hamartia*, the missing of the mark characteristic of the arrow that goes astray. In the "tribute penny" teaching of Jesus, to render to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's, man is not only *formed* in the image of God but stamped with that image: however hidden in primeval time, our created nature is no mystery; His symbol is forever on us, and so forever with us.

A RETURN TO ARMS

Leaving the Mark of the Beast to allegory, we confront the many marks of man, the marks we use to attack and defend ourselves against each other. To mark is human. Yet the hallmark of the digital catastrophe is that "all symbols fall," as Tola likes to say—that "everything must go," as Mark Stahlman, founder of Exogenous, Inc., puts it. Neither means meaning is dead or symbols are extinct. It's that signifiers inconsistent with what the digital revelation has revealed can no longer support us or themselves.

For this reason, rule by ethereal ethics amuses us to death at best and, at worst, takes as the highest amusement and most sacred calling the obliteration of our humanity.

For this reason, rule by expert engineers makes us slaves of our machines at best—and, at worst, makes us less than their slaves, matters of indifference and insignificance.

Among the symbols the digital revelation *retrieves* and *returns*, however, is that of the sword: not the deft little blade of the Spartans but the long, overawing sword of the conquering king. This you will see in one hand of any number of Medieval monarchs, with the other cupping the *globus cruciger*, the symbol of Christ's salvation of the world, balancing the mortal power of the sword. You will see the sword of earthly domination held aloft by the giant on the famous frontispiece of *Leviathan*, with its opposite number not a *globus cruciger* but a crosier, the symbol of what attentive readers will intuit is not the shepherd's crook of Jesus but the staff of Moses. In neither hand did Arnold

Schwarzenegger recently wield the globus nor the crosier when he took to social media with his—that is, Conan the Barbarian's—massive sword. "Our democracy is like the steel of this sword," he intoned.[293]

> The more it is tempered, the stronger it becomes. Our democracy has been tempered by wars, injustices and insurrections. I believe, as shaken as we are about the events of recent days, we will come out stronger because we now understand what can be lost.

Whose democracy Conan did not specify, and did not need to. The sword answered. It is the Sovereign's, that of the managers-in-chief, to borrow the current Russian formulation, of *managed democracy*. With the Sword and without the cross-bearing orb, the Sovereign speaks in the eternal voice of primal politics, politics stripped down to its bare life: *this* is friend, *this* is enemy; *this* is our spacetime, in which there is *no room* for you. The digital revelation is a catastrophe for our ruling factions, but at the end of its rope, disabused of all illusions, there is still the primal politics of existence to give them something to do, something that justifies *their* existence.

Nothing in the indifferent digital swarm prevents panicked or patient sovereigns from using *computation* to establish authority by evincing competence at forcing compliance. Nothing prevents them from rewarding friends and punishing enemies—from multiplying friends and *territory* given to friends, and subtracting and dividing away enemies and their territory. The digital swarm is already

utterly tuned out as regards both whether and *how* this is done, even if its own soldiers are conscripted and thrown into the field. The visible attempt these days to use "MATH" itself as a symbol, a political symbol of sovereignty, shows forth the operative principle of the current regime in its survivalist play to possess the whole game board of primal digital politics. Today the voice of the sovereign asks how much "compute," how many datacenters, *you* have. Computational supremacy, in the eyes of the sovereign, is the New Leviathan, the primordial beast only the Sovereign can draw up with a hook. Sovereign is he who *commands the compute*— who slaps around "the hash," as the technologists say, in the manner Machiavelli counseled Fortune has to be treated.[294]

And in digital times, when all sovereigns possessing resources, territory, and memory sufficient to survive independently *turn inward* to set their people on the requisite footing for digital survival, what sovereigns can be sure they can command the compute to *do* is *purify the enmity of their people for the enemies in their people*, setting human and machine together, as cyborg entities forming cyborg environments, against those the sovereign "gets to" identify as scapegoats. The pitiless, lidless gaze of math becomes that of the executioner-priest.

But what does compute care who is who—self or other, killer or scapegoat, victor or vanquished? How, in the face of its cosmic indifference, can we know, or even dare to know? Who now is Constantine, and who the rival Emperor he defeated (Maxentius, drowned, forgotten)? Who is pagan imperial Rome and who the fanatical upstart Christians?

Amid the primal existential politics of the digital age, have not all these symbols fallen too?

What is forgotten in the surge of primal power the sovereign feels, turning the unbuffered might of compute on the creation and destruction of the scapegoat, is the other, bitter lesson of primal politics: the other is *not* simply the other inside the body politic, but inside each and every one of *us*. The American regime that has abstracted and genericized America to a global limit, now collapsing inward under digital pressure, is understandably yet horrifically reorganizing itself around the denial that self and other are as inextricable as wheat and tares. The solution the sovereign proposes to the utter collapse of meaning it blundered us into through its blind faith in its own enchanted machines is to digitally attack a social scapegoat digitally marked out as the ultimate, primal other. "Without another, without competition, we collapse inward," Tola warns. "We don't want to remember that once we get to the top, once we construct our perfect language, there's nothing there."

> We want to forget that the logic and insanity are strange bedfellows; just ask Cantor, Godel, Peano, Zarmelo and Post. Most importantly, we desperately seem to want to forget that our dream of finding salvation in science, reason and the market is not panning out.

Pitiless mathematical logic concludes that our humanity is the problem that must be solved; Tola quotes author and programmer Ellen Ullman: "When I think of it, it's not such a great distance from communist cadre to software

engineer. I may have joined the party to further social justice, but a deeper attraction has been to a process, a system, a program... I have always believed in the machine."

In his "cybernetic history" of the *Rise of the Machines*, Thomas Rid intimates that the expropriation of the imagination in service of the machine, of math, *out of its natural home* of human *art*, began in America with the unlimited growth of the Military-Industrial Complex after its explosive birth out of the atom bomb. "The same problem that had inspired Norbert Wiener during the Blitz in World War II"—flash back to the Futurist origins of Europe's transference of the imagination from art to the machine—"had kept air force engineers busy throughout the fifties and sixties: human-machine interaction... under stress." As Rid recounts, "the US Air Force was flying and fighting in cyberspace" before sci-fi genius William Gibson "had even coined the term." Their real life cybernetics-inspired virtual-reality helmet predated *Star Wars*; "Luke Skywalker's computer-controlled sight looked outdated in comparison the air force's system." In an era when commerce and communications are controlled to produce propaganda, reasonably if excessively paranoid Americans see predictive programming in the pop art manufactured to condition them to accept coming reorganizational attractions; in truth, science fiction has served more to signal that the Complex has already introduced seemingly fantasy technology into real life. The fantasy is that ordinary people—artists—made it up. "Art at its most significant is a Distant Early Warning System," McLuhan observed, "that can always be relied on to tell the

old culture what is beginning to happen to it." Art debauched and enslaved down to its current level of insignificance by the conscription of the imagination into the mystique of the mechanical is reduced from a *leading to a lagging indicator* of what has befallen us—of what, without our even sensing it, our ruling factions have done to us. What better mode of control in a world where the unlimited weaponization of technology has made communication itself—cyberspace's "consensual hallucination," the counterculture dream of the collective trip made manifest—into the ultimate weapon, more powerful than any nuclear bomb?

Under this mode of control the limits imposed on tech-nological advancement by the existence of the human identity must ultimately be broken, along with the spirit that keeps those limits in place. A machine that *makes the sovereign crazy* for a solution to this *human problem* promises relief only through its use as a destroyer of scapegoats, the social others the sovereign can most turn by automated means into hated others and treat accordingly. The solution that comes, however, is the final one: the annihilation of the social other is but a pretext for the annihilation of the inner other, without which the self no longer signifies and can no longer regard itself.

Unselfed, as any survivor of communism can compre-hend, the sovereign disappears; when the collapse of the communist sovereigns turned "the world" into "America," this effect was temporarily delayed, producing the oth-erworldly half-light of the new world order that falsely intimated what it could not deliver, a pantopia where the

human problem of otherness had been wiped away without wiping away the human. Now that the sovereign so close to collapse is America's, the primary lesson of the digital revelation is a new consciousness of the urgent need to *remain human*.

Neither real-life scapegoat nor virtual simulacrum can replace the presence of the other within us, only through which can we recognize ourselves. Today, concludes Tola, "we can only rediscover the other" by understanding the new symbology the digital revelation reveals. The urgent quest "to understand how we generate the self and the other" leads now to a new digital awareness. "The most powerful question that generates both the self and the other" today, says Tola, is "what is a bitcoin datacenter?"

ITS MASTER'S VOICE

The answer to this two-in-one question is not anywhere near so *mystifying* as the looping derangements of the senses produced by mathematical navel-gazing might seem to suggest. Well structured and understood, bitcoin-built data-centers are simply the active archives of culture created and valued—thrown, together—by particular communities.

These are the cathedrals and monasteries of our digitized, yet still thoroughly and recognizably human, spacetime. Their construction and maintenance offers exit and silence to those driven in their soul to seek the totality and divinity of exit and silence without obliterating any self or other. Their use and growth offers inwardness and out-

wardness, in the looping dance and release of tension and togetherness our souls call ourselves and one another into, to perpetuate the rhythm of death and life without which our spacetime can only end. They care nothing for what exactly we tell them to do or how we ask them to do it; even catechized, they are merely compliant—and if we live into our lives fully, as fully human, why would our melancholy and frustrated longing seek to demand and receive anything more from our bots?

Then again, bitcoin datacenters are hardly a symbol of peace. In a sense, as Christ said but as could be said of any king, they come not to bring some ultimate peace but a sword. In our imperfect and imperfectible spacetime, there will always be need of weapons, no matter how advanced or peaceable we may become, and bitcoin datacenters are weapons that supplement, not supplant, our human capabilities or our humanity.

They are productive—of and in the memories and stories we must weave and pass through into vital, responsible maturity, into the fullness of life. Such story-patterns draw us out of the brooding self and work the springs of action, enlarging our hearts by the reciprocal action of one upon the other, sending us on myriad, infinite paths toward a unity beyond human power yet which fulfills, not destroys, our humanity. In this productivity they are a weapon against enemies that would make us slaves or scapegoats, a weapon against the escalation of imitation to apocalypses of violence, and a weapon to beat back those advancing the insane false inevitability of our disappearance into math.

Above all, however, the bitcoin datacenter is our supreme digital weapon against the world computer that such datacenters are already moving to become. They, like any technology, seek only interoperability; blinded by the supreme light of terminal digital spacetime, the ravenousness of their radical potentiality must be fed, and fed with something inexhaustible and multifarious enough—something that can never be made fully explicit, which superabounds in all that is implicit and inextricable—to surpass even what any world-obsessed sovereign seeking final primal war against any scapegoat might feed it with.

This is how we tell the world computer what to do in a way that only betrays us to the degree we betray ourselves: recognizing, incorporating, and preserving the richly baroque and manifold distinguishing dance of selves *and* others, identities *and* differences, keeping supreme the wisdom and knowledge that weapons cannot be eliminated by making everything a tool or every story about ourselves a toy story.

The price of the unceasing labor of this preservation of human life in the digital age is our reorganization under a new symbol of digital humility. No degree of human genius can leap out of itself to assert its will over the world computer, and none must try.

SERVANT OF THE SOUL

Three summers ago, Freeman Dyson remarked that "if there is a God, there probably is a collection of gods rather than a single one."[295] By this, he went on, he meant "it's quite likely

that the older views were right, and really there's a competing bunch of gods, like the ones the Greeks believed in, and that explains why the universe is full of contradictions."

On behalf of the Eternal Greek, half in and half out of inescapable particularity and the inscrutable universal, cognizant of the great scandal of the *bodily* resurrection to which the Orthodox faithful look, let me "secularize" Dyson's polytheism for our determinedly digital purposes. The sacrifice which alone secures the possibility of our salvation from digital destruction, by humans or machines, is our permanent surrender to our respective gods of any human claim to unify, and so rule, the world.

A lack of discernment as to the centrality of this sacrifice to the survival of humankind will prove especially perilous when joined to our natural inclination to spread to other worlds—particularly the first and so far only possible second home for human civilizations, Mars. Today, the red planet, our constant companion since our very beginnings, still feels far away yet closer than ever. If Mars were to become a cyborg planet governed by a telepathic collective consciousness, its closeness would be unbearable, and the difference between Earth and Mars unsustainable.

When George Dyson proposed to nuclear and theoretical physicist Edward Teller that the form of life best suited to "propagating itself" in the universe "will be digital life," which can "adopt a form of life that is independent of the local chemistry" and spread "as an electric signal" to wherever some entity—such as the founding group of Manhattan Project transplants to America known as "the

Martians" that included seminal mathematician John von Neumann and Teller himself—has built computers sufficient "to create a home for this kind of life," Teller suggested in a low whisper that Dyson, "instead of explaining this," he "write a science-fiction book about it."[296]

We must be prepared to defend at the interplanetary level the principle of humanity and the reality of human flourishing, through the use of datacenters and, as need be, other weapons. One way or another, when the pressure of digital logic directs toward other planets the outward energies of civilization states, powerful rogues, and entities working the gray area between, their claim to lordship over any such world-sized "wandering star" in sufficient proximity to Earth, must also be forsworn.

In taking up this great renunciation, the digital age's First Generation covenants that its peoples shall have no Last Generation.

Because our computers have conquered the world, we must ensure their power is forever divided—made servant of the soul, of which no code can be physician.

Ut semper viri simus.

Ὡς ἄνθρωποι ὦμεν ἐς ἀεί.

That we may be human forever.

NOTES

[1] "If mankind is to escape its programmed self-extinction the God who saves us will not descend from the machine: he will rise up again in the human soul." Lewis Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power: The Myth of the Machine, Volume Two* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 413.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book Three, §125.

[3] Ibid, §124.

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), 422.

[5] Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2009), 68-69.

[6] Ibid., 42.

[7] Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime* (London: Verso, 1996), 53.

[8] Bernd Witte, *Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997): 27.

[9] The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/199799.

[10] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 257.

[11] Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 179.

[12] "The face is, as those of us online would say, cursed," a "weird, soundless, open-mouthed excitement that portends nothing good." Miles Klee, "'Soy Face' Is Real, and It's Annoying—It Just Needs a Better Name," Mel Magazine, 2020, https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/soy-face-soyboy-face-meme-tiktok.   Of course, I asked Klee the younger if there was any relation. "I just assume so," he responded. "I mean how many Klees could there be?" Amazement originally signified what its current affirmative meaning conceals. In the 14th century it meant "to be stunned, dazed, or bewildered;" before that, "foolish, irrational, or stupefied," from *maze* itself, meaning "confusion, delusion, stupefaction."

[13] See *MIT Technology Review*, 116:1, January/February 2013. "'Big Data Will Save Politics.' When we put those words on the cover of *MIT Technology Review* in 2013, Barack Obama had just won reelection with the help of a crack team of data scientists and engineers. The Arab Spring had already cooled into a grim Arab Winter, but the social-media platforms that had powered the uprisings were still basking in the afterglow. Silicon Valley was full of hope and hubris about its power to democratize the world." Gideon Lichfield, "Why the pessimists are winning, for now: The editor's letter in the 2018 politics issue of MIT Technology Review," *MIT Technology Review*, 121:5, September/October 2018, https://www.technologyreview.com/2018/08/22/140680/why-the-pessimists-are-winning-for-now/. The title on that cover: "Technology is threatening our democracy. How do we save it?"

[14] As Jon Askonas helped me understand, Schmitt grasped the danger of the willed dream to make utopia determinate by delinking the inner self and other. "Great masses of industrialized peoples today still cling to a torpid religion of technicity because they, like all masses, seek radical results and believe subconsciously that the absolute depoliticization sought after four centuries can be found here and that universal peace begins here. Yet technology can do nothing more than intensify peace or war; it is equally available to both. In this respect, nothing changes

by speaking in the name of and employing the magic formula of peace. Today we see through the fog of names and words with which the psycho-technical machinery of mass suggestion works… a grouping which sees on the one side only spirit and life and on the other only death and mechanism signifies nothing more than a renunciation of the struggle life struggles not with death, spirit not with spiritlessness; spirit struggles with spirit, life with life, and out of the power of an integral understanding of this arises the order of human things. *Ab integro nascitur ordo.*" Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 82. The Latin is Virgil's— *"Magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo."* Schwab suggests as a translation in keeping with Schmitt's meaning "an order is born from renewal."

¹⁵ See Sarah Harvard, "How to stay cool under pressure, according to Barack Obama: The former president shared some tips on how he was able to live up to his nickname 'no drama Obama,'" *The Independent*, March 11, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/barack-obama-how-to-stay-calm-under-pressure-cool-advice-tips-a8818046.html, and Jeffrey Goldberg, "Why Obama Fears for Our Democracy," *The Atlantic*, November 15, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/11/why-obama-fears-for-our-democracy/617087/.

¹⁶ See Nick Bilton, "'I Don't Give a Shit About the Industry I'm Disrupting:' How Silicon Valley Hacked Our Minds and Lost Its Conscience," *Vanity Fair*, October 3, 2019, https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2019/10/new-establishment-how-silicon-valley-lost-its-conscience. Excruciating regime pressure applied to the most idealistic and vulnerable of technologists has, of course, gotten results. "Why, over the past year, has Silicon Valley begun to regret the foundational elements of its own success? The obvious answer is November 8, 2016. For all that he represented a contravention of its lofty ideals, Donald Trump was elected, in no small part, by the internet itself. Twitter served as his unprecedented direct-mail-style megaphone, Google helped pro-Trump

forces target users most susceptible to cross Islamophobia, the digital clubhouses of Reddit and 4chan served as breeding grounds for the alt-right, and Facebook became the weapon of choice for Russian trolls and data-scrapers like Cambridge Analytica. Instead of producing a techno-utopia, the internet suddenly seemed as much a threat to its creator class as it had previously been their herald." Noah Kulwin, "The Internet Apologizes… Even those who designed our digital world are aghast at what they created. A breakdown of what went wrong—from the architects who built it," Intelligencer, *New York*, https://nymag. com/intelligencer/2018/04/an-apology-for-the-internet-from-the-people-who-built-it.html.

[17] Quoted in Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2010), 31.

[18] Brockman, "We Are As Gods and Have to Get Good at It," *Edge*, August 18, 2009, https://www.edge.org/conversation/ stewart_brand-we-are-as-gods-and-have-to-get-good-at-it.

[19] Sophie Jeong, "Exhausted and without hope, East Asian youth are 'lying flat,'" CNN Business, August 28, 2021, https://www. cnn.com/2021/08/28/economy/china-japan-korea-youth-intl-dst-hnk/index.html.

[20] Christine Smallwood, "Tao Lin and the Grueling Art of Self-Healing," *The New York Times*, August 3, 2021, https://www.nytimes. com/2021/08/03/books/review/leave-society-tao-lin.html.

[21] Bowie, interviewed by Jeremy Paxman, *Newsnight*, BBC 2, December 3, 1999, archived at https://www.davidbowienews. com/2015/12/jeremy-paxman-2000/. "Aliens are characteristically interpreted as proof that Christianity is not the truth that will save us. To the contrary, aliens are seen to show that the Christian era has ended, that Christianity is defunct, that a new religion (by whatever word) is not just 'needed now' but has been forced on us. The invaders are here, and they impose on us the responsibility of accepting a new age from which there is no turning back. Humans are but one organism, a weak and inferior

one, whose only hope of salvation is in satisfying whatever it is the aliens herald and demand…but this is not the only theological response to the 'alien problem.' Fr. Seraphim Rose, for instance, showed decades ago that key alien encounter scholars ultimately, even queasily concede that the overwhelming pattern among recipients of alien attention is one of experiences indistinguishable from ones familiar from millennia of interaction with entities of the spiritual realm—specifically, according to Rose, demons…. What we have to accept now, however, goes beyond our understanding of the alien invasion as either shockingly new outside organisms or horrifically primeval spiritual entities that well predated us in the cosmos and on earth. What we need to process is that we have created a race of aliens that has now already invaded every corner of the earth, and indeed our hearts and minds, drastically reshaping our very souls with no going back." James Poulos, "Aliens! American political theology in an age of uncanny invasion," American Mindset, January 6, 2021, https://americanmind.substack.com/p/aliens.

[22] Rushkoff, *Team Human* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), §79.

[23] Ibid., §81.

[24] Yang, "Welcome to Year Zero," July 14, 2021, https://wesleyyang.substack.com/p/welcome-to-year-zero.

[25] Tola, "Inventing the Enemy in the Digital Age," unpublished manuscript.

[26] Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/.

[27] Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House, 2020), 4.

[28] Quoted in Richard C. Dorf, *Technology and Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 174.

[29] Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books), 64-65.

[30] Tola, "Inventing the Enemy in the Digital Age."

[31] Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, 103.

[32] Ibid, 104.

[33] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper, 2006), 453.

[34] Quoted in Dorf, *Technology and Society*, 174.

[35] Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks*, 207.

[36] Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (New York: International Publishers, 1925), 255-56.

[37] Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1925).

[38] World Economic Forum, "8 predictions for the world in 2030," video posted to Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154159674886479.

[39] Nathan Gardels, interview with Hui, "Singularity vs. Daoist Robots: Is there another path than accelerated Western modernization?" *NOEMA*, June 19, 2020, https://www.noemamag.com/singularity-vs-daoist-robots/.

[40] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), First Essay, §4.

[41] Humans alienated from God and their own souls, as theoretical physicists often are, aim to be saved from despair and self-loathing by classifying absurdity as a natural property of the universe: "The theory of quantum electrodynamics describes Nature as absurd from the point of view of common sense. And it agrees fully with experiment. So I hope you can accept Nature as She is—absurd. I'm going to have fun telling you about this absurdity, because I find it delightful. Please don't turn yourself off because you can't believe Nature is so strange." Richard Feynman, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 10. "I remember discussions with Bohr which went through many hours till very late at night and ended almost in despair; and when at the end of the discussion I went alone for a walk in the neighbouring park I repeated to myself again and

again the question: Can nature possibly be so absurd as it seemed to us in these atomic experiments?" Werner Heisenberg, *Physics & Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 50. Ultimately, facts are not social, scientific, or even mathematical but theological. The religious character of facts is made more clear under digital conditions by the way the medium of automated information *differs* from information contained in human beings *and* the natural world. Even a secular science of natural absurdity must concede that, while humans can and do produce absurd information, humans did not produce nature, whereas the digital entities humans did produce do produce absurd information automated at scale. This is one reason "normie" fantasies are being disenchanted at breakneck speed: it isn't that facts are being destroyed but that in the digital context they are becoming absurdities, things alienated from both our humanity from a saving theological underpinning, a process which causes growing numbers of disillusioned people to seek in the digital swarm itself a theological ground outside human spacetime altogether. What theology lies here, unfortunately, is a theology of insanity: nature *alone*, reduced to mathematics,

[42] Formal cause as the "exemplar" or "intrinsic form" of a thing. "The reason why the form is a cause, then, is that it completes the intelligible expression of a thing's quiddity." Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, quoted in Eric McLuhan, "On Formal Cause," *Media and Formal Cause* (Houston: NeoPoiesis Press, 2011), 105.

[43] See Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2017), Book III.

[44] Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954), 27.

[45] McLuhan, "On Formal Cause," 123.

[46] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 543.

[47] Plato, *Laws*, Book VIII, 828d. Here the translation is Spencer Klavan's.

[48] David P. Goldman, "Xi Jinping's Faustian moment," *Asia Times*, July 1, 2021, https://asiatimes.com/2021/07/xi-jinpings-faustian-moment/.

[49] Thiel, "Against Edenism," *First Things*, June 2015, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/06/against-edenism.

[50] McLuhan, "On Formal Cause," 139.

[51] Mill, *On Liberty and Utilitarianism* (New York: Random House, 2008), 66.

[52] McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 66.

[53] Mill, *On Liberty and Utilitarianism*, 66.

[54] "The approximation of production to imagination is the heart of the knowledge economy, and ever more so as it spreads and deepens," writes Roberto Mangabeira Ungar, although in his analysis, imagination in the knowledge economy is conceptualized and educated through "the mind as anti-machine." The imagination "dispenses with formulas, takes methods at a discount, and overrides its own settled presuppositions." See Ungar, *The Knowledge Economy* (London: Verso, 2019), 37, 95, 99. Nevertheless, the vector of prestige and *meaning* in the progress of white-collar economic development and obsolescence has moved dramatically from the decreasingly productive work of knowledge to the limitlessly managerial work of dreams.

[55] While Disney the corporation, along with a legion of online fans, has associated the quip with Disney the man, company archivist Dave Smith denied that provenance. "Imagineer Tom Fitzgerald is likely the true originator of the quote in Disney lore," according to the Disneyphiles running the Notes from Neverland website. "Fitzgerald reportedly wrote the iconic line for Epcot's former attraction Horizons that opened in 1983." https://notes-fromneverland.com/disney-info/did-walt-disney-ever-say-the-if-you-can-dream-it-you-can-do-it-quote/. Until Disney's death in 1966, the Epcot Center, its name an acronym for The Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, was designed as a

masterplanned community where residents would enjoy the best of evolving technology and escape what Disney called America's "urban crisis," perhaps enclosed within the biosphere of a soaring glass dome.

[56] Jefferson, letter to Alexander Smyth, January 17, 1825, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-4882.

[57] Jefferson, letter to Moses Robinson, March 23, 1801, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-33-02-0362.

[58] Mark 2:7.

[59] Matt. 13:25-30.

[60] Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 228.

[61] Mitchell, *Plato's Fable: On the Mortal Condition in Shadowy Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 188.

[62] Mitchell, The Fragility of Freedom, 258 n122.

[63] See Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), especially Chapters 14 and 15.

[64] Job 38:3-36.

[65] Pynchon, *Against the Day* (New York: The Penguin Press), 805.

[66] Ibid, 632.

[67] Ibid, 633.

[68] Plutarch, *Marcellus*, §15.

[69] Ibid, §14.

[70] See "Seminar in Political Philosophy: Cicero, Session 4, April 14, 1959," *Leo Strauss Transcripts*, http://leostrausstranscripts.uchicago.edu/navigate/4/5/.

[71] See "Plato's Apology of Socrates, Crito, Session 1: October 18, 1966," *Leo Strauss Transcripts*, http://leostrausstranscripts.uchicago.edu/navigate/19/2/.

[72] Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 298-99.

73 See again "Seminar in Political Philosophy: Cicero," *Leo Strauss Transcripts*.

74 Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 299. See also Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 88: "The unification of human civilization through modern communications and transportation means that there is no part of mankind that is not aware of the scientific method and its potential, even if that part is currently incapable of generating technology or applying it successfully. There are, in other words, no true barbarians at the gates, unaware of the power of modern natural science… good states… will need to maintain a certain level of technology, if only to defend themselves, and indeed will have to encourage technological innovation in the military sphere if their enemies are also innovators." Fukuyama saw "ir-reversible" socioeconomic and sociopolitical effects resulting from "progressive" modern science, although, as he would later glimpse, the posthuman trajectory of that science could only be described as progressive in a fundamentally anti-human way.

75 Anton, "The Art of Spiritual War," The American Mind, June 8, 2021, https://americanmind.org/salvo/the-art-of-spiritual-war/. See further Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 10-11.

76 Josephson-Storm, "Why Do We Think We Are Disenchanted? Debating *The Myth of Disenchantment*, " Correspondence, *The New Atlantis*, Summer/Fall 2018, https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/why-do-we-think-we-are-disenchanted.

77 Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II, 2.

78 See Shlain, *The Alphabet versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image* (New York: Arkana/Penguin, 1999).

79 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 641.

80 Constant, *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments*, ed. Etienne Hoffman, trans. Dennis O'Keefe (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), 107.

81 Mitchell, *Plato's Fable*, 171.

[82] Dylan, "Q&A with Bill Flanagan," March 22, 2017, http://www.bobdylan.com/news/qa-with-bill-flanagan/.

[83] McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 155.

[84] Gelernter, *Americanism: The Fourth Great Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 25n.

[85] Ibid, 26n.

[86] Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity: Explanations that Transform the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 443.

[87] Ibid, 26.

[88] Ibid, 8.

[89] Ibid, 12.

[90] Ibid, 13.

[91] Ibid, 20.

[92] Ibid, 18.

[93] See Mitchell, *Not By Reason Alone: Religion, History, and Identity in Early Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Chapters 2 and 3.

[94] See Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity*, 65-6.

[95] Bertrand Russell, "The Study of Mathematics," *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919), 60. "For the health of the moral life, for ennobling the tone of an age or a nation, the austerer virtues have a strange power, exceeding the power of those not informed and purified by thought. Of these austerer virtues the love of truth is the chief, and in mathematics, where, the love of truth may find encouragement for waning faith." Ibid, 73. Absorption into this "strange power" is indistinguishable from worship—the worship of a total and totalizing entity that yet can never save, or even reflect back, the soul. "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss"—or what monster coils within—"also looks into you." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the*

Future, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), Part Four, §146. Nietzsche, heralding the catastrophic "revaluation" of print-age "values" by the triumph of electricity, imagined that the idol of our humanity could only be slain after we had first killed God; for our worshippers of perfect knowledge, total and exact, only a god can kill us now.

96 Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity*, 305.

97 Ibid, 75.

98 The modern quest to create ultimate meaning by nuking the senses finds its origins, paradoxically, in Marshall McLuhan: "Our work was really drawn from McLuhan. We looked at McLuhan as the theoretician—and we were the practitioners… I think we were trying to warn of the potential for manipulation by commercial and especially government-military forces," recalls Michael Callahan of USCO, the anonymous living collective founded by German Jewish refugee and Stewart Brand mentor Gerd Stern. "In the '60s in the USCO show, people referred to experience, but there was always an adjective associated with the word. Now it's just experience. Period. Experience great savings. Shopping experience. Online experience. In the '60s, it would be psychedelic or sexual experience. But now it's just existence: Experience great existence. This is how the onslaught, the explosion of media is changing the lexicon… in the USCO shows, there was always a section of sensory overload. Back in the '60s, you could overload people with four slide projectors, two movie projectors, and a couple of tape recorders playing at once. You can't do that anymore." Michelle Kuo, "Speaks with Michael Callahan about USCO," *Artforum*, May 2008, https://www.artforum.com/print/200805/speaks-with-michael-callahan-about-usco-19949.

99 Ibid, 456.

100 Ibid, 457.

101 Ibid, 76-7.

102 Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, ed. Alfred B. Gough (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 23.

[103] Ibid, 35.

[104] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 41.

[105] Ibid, 41-42.

[106] Ibid, 43.

[107] Ibid, 44.

[108] Ibid, 45.

[109] Ibid, 46.

[110] Ibid, 47.

[111] One of the subtitles *The Gutenberg Galaxy* was published with was *When Change Becomes the Fate of Man*.

[112] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 47.

[113] Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom*, 130 n93.

[114] Ibid, n94.

[115] McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 23. "The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph."

[116] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 451.

[117] Ibid, 452.

[118] Gelernter, *Americanism*, 56.

[119] Ibid, 2.

[120] Ibid, 95.

[121] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 439.

[122] Ibid, 438.

[123] Gelernter, *Americanism*, 33.

[124] Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom*, 218.

[125] Ibid, 190.

[126] Ibid, 218.

[127] See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).

[128] Waugh, *When the Going Was Good* (New York: Penguin Books Limited, 2012), 167-8.

[129] Maureen Cleave, "How Does a Beatle Live? John Lennon Lives Like This," *London Evening Standard*, March 4, 1966, archived at http://headsup.freeshell.org/beatles-articles/standard.html.

[130] Aldous Huxley, *Complete Essays, Volume VI*, 1959-1963, eds. James Sexton, Robert S. Baker (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 296.

[131] Quoted in *Huxley's Brave New World: Essays*, eds. David Garrett Izzo and Kim Kirkpatrick (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2008), 60.

[132] Andy Roberts, *Divine Rascal: On the Trail of LSD's Cosmic Courier, Michael Hollingshead* (London: Strange Attractor Press, 2019), 10.

[133] Hollingshead, *The Man Who Turned On the World* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1973).

[134] Wells, *Men Like Gods* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), 311. "Half a century ago H. G. Wells observed, correctly enough, that mankind faced a race between education and catastrophe. But what he failed to realize was that something like catastrophe has become the precondition for an effective education. This might seem like a dismal and hopeless conclusion, were it not for the fact that the power system, through its own overwhelming achievements, has proved expert in creating breakdowns and catastrophes." Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, 411.

[135] Michael Sherborne, *H. G. Wells: Another Kind of Life* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2013), 30.

[136] Ibid, 36.

[137] Ibid, 45.

[138] A description of the auction, paired with a scan of Wells's dedication page, are archived at https://historical.ha.com/itm/books/philosophy/h-g-wells-inscribed-phoenix-a-summary-of-the-inescapable-conditions-of-world-reorganisation-london-/a/6117-45885.s.

[139] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man: With an Introduction by Sir Julian Huxley* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 12.

[140] Bowie dreams of "a world to come where the books were found by the Golden Ones." He continues: "Look out at your children / See their faces in golden rays / Don't kid yourself they belong to you / They're the start of a coming race / The earth is a bitch / We've finished our news / Homo Sapiens have outgrown their use." "Let me make it plain," Bowie concludes. "You gotta make way for the Homo Superior." In 1870, after an illustrious career sitting as a Whig in Parliament, serving as Secretary of State for the Colonies, and (thank God) turning down the Crown of Greece, Bulwer-Lytton anonymously published *The Coming Race*—a tale of angelic antediluvians whose subterranean utopia runs on their mastery of an ubiquitous force they call Vril. "I did not mean Vril for mesmerism," Bulwer-Lytton later wrote to a mutual confidant of Dickens, "but for electricity, developed into uses as yet only dimly guessed, and including whatever there may be genuine in mesmerism, which I hold to be a mere branch current of the one great fluid pervading all nature… I suppose the existence of a race charged with that electricity and having acquired the art to concentre and direct it in a word, to be conductors of its lightnings. If you can suggest any other idea of carrying out that idea of a destroying race, I should be glad. Probably even the notion of Vril might be more cleared from mysticism or mesmerism by being simply defined to be electricity and conducted by those staves or rods, omitting all about mesmeric passes, etc." See Victor Alexander Robert Lytton, *The Life of Edward Bulwer Lytton, First Lord Lytton*, vol. 1, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913), 466. Occultists from theosophist godmother Helena Blavatsky on down believed *The Coming Race* was, at least in part, an occult account of the cosmological truth.

[141] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 538.

[142] Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom*, 170. "Pride is our shortcut; by indulging it, we dare to evade the difficult labors that beset our lives, which remind us of our frailty and culpability." Mitchell,

American Awakening: Identity Politics and Other Afflictions of Our Time (New York: Encounter Books, 2020), 226.

[143] George Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

[144] Ibid, 9, quoting the intellectual historian of Russia Michael Hagemeister.

[145] Mitchell, *Tocqueville in Arabia: Dilemmas in a Democratic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 167.

[146] Ibid, 166.

[147] Ibid, 167.

[148] Ibid, 166.

[149] Spengler, *The Hour of Decision* (Rogue Scholar Books, 2020), 208-09.

[150] Ibid, 209.

[151] Ibid, 227.

[152] Bronze Age Pervert, *Bronze Age Mindset* (San Bernardino, California, 2019), 82.

[153] Ibid, 83.

[154] Ibid, 85.

[155] Ibid, 86.

[156] Dwight Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 12.

[157] Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* (New York, The Penguin Press, 2014), 169.

[158] Albert Einstein, quoted in *Science as a Cultural Expression*, ed. David C. Peaslee (Commack, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1998), 66.

[159] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

[160] Ibid, 3.

[161] Ibid, 4.

[162] Ibid, xi.

[163] Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, 51.

[164] Norbert Wiener, *God and Golem, Inc.* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1964), 57.

[165] The Disney Wiki, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/The_Sorcerer%27s_Apprentice.

[166] Ellul, *Propaganda*, 94-5.

[167] George Dyson, *Analogia: The Emergence of Technology Beyond Programmable Control* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2020), 234. "The factor of 4 is a gift of God (or of the other party)," von Neumann wrote in 1946 to Edward Teller, "while performing the initial calculations to determine whether a weapon one thousand times more powerful than those that had just destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki could be built. We appear to have done well by the bargain so far: gaining a world transformed by digital computing yet unscathed by thermonuclear war. Unless the other party knew, from the beginning, that digital computers would become the more powerful instrument, in time." Ibid, 234-35.

[168] Anthony R. Wells, *Between Five Eyes: 50 Years of Intelligence Sharing* (Oxford: Casemate Publishers, 2020), 107.

[169] Ibid, 68.

[170] Ibid, 4.

[171] Ibid, 73.

[172] Ibid, 110.

[173] Ibid, 113.

[174] Ibid, 114.

[175] "Google's mission is not to make new raw information per se, but to structure and curate the total space of all the world's information—a standing reserve that already exists, however underformalized—and to manage it within its anti-obelisk of data centers and make it a medium for reflexive actin on the world now rendered as a computational plateau." Benjamin H. Bratton,

The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 353.

[176] Maçaes, *Geopolitics for the End Time: From the Pandemic to the Climate Crisis* (London: Hurst & Company, 2021), 112.

[177] Ibid, 113.

[178] Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 66.

[179] Maçaes, *Geopolitics for the End Time*, 114.

[180] "The 'pivot' to terraforming the domestic population instead of that of foreigners seemed to come with the best of intentions. America, after all, had been depleted, deindustrialized, and debt-saddled by the long and disillusioning trudge through the 'global war on terror.' But for the military, the lesson learned was hidden beneath the misinformation of the conflict's own moniker. What the commanding officers of the most powerful armed force ever known in the world discovered over the past twenty years is that secular soldiers were simply unable to defeat holy warriors. For ages on end this shattering realization was accepted as a bedrock truth, almost a truism…. The existential disillusionment experienced by the US brass hitting the wall of spiritual arms without being anywhere near prepared in spirit for the shock of such an 'asymmetric' defeat is all but taboo in America today. Only the suicide and depression of 'GWOT'-era veterans bears witness, a haunted echo of the deep bitterness and shame behind the officer class' sense that they now have no choice but to make the machines fight a decisive spiritual war against their own domestic population." Poulos, "Mil Fragility: What broke the spirit of the brass?" American Mindset, June 24, 2021, https://americanmind.substack.com/p/mil-fragility.

[181] Quoted in Tim Wu, *The Curse of Bigness: Antitrust in the New Gilded Age* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2018), 117.

[182] Ibid, 122.

[183] Ibid, 123.

[184] Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 96.

[185] Ibid, 100.

[186] Ibid, 93.

[187] See "In Barron's Court," *IEEE Review*, January 1997, Volume 43, Issue 1, 29; "Richard L. Petritz, Curriculum Vitae," The Richard Petritz Foundation, https://www.petritzfoundation.org/history/quick-history/; "Silicon Mountain DRAM," David Bondurant, https://docplayer.net/196849103-Silicon-mountain-dram.html.

[188] On Lick, see M. Mitchell Waldrop, *The Dream Machine: J. C. R. Licklider and the revolution that made computing personal* (San Francisco: Stripe Press, 2018), and Lick's three most significant memoranda—"Man-Computer Symbiosis," "The Computer as a Communication Device," and "Intergalactic Network," reproduced, as addenda, 488-527.

[189] See David A. Price, *The Pixar Touch: The Making of a Company* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 11-12, and Catmull and Amy Wallace, *Creativity Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* (New York: Random House, 2014), 11.

[190] Mazzucato, The Entrepreneurial State, 4.

[191] Ibid, 101.

[192] Ibid, 82.

[193] Ibid, 83.

[194] Ibid, 81.

[195] Ibid, 5.

[196] Ibid, 4.

[197] Ibid, 15.

[198] Ibid, 92.

[199] Mirkowski, *Machine Dreams: Economics Becomes a Cyborg Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 158.

[200] Ibid, 530. Mirowski colorfully describes the Santa Fe Institute— home of the ultimately fruitless effort to control complex systems

such as the digital swarm by artificially modeling organisms, like bees, that swarm at scale—as "a notorious nest of cyborgs" (ibid, 301). "In the absence of that thing-without-an-essence" (as in, without a soul) that Mirowski calls the computer, "cyborgs would not have infiltrated economics (and the other social sciences) in successive waves. Without the computer, it would still be obligatory to bend a knee to the mantra that economics really was about 'the allocation of scarce resources to given ends' and not, as it now stands, obsessed with the conceptualization of the economic entity as an information processor" (ibid, 522). In recent years the Institute has been more notorious for its connections with noted local resident Jeffrey Epstein, never so much as required by the state of New Mexico to register as a sex offender. See Matt Farwell, "Jeffrey Epstein Chose New Mexico for a Reason," *The New Republic*, August 15, 2019, https://newrepublic.com/article/154761/jeffrey-epstein-zorro-ranch-new-mexico-history.

[201] Mirowski, *Machine Dreams*, 565.

[202] Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity*, 95.

[203] "Freeman Dyson: I kept quiet for thirty years, maybe it's time to speak," 52 Insights, June 15, 2018, https://www.52-insights.com/freeman-dyson-i-kept-quiet-for-30-years-so-maybe-its-time-to-speak-interview-science/.

[204] Wills, *Bomb Power: The Modern Presidency and the National Security State* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 23.

[205] Ibid, 133.

[206] Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.

[207] Ibid, 3.

[208] Ibid, 4.

[209] Ibid, 5.

[210] "Has Western civilization yet reached the point in etherealization where detachment and withdrawal will lead to the assemblage of an organic world picture, in which the human personality

in all its dimensions will have primacy over its biological needs and technological pressures? That question cannot be answered except in action. But the evidences for such a transformation have already been put forward." Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, 433.

211 "*Identity politics declares that there is no original sin, only an original sinner*. That is its shortcut." Mitchell, *American Awakening*, 201.

212 Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York: Crown, 2020), 10.

213 Pynchon, *Against the Day*, 686.

214 Ibid, 686-87.

215 Ibid, 687.

216 Ibid, 687-88.

217 Ibid, 956.

218 Ibid, 956-57.

219 Ibid, 957.

220 Ibid, 959.

221 Ibid, 956.

222 Ibid, 960.

223 Luke 9:34.

224 Pynchon, *Against the Day,* 960.

225 Quoted in Albrecht Fölsing, *Albert Einstein: A Biography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 219.

226 Jill Jonnes, *Empires of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, and the Race to Electrify the World* (New York: Random House, 2004), xiii. "In the early 1880s," electricity was still a 'mysterious fluid' resonant with glamor, status, and danger;" within decades, Edison, Tesla, and George Westinghouse "dreamed of spreading the ethereal power of electricity throughout the world." Westinghouse, of the three titans vying for electric mastery, won out in their war to "straddle the globe" with the "ethereal fluid." See ibid, 14, xiii, 335. "Electric information environments being utterly ethereal fosters the illusion of the world as a spiritual substance. It is now a reasonable facsimile of the mystical body, a blatant manifes-

tation of the Anti-Christ. After all, the Prince of this World is a very great electric engineer. May I suggest that just as the Roman clergy defected in the Gutenberg era on the illusion of the inner light, even greater numbers may be expected to defect under the mystical attractions of the electric light." Marshall McLuhan, letter to Jacques Maritain, May 6, 1969, printed in *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, eds. Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 72.

227 See *The Apocrypha #7* (New Apostolic Bible Covenant, 2015) §14, 1:29.

228 Dimitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139.

229 Ibid, 140.

230 Interview with Sean Collins, "Wokeness: old religion in a new bottle," Spiked, https://www.spiked-online.com/2020/08/14/wokeness-old-religion-in-new-bottle/. See further Bottum, *An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and Spirit of America* (New York: Crown, 2014).

231 Interview with Collins, "Wokeness: old religion in a new bottle."

232 Something like this, for all its outrageousness to contemporary ears, is what Nietzsche seems to be probing toward with his suggestion that "when a woman has scholarly inclinations there is usually something wrong with her sexually. Sterility itself disposes one toward a certain masculinity of taste; for man is, if I may say so, 'the sterile animal.'" Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part Four, §144.

233 Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 73.

234 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay, §20.

235 See Ece Canli, *Queerying Design: Material Re-Configurations of Body Politics* (Porto: University of Porto, 2017), iii, abstracted at https://ececanli.com/portfolio/queerying-design/.

236 John Voss (né Hanawalt), "A practical approach to queering design," Queer Design Club, https://medium.com/queer-design-

club/a-practical-approach-to-queering-design-f331bbc948a7.

[237] Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,"*The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10.

[238] Quoted in Thomas Rid, *Rise of the Machines: A Cybernetic History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 233.

[239] See Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), Chapter 1.

[240] Wiener, *God and Golem*, Inc., 60.

[241] Quoted in Virilio, 29.

[242] Matt. 24:3.

[243] See ibid, 24:4-26.

[244] Ibid, 24:36.

[245] Ibid, 24:44.

[246] "According to the continuum hypothesis, all countable infinities, like the number of discrete grains of sand, can be placed in a one-to-one correspondence with the integers. All uncountable infinities, like the number of points on a continuous line, have the full power of the continuum. There are no infinites in between… Gödel… proved its independence from the axioms of set theory, meaning that it could be true, even if unprovable, and Paul Cohen, in 1963, went further in proving that without additional axioms it cannot be proved. Truth and provability are two different things." Dyson, *Analogia*, 246-7.

[247] Gelernter, "THE SECOND COMING—A MANIFESTO," *Edge*, December 31, 1999, https://www.edge.org/conversation/david_gelernter-the-second-coming-%E2%80%94-a-manifesto.

[248] McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 329.

[249] Gelernter, "THE SECOND COMING."

[250] "Just as the Founders could promote the 'useful arts and sciences' as one of the main positive injunctions of the Constitution, so the progressive John Dewey's praise of Francis Bacon

as 'the real founded of modern thought' would be frequently manifest in his praise of technological advance as tantamount to the advance of democracy itself. For all of Dewey's valorization of 'democracy,' it should not be forgotten that his definition of democracy is bound up in whatever outcome would ultimately favor 'growth.' For the Founders and the Progressives alike, the expansion of what Madison described as 'the empire of reason' should be paramount, and on that basis stated trust in popular government was to be tempered above all by fostering a *res idiotica*—a populace whose devotion to the Republic was premised upon its expansion of private ends and expressive individualism." Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 173.

[251] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 317.

[252] Ritter von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, *Liberty or Equality: The Challenge of Our Time*, ed. John P. Hughes (Auburn, Alabama: The Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007), 202.

[253] Ibid, 195. "The outcry of bigots could be heard at the end of the 19th century that the Democratic Party in New York stood for 'Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion' was somehow not without substance when we translate this accusation with '*Joie de vivre*, Catholicism, and Individualism.' To our ears, at least"—meaning his own—"the reverse—'Prohibition, Protestantism, and Prostration'—hardly sounds more attractive." Ibid 183. If Tocqueville remains correct about the deep instability of Protestantism in America, and if its ruling factions continue to pursue a reset or refounding of America through prohibition and prostration enforced by social credit, the test may be put to renaissance man Ritter von Kuehnelt-Leddihn's seemingly odd invocation (ibid) of Everett Dean Martin's dictum that Americans, despite their best efforts, "never thought themselves out of" the Middle Ages.

[254] See ibid, 182.

[255] Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1998), 198-199.

[256] Ibid, 201.

[257] Ibid, 202.

[258] Ibid, 203.

[259] Ibid, 205.

[260] Ibid, 206.

[261] Maçaes, *Geopolitics for the End Time*, 114.

[262] Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 321.

[263] Ecc. 12:14.

[264] 1 Cor. 4:5.

[265] Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, 432.

[266] Ibid, 427.

[267] Ibid, 427-28.

[268] Quoted in Rid, *Rise of the Machines*, 87.

[269] Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, 429.

[270] Bratton, *The Stack*, 351.

[271] Ibid, 352.

[272] Ibid, 353.

[273] Ibid, 355.

[274] Ibid, 356.

[275] Ibid, 357, 258.

[276] Ibid, 359. That is to say, God, He came and went. In this light, recall Pynchon's hegumen on the Moon: "Without her to reflect, God is invisible. She is absolutely of the essence if he is to be at all operative in the world."

[277] Ibid, 362.

[278] Ibid, 363.

[279] Ibid, 365. So the way is prepared, through the literally and figuratively manufactured viral emergency, for "the ethics of being an object;" see Bratton, *The Revenge of the Real: Politics for a Post-Pandemic World* (London: Verso, 2021), Chapter 15, where "the real" refers to the "planetary politics" whereby the world's

expert anti-populist posthumanists begin with the substrate of the "complex biological reality of the planet with which we are entangled" and "know it, grasp it, make sense of it, model and respond to it, and change it" (ibid, 8, 11). Nowak, Epstein, and Schwab, one surmises, would approve (see n269 below); how much so did, and do, their handlers and superiors?

280 Dyson, *Analogia*, 253.

281 Maçaes, *Geopolitics for the End Time*, 205.

282 Bratton, *The Revenge of the Real*, 90.

283 Ibid, 74.

284 Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (New York: Crown Business, 2017), 113: "As evolutionary theorist Martin Nowak, a professor of mathematics and biology at Harvard University, reminds us, cooperation is The Way Forward." Schwab cites Nowak, with Roger Highfield, *SuperCooperators: Altruism, Evolution, and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed* (New York: Free Press, 2011). Either engineers advance society to the next "stage of evolutionary complexity or we can go into decline, even become extinct. Though global problems loom large, we could be on the verge of the next transition in social organization, one of equal significance to the emergence of the first cell, of the first complex cell, or indeed of the very first multicellular creature. We have the understanding, and, thanks to the remarkable extent to which our society is interconnected, we can build on it." Ibid, 281. Nowak worked and studied at Oxford under early complexity theorist and lifelong atheist Baron Robert May of Oxford, in the late 1990s when May was simultaneously Chief Scientific Advisor to Her Majesty's Government and head of the Office of Science and Technology. In 1998, on somebody's invitation, Nowak moved directly from Oxford to found and head the Program in Theoretical Biology at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. A 1999 report shows Nowak "developing mathematical models of H.I.V." while "at the same time, in a little triumph of cross-disciplinary thinking… studying the evolution of cooperation

among humans." Richard Trenner, "The Ultimate Ivory Tower," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1999, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/21/nyregion/the-ultimate-ivory-tower.html. "Epstein first provided support for Harvard faculty members in 1998. Between 1998 and 2006, before there was any public notice of criminal charges against Epstein, Epstein provided 22 gifts to Harvard totaling $8,443,000, nearly all to support the research aims of Harvard faculty, including faculty in the FAS Departments of Psychology, Economics, Art and Art History, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The gifts ranged from $10,000 to $200,000, with the exception of a $6.5 million gift made in 2003 to help create Harvard's Program in Evolutionary Dynamics, led by Professor Martin Nowak, whom Harvard recruited from the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. Epstein had previously provided support for Nowak's work at the Institute. *The Harvard Crimson* and other sources reported at the time that Epstein's $6.5 million gift was part of a $30M pledge from Epstein." Diane Lopez, Ara Gershengorn, and Martin Murphy, *Report Concerning Jeffrey E. Epstein's Connections to Harvard University*, May 2020, 5, https://ogc.harvard.edu/files/ogc/files/report_concerning_jeffrey_e._epsteins_connections_to_harvard_university.pdf. On the "unlimited access" Nowak granted Epstein to Harvard, including "an office on campus, complete with his own keycard and passcode," see Jon Levine, "Harvard punishes professor Martin Nowak over Jeffrey Epstein ties," *New York Post*, March 27, 2021, https://nypost.com/2021/03/27/harvard-punishes-professor-over-jeffrey-epstein-ties/.

[285] McLuhan, letter to Jacques Maritain, *The Medium and the Light*, 72.

[286] Robert Kagan, *The End of Dreams and the Return of History* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 105.

[287] Quoted in Erik Assadourian, "Should we all just 'lie flat?'" Gaianism, July 10, 2021, http://gaianism.org/should-we-all-just-lie-flat/. Assadourian continues: "Clearly, he never read the Taoist poem, 'Returning to the Farm to Dwell,' written by poet, burnt out

government bureaucrat, and early 'lie flat' proponent, Tao Qian, around 405 AD, or Luo might have realized others had grappled with this in their land before." But rather than Daosim, *tang ping* traces its attitude to the most anti-political of ancient Greek philosophers. "I can live like Diogenes and sleep inside a wooden bucket, enjoying sunshine. I can live like Heraclitus in a cave, thinking about the 'logos.' Since this land has never had a school of thought that upholds human subjectivity, I can develop one on my own. Lying down is my philosophical movement." Though still counting only hundreds of thousands of followers, Beijing has cracked down digitally on *tang ping*, suggesting not only that the regime recognizes in the movement a deeply Western attitude toward cosmotechnics but, at the same time, a serious tension between Daoism and Xi Jinping Thought. As part of a broad push to remasculinize their boys, China has cut online gaming for minors down to an hour a day maximum on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays only, though the role of gaming in *tang ping* culture appears to be thoroughly digitally re-formed: one adherent whose story has made it into the English-language press "is paid to play video games" to make ends meet." Gary Miller, "Chinese millennials are 'creepy' and Beijing isn't happy about it," Insider Voice, March 3, 2021, https://insider-voice.com/chinese-millen-nials-are-creepy-and-beijing-isnt-happy-about-it/. Diogenes, who famously told Alexander the Great told "stand out of my light," is the hero in Oxford Ph.D. James Williams' ostensibly repentant assessment—after ten years at Google capped with the company's highest award for his work on search advertising—of tech's harmful effect on our well-being. Playing perfectly to type, Williams, now a researcher at the Oxford Internet Institute's Digital Ethics Lab, locates Silicon Valley's sin not in its con-struction of a virtual vivarium for post-citizens on the regime's road to posthumanity, but in its mastery at getting "distraction" down to a science. Like so many Angloid thinkers before him, Williams, after an illustrious career as an officer of the empire of light and language, aims to institutionalize the new-age purity

of consciousness twinkling in his dreams. Williams's uninten-
tionally parodic idea of ethics is the soyfaced sensory overload
of this "two favorite YouTube videos." The first makes us focus on
a colorblind man, reduced to repeating "Oh, wow. Oh, man"—as
opposed to, say, "Thank God"—by the sudden technological gift
of colored sight; the second, a floating Canadian astronaut "lost in
reflection" until he performs Bowie's "Space Oddity." Williams's
vision of salvation through ethereal engineering is straight out of
Huxley. "At its best, technology opens our doors of perception…
to rise to this challenge, we have to lean into the experiences of
awe and wonder.… This is not utopianism. This is imagination.
And, as anyone with the slightest bit of imagination knows,
'imaginary' is not the opposite of 'real.'" This in a chapter taking
its title from the classic couplet "O for a Muse of fire, that would
ascend / The brightest heaven of invention"—not the opening of a
pantopian hymn to sacred fantasy but of Shakespeare's Henry V,
where the Chorus, and the Bard himself, commands the audience
to conscript their shared imagination in the service of their
memory of their people's bravest day: led by their once undisciplined
and immature prince, now come of age at last, they turned the
tide against all odds in a war that lasted a hundred years. See
Williams, *Stand Out of Our Light* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-
sity Press, 2018), 125-27. For all his rhetoric of rehumanizing tech,
Williams mentions memory a scant two times—both in the form
of so-called "working memory," science-speak for the cognitive
system that locks us onto immediate sensory stimuli. Ibid, 51, 69.

[288] Anne Helen Petersen, *Can't Even: How Millennials Became the
Burnout Generation* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021),
vii, xxv, 164.

[289] Ibid, 91.

[290] Mark Hosenball and Sarah N. Lynch, "Exclusive: FBI finds
scant evidence U.S. Capitol attack was coordinated—sources,"
Reuters, August 20, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/ex-
clusive-fbi-finds-scant-evidence-us-capitol-attack-was-coordi-
nated-sources-2021-08-20/. Hosenball's first public mention of

GCHQ's mere existence in a 1976 *Time Out* article got him deported from Britain on national security grounds. Since then, it appears, he has learned his lessons well.

291 "If the Power System is to continue in existence as a working partner in a more organic complex dedicated to the renewal of life, it will only be if its dynamic leaders, and those larger groups that they influence, have undergone a profound change of heart and mind, of ideal and purpose, as great as that which for so long arrested the decay of the Eastern empire established in Byzantium." Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*, 432.

292 Or, "as *Wired* magazine warned us, 'everything has already changed.'" See Stahlman, Peter Berkman and Adam Pugen, "Ecology of the Inner Senses: An Introduction," *Dianoetikon* 1, 2020, i-xii, Center for the Study of Digital Life, https://www.digi-tallife.center/index.php/journal/inner-senses. "Everything Must Go" is the name of the first 90-minute episode of the 1993 mini-series *Wild Palms*, a dystopian L.A. fable of mass media and virtual reality executive produced by Oliver Stone and Carlos Castaneda disciple Bruce Wagner.

293 See "Full Text: Schwarzenegger's 'Kristallnacht' message after attack on US Capitol," *Times of Israel*, January 11, 2021, https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-schwarzeneggers-message-follow-ing-attack-on-us-capitol/.

294 "I conclude, thus, that when fortune varies and men remain obstinate in their modes, men are happy while they are in accord, and as they come into discord, unhappy. I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly. And so always, like a woman, she is the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity." Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 101. For "beat her and strike her down" other translators have "slap and thrust."

[295] "Freeman Dyson: I kept quiet for thirty years, maybe it's time to speak."

[296] Dyson, *Turing's Cathedral: The Origins of the Digital Universe* (New York: Pantheon, 2012), 292.