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Contents

Liberal Democracy's Crisis: What a Forgotten 'Frankfurter' Can Still Teach Us [1]

William E. Scheuerman[2]

Abstract: Contemporary liberal democracy is in crisis. The ideas of Franz L. Neumann (1900-54), the neglected first-generation Frankfurt School's political theorist, provide a useful starting point for making sense of that crisis. By this I do not mean that we can mechanically apply Neumann's reflections to our present moment. Rather, Neumann's thinking, though tension-ridden and incomplete, can help identify key features of a critical analysis of the contemporary crisis. With the dramatic growth of authoritarian populism, and the ascendancy of figures like Recep Erdogan, Jaroslaw Kacyznki, Viktor Orban, and Donald Trump, Neumann's gloomy political and theoretical diagnosis from the late 1940s and early '50s suddenly seems prescient. By selectively revisiting Neumann, we can begin to grasp what a critical theory of politics and law suited to the present historical moment should look like. Neumann's perspective, I argue, exhibits some

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2   William E. Scheuerman's primary research and teaching interests are in modern political thought, German political thought, democratic theory, legal theory, and international political theory. After teaching at Pittsburgh and Minnesota, he joined the Indiana faculty in 2006. Bill's most recent book is *Civil Disobedience* (Polity Press, 2018). He is also the author of *Between the Norm and the Exception: The Frankfurt School and the Rule of Law* (MIT, 1994), which won two prestigious awards, as well as *Carl Schmitt: The End of Law* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), *Liberal Democracy and the Social Acceleration of Time* (Johns Hopkins, 2004), *Frankfurt School Perspectives on Globalization, Democracy, and the Law* (Routledge 2008), *Hans J. Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond* (Polity, 2009), and *The Realist Case for Global Reform* (Polity, 2011). He has edited *The Rule of Law Under Siege* (California, 1996), *From Liberal Democracy to Fascism: Legal and Political Thought in the Weimar Republic* (Humanities Press, 2000) (with Peter Caldwell), and *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity* (Penn State, 2009) (with Hartmut Rosa). Bill has published in many professional journals, including *Constellations, History of Political Thought, International Theory, Journal of Political Philosophy, Politics & Society, Review of International Studies,* and *Social Research.*

real strengths vis-à-vis alternative critical theory approaches, in part because it takes the relative autonomy of politics and law seriously.

Contemporary liberal democracy is in crisis. Because there is no more pressing task for a critical theory of politics than a systematic analysis of that crisis, we start with a brief analysis of its contours. The ideas of Franz L. Neumann (1900-54), the unfashionable first-generation Frankfurt School's political theorist, provide a useful starting point for making sense of that crisis. By this I do not mean that we can mechanically apply Neumann's reflections to our present moment. Rather, Neumann's thinking, though sometimes tension-ridden and incomplete, can help identify key features of a critical analysis of the contemporary crisis.[3] With the dramatic growth of authoritarian populism, and the ascendancy of figures like Recep Erdogan, Jaroslaw Kacyznki, Viktor Orban, and Donald Trump, Neumann's gloomy political and theoretical diagnosis from the late 1940s and early '50s suddenly seems prescient. By selectively revisiting Neumann, we can begin to grasp what a critical theory of politics and law suited to the present historical moment should look like. As I hope to show, that theory, like Neumann's, will need to be positioned, however uneasily, "between liberalism and Marxism."

Liberal Democracy's Crisis

Talk of a "crisis of liberal democracy," of course, is nothing new. Partaking in it unavoidably raises fears of playing the role of the little boy who cried wolf. The fact that overheated crisis rhetoric can help generate, or

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3   In a similar vein: Christian Fuchs, "The Relevance of Franz L. Neumann's Critical Theory in 2017: 'Anxiety and Politics' in the New Age of Authoritarian Capitalism," *Triple C: Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society* 15(2017) (downloaded at htttp://www.triple-c.at). Also, Dan Krier, "Behemoth Revisited: National Socialism and the Trump Administration," *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture* 16: 1-2 (2017) (downloaded at logosjournal.com). Neumann's ideas have also used for interpreting recent Brazilian political transformations: Jose Rodrigo Rodrigues, "Society Against the State: The Brazilian Crisis Below the Surface" 15: 2-3(2016) (downloaded at logosjournal.com).

at least exacerbate, democracy's problems --just think of Carl Schmitt's disastrous role in the late Weimar Republic—might lead us sensibly to hesitate before employing to it.

Whatever its limitations and dangers, the term "crisis" nonetheless remains apposite. At present, it would be misguided to anticipate liberal democracy's imminent demise, at least in contexts where its basic preconditions, as laid out by an impressive body of political science literature, remain relatively secure. However, it would be no less silly to close our eyes to some disturbing novelties. Liberal democracy's crisis <u>tendencies</u>, at any rate, are very real.

For example, what the late Robert Dahl identified as an <u>essential</u> precondition for democratic stability, i.e., a relatively widespread <u>belief</u> in democracy among both leaders and citizens, has now become precarious, at least if we take the public statements of Orban, Trump, and other populist demagogues seriously.[4] Polling data from a broad array of liberal democracies, including those deemed by most social scientists to have successfully "consolidated," points not simply to growing dissatisfaction among citizens with their governments and ruling elites, but arguably with liberal democracy itself. In the US, for example, the percentage expressing approval by military rule has risen from 1 in 16 in 1995 to 1 in 6 at present. Among those born before World War II, 72 percent describe living in a democracy as "essential;" among millennials (i.e., those born in the 1980s and after), the number is a mere 30 percent. 46 percent of respondents to an October 2016 US survey of declare that they "never had" or have "lost" their faith in democracy. Notwithstanding some national variations, the US pattern, with younger cohorts more frequently expressing skepticism about democracy and favoring "strong leaders" who do not bother with parliaments and elections, tends to be reproduced elsewhere. If we take such data seriously (and there no reason <u>not</u> to do so), principled fidelity to liberal democracy, even within "advanced" democracies, seems to be on the decline.[5]

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4   Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven, 2015; 2nd ed.), 147.

5   The polling data are usefully collected in: Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha

But perhaps citizens are merely venting to pollsters but in fact continue to <u>act</u> like democratic citizens? Here as well, a growing body of empirical evidence seems unsettling. Even in OECD liberal democracies, since the 1980s we find striking declines in electoral participation, significant disengagement from mainstream political parties, and heightened rates of electoral volatility. Citizens now participate less than their predecessors in those organizations and institutions (most importantly: parties) that are supposed to mediate between society and the state. When they bother to vote, they do so in increasingly unpredictable and inconsistent ways. Party loyalty has declined almost everywhere.[6]

To be sure, we also arguably observe an upsurge in novel types of political activity (for example, "hacktivism") and mass protest (Occupy, for example), both conventional and unconventional. But that uptick, particularly when it takes the form of diffuse populist appeals directed against elites, can obviously serve as a vehicle for expressing profound dissatisfaction with contemporary liberal democracy and its basic operations. Whether new modes of protest politics can effectively supplement, let alone replace, increasingly precarious organizational linkages between citizens and states (e.g., labor unions, parties) remains, at best, an open question. Too often, protest politics seems, in the context of social acceleration, dynamic and fast-moving but also correspondingly transitory and ephemeral, rarely resulting in meaningful policy shifts, in part because those institutional mechanisms that are supposed to make government accountable seem more and more dysfunctional.[7]

As Peter Mair aptly notes, it is not just democratic citizens who are abandoning conventional types of political participation: political <u>elites</u> are also giving up on key features of recent liberal democracy as well. They tend to view political parties, for example, as mere steppingstones

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Mounk, "The Signs of Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 28(1):2017, 5-15.

6   On these trends: Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (New York, 2013), 17-73.

7   On the challenges posed by social acceleration to liberal democracy, see my *Liberal Democracy and the Social Acceleration of Time* (Baltimore, 2004).

to successful careers, increasingly defined by the politician's ability 1) to make politically diffuse personalistic appeals to a prospective electoral majority and 2) marshal political resources (e.g., campaign donations) from sources well beyond the party rank-and-file. Many of them favor, or at least condone, technocracy, particularly when politically convenient, by passing the buck to unelected institutions, including those operating "beyond the nation state" (e.g., the European Central Bank, WTO, etc.), as part of a strategy of diffusing divisive distributional questions. Significantly, the two major institutions modern democracy has developed for mediating between citizens and state authority --political parties and parliaments-- tend to get left at the wayside. The present crisis is a crisis of postwar "party democracy" and parliamentarism.[8]

These trends are probably motored, to a substantial degree, by structural economic forces, and especially the fact that since the 1970s the most important political efforts to navigate basic tensions between capitalism and democracy have shifted the arena for meaningful political conflict "upwards and away from the world of collective action of citizens towards ever more remote decision sites where interests appear as 'problems' in the abstract jargon of technocratic specialists."[9] With a growing array of policies effectively being determined by institutions (e.g., the ECB) and actors distant from and relatively unchecked by popular electorates, conventional modes of democratic participation tend to wither. Why bother investing time or energy in a nationally based trade union or polity party when its impact seems marginal? Although the story is complex and messy, the present political crisis is ultimately also a crisis of capitalist democracy, with political elites still unable to identify a political and social mix capable of successfully integrating broad swaths of

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8   Mair, *Ruling the Void*, 75-98.

9   Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* (London, 2016), 20. See also Streeck's *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London, 2014). My partial reliance here on Streeck by no means implies an endorsement of his anti-cosmopolitan political proposals. A persuasive response to Streeck's proposals for a renationalization of currency is offered by Claus Offe, *Europe Entrapped* (Cambridge, 2015).

the populace to the extent that postwar Keynesianism, however briefly, successfully achieved. On Wolfgang Streeck's provocative account, each attempt to do so since the 1970s (i.e. monetarism, massive public debt, privatized Keynesianism) has turned out be not only tension-ridden but ultimately unstable, with each eventually driving the shift in decision making away from postwar democracy's core institutions.

Predictably, the political gap is now being filled by right-wing populist movements that promise relief to marginalized groups bearing the heaviest burden of neoliberal policies.[10] Just as predictably perhaps, given neoliberalism's postnational (e.g., the EU) and (sometimes) global (e.g., WTO) institutional underpinnings, the populist backlash tends to take nationalistic and even xenophobic forms. Why and how populist movements morph into illiberalism and ultimately authoritarianism remains, of course, a complicated matter, as does the best way to characterize the diverse movements at hand. Yet we can be certain of at least one point: growing skepticism about liberal democracy, in conjunction with the widespread --and by no means altogether unfounded-- perception that its usual institutional tools (political parties and parliaments) no longer matter enough, provides fertile ground for authoritarianism. Trump and his doppelganger elsewhere remind us that demagogues, as so often in political history, are again ready to harvest the fruits.[11]

Why Franz L. Neumann?

Franz L. Neumann, the early Frankfurt School's political and legal theorist (and, subsequently, a professor of political theory at Columbia Uni-

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10 Populism, of course, remains a contested term. See Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia, 2016); also, the astute critical response by Jeffrey Isaac, "Is There Illiberal Democracy? A Problem with No Semantic Solution" (2017) (downloaded at http://www.eurozine.com). Of course, populism can take either left-wing or right-wing variants. My focus here in on the latter because 1) right-wing authoritarian populism presently poses the greatest threat to "advanced" democracies and 2) it was Neumann's main object of inquiry.

11 As I write, the US political system has been able to withstand, for the most part, Trump's authoritarian and xenophobic preferences to a greater degree

versity), is pretty much a forgotten figure today, even among those with some working knowledge of Frankfurt critical theory.[12] Yet Neumann's postwar writings, penned prior to his death in a tragic automobile accident in Switzerland in 1954, speak with striking perspicuity to the contemporary crisis.

The central concern of Neumann's late essays, most of which were posthumously collected and edited by his friend Herbert Marcuse in *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State* (1957), is stated concisely in a crucial (1953) essay, "The Concept of Political Freedom." According to Neumann, there is "no doubt that today the citizen's alienation from democratic political power is increasing," and that the resulting growth of mass political apathy was playing "into the hands of demagogues."[13] Indeed, Neumann quickly added, it might easily lead to caesarism, or mass-based authoritarianism. After ascribing to the idea of political freedom three core (judicial, cognitive, and volitional) elements, Neumann diagnosed a "crisis of political freedom": contemporary liberal democracy's failure to realize political freedom's rich normative potential opened the door to au-

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than others elsewhere (e.g., Hungary, Poland, Turkey). Nonetheless, there is no question that Trump's political instincts mesh, in key respects, with those of authoritarian right-wing populists elsewhere.

12 For some insightful recent engagements, however, see Mattias Iser and David Stecker, eds. *Kritische Theorie der Politik –Eine Bilanz* (Baden-Baden, 2003); Duncan Kelly, *The State of the Political: Conceptions of Politics and the State in the Thought of Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Franz Neumann* (Oxford, 2003); Bernd Ladwig, "Die politische Theorie der Frankfurter Schule," in *Politische Theorien der Gegenwart I,* eds. Andre Brodocz and Gary S. Schaal (Opladen, 2016, 4th ed), 33-74.

13 Franz L. Neumann, "The Concept of Political Freedom," in *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State: Essays in Political and Legal Theory*, ed. Herbert Marcuse (New York, 1957), 190 [130]. [German page numbers in brackets from *Demokratischer und autoritärer Staat* (Frankfurt, 1967)]. The argument's basic outlines already appeared in "Die Wissenschaft der Politik in der Demokratie" (1950), in Neumann, *Wirtschaft, Staat, Demokratie. Aufsätze, 1930-1954,* ed. Alfons Söllner (Frankfurt, 1978), 373-92. One of the demagogues Neumann clearly had in mind was Senator Joseph McCarthy. During the 1940s, Frankfurt School scholars vested substantial energy in empirical studies on right-wing (American) demagogues, for example: Leo Lowenthal and Nobert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit* (New York, 1949).

thoritarian movements that tapped anxiety and fear, emotions that Neumann interpreted as undergirding irrational conspiracy theories and, ultimately, the construction of an or "enemy" whose very existence allegedly represented a life-or-death threat. Irrational anxiety and exclusionary authoritarian politics directed against a despised "other," on this account, went hand in hand. For Neumann, "Montesquieu correctly observed that fear is what makes and sustains dictatorships."[14] Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* (1952), he added, provided a disturbingly vivid expression of how fascism and its apologists had exploited this destructive exclusionary logic.[15] Despite fascism's military defeat, the exclusionary logic of friend vs. foe continued to haunt political and social life.

Neumann's message in "Concept of Political Freedom" was straightforward enough: unless liberal democracy could provide adequate opportunities for informed, active, and efficacious citizenship, it invited authoritarian responses feeding on fear and anxiety. Fear, he argued in the closely related "Anxiety and Politics" (1954), remained ubiquitous in contemporary society and had "begun to paralyze nations and to make men incapable of free decisions."[16] Only a political and social order that worked not only to reduce irrational, self-destructive fear, but also give citizens substantial opportunities to thematize and act constructively on their worries, might ward off caesarism. Novel possibilities for consequential political action, or what Neumann dubbed "volitional" freedom, would have to be identified, even if it was probably unrealistic to expect too much from direct mass participation in government decision-making. Under contemporary conditions, "[t]he [proper] model of a democracy is not Rousseau's construct of an identity of rulers and ruled, but representative of an electorate by responsible representatives."[17] Even so,

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14   Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 194 [134]. See also, in the same volume, "Montesquieu," 96-148 [142-194].

15   Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 193 [134], 200n102 [141, n102].

16   Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," in *Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 270 [261].

17   Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 192 [132].

representative democracy, in which elected leaders were supposed to be accountable to an alert electorate, had to do much more to link decision making effectively to citizens.

Of course, fear and anxiety rested on psychological and social sources. With recourse to Freud, "Anxiety and Politics" explored the social psychology of mass movements whose followers uncritically identified, on the base of libidinally charged ties that promised relief from anxiety but in fact intensified it, with caesaristic leaders. Like Theodor Adorno and other figures within the early Frankfurt School, Neumann uncritically relied on orthodox Freudianism and some of its most controversial tenets. At the same time, he rightly emphasized its explanatory insufficiency: a proper analysis also required attention to the social dynamics by means of which fear "can become a cruel weapon in the hands of irresponsible leaders."[18] Labor's alienation, experiences of social decline or degradation, and modern competitive society, were the most likely social and historical culprits. With his eyes on racism in South Africa and the US, Neumann observed that it was "not only social classes [that] resist their degradation" via regressive mass movements: the anxieties of dominant whites that they "will be degraded through the economic and political rise of Negroes is used in propagandist fashion for the creation of affective mass movements, which frequently take on a fascist character."[19]

In the final analysis, however, neither anxiety's psychological nor its social sources could fully explain the dangers at hand: "The elements of political alienation must be added" to the causal story.[20] For Neumann, fear and anxiety only became politically consequential in the context of

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18 Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," 288 [278].

19 Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," 290 [280].

20 Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," 290. [281]. Neumann's critical point about the limitations of theories of social (and psychological) alienation remains, I believe, pertinent in the context of the ongoing revival of interest in alienation among fourth-generation critical theorists (e.g., Rahel Jaeggi, Hartmut Rosa). For a recent attempt to reintroduce the concept of political alienation into contemporary critical theory, see Paul Sörensen, *Entfremdung als Schlüsselbegriff einer kritischen Theorie der Politik* (Baden-Baden, 2015).

political alienation, e.g., contemporary democracy's failure to realize adequate possibilities for meaningful political action. As Axel Honneth has observed, Neumann worried about the psychological and sociological roots of anxiety because they threatened to "destroy the conditions of uninhibited will-formation in the public sphere."[21] Even more noteworthy, however, he emphasized the dangers of distinctly political failures to combat mass apathy, disinterest, and cynicism, specifically political phenomena that prepared the ground for caesarist leaders scorning the normal rules of the game and successfully exploiting "the inability of the citizen to make individual decisions."[22]

On Neumann's account, it would be a terrible mistake to reduce critical theory to psychology or sociology. They helped make sense of fear and anxiety but could only go so far in explaining its dangers: Neumann insisted on advancing a critical political theory. "Anxiety and Politics" intimated that it was unrealistic, given modern social complexity, to hope for a complete disappearance of irrational anxieties, though social and economic reforms could surely mitigate their perils. Nonetheless, an improved democratic political order, providing citizens with a real chance to act on their fears in productive ways, could help carry the burden of counteracting authoritarian trends. If the ambitious ideal of political freedom could be more fully realized in modern democratic states, Neumann suggested, then the "freedom from fear" boldly announced by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous "Four Freedoms" speech might gain traction.[23]

A critical theory of contemporary democracy necessarily relied on psychology and sociology. Yet, political theory --i.e., a critical minded account of both modern democracy's normative potentials and its real-life failures-- remained pivotal. With echoes of Montesquieu, fear had political-institutional roots and relied on an identifiably political dynam-

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21 Honneth, "'Anxiety and Politics': The Strengths and Weaknesses of Franz L. Neumann's Diagnosis of a Social Pathology," *Constellations* 10 (2003), 253.

22 Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," 290 [281].

23 Neumann, "Anxiety and Politics," 270 [261].

ic.[24] Despite the initial overlap between Neumann's diagnosis and that of Adorno and others in the Frankfurt School, he envisioned political theory as fundamentally constitutive of critical theory in a way they never did. One reason, as we have emphasized, was basically diagnostic: the "malfunctioning of the democratic state," whose symptoms and causes included "the growing complexity of government; the growth of bureaucracies in public and private life; the concentration of private social power; the hardening of political parties into machines which…tend to exclude newcomers," generated political cynicism and the commonplace view that politics was nothing but "a struggle between small cliques," with parties reduced to "machines without mass participation."[25] In some contrast to Adorno and others within first-generate Frankfurt critical theory, Neumann's late writings took political and legal institutions --as relatively autonomous sources of dangerous forms of political alienation—seriously: without proper attention to them, critical theory could not make sense of the authoritarian perils faced by contemporary society.

Some limitations notwithstanding, Neumann's account captures central features of our contemporary situation, where cynicism is fueled by a political system that no longer seems responsive to citizens, many of whom are now embracing more-or-less authoritarian leaders promising relief from their worries, irrational or otherwise. Neumann would not have been surprised to learn that such movements claim popular credentials while making mincemeat of democracy, or that they cultivate and, when gaining power, institutionalize irrational fear and anxiety, by an exclusionary, oftentimes xenophobic brand of friend vs. foe politics. At times, they even seem to be following Schmitt's playbook. Some of their key figures, at any rate, are in fact admirers of Schmitt and his brand of radically nationalistic and authoritarian plebiscitarianism.[26] Racial-

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24 See also Neumann's unfinished "Notes on the Theory of Dictatorship" in *Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 233-56 [224-247].

25 Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 190 [130-131]; "Anxiety and Politics," 290 [281].

26 For example, one of Putin's recent political advisers, Alexander Dugin, is a well-known Schmitt connoisseur.

ized appeals to social groups facing stagnation or decline --in the US, the white male working class-- make up a key part of the story. Yet those social factors only take us so far in understanding populism: they need to be supplemented with a hard-headed critical analysis of the democratic state's failings. As Neumann presciently anticipated, we now need a critical-minded political theory that situates the reemergence of mass-based authoritarianism in the context of contemporary democracy's crisis tendencies. Without such an approach, we simply cannot do justice to what ultimately remains a <u>political</u> phenomenon.

Astute commentators have noted Neumann's growing appreciation in the late 1940s and early '50s for liberal political philosophers (e.g., John Stuart Mill) and social theorists (especially Max Weber); some have interpreted the trend as evidence of a certain de-radicalization.[27] Much can be said in defense of this reading. Yet, it risks obscuring the shift's sound rationale: though it would be wrong "to reject Marxism root and branch," Marxism was inadequate as both a theory of <u>political action</u> and a theory of <u>political institutions</u>.[28] To make sense of liberal democracy's dysfunctionalities, however, critical theory needed both, and from Neumann's perspective, the liberal political tradition provided a useful starting point. Marxist theory suffered "from a misunderstanding: the confusion of sociological analysis with the theory of political action."[29]

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27   Hubertus Buchstein, "A Heroic Reconciliation of Freedom and Power: On the Tension Between Democratic and Social Theory in the Late Work of Franz L. Neumann," *Constellations* 10 (2003), 228-46; H. Stuart Hughes, "Franz Neumann Between Marxism and Liberal Democracy," in *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960,* eds. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, 1969), 446-62.

28   Neumann, "Approaches to the Study of Political Power" (1950), in *Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 11 [90]. On Mill, see Neumann, "Intellectual and Political Freedom" (1954), in *Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 201-215 [292-306].

29   Neumann, "Economic and Politics in the Twentieth Century" (1951), in *Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 263 [253]. In other words, Marxists mistakenly think they can deduce a theory of political action from "sociological" claims (about the state's class nature, for example). Neumann's engagement with interwar Marxists (e.g., Hilferding) is discussed at length by Jürgen

Despite some overlap with Judith N. Sklar's more recent "liberalism of fear," Neumann never tethered his postwar theoretical reflections to a minimalist, overly cautious brand of liberalism.[30] On the contrary, as we have seen, on his view only a more robust realization of political freedom's three (legal, cognitive, and volitional) moments could ward off authoritarianism. In other words: the rule of law and civil liberties, and ultimately only a flexible and dynamic version of representative democracy offering enhanced possibilities for meaningful political action, could get the job done. Situated between "Marxism and liberalism," Neumann's final writings recognized that Marxism needed to be supplemented --and, in some cases, significantly amended-- by a forward-looking political liberalism that could help interpret and then counter political alienation.

Although Neumann died before he could pursue this project satisfactorily, many of its key features are found in major second-generation Frankfurt School figures --most prominently, the young Jürgen Habermas.[31] In Habermas' early writings (for example, the landmark *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* [1962]), as in Neumann's post-1945 contributions, we encounter a Neo-Marxist account of capitalism fused with a deep appreciation for the latent normative potentials of modern liberal democracy.

The mature Neumann's extensive engagement with Weber's political sociology is probably one reason why a strong streak of <u>etatism</u> characterizes his postwar writings, which sometimes pointedly rejected orthodox Marxist ideas of the "primacy of production": "[t]he primacy of politics over economics was always a fact, which was at times glossed over, at

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Bast, *Totalitärer Pluralismus* (Tübingen, 1999).

30   Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in Shklar, *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann (Chicago, 1998), 3-21. Montesquieu, for example, is an inspiration for both Neumann and Sklar. Shklar co-directed my dissertation on Neumann and Otto Kirchheimer (later published as *Between the Norm and the Exception: The Frankfurt School and the Rule of Law* [Cambridge, 1994]): Shklar admired Neumann and much of his work, though she could not abide his Marxism.

31   And also, I would add, in some writings of Ingeborg Maus, Claus Offe, and Ulrich Preuss.

times openly recognized."[32] Like other leftists of his generation, Neumann shared the widespread faith in the potentially rationalizing force of organized political power as an instrument of liberation. Unlike orthodox Marxists, however, he thought Weber provided useful conceptual tools for understanding the state and political power, which he defined, in a conventionally Weberian spirit, as "social power focused on the state. It involves control of other men [sic] for the purpose of influencing the behavior of the state, its legislative, administrative and judicial activities."[33]

Today, Neumann's old-fashioned (leftist) statism seems out-of-date wherever libertarians and neoliberals have successfully delegitimized the state, and even many on the left have become uncomfortable with conventional notions of state power as encapsulating a "monopoly on legitimate coercion." This is not the place to debate the merits and demerits of the mature Neumann's Weberian-Marxist state theory. Nonetheless, it potentially provides a useful corrective to fashionable notions of "governance," notions that often, as Claus Offe has astutely observed, refer to "diverse and contradictory semantic contents and associations" and function to veil power and domination.[34] Too often, ideas of governance rest on crude and caricatured concepts of the state, concepts that tend a priori to reduce it to little more than hierarchical, organized violence; Neumann probably would have expressed skepticism. To the extent that the present political crisis can be interpreted as a backlash against so-called "global governance," operating in conjunction with a reassertion of state sovereignty (and the modern state's coercive instruments), Neumann's unfashionable ideas about the modern state perhaps deserve a second look.

In conversations with students and friends, Neumann expressed frustration that the creative turn his postwar writings had taken, as evinced

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32   Neumann, "Economics and Politics in the Twentieth Century," 268 [259]. On Neumann's "left-etatism," see Buchstein, "Heroic Reconciliation of Freedom and Power," 231-33.

33   Neumann, "Approaches to the Study of Political Power," 3 [82].

34   Claus Offe, "Governance: An 'Empty Signifier?" *Constellations* 16 (2009), 551.

especially by "The Concept of Political Freedom," was being ignored by colleagues.[35] In hindsight, it is easy to see why not only Neumann's contemporaries, but many subsequent democratic theorists, neglected them: they clashed with the relatively self-satisfied stories about postwar democracy that soon flourished among scholars and pundits amid decades of pretty much uninterrupted economic growth. The relatively brief intellectual hegemony of "elite" and "pluralist" theories of democracy overlaps, interestingly, with what in hindsight looks like a brief "golden age" of OECD capitalism. Yet, the once seemingly permanent equilibrium between capitalism and democracy now appears as an historical exception: the relationship between capitalism and democracy remains basically tension-ridden and unstable, a fact that would hardly have surprised Neumann.[36] Despite his legitimate skepticism about Marxism as both normative theory and empirical political sociology, Neumann never rejected Marxism "root and branch." It remained an important toolkit, in part because no analysis of <u>capitalist</u> liberal democracy could fully dispense with it.

Revealingly, the main reason for Neumann's much-discussed antipathy to his fellow Frankfurter Friedrich Pollock's theory of state capitalism was <u>not</u> per se the major role Pollock attributed to political or state institutions; Neumann conceded that the state played a pivotal role in contemporary capitalism. Instead, what irritated him was the empirically tendentious implication that state capitalism represented a more-or-less perfectly integrated social and political formation, one in which material conflicts could be successfully suppressed.[37] Neumann was right to reject that thesis when it first emerged in the early Frankfurt School and was quickly embraced by Pollock, Max Horkheimer, Adorno, and others. In the shadows of the global 2008 financial crisis and recent "Euro crisis" (at the very latest!), his skepticism seems even more prophetic.

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35   Rainer Erd, ed., *Reform und Resignation: Gespräche über Franz L. Neumann* (Frankfurt, 1985), 183-236.

36   Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*

37   For a discussion, see my *Between the Norm and the Exception*, 149-53.

Despite many theoretical and political affinities with Neumann, Habermas's view of postwar capitalism, unfortunately, occasionally echoed Pollock and Horkheimer. In *Legitimation Crisis* (1973) and then his magnum opus, *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), Habermas pictured the state's administrative system as successfully defusing traditional forms of economic and class-based social conflict, by means of a series of bureaucratically achieved welfare compensations and rewards. Even if class inequality remained a feature of capitalism, the postwar administrative apparatus had efficaciously pacified class conflict to such an extent that "the unequal distribution of social rewards" could "no longer be traced back to class positions in any unqualified way." Class conflict was losing its "structure-forming power for the lifeworlds of social groups," with new types of class-unspecific reification apparently gaining in significance.[38] Economic crisis tendencies were not merely "processed, flattened out, and intercepted, but also…inadvertently displaced into the administrative system."[39]

Ironically, just as Habermas was putting the final touches on *Theory of Communicative Action*, the postwar Keynesian class compromise was coming undone in the UK, USA, and elsewhere. To the extent that the "legal institutionalization of collective bargaining" constituted the basis for the "pacification of class conflict in the social-welfare state," for example, a dramatically decreasing number of workers even in "advanced" capitalist countries are subject to union contracts.[40] Not surprisingly, we find massive evidence of the alarming degree to which capitalist-based economic inequality directly shapes social existence. Just to mention one example: between the Second World War and the 1980s, men's incomes in the US could only be explained to a decreasing degree by their fathers'

38   Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1984 [1981]), 348-49 [Deutsch: II, 512].

39   Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action,* Vol. 2, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1989 [1981]), 344 [Deutsch: 506].

40   Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action,* Vol. 2, 347 [Deutsch: II, 510]. In the US, about 11% of wage and salary workers are now union members, with the number being even lower in the private sector. The numbers are higher in

income. By 2000, following twenty years of attacks on the welfare state, the number matched pre-New Deal levels and was well over twice what it had been in 1950. 36% of US children whose parents find themselves in the bottom fifth in terms of wealth distribution will remain there; those born into upper income brackets are also much more likely to remain there than just a few decades ago. Like other developed capitalist societies, the US assuredly remains one in which the category of social class remains not only disturbingly central, but where class inequalities are growing dramatically.[41]

Neumann's prescient postwar political diagnosis, in short, is once again pertinent. The "malfunctioning of the democratic state" seems even more manifest today, and just as Neumann predicted, authoritarian mass movements are ready to pick up the slack by exploiting fears and anxieties. Tensions between capitalism and democracy remain a key part of that story.

Critical Theory and the Rule of Law

Among authoritarian populism's most ominous tendencies is its disdain for the rule of law, or what Neumann in "Concept of Political Freedom" dubbed legal or "judicial liberty." When in power, right-wing populists tend to remodel legal and constitutional practice according to the adage "for my friends everything, for my enemies, the law." That is, they transform law and courts into a discriminatory weapon against their political "enemies," while looking the other way when allies and "friends" skirt the law's boundaries.[42] Authoritarian populists tout their fidelity to constitutional government and the rule of law, when in fact crudely instrumentalizing both as part of the struggle against some "other" (e.g., immigrants, racial minorities, or the "liberal elite"). Conveniently, that

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Western Europe, of course, but there as well they have declined substantially since the 1970s.

41 Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York, 2009), 160-61.

42 Müller, *What is Populism?*, 60-68.

strategy masks the stunning facts of elite-level corruption and the hollowing-out of the liberal democratic state's most valuable social achievements.

In this vein, Donald Trump scored points among otherwise skeptical anti-statist US conservatives during his 2016 campaign by attacking then President Obama's supposedly "lawless" executive orders defending immigrants, vigorous environmental protections, and a full-bodied interpretation of the Affordable Care Act. After winning the presidency, President Trump rapidly reversed course by issuing a volley of executive decrees, including his controversial "Muslim ban" prohibiting entry to the US by refugees and visitors from majority Muslim countries. Trump pays lip service to the rule of law, when in fact reducing it to nothing more than *authoritarian legalism*, i.e., "law and order," with its main targets being black protestors (i.e., Black Lives Matter), undocumented immigrants, and others whom Trump apparently considers a threat to "real Americans." While insisting on a strict and repressive enforcement of existing statutes when it abets his assault on marginalized groups and political opponents, he simultaneously views his own efforts --and those of allies-- as above the law. Flagrant corruption and conflicts-of-interest within his Administration are pushed aside; Trump has actively resisted --and probably obstructed-- efforts to investigate Russian collusion in the 2016 election; he pardons those (e.g., the racist, xenophobic Sheriff Arpaio) whom courts have determined to have acted illegally; he views the US Department of Justice and Attorney General as extensions of his own army of personal lawyers. Most ominously perhaps, he has "unchained" customs and border agents, as well as local police departments, from general rules and federal legal directives that have functioned, with some success, to check their substantial discretionary powers.

Massive official discretion, it seems, is acceptable so long as it serves the regime's political agenda and Trump's "friends." Not surprisingly, general law also goes out the window in the context of Trump's White House "deals" with large corporations. His widely publicized wrangling with the Carrier Corp., concessions from Boeing over Air Force One's

price tag, threats to penalize automakers for moving production abroad, high-profile deal making with corporate leaders at White House meetings: none of this coheres with the rule of law.

If contemporary critical theory is going to make sense of --and help resist-- the ongoing attack on law-based government, it needs a sufficiently supple account of the rule of law. Here as well, Neumann's writings offer a useful springboard.

In the US, libertarians and liberals have responded vocally to Trump's anti-legalism. Their retort, unfortunately, tends to rest on a view of the rule of law as necessarily married to "market economies."[43] On the left, the response has been somewhat muted. Mark Tushnet, Harvard law professor and dean of US-based critical legal scholarship, refuses to criticize Trump's anti-legalism. Why? The idea of the rule of law is "almost entirely without content." Trump cannot be coherently accused of expressing contempt for the rule of law: if there's no there there [i.e., regarding the concept of the rule of law], I can't see how you could be contemptuous of 'it'." Tushnet's anti-formalist jurisprudence and legal skepticism necessarily prohibit him from preserving even a modest version of the rule of law. By day's end, he deems it naïve --and potentially counterproductive-- to criticize Trump for his (alleged) hostility to law-based government.[44]

For its part, the leftist political journal *Jacobin* digs up the carcass of orthodox Marxism to attack liberals worried about Trump's legal infidelities. The "'rule of law' and other bourgeois norms," we are told, "are hardly a good check on presidential mischief." Offering nothing but a "thin veneer of legal formality," the rule of law functions to mask capitalist injustices, not potentially check or restrain them. All Trump has done is peel back the superficial legal façade "to reveal the ugly, rotten germ of

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43   Paul Gowder, "The Trump Threat to the Rule of Law and the Constitution" (February 3, 2017) (downloaded at https://niskanencenter.org).

44   The comments come from Tushnet's blog, "Scholars Across the Political Spectrum" (June 4, 2016) on the "Balkinization" blog (downloaded at https://balkin.blogspot.com).

authoritarianism that was latent all along" in the liberal capitalist state.[45]

The fatal problem with this position, as we should recognize from the debris of orthodox Marxist legal theory, is that it cannot distinguish sufficiently between liberal-democratic and authoritarian "bourgeois" states; the latter apparently represents the former's hidden face, a face that reveals its true features during dire emergencies. Because of its economic reductionism, this position simply ignores familiar ways in which the rule of law provides legal security and personal freedom not only to privileged but also socially subordinate groups: "As compromised as the Rule of Law is and always has been," the radical lawyer Chase Madar rightly notes, "we would be wrong to discard it entirely."[46] The rule of law constitutes more than a thin veneer for capitalist (and other forms of) domination: it potentially checks and counters their myriad dangers.

Neumann can help us sketch out an alternative, more nuanced vision of the rule of law. Like contemporary radicals, Neumann never denied the rule of law's role in masking illegitimate power and social inequality. Unlike them, he allied with liberals who highlight its protective functions and normative merits. He parted with mainstream liberals, of course, by refusing to close his ideas to the rule of law's more troublesome political and economic uses. His approach, which ably fuses social critique with the requisite normative sensibilities, is precisely what we need today.

On Neumann's view, the modern rule of law always demanded that state action only transpire when based on clearly promulgated, public, general norms; everything government did had to be traceable to general statutes announced in advance. This simple intuition only carried sufficient weight, however, if law offered adequate checks on state officials. "It is the most important and perhaps the decisive demand of liberalism that interference with the rights reserved to the individual is not permitted on the basis of individual but only on the basis of general laws."[47]

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45   Jordan von Manalastas, "The Rule of Law Won't Save Us" (April 26, 2016) (downloaded at https://www.jacobinmag.com).

46   Chase Madar, *The Passion of Bradley Manning* (London, 2013), 123.

47   Franz L. Neumann, "The Change in the Function of Law in Modern Society"

When instead imprecisely defined to permit <u>any</u> conceivable activity by state officials, as Neumann accused legal positivists (for example, Hans Kelsen) of proposing, legal statutes became empty: they could no longer restrain officials in minimally necessary ways. Generality required that "the essential facts to which the norm refers are clearly defined" and references to vague or controversial moral standards (e.g., "in good faith," "unconscionable") minimized.[48] Generality was also indispensable to judicial independence, a crucial feature of legal liberty. When statutes ceased to constitute "a hypothetical judgment of the state regarding the future conduct of its subjects," but instead were retroactive, or so vaguely formulated as to invite judges to single out individuals without reference to some rule, judges became nothing more than ad hoc administrators.[49]

When so conceived, the rule of law performed a key politico-ideological function: "[t]o say that laws rule and not men [sic] may… signify that the fact is to be hidden that men rule over other men."[50] The rule of law's seeming impartiality veiled the political (and social) power of those groups --most importantly, privileged bourgeois groups-- that tended to dominate state decision making. The rule of law also performed basic economic functions. Classical capitalism demanded "general laws as the highest form of purposive rationality, for such a society [was] composed of entrepreneurs of about equal value."[51] Equal treatment before the law went hand in hand with a competitive economy whose key players were roughly equal.[52] For Neumann, the main dilemma at hand was that the rule of law's economic presuppositions vanished with the unavoidable transition from competitive to organized or monopoly capitalism. Although legal reality during competitive capitalism never seamlessly

[1937], in *Democratic and Authoritarian State*, 31 [39].

48   Neumann, "Change in the Function of Law," 28 [37].

49   Neumann, "Change in the Function of Law," 28 [37].

50   Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 168 [108].

51   Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 168 [108].

52   A view shared by Friedrich Hayek, except that Hayek believed that a return to classical capitalism was both possible and desirable; Neumann obviously did not.

meshed with strict models of the rule of law, contemporary monopoly capitalism demanded, in both qualitatively and quantitatively unprecedented ways, discretionary and increasingly specialized legal interventions or "individual measures," inconsonant with conventional ideas of general or formal law. When facing a large firm or bank, governments necessarily pursued, either de jure or de facto, individual measures, often doing so simply to stabilize a crisis-prone economy.

In other words, legal generality –for Neumann, the mainstay of the rule of law-- increasingly <u>clashed with</u> contemporary capitalism. Accordingly, Neumann would <u>not</u> have been surprised by the dramatic demotion of general rules of law during the recent 2008 financial and subsequent "Euro" crises, a demotion that entailed a vast increase in discretionary decision making disproportionately favoring large banks and corporations.[53] Nor would he be startled by the striking preference among Trump and his business allies for ad hoc wheeling-and-dealing: economic policy via individualized executive branch deal making, with noncompliant firms facing the President's twitter crossfire, not only makes political sense for Trump, but it meshes well with globalizing capitalism's seeming "elective affinity" with anti-formal law and non-traditional modes of legal decision making. Under contemporary social and economic conditions, capitalism's once erstwhile dependence on strict general rules undergoes decay. [54]

To his credit, Neumann also underscored the rule of law's ethical or moral functions, functions that operated even amid injustice and inequality. Though a product of bourgeois-liberalism, the rule of law provided basic protections potentially enjoyed by a broad array of social groups:

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53 On the US response to the 2008 crisis, and its extensive reliance on open-ended emergency-economic discretion, see Philip A. Wallach, *To the Edge: Legality, Legitimacy, and the Response to the 2008 Financial Crisis* (Washington, D.C., 2015). On similar trends in Europe, Jonathan White, "Emergency Europe," *Political Studies* 63 (2015), 300-18.

54 Inspired by Neumann, I pursue this line of inquiry in my *Frankfurt School Perspectives on Globalization, Democracy, and the Law* (London: Routledge, 2008), 13-46.

> The generality of laws and the independence of the judge guarantee a minimum of personal and political liberty…Generality of the laws and independence of the judge, as well as the doctrine of the separation of powers, have therefore purposes that transcend the requirements of free competition…Equality before the law is, to be sure, "formal," that is, negative. But Hegel, who clearly performed the purely-formal nature of liberty, already warned of the consequences of discarding it.[55]

Judicial liberty, Neumann similarly asserted in "Concept of Political Freedom," helped guarantee "a minimum of freedom, equality, and security," and its ethical or moral function should be viewed as ultimately transcending its political-ideological and economic functions.[56]

"The Concept of Political Freedom" <u>both</u> highlighted the rule of law's indispensable role in buttressing political freedom <u>and</u> law's limitations: "power cannot be dissolved in legal relationships."[57] The liberal-legalist utopia of a political and social order seamlessly regulated by perfectly calculable, predictable, strict general rules "does not work. It never did and never could."[58] Partly because of juridical liberty's limits, a free society would have to help maximize opportunities for cognitive and volitional freedom, in other words: significant possibilities for a well-informed, active citizenry. In this manner, Neumann effectively circumvented one possible criticism of his version of critical theory, namely that he had offered an overly "legalistic" vision of freedom that failed to do justice to its other attributes. Although a free society should strive to realize a robust instantiation of the rule of law, he acknowledged that there might be legitimate reasons for compromising it. The rule of law has been widely associated with constancy and stability in the law, for example, yet "[n]o political system is satisfied with simply maintaining acquired rights…[N]o system, even the most conservative one (in the lit-

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55 Neumann, "Change in the Function of Law," 42 [50].

56 Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 170 [110].

57 Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 170 [110].

58 Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," 170 [110].

eral meaning of the term) can merely preserve; even to preserve it must change."[59] Legal constancy stood, unavoidably, in tension with of social change and dynamism.

Just as legal liberty constituted a necessary yet insufficient condition for political freedom, so too did <u>legal</u> theory represent a crucial, yet limited, element of a broader <u>political</u> theory of contemporary democracy. The widespread tendency to quarantine legal from political theory simply made no sense partly because the "crisis of political freedom" was, in part, a crisis of juridical liberty --in other words, a failure institutionalize the rule of law and basic rights in sufficiently satisfactory ways. While noting the necessary limits of legal liberty, "Concept of Political Freedom" accordingly expressed anxieties about contemporary democracy's failure to secure a sufficient modicum of it. Unless liberal society could figure out how to preserve the rule of law in creative and novel ways, democratic citizens would have legitimate grounds for concern. Liberal democracy needed to live up to the untapped potential of modern ideas of freedom. It would likely fail to do so, however, if it sacrificed too much of the rule of law.

With the rule of law now facing direct attacks from Trump and others, here Neumann's postwar agenda seems pertinent as well. If we are to ward off the specter of authoritarian populism and the crisis of democracy, we could do worse than by determining how the rule of law can and should be realized under the conditions of globalizing capitalism.

Concluding Reflections

Based on my discussion, it should be clear why I cannot endorse the criticism, recently voiced by Nancy Fraser and perhaps shared by Axel Honneth, that the ongoing revival of interest in political and legal theory among contemporary Frankfurt critical theorists represents a troublesome "kind of politicism…or legalism," or "philosophy of law, political

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59 Neumann, "Concept of Political Freedom," p. 172 [112]. On legal constancy as constitutive of the rule of law, see Lon L. Fuller, *The Morality of Law* (New Haven, 1964), pp. 79-81.

theory disconnected from social theory."[60] Nor can I embrace the deep hostility to law now being endorsed by some third and-fourth generation critical theorists, a deep hostility that strikes this author as politically misconceived given the reemergence of right-wing authoritarianism.[61] As the neglected figure of Franz Neumann helps recall, political and legal theory needs to go hand in hand with the critique of capitalism; critical theory also needs an appropriately nuanced view of modern law. If serious about developing a response to democracy's present crisis, critical theory also has little to gain by borrowing heavily from fashionable variants of poststructuralism. Although I cannot fully defend this claim here, my impression is that when we scratch below poststructuralism's shiny veneer, we generally encounter a warmed-over legal skepticism, incapacity to do proper justice to the normative core of modern liberal democracy (and especially the key idea of <u>freedom</u>), and a kneejerk antistatism.[62]

Contemporary critical theorists face tough questions about its philosophical bearings. Should its basic contours, for example, be Kantian, Hegelian, or Marxist? And how should they relate to political and legal theory, as well as social theory and the empirical social sciences? The original Frankfurt School's political theorist, Franz L. Neumann, will only take us so far in answering those deep and difficult questions. As a starting point for tackling the ongoing crisis of liberal democracy, how-

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60   Nancy Fraser, interviewed by Jo Littler, "An Astonishing time of Great Boldness: On the Politics of Recognition and Redistribution" (August 15, 2015) (downloaded from wwww.eurozine.com). For my response, see "Recognition, Redistribution, and Participatory Parity: Where's the Law?" in *Feminism, Capitalism, and Critique: Essays in Honor of Nancy Fraser*, ed. Banu Bargu and Ciara Bottici (New York, 2017), 139-56. On Honeth's worries about legalism, my "Recent Frankfurt Critical Theory: Down on Law?" *Constellations* 24(2017), 113-26, along with Honneth's response ("Beyond the Law: A Response to William Scheuerman," 126-32) in the same issue.

61   Daniel Loick, *Juridismus. Konturen einer Kritischen Theorie des Rechts* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2017); Christoph Menke, *Kritik der Rechte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 205).

62   On Foucault's antistatism, see Mitchell Dean and Kaspar Villadsen, *State Phobia and Civil Society: The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault* (Stanford, 2016).

ever, Neumann's version of critical theory, situated "between Marxism and liberalism," offers an impressive start.

Vico and the Divine Drama

James J. Chriss[1]

Abstract: A commitment to conventional science more or less accepts the tradition of rationalism handed down from Descartes, with regard to the procedures for acquiring good knowledge that can stand the test of time. Other fields use other methods of peering into the human social world, and in these other fields (specifically here, philology and liturgical studies) a commitment to rationalism may appear misguided or simply misapplied. As a sociologist committed to the project of scientific sociology, I nevertheless am intrigued by what intellectuals are doing in the fields of literary analysis and the arts. My familiarity with Vico (because he produced a pre-sociological account which he referred to as a 'new science' in the early 1700s) is the conveyance mechanism I use to step into and attempt to make sense of this other realm. I examine this movement of thought in the special case of conceptualizing religion as a dramatic performance. In the end I speculate on what has been accomplished, and what shape future studies might take.

The Cartesian Dilemma

Descartes placed the knowing subject in the center of a knowable universe. This knowing subject was the difference in a physical world indifferent to the strivings of such sentient beings. Descartes knew as well that for millennia there had been primitive, brutish, and savage beings roaming the earth, but these were not knowing subjects. Yes, certainly they were endowed with the ability to sense pleasure and pain, and this is nature's method. But all creatures down to the lowliest single-cell organisms could do that, so there was nothing remarkable about sense perception. In this lower state guided by nature's method, life is merely a struggle for survival in a harsh physical environment. The stimuli of pleasure and pain buffet

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1   James J. Chriss is currently Professor in the Department of Criminology, Anthropology, and Sociology at Cleveland State University. His primary interests are social control, policing, and sociological and criminological theory. He is also interested in the arts both as a performer and an occasional intellectual contributor. His most recent books are *Social Control: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Polity, 2013) and *Confronting Gouldner: Sociology and Political Activism* (Haymarket Books, 2017).

creatures about willy-nilly until entropy does its work through the final and catastrophic loss of heat and dissipation of energy. Death and tragedy are always the final and nonnegotiable end to all our worldly strivings.

But even as early humans lacked reflexivity and self-awareness, and even as they rarely questioned their place in the vast cosmos, there was an inkling of pre-philosophical reflection that emerged slowly over the course of social and physical evolution. One of the things that set apart humans from other animals, even in their earliest stages of development, was the ability to create and share symbols which took them beyond the simple grunts and displays typical of the lower animals. Emerging out of this was the invention of religion in its earliest incarnation, and it is here Vico takes his rightful place in the succession from Descartes.

Although Vico railed against Descartes' metaphysics and rationalism, the scientific impulse of Descartes coupled with Bacon's theory of learning (the so-called 'distempers' of learning) set Vico on a path toward scientific explanation culminating in the development of his own Baconian-inspired 'new science'.[2] Published in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Vico's *Nueva Scienza* argued that there are two kinds of sciences, one dealing with the natural world and the other dealing with the human social world, including most importantly its culture and history. Whereas Descartes argued that mathematical thinking and the exacting standards of scientific rationality lead to certitude about the physical universe, Vico argued that because human beings make the social world, they should understand it better than nature, the laws of which are not

2   These distempers of learning were for Bacon the contentious clash of competing knowledge claims which, when reconciled, would produce new knowledge. In this sense it is similar to the ancient Greek dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis (later utilized famously by Hegel), although Bacon was somewhat skeptical of the syllogistic form of Aristotelian deductive reasoning. For more on Bacon and Vico's relation to him, see Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Jürgen Klein, 'Francis Bacon', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/francis-bacon/; and B.H.G. Wormald, *Francis Bacon: History, Politics and Science, 1561-1626* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

available to experience but must be conjured by way of logical axioms.[3] Vico's 'new science' represents an early glimpse into the burgeoning field of human and social sciences which would become institutionalized in the academy beginning in the 19th century, although admittedly Vico's conceptualization of this new field was shot through, unapologetically, with religious sensibilities.[4]

Vico noted that it was a brutish and childish sense of wonder, not a highfalutin rationality (which would come much later), that prodded primitive humans into thinking more systematically about the world. Vico stated that wonder led to worship, and worship in turn to faith. Religion was based on primitive experience rather than on the sort of rational achievement which Descartes heralded as the beginning of true enlightenment.[5] Although the origins of religion are buried in the archaic past, Vico developed a historical method that gave him a purchase on its explanation. Vico emphasized the internality of knowledge, namely, the *verum et factum convertuntur*, which is the idea that the concept of truth gets converted, or is instantiated in, the performances and acts of human volition.[6] As discussed above, since humans create culture they have more secure knowledge of it in comparison to God or nature which are either unknowable or imperfectly known.

Commemoration

Vico's theory of knowledge led him to argue that the need to commemorate is what creates and sustains society. Commemoration is the

3   James J. Chriss, *Confronting Gouldner* (Haymarket Books, 2017, p. 19).

4   Peter Burke has aptly described Vico as a 'Christian Aristotelian', noting that he studied the philosophy of the Scholastics such as the British Franciscan Duns Scotus as well as the metaphysics of the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suarez. See Peter Burke, *Vico* (Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 11).

5   See Paul Avis, *Foundations of Modern Historical Thought* (Routledge, 2016, pp. 149-150).

6   Howard N. Tuttle, 'The Epistemological Status of the Cultural World in Vico and Dilthey', pp. 241-250 in G. Tagliacozzo and D.P. Verene (eds.) *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 244).

self-exploration of a people, representative of the strivings of humanity as these appear in whatever form or historical epoch.[7] In creating the past and keeping it alive, commemoration is the shared vision of the people as they make sense of their life conditions as best they can. Commemoration flows from the human ability to externalize, to represent internal experiences to larger social circles. Vico noted that the premier form of externalization is the practice of burying the dead, which itself sets the stage for tradition, the solidarity of the religious congregation, transcendence, epiphany, and most importantly, culture. Burying the dead squares the circle, simultaneously creating closure and perpetuation: Closure for a single life lived, and perpetuation of the memory of that individual in the hearts and minds of those who knew the deceased. And further, stories can be told about this person, and these stories can be passed across the generations, thereby forming a bond of remembrance and observance that is visibly present in the gathering of persons and in the telling of tales orally or in writing. These acts evolve into collective practices known as rituals which are imbued with religious significance, thereby serving to bind together a congregation of like-minded believers who make sense of birth, death, and other important life transitions.[8]

Even as Vico argued that human knowledge of history and culture is more secure than that of the natural world, he was not making an invidious distinction between culture and history on the one hand, and science on the other. Even with his Catholic religious sensibilities (or perhaps because of them?), he developed a nuanced understanding of politics and other worldly pursuits in relation to the state of nature. He used the biblical story of the great flood to ascertain how politics would look if humans were in the state of nature and bereft of the social relations typical of human civilization. Vico believed that those who survived the flood—Noah's wayward sons and their descendants—would rapidly

7   Eelco Runia, 'Burying the Dead, Creating the Past', *History and Theory* 46, pp. 313-325 (2007).

8   See Chriss, *Confronting Gouldner*, pp. 18-22.

lose their humanizing imagination and decline into an animalism based upon the immediate needs of the moment, stuck as they were in the behaviorist hypothesis of stimulus-response. These isolated humans would lose both their civilization and their ability to use and adapt to nature. As Laura Ephraim has observed, Vico used this story of the flood to explain how men were 'rescued from solitude by the intervention of a singular act of nature: a great thunderstorm, the first after centuries of floodwater evaporation'.[9]

To overcome such adversity, human beings had to learn to work together to achieve desired results. Vico's naturalism is not really the modern secular version of naturalism, however, because lying behind that great flood was the wrath of God. It was only through family relations, devotional religious practice, and the execution of noble wars (when needed) that the Hebrews and their gentile neighbors maintained sociability and were able to form adequate restrains against the passions.[10] These theistic sensibilities lying behind and animating Vico's conceptual arsenal stood in tension with the development of secular humanistic reasoning stretching from Descartes and Hobbes into the Enlightenment.

The previous sentence is of course a simplification and overstatement of Vico's relation to humanistic and Enlightenment reasoning. Perhaps Jürgen Habermas has captured as well as anyone the hybridity of the Vichian formulation when he argued that it represents the topos of the Scholastic tradition which includes the knowing subject in the surrounding world which one either has a hand in creating (culture) or to which one must learn to adapt in order to survive and thrive.[11]

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9   Laura Ephraim, 'Beyond the Two Sciences Settlement: Giambattista Vico's Critique of the Nature-Politics Opposition', *Political Theory* 41 (5), pp. 710-737 (2013).

10   Indeed, in a letter he wrote to Filippo Maria Monti on November 18, 1724, Vico explained that he would draw the principles of his new science 'from within those of sacred history'. See John Robertson, 'Sacred History and Political Thought: Neapolitan Responses to the Problem of Sociability after Hobbes', *The Historical Journal* 56 (1), pp. 1-29 (2013).

11   Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, translated by J.J. Shapiro (Beacon Press, 1971, pp. 148-149).

Vico's hybridity is evident in the way he fused his new science with philosophical, religious, and commonsense insights into explaining the development and maintenance of human society. It is very likely that this hybridity attributed to Vico is rooted in Scholasticism itself, which simultaneously is a project of empiricism, dialectics, metaphysics, and theology. It could be argued that Vico's thought, located as it is in the latter stages of the development of the Scholastic tradition (per Habermas and others), represents a continuity between the late Middle Ages and modernity. As Hans-Georg Gadamer has argued, Vico's defense of humanism and common sense were derived from Jesuit pedagogy whereby elements already evident in the classics (of Scholasticism and even earlier antiquity) are the basis of wisdom and truth in current storytelling (this being the humanistic ideal of 'eloquentia').[12]

Vico argued that besides burying the dead, two other features or practices are necessary for the maintenance of society, namely, marriage and religion. Vico considered all three of these—burial of the dead, religion, and marriage—to be universal principles which all human societies must discover and properly implement (for example, through the development of customs and other institutionalized practices) in order to maintain themselves as going concerns.[13] In our discussion to this point I have elided the fact that Vico treated burial of the dead not as a religious ritual imbued with significance for members of a congregation, but as an act of sanitation which helps stem the spread of disease.

Even so, this admittedly 'commonsensical' or 'worldly' or 'pragmatic' insight about the health benefits of burying the dead was derived from the hero myth of Hercules from ancient Rome and Greece. The fi-

12 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second revised edition, translated by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall (Continuum Books., 2000, p. 19). For more on the relevance of Scholasticism for modern and even postmodern philosophy and theology, see Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012).

13 A good discussion of the three principles of Vico's new science can be found in Leon Pompa, 'Vico and the Presuppositions of Historical Knowledge', pp. 125-140 in G. Tagliacozzo and D.P. Verene (eds.) *Giambattista Vico's Science of Humanity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. 133-135).

nal book of Vico's *New Science* includes a discussion of the 'age of the heroes' among the ancient civilizations. There, Vico reiterates the three principles central to the development of human society, namely, 'belief in a provident divinity', 'solemn marriages', and 'burial of the dead', and illustrates the latter by way of select fables relating to the 'natural law of the heroic gentes'.[14] He begins by discussing the 'great labours' of Hercules which began in the epochs of Juno and Diana, on whose orders he was directed to kill the 'wild animals' in defense of 'the families' (which is the fable version of the defense of marriage). Hercules then descends into the underworld and drags Cerberus—the three-headed hellhound guarding the entrance to Hades—out from it, the need of which arose during the epoch of Apollo where and when presumably the practice of burying the dead began. The underworld was the sepulcher of the first poets, where the earth opened under the feet of Ulysses providing him a glimpse of heroes of the past. With Hercules driving the dogs from the sepulchers, the third principle of humanity was established. Here Vico makes a point of etymology, explaining that this leap into humanity or 'humanitas' was derived from *humare* which means 'to bury'. Hercules brought an end to the era when Orcus (a demon lord and master of the undead) and the dogs devoured human corpses, and afterward enlightened civilizations buried their dead as a religious practice whereby the burial plot is sacred and the souls of the dead are revered as an aspect of divinity.[15]

Mimesis

Vico notes that the earliest humans, endowed with aggression and a propensity towards violence by way of nature's method, were also possessed with a childlike curiosity and fear regarding the sensory world. Lacking the not-yet developed intellectual tools of the Enlightenment, early hu-

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14 This discussion is found on pages 262 and 263 of Leon Pompa's edited and translated volume on Vico's *New Science*. The *New Science* was written over a number of years beginning in 1725. See Giambattista Vico, *The First New Science*, edited and translated by L. Pompa (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

15 Vico, *The First New Science*, p. 264.

mans took a naturalistic aesthetic stance toward worldly things, record-ing their fascination and awe of the world in cave drawings, primitive musical performance (emphasizing rhythm and only later discovering melody and polyphonics), dance, and poetry. This struggle to explain the world through aesthetics was the ancient version of history and theory, and it is ironic that poetry and the arts had such a humble beginning (for today many view poetry, drama, and performance generally as high art). Folk art is the process of mimesis, namely, the use of symbols locally developed and sustained to create a communicative stance toward an experienced world. The focus of this earliest project of explanation or understanding is the 'beautiful' and to a lesser extent the 'good' (because it is all too easy to conflate the two) rather than an intellectual quest for the 'true'.[16] Richard Harvey Brown provides a history of how western science and reason, through its dispassionate quest to unlock the secrets of the world by way of the exacting methods of the physical sciences, slayed the earlier dragons of the aesthetic and experiential.[17]

The classical theory of art, which Vico was profoundly influenced by, is that art raises up reality into its truth which is not merely a representa-tion to be judged against competing representations. Art, then, is based on mimesis or imitation, originating in folk play and dance and associ-ated with the divine.[18] This use of primitive aesthetics was slowly and inexorably transformed with the movement into modern, rationalistic systems of thought which tended to view such folk insights and practices as a curiosity or perhaps even as an exotic abomination.[19] The epic tales and myths of antiquity, in all their rich detail, versions of which could be found in the folk art and stories of numerous primitive tribes being discovered by early explorers and anthropologists, were now viewed in-

16 See Victor Yelverton Haines, 'Aesthetic Order', *Journal of Value Inquiry* 28, pp. 193-215 (1994).

17 Richard Harvey Brown, *A Poetic for Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1977).

18 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 113.

19 For a detailed argument along these lines, see Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by R. Hullot-Kentor (Continuum Books, 2002).

vidiously as products of 'savage minds'.[20] Modernity discovered civilization is precarious and can descend into savagery whenever conditions are ripe, and much modern literature has been consumed with guarding against a return to the state of nature (e.g., early on *Robinson Crusoe*, and later *Lord of the Flies*).

Under the auspices of today's political correctness, it is no longer tolerable to refer to primitive or preliterate groups as 'savages' or 'rude people', hence modern (or postmodern) sensibilities might find the title of Bronislaw Malinowski's 1929 study shocking: *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*.[21] Similarly, Herbert Spencer noted the regressive tendencies of persons during the settling of the United States western frontier in the mid-nineteenth century, stating that:

> …we have the fact that men, partially adapted to the social state, retrograde on being placed in circumstances which call forth the old propensities. …The back settlers of America, amongst whom unavenged murders, rifle duels, and Lynch law prevail—or, better still, the trappers, who leading a savage life have descended to savage habits, to scalping, and occasionally even to cannibalism—sufficiently exemplify it.[22]

This discussion inexorably moves into philology, a diverse field of study which for our limited purposes is best exemplified in the work of Erich Auerbach. In its most basic form, philology is the study of texts and writing, especially with regard to the kinds of written expression that could be categorized under the broad term of 'art' or 'literature'.

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20   For more on the 'savage mind' problem, see Thomas D. Fallace, 'John Dewey and the Savage Mind: Uniting Anthropological, Psychological, and Pedagogical Thought, 1894-1902', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 44 (4), pp.335-349 (2008); and Tony C. Brown, *The Primitive, the Aesthetic, and the Savage: An Enlightenment Problematic* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

21   The full reference is Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (Routledge & Sons, 1929).

22   Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics* (Appleton and Co., 1872, p. 450). I cited this passage in a chapter I wrote on 'Policing in the Wild West' in my book *Beyond Community Policing* (Routledge, 2016).

In the development of his own 'earthly, counter philology', Auerbach was heavily influenced by Vico's new science because, at its core, it represented a philosophy of history which emphasized the progression or stages of development in humanity's quest to understand its place in the cosmos.[23]

Foundationalism

It is in his book *Mimesis* where Auerbach develops the basic contours of his philological project. Auerbach is, in effect, attempting to explain the development of foundationalism, which is the project of anchoring the authorial voice in a concrete or discernable source which is widely recognized by a readership audience as a plausible source for such grounding.[24] In his opening chapter, titled 'Odysseus' Scar', Auerbach argues that ancient writings, from the Homeric epics to Biblical times, attempted to convey a sense of authoritative proclamation through the careful attention to details of persons, places, and events depicted in stories. Why did Homer spend so much time and detail on Odysseus' return home, in the scene where the housekeeper Euryclea noticed a scar on Odysseus' thigh when he moved from shadow into light and back again? There are some seventy verses dedicated to this scene, which is a literary trope known as 'framing' which draws the reader's attention to something that on its surface seems trivial but which has ramifications for the continuing development of the story documenting the protagonist's experiences with the triumphs and travails of life. Since foundationalism had not yet been invented, the authorial voice must prove its mettle through a careful and systemic telling of a tale in all its finest details and accoutrements. The narrative speaks to the common folk and enters into their world through

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23 See James I. Porter, 'Erich Auerbach's Earthly (Counter-) Philology', *Digital Philology* 2 (2), pp. 243-265 (2013). The best single source of Auerbach's writings on Vico are contained in: Erich Auerbach, *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach*, edited by J.I. Porter, translated by J.O. Newman (Princeton University Press, 2014).

24 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1953).

a close and careful depiction of the everyday objects, persons, and character motivations operating there.

This earliest Homeric style of literature is then compared to a different style of writing apparent in the old and new testaments of the Bible. The dense and flowery poetic form of the Homeric epics gave way to a more turgid, matter of fact depiction of persons, places and events, such as the homogenous narrative in the King James version of the story of Genesis. The writer (the so-called Elohist) writes rather matter-of-factly: 'And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said to him, Abraham! And he said, Behold, here I am'.[25] No details are provided about the speakers, unlike in Homer where great attention to such details is provided. The writers of the Bible discovered a new literary form via the invocation of a definitive source for their observations and proclamations, namely the word of God. In Exodus 3:1-14 at Mt. Sinai, Moses came upon a burning bush and asked for a name behind the voice speaking to him, and God said 'I am that I am'. This is the certitude of the mathematical principle of identity 'If A then A' or the colloquial phrase 'It is what it is'.[26] It is the foundational discourse of identity, first visible within religious and liturgical writings, then secularized into scientific precepts with the emergence of science, rationalism, and the Enlightenment. Under the sway of religious authority, the foundation was the word of God as told by the prophets, while in science it is the consensual community of scientists following proper methods to discover and report on truths of the world within their particular fields of inquiry.

The battle over foundationalism played out throughout the course of development known as secularization, as religion was slowly and inexorably unseated as the public authoritative voice for all that is known about the world and beyond (significantly with regard to understandings of truth, beauty, and the good) and replaced by science and legal-bureaucratic reasoning. Over the course of this development, the idea of

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25 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 8.

26 See James J. Chriss, 'My Son the Poet', *Qualitative Inquiry* 23 (6), pp. 465-472 (2017).

instrumentalism got smuggled into the foundationalism discourse with sometimes surprising results.[27] This touches upon epistemology, or the nature of knowledge, and it lies behind the scientific project itself in terms of its ability to explain worldly objects which come to the attention of scientists. For our very limited purposes, there are four approaches to scientific explanation and verification, namely:

- Falsificationism – Popper's idea that scientific findings can never be positively verified but can only be temporarily verified—for the time being and until later critical tests can be analyzed—by way of rejecting the null hypothesis;

- Instrumentalism – which treats theory as a tool and only a tool for computation, thereby favoring pragmatism and antirealism while dispensing entirely with the project of realism and truth-seeking;

- Conventionalism – theory is true by convention if it can be shown that hypotheses generated from the theory are consistent with empirical reality; this appears to be the obverse of falsificationism;

- Operationalism – the concepts of a theory have no meaning unless they can be measured, that is, that nominal or plain-language concepts must be convertible into operational definitions which allow quantification and hence testing of key concepts.[28]

Within the context of our discussion of foundationalism and various approaches to securing the grounding for knowledge claims, Peter Man-

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27   The alleged triumph of science over superstition, myth, and religion has produced a massive and bewildering literature, but several recent publications in this area are worth noting. See Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (Viking, 2018); Anthony Gottlieb, *The Dream of Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Philosophy* (Liveright, 2017); James J. Chriss, 'Rescuing the Enlightenment Project: Habermas and the Postmodern Challenge', *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory* 2 (1), pp. 83-118 (2018).

28   This is derived from the discussion in J.O. Wisdom, 'Four Contemporary Interpretations of the Nature of Science', *Foundations of Physics* 1 (3), pp.269-284 (1971). I have purposely left out Wisdom's discussion of the notion of the 'truth-value' of induction which for him thereby sets it apart from the other four categories listed above. The reason for doing this cannot be gone into here, but it is very complex, a small part of which concerns Bacon, Vico, and

icas and Alan Rosenberg are consistent with Wisdom's understanding of instrumentalism as a scientific approach which sees theories '…entirely as conventional approaches for coping with and adapting to our environment'. Malinowski's theory of culture is an example of such an instrumentalist approach, as he begins with the biological requisites of individual and species survival and emphasizes the ways in which individuals evolve unique practices and customs (that is, culture) for manipulating and adapting to their environment.

For example, while visiting the Bemba and Chagga tribes of East Africa, Malinowski observed various tribespersons discovering which types of wood when rubbed together are most suitable for making fire. This, then, for Malinowski, is science; there are theoretical and scientific elements embedded in any human activity which attempts to facilitate species survival. Jack Goody argues as well for Malinowski's instrumentalist position, suggesting that there is substantively no difference between modern science's over project to control nature and the mystical attitudes toward this same activity which characterizes preliterate societies.[29] Of course, Manicas and Rosenberg go on to suggest that David Bloor, for example, would go beyond envisioning science in strictly instrumentalist terms, for he would suggest further a relativizing agent. This is the 'materialist function' of truth-talk, suggesting a dimension, namely power, which lies beyond purely instrumentalist formulations pertaining to how cultures attempt to construct theories which purportedly relate to and are representative of reality.[30]

The instrumentalist perspective on foundationalism in science is con-

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to what extent the move from deduction to induction imperils or rescues the humanistic project. It has to do with Bacon's own attention to classical fables and myths. See Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science*, translated by S. Rabinovitch (University of Chicago Press, 1968).

29 This instrumentalist attitude toward knowledge goes back a very long way in the history of philosophy. For example, Roman philosopher and army commander Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) consistently argued that there is no real difference between science and story-telling. See Anthony Gottlieb, *The Dream of Reason* (Norton, 2002, p. 364).

30 See David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (Routledge & Kegan Paul,

sistent, perhaps unwittingly, with notions of mimesis, and leads to the observation that prescientific ways of knowing and telling discovered by the likes of Vico and Auerbach are the original grounding for what later would become science. For example, according to Carl Schmitt's concept of 'political theology', the political is a recapitulation of the religious, as for example, in the development of government first in the form of a powerful sovereign (the king) and later in the form of a constitutional republic where the state oversees the activities of ratified political subjects. Here, via secularization the authoritative word of God is replaced by kings and state constitutions, but the original foundational discourse first developed in antiquity is carried forward into modernity under different guise.[31] And presumably under communism, where the state would 'wither away and die', the people themselves would become the new ruling and sacred subject. Indeed, in modernity wherever capitalism or its later variant neoliberalism are still viable, the individual or 'self' rises to prominence as a new sacred object.[32]

Schmitt goes on further to note that the dualisms which mark modern thought—the most significant for Schmitt being that at its essence the political is friends vs. enemies—have their origins in the Christian belief of Christ as a 'god-man'. All later forms of ruling and ruled, of superior and subordinate, of individual and group, possess this dualistic essence. Vico's philosophy of history is simply a bearer of this dualism or hybridity as discussed previously. Apropos to this, Schmitt notes that 'In actuality,

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1976); Jack Goody, 'Literacy, Criticism, and the Growth of Knowledge', pp. 226-243 in J. Ben-David and T.N. Clarke (eds.) *Culture and Its Creators: Essays in Honor of Edward Shils* (University of Chicago Press, 1977, pp. 227-228); Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1960); Peter Manicas and Alan Rosenberg, 'Naturalism, Epistemological Individualism and the "Strong Programme" in the Sociology of Knowledge', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 15, pp. 76-101 (1985), p. 85.

31 See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by G. Schwab (MIT Press, 1985).

32 See Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology* (Seabury Press, 1976); James J. Chriss, 'Durkheim's Cult of the Individual as Civil Religion: Its Appropriation by Erving Goffman', *Sociological Spectrum* 13, pp. 251-275 (1993).

Vico did not produce a myth. But by conceiving the history of people to be a history of myths, by overcoming the historical blindness of Cartesian scientific principles, he advanced a new historical understanding'.[33]

Enter Tarde

Among sociologists, clearly the one closest to the spirit of inquiry known as mimesis is the French classical sociologist Gabriel Tarde. Tarde's theory of imitation was largely derived from Leibniz's monadology, which was a philosophy of life which rejects the Cartesian dualism of mind/body while recommending that at each level of reality elemental units (monads) exert influence on other units up and down the continuum of lived experience. This lends itself to the later concept of cybernetics, developed most prominently by Norbert Wiener, which finds continuity across nature and society with regard to communication and control.[34] Specifically, the cybernetic dictum argues that things high in information control things high in energy. Examples of cybernetic systems are a rider (high in information) steering the massive power of the horse (high in energy), the helmsman guiding a ship at sea, or the thermostat controlling the temperature of a room.[35]

Wiener argued that communication is analogous to transportation, in that something is moving from one end of a line to the other, either materially (standard material transport) or symbolically or ideationally (information transport). Before the rationalistic splitting of the world into mind and body, religious and mythic traditions had explained human individuality and its connection to the collectivity via the notion of the

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33 See Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, translated by G. Schwab and E. Hilfstein (University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 84). For the formulation of the political as friends vs. enemies, see Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, translated by G. Schwab (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

34 In this part of the discussion I have been helped immensely by reading P.R. Masani, 'The Scientific Methodology in the Light of Cybernetics', *Kybernetes* 23 (4), pp. 5-132 (1994).

35 Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950).

soul. The act of conception gives rise to the soul, which in Christian belief is the central focus of the fate of mankind under the divine providence of an omniscient God, to the extent that some souls will achieve grace while others will be condemned to the flames of hell. Other religious systems such as Buddhism also believe in the eternal nature of the soul even as the vital source may occupy other bodies or life forms by way of reincarnation.

Wiener discusses this with an eye toward connected Leibniz's theory of the continuity of the soul to his new cybernetics, stating that 'Leibniz conceived the soul as belonging to a larger class of permanent spiritual substances which he called *monads*'.[36] These indestructible monads, according to Leibniz, are in contact with one another and interact in ways that are unknown or uncertain. In Leibniz's time the microscope was just being employed and led to biological speculations about a previously unobserved world. It is this fusion of high science with mysticism and religious doctrines, concerning the effect of an unseen God on the world, which framed Tarde's work.

Besides being a lawyer and criminologist, Tarde was also an innovator of statistical analysis. He was already aware that a mass of points—such as that embodied in regression analysis within inferential statistics—may take on a discernable shape which could provide explanations or suppositions about the meaning of that shape for particular areas of study (whether science, politics, law, or economic analysis). It is likely that the arrangement of these atoms, or monads, or units are in communication with each other and are doing some kind of work for the broader system whether physical or social.[37] Tarde's social monads are not simply persons, but the entire relational level of existence in terms of describing how units of interest (nodes) are related (or tied) to others within social networks.

36　Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, p. 106.

37　This point is discussed in Bruno Latour, 'Tarde's Idea of Quantification', pp. 145-162 in M. Candea (ed.) *The Social after Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments* (Routledge, 2010).

For Tarde, the supremely social activity which makes society what it is, is imitation.[38] This focus was part of a discovery claimed by Tarde, influenced most directly by Leibniz and Herbert Spencer, of a universal repetition evident at three levels of reality, namely, the physical, the organic, and the superorganic. The repetition principle in the physical world is vibration, such as vibrations of light, sound, electricity, and so forth which propagate waves of their effects onto receiving objects, piling up resemblances in their wake. (Think of the ripple of waves emanating from a stone tossed into the water.)[39] With regard to the organic world, all resemblances of vital origin result from heredity, specifically, from hereditary transmission. After fertilization, cells divide and multiply in rapid succession, as offspring carry many of the traits and characteristics of their parents' bloodlines. This is the idea that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' writ large. Finally, social resemblances are propagated across society by way of imitation.[40]

Imitation may occur by happenstance, such as a horse breaking from the herd causing a stampede. It can also occur through more cognitive, thoughtful, or planned ways, such as in the realm of inventions and innovations which are expected to improve society through their widespread adoption. The positive effects of helpful inventions and the destructive effects of mob violence or other crowd phenomena are both instantiated through imitation, which for Tarde represents the lifeblood of society.

In their battle for supremacy in French sociology at the end of the nineteenth century, Emile Durkheim's social facts orientation won out over Tarde's imitation largely because of concerns over the irrational or

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38 See Gabriel Tarde, *Laws of Imitation*, translated by E.C. Parsons (Henry Holt and Co., 1903).

39 Recent innovations in cosmological physics regarding string theory and the effect of vibration of these strings on physical reality may provide some level of vindication for Tarde's universal repetition principle. See C. Barrabès, 'Thermodynamics of a System of Cosmic Strings: Equilibrium States', *Il Nuovo Cimento B Series 11* 101B (1), pp. 103-117 (1988).

40 This is summarized at greater length in my *Confronting Gouldner*, pp. 175-180.

noncognitive effects imitation can produce in society. At about the same time that Tarde was launching his project, Gustave Le Bon's work on crowd psychology gained prominence.[41] This harkened back to modern fears over the precariousness of civilization and the retreat into barbarism and savagery as discussed previously. Indeed, it is well known that constructive activities are much harder to accomplish and sustain than destructive ones, a point understood all too well by terrorists and others engaging in scorched earth strategies. For example, a house which takes three months to build can be torn down in several hours. An antique vase which has been enjoyed and kept in safe hands for centuries could be destroyed by a careless drop to the floor. And fast food is widely condemned as both aesthetically unpleasing and unhealthy due to its higher salt and fat content in comparison to traditionally-prepared dishes. Indeed, Lester Ward once suggested that a rough measure of civilization is how quickly people eat their food; the quicker, the lower the development.[42]

With the advent of the Internet and the proliferation of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, tremendous numbers of persons connected across worldwide social networks can receive information instantly upon posting. A recent study of the ways information travels on Twitter discovered that fake news travels six times faster than real news. Although truth may be stranger than fiction, apparently fiction is faster than truth. This finding comports with the largely negative effects of fast capitalism and the general acceleration of life (dromology) leading to a deterioration in both the quality and duration of face-to-face engagements.[43] The triumph of civilization was the replacing of the old 'pain economy', typified by social circumstances in which wants went unsatisfied and toil and despair were accepted as grudging

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41   Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Unwin, 1896).

42   See Lester F. Ward, *Psychic Factors of Civilization* (Ginn and Co., 1893).

43   For a summary of the Twitter study, see https://www.newscientist.com/article/2163226-fake-news-travels-six-times-faster-than-the-truth-on-twitter/. For critical analyses of fast capitalism and the increasing pace of life, see Ben Agger, *Fast Capitalism: A Critical Theory of Significance* (University of Illinois

realities of life, with an elevated 'pleasure economy' in which wants were largely satisfied and pain was systematically subdued.[44] This achievement, according to critics, is in jeopardy due not only due to declining civic engagement and the rapaciousness of market economies, but also to widespread environmental degradation in the era of the Anthropocene.[45]

Consistent with Vico, Tarde argued that life imitates art more so than the other way around. Tarde stated that social achievement '…always opens with some great book or epic or poetical work of very remarkable relative perfection. The Iliad, the Bible, Dante, etc. are the high sources from which all the fine arts are fated to flow'.[46] Further, imitation progresses from within to without. Stated differently, the imitation of ideas precedes the imitation of their expression, but also the imitation of ends precedes imitation of means. To clarify, ends or ideas are the inner, while means or expressions are the outer. This also means that aesthetic sentiments form and spread long before the talents which are developed to satisfy them. Imitation also tends to travel in the direction from social superiors to social inferiors, meaning that the lower classes tend to imitate and emulate symbols of higher class standing. In a passage worth quoting at length, Tarde made the following pregnant observations:

> Just as the royal courts created, under the form of flattery and of narrow and one-sided courtesy, the habit of reciprocal and general amiability and politeness, and just as the example of the command of one chief or of the privileges of a chosen few had only to spread to give birth to law, the command of each to all and of all to each, so we find in the beginning of every literature some sacred book, the Book of all others, the book

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Press, 1989), and Paul Virilio, *The Great Accelerator*, translated by J. Rose (Polity Press, 2012).

44 See Simon N. Patten, *The Theory of Social Forces* (American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1896).

45 See Timothy W. Luke, 'On the Politics of the Anthropocene', *Telos* 172, pp. 139-162 (2015).

46 Tarde, *Laws of Imitation*, p. 207.

of which later secular books are merely sanctuary-stolen reflections, in the beginning of all writing some historic writing, in the beginning of all music some religious dirge or lyric, at the beginning of all sculpture some idol, at the beginning of all painting some tomb or temple fresco or some [monastic] illumination of the sacred book.[47]

From Within to Without: The Concept of Theo-Drama

We now arrive at the place that is most precarious, at least from the perspective of this author who has spent a career in the conventional social sciences and who only rarely ventures into the world of philosophy, philology, and liturgical studies. My reflections on Vico and the cast of others discussed here is a preparation to tackle the idea that the actual workings of religion in the real world can be fruitfully analyzed as a play or performance. From the perspective of sociology, we already have been exposed to this idea in the work of Erving Goffman, whose dramaturgical theory of social action views persons as playing parts before a group of others, all for purposes of managing impressions of the type of person he or she is.[48] The payoff of such presentations of self is the (hopeful) maintenance of the definition of the situation whereby the actor on the front stage comes across as a well-demeaned individual as needed within social gatherings. Since much of this action is carried out via face-to-face interaction, actors must be adept at usage of symbolic and physical props, including their own affective endowment (or face) through the display of appropriate gestures and language.

But now, given this basic grounding in Goffmanian dramaturgy, which describes mundane face-to-face interaction through the lens of theatrical performance, how is one to make sense of the strange and enigmatic work of Swiss theologian and Catholic priest Hans Urs von Balthasar, who

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47   Tarde, *Laws of Imitation*, p. 223.

48   Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Anchor Doubleday, 1959).

published a sprawling five-volume work in the 1980s titled *Theo-Drama*?[49] This work is so massive, so sprawling, that when Balthasar came upon Goffman's work in volume one, he dutifully made note of it but flicked it off as if it were a pesky gnat. What is amazing to realize is that the grandeur and scope of Balthasar's application of the dramaturgical metaphor to religious practices and sentiments, as played out in the real world by real flesh-and-blood human beings, completely swamps the small little slice of reality carved out by Goffman and his followers.

One question that arises within the Goffman scheme as applied to face-to-face interaction in the everyday lifeworld is: Who writes the script? In the Goffman scheme, actors are seen more or less as improvisational actors who can 'wing it' as the needs of the social gathering dictate. This provides flexibility to actors, and this endowment of agency guards against the domination of structural requirements of the broader system in which persons are merely programmed to dutifully fulfill their roles within that system. A structural answer to the question: Who writes the script?, would be that culture writes it, carried along systematically through socialization and the various agents who are tasked with providing guidelines for conduct. This provides a glimpse into one of the enduring battles raging in sociology, namely structure vs. agency. Those championing agency over structure would, for example, agree with Harold Garfinkel's depiction of actors within Talcott Parsons' structural-functional framework as being 'cultural dopes' where people are basically wind-up automatons let loose in the world only after a thoroughgoing socialization which would verify that the need-dispositions of the personality align with the 'needs' of the system.[50]

Edmund Buckley has suggested that there are five cultural elements which constitute human civilization. These are:

- Industry (e.g., agriculture, commerce, writing)

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49 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume I, translated by G. Harrison (Ignatius Press, 1988).

50 See Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Prentice-Hall, 1967), and Talcott Parsons, 'An Outline of the Social System', pp. 30-79 in T. Parsons, E. Shils, K. Naegele, and J. Pitts (eds.) *Theories of Society* (Free Press, 1961).

- Knowledge (whether lay or scientific)
- Art (including architecture, music, painting, literature, and the performance arts)
- Conduct (morality and law)
- Religion

Buckley goes on to note that 'Religion is as proper to man as any other cultural [element], springing from his normal impulses of hope and fear in presence of the world about him, and is by no means a foreign, unhuman something imported to him from without. Intimate acquaintance with the prophet and his times shows that his message and conduct are entirely explicable as human function'.[51]

Religion has taken upon itself to vouchsafe all the critical life activities and transitions experienced by human beings, including birth, death, marriage, puberty, food quests, and so on. The most crucial aspect of religion are the teachings concerning how true believers can maintain good relations with their deity (or deities in the case of polytheism, which is on the decline) who because they offer so much—salvation or eternal life—must be simultaneously feared and revered. The mandate of proper conduct before the divine oversees the very large sphere of human experience which is conduct and morality (and sometimes fused with law and government in the special case of theocracy), the implications of which reach out to the cosmos and beyond. It speaks first and foremost to the existential dilemma, and connects persons to doctrines which provide plausible answers about the meaning of death and assurances of an afterlife.[52] In this way, persons can set aside as an article of faith the imponderable questions about the meaning of life and their place in the cosmos, and can carry on with the business of living, sharing these understandings and insights with like-minded others in the solidarity of the congregation.

51 Edmund Buckley, 'A Sketch of the Science of Religion', *The Biblical World* 23 (4), pp. 256-262 (1904), p. 262.

52 Kevin Vanhoozer extends Balthasar's work by examining the drama of doctrine per se, focusing on the Gospel as Theo-drama. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

Because of this, the scale upon which religion exerts its influence is vast and incalculable. Even within the context of the alleged waning of religious affect under secularization, its effects are still massive and consequential. It would make sense, then, given what we know about the arts and how they are connected to human strivings, that religion itself would be the template upon which much of human civilization's self-understanding would evolve.[53] This reflection is important to the understanding of why Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* project is set on such a grandiose scale.

Within the divine drama, how does Balthasar answer the question, Who writes the script? We would expect his answer to be something like this: On a smaller scale, such as within the realm of face-to-face interaction, perhaps people as improvisational actors write their scripts as they go along, or at a higher analytical level (where the concept of structure dominates), perhaps it is culture. Within the massive expanse of the divine drama, perhaps it is God who writes the script? Vico said as much with regard to human history being the result of divine providence. But Balthasar does not provide such a direct answer to the question. He does, however, note that religion gave us the concept of the 'world stage', returning to the early Stoics and the later Scholastics and following the concept of mimesis within philology. The Ancient Greek concept of the pantheon spoke of multiple gods who were spectators of the earthly drama unfolding before them. They took active part in the affairs of men as it suited them, and much of the ancient heroic literature covered by Vico, Herder and others gets into the details of these storylines. What was delivered to man by way of the mimesis of the first degree was ethics, the rules and regulations handed down from on high which directs humans to do that which is good.

Here Balthasar cites Epictetus, an ancient Greek Stoic philosopher who argued that true liturgy and philosophy encompass a total way of life

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53 Ulrich Beck, the great sociologist of the global risk society, shortly before his passing left us with a gift of his reflections on the divine. It is a monumental achievement in sociology and theology. See Ulrich Beck, *A God of One's Own*, translated by R. Livingstone (Polity Press, 2010).

and are not simply clever words thrown together on a page. The quote of Epictetus is as follows:

> Regard yourself as an actor in a play. The poet gives you your part and you must play it, whether it is short or long. If he wants you to play a beggar, act the part skillfully. Do the same if you are to play a cripple, a ruler or a private person. Your task is only to play well the part you have been given; the choosing of it belongs to someone else.[54]

It would take several hundred more pages to explain who this 'someone else' is. It is found in Balthasar's discussion of the three elements of dramatic creativity, which are author, actor, and director. For Balthasar, the poet essentially is God the Father who uses his understanding of the divine mandate to guide his actors through their paces in the enactment of scenes, all of which redound to the glory of the one true God (symbolizing as well the triumph of monotheism over polytheism).[55] Here Balthasar cites the German poet and playwright Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, who wrote about the poet:

> As the Divinity stands behind the edifice of the world, so he stands behind his work; *he* is the work, and the work is *he*; if we even so much as enquire about the artist, we show that we are not worthy of the work and do not measure up to it, or else are already tired of it.[56]

In some respects, poets are like the ancient prophets in that God speaks *through* them in the creative moment of bringing persons, places, and events to life on the stage.[57] Within this religious sensibility or conviction, creativity is a gift bestowed by God, and the poets are the stewards of the Word. Indeed, according to Kierkegaard, God is like a

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54   Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, pp. 140-141.

55   See Rodney Stark, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

56   Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, pp. 273-274.

57   Michael Horton extends this insight and speaks of a covenantal hermeneutic

poet and the way he speaks through artists in the world is an extension of the Christian *mysterium* which never glimpses God directly but must be ascertained through indirect means.[58] Even if we agree with Descartes that we are knowing subjects operating in a knowable universe, God is not a proper object of that knowledge.[59] Again, true connection with the divinity is always an article of faith, and worship is the externalization of that understanding.

Conclusion

As opposed to science's quest to attain truth and certainty through systematic, careful observation, the operationalization of concepts, and the use of blind peer review to guard against noncognitive elements (such as bias) entering into its explanations, the arts, through elegant and evocative forms of writing or performance, seek to enlarge the sense of wonder, excitement, and affectual pathways to understanding without reliance on rationalism. Art seeks to capture understandings about the world that often are not quantifiable. Additionally, whereas science moves more and more toward specialization in narrower and narrower areas of study, art (and especially religion) are preoccupied with the entirety of life and the cosmos beyond. And whereas science operates on the basis of a 'culture of critical discourse' and an 'organized skepticism' about the claims contained in research findings, art and religion seek to guide persons toward belief in the good, the beautiful, or the true in areas that are rife with ambiguities and complexity.[60] As Donald Crosby

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entered into by creative artists who understand they are speaking to deep existential dilemmas geared toward the elimination of human suffering. Hence, these religious poets and dramatists are not akin merely to court reporters; they summon others to hear God's word and act upon it. The end result is proselytization and mission, results favored by Balthasar as well. See Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

58 Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, p. 277.

59 See David S. Cunningham, 'Orators, Actors, and Saints: Divine Revelation as Rhetoric and Drama', *Anglican Theological Review* 85 (2), pp. 341-360 (2003).

60 This triad of the beautiful, true, and good has been a central feature of west-

has described it, 'The sustaining power of a religious tradition resides not simply in its overt pronouncements and proofs but in attunements to pervasive mystery and its symbolic evocations of intuitions of continuity, cohesion, conviction, and hope in the presence of that mystery'.[61]

Durkheim has argued along lines similar to this. In his broad discussion of sociology and philosophy, Durkheim sought to go beyond Kant's categorical imperatives concerning the nature of morality by bringing to bear newer insights into the human condition that the social sciences had been developing since Kant's time.[62] The lynchpin of Durkheim's analysis was his insistence that social (or collective) reality is fundamentally different than individual reality. Indeed, Durkheim's point of departure from Tarde, the latter of whom never felt the need to make such a sharp distinction between the individual and the collectivity, is that when persons enter into relations with fellow human beings they come to the profound realization that the social world is quite distinct from their own private existence.

We talked earlier about the power of the collectivity to do ill or good (while also noting that the bad is much easier to achieve than the good) because of the sheer numbers it possesses as persons bonded to others in shared pursuits are able to exert effects on the world on a much wider and consequential scale than could be achieved by individuals acting alone. Durkheim goes on to suggest that these social forces are not easily controlled and cannot be expected to achieve narrow, preconceived

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ern philosophy since the time of Plato, but was first treated systematically within European social thought in the work of Victor Cousin. See Victor Cousin, *Lectures on the True, the Beautiful and the Good*, edited and translated by O.W. Wright (Appleton and Co., 1853). For a recent treatment of the topic, see John Levi Martin, 'The Birth of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful: Toward an Investigation of the Structures of Social Thought', *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 35, pp. 3-56 (2017).

61   Donald A Crosby, *The Specter of the Absurd: Sources and Criticisms of Modern Nihilism* (State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 227).

62   Emile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, translated by D.F. Pocock (Cohen & West, 1965). See also Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, translated by J.W. Swain (Free Press, 1954).

ends. Indeed, the social forces embodied in shared activities and group sentiment '…need to overflow for the sake of overflowing, as in play without specific objective, at one time in the form of stupid destructive violence or, at another, of heroic folly'.[63]

Durkheim continues this thought concerning the power of the social by suggesting that such moments of 'collective ferment' give rise to the great and enduring ideas of civilization. He argues that the times when persons are thrown into close contact with one another, which marks a reality fundamentally and qualitatively different from that of the lone individual, are potentially epoch-making in their scope and duration. The epochs emerging from the collective ferment of the exchange of ideas (an Enlightenment conceit to be sure, and quite Kantian at heart) specifically mentioned by Durkheim here are Christendom, Scholasticism, the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the later socialist upheavals of the nineteenth century. The intensity of the group sentiment takes individuals beyond egoism and impresses upon them the notion that '… the time is close when the ideal will in fact be realized and the Kingdom of God established on earth'.[64] Even so, individual enthusiasm during these times of social movement and upheaval cannot be sustained for long, hence there is a need to scrabble together symbolic representations of the struggle or word to act as a focal point for revivification when the inevitable flagging of energy commences. This idea of Durkheim's, that ritual focuses attention and energy on matters of pressing importance to a group of true believers, illustrates how various collective endeavors (of the religious, economic, political, or otherwise) sustain the energies needed to guard against both entropy and the eroding effect of nonbelief.[65] Religious efforts along these lines require even more dedication

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63   Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, p. 91.

64   Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, p. 92.

65   Randall Collins fused Durkheim's theory of religion and ritual with Goffman's dramaturgical theory. This new concept, interaction ritual chains, could be said to be the glue holding together the divine drama and other large-scale endeavors. See Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

and focus of true believers for the additional work of maintaining the boundaries between the sacred and the profane.[66]

Those of us who have spent years committed to the belief that a scientific sociology is attainable, and that human society is better off for it, are neither worried nor disappointed that the advancements we have made toward expanding human happiness or contributing to the common weal have generally fallen short of aspirations. We also understand that the development of technical instruments for data gathering and increasingly sophisticated computer and inferential statistics programs—all part of the apparatus of rationality within big science—provide glimpses into a social world that is largely resistant to this type of encroachment. Hence, alongside the standard work of furthering the cause of scientific sociology or criminology, some of us enterprising souls take the effort to examine the state of the art in other fields of study. Since the literature in any field is vast and growing, there are limits to how sophisticated such ventures actually are or could be.

Yet, there is nothing to fear in striking out in this manner. For those so inclined, Vico is a beacon drawing us to test our intellectual mettle against his and others' writings stretching back to the ancient Greeks. And there is also an opportunity to study how concepts, theories, and ideas familiar to us in our home discipline (here, the dramaturgical theory of Goffman) have appeared elsewhere in same or similar form. This itself is a process of mimesis, and the study has real-world benefits for seeing and experiencing how connections could be forged between otherwise disparate (some might say incommensurable) fields of study. In my own case, if the line of research and inquiry initiated here continues, this would be where the next round begins.

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66 See Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, and Robert Hertz, *Death & the Right Hand*, translated by R. Needham and C. Needham (Free Press, 1960).

Mass Hypnoses: The Rise of the Far Right from an Adornian and Freudian Perspective

Claudia Leeb[1]

Abstract: In this article I combine the insights of early Frankfurt school critical theory, in particular those of Theodor W. Adorno, with the insights of psychoanalytic theory, in particular those of Sigmund Freud, to show how economic factors interact with psychological factors to grasp the rise of the far right, as the current literature only focuses on one or the other and thus can't explain their important connections. It shows that the bond between the leader and her followers is the result of the psychoanalytic mechanism of introjection, and not identification as the current literature on the far right suggests. It furthermore explains that introjection generates conditions that are akin to hypnoses, which allows far right leaders to manipulate the masses, and which explains why millions of people responded to the failures of neo-liberal capitalism by voting in leaders that further undermine their existence. To further detail the theoretical framework I analyze a Trump rally and an interview with a Trump follower.

1. Introduction

As a rebellion against civilization, fascism is not simply the recurrence of the archaic but its reproduction in and by civilization itself.[2]

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1   Claudia Leeb is an Assistant Professor in political theory at Washington State University. She is the author of *The Politics of Repressed Guilt: The Tragedy of Austrian Silence* (2018, Edinburgh University Press), *Power and Feminist Agency in Capitalism: Toward a New Theory of the Political Subject* (2017, Oxford University Press), *Working-Class Women in Elite Academia: A Philosophical Inquiry* (2004, Peter Lang Publisher), and *Die Zerstörung des Mythos von der Friedfertigen Frau* (1998, Peter Lang Publisher). She has articles published in Political Theory, Theory & Event, Perspectives on Politics, Constellations, Social Philosophy Today, The Good Society, Philosophy & Social Criticism, and Radical Philosophy Review. She has also contributed several book chapters to anthologies on early Frankfurt school critical theory.

2   Adorno, T. W. (2002). Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda. In *The Culture Industry*, ed. Jay Bernstein (London/New York: Routledge), pp. 132–157, p. 137.

Recent political theory and political science literature on the rise of the far right in Europe and the United States largely dismisses or ignores Marxist economic analysis and social-psychological explanations in their theoretical frameworks.[3] Those few scholars who attempt to incorporate socio-psychological explanations do so often without any in-depth engagement with psychoanalytic theory, and often without connecting it to an economic analysis;[4] and those few scholars who provide an economic analysis fail to elaborate such analysis in the context of socio-psychological mechanisms.[5]

In this article I combine the insights of early Frankfurt school critical theory, in particular those of Theodor W. Adorno, with the insights of psychoanalytic theory, in particular those of Sigmund Freud, to show how economic factors interact with psychological factors, as the current literature only focus on one or the other and thus can't explain the connections that are important to grasp the rise of the far right. In particular I explain the centrality of the psychoanalytic mechanism of introjection to explain the bond between the leader and her followers, and how this mechanism is connected to mass hypnoses, to understand why millions of people respond to the failure of neo-liberal capitalism by voting in leaders that further undermine their existence.[6] To further exemplify my

3   See Müller, Jan-Werner. (2016). *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press); and Wodak, Ruth. (2016). *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC: Sage).

4   See Moffitt, Benjamin. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press); and Mudde, Cas and Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. (New York: Oxford University Press).

5   See Judis, John B. (2016). *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*. (New York: Columbia Global Reports).

6   Here it is important to note that my elaboration of the applicability of Adorno's discussion of Freud on the techniques fascist agitators use to hypnotize the masses, does not mean that I aim to conflate fascism with right wing populism that plagues the world today. Rather, as John Abromeit rightly suggests fascism is an extreme form of right-wing populism. Insofar as there is an uncanny connection between the techniques used by fascist leader and

theoretical elaborations I draw on Arlie Russell Hochschild's sociological description of a Trump rally in one of her chapters of S*trangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, and analyze an interview with a Trump supporter.

The paper consists of five sections including the introduction and the conclusion. In the second section, "Mass Hypnoses", I outline the mechanisms of ego ideal replacement and introjection and the ways they are connected to hypnoses. In the third section, "The Return of the Archaic", I provide an analysis of a Trump rally, to elaborate on the hypnotic tools used by far right leaders as a means to get the masses to conform to their will. In the fourth section "The Release from Restrictions," I further analyze the Trump rally and an interview with a Trump follower to explain the ways in which narcissistic love is connected to mass hypnoses.

2. Mass Hypnoses

> Those who become submerged in masses are not primitive [wo/]men but display primitive attitudes contradictory to their normal rational behavior.[7]

The current political science literature that aims to employ a socio-psychological framework to explain the rise of the far right, suggests that the bond between the leader and her followers is the result of the followers identifying with the leader.[8] Also those thinkers who aim at a more elaborated socio-psychological framework derived from psychoanalytic theory, such as Samir Gandesha, argue that identification is at the ba-

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those right wing leaders use to turn individuals into crowds bent on violent action, it is necessary to make those obvious to avoid the sliding of right wing populism into fascism. See Abromeit, John. (2018). Right-Wing Populism and the Limits of Normative Critical Theory. *Logos* 17 (1) http://logosjournal.com/2017/right-wing-populism-and-the-limits-of-normative-critical-theory/

7   Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 136.

8   See Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*; and Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*.

sis of Trumpism.[9] Even early Frankfurt school critical theorists, such as Adorno as well as Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich, who draw on Freud's core text *Group Psychology and the Ego* to explain the rise of fascism in Europe and proto-fascist elements in the United States, suggest that the bond between the leader and her followers is based on identification.[10]

However, if we take a closer look at Freud's *Group Psychology and the Ego* it becomes clear that it is *not* identification, but rather introjection that establishes the bond between the leader and her followers. In psychoanalysis, when a person identifies with another person, she molds her own ego ideal after the object she has taken as her role model.[11] As a result the person has enriched her ego with the properties of the model. In contrast, when one introjects another person, a person's ego is not enriched as in identification. Rather, as Freud points out, the "ego is impoverished, it has surrendered itself to the object, it has substituted the object for its own most important constituent", which is the *ego ideal*.[12]

For Freud, the ego ideal is the most important constituent, because it monitors the narcissistic ego to keep it in line with the ideal, via the function of moral conscience, which is why the ego ideal is often in conflict with the ego. Originally our ego is purely narcissistic and believes itself to be fully self-sufficient. However, when the ego has to contend with demands of the environment, which it cannot always meet, it splits part

9   See Gandesha, Samir. (2018). ""Identifying with the aggressor": From the authoritarian to neoliberal personality". *Constellations*, 25 (1):147-164.

10   To be fair to Adorno, he points out in *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, which is based on Freud's text, that it's impossible to discuss the very subtle theoretical differentiation in Freud's psychoanalysis, particularly between identification and introjection, and that he contents himself with a few observations on the relevancy of the doctrine of identification to fascist propaganda. Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 139. See also Mitscherlich, Alexander and Mitscherlich, Margarete. (1975). *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*. Trans. B. R. Placzek, (New York: Grove Press), pp. 22-23.

11   Freud, Sigmund. (1989). *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Trans. James Strachey. (London/New York: W.W. Norton & Company), p. 48.

12   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 57.

of itself off—the ego ideal, which represents the ideal view we have of ourselves, or what we aspire to be like. Being unable to live up to ego ideal generates feelings of failure and frustration in people, which they can get rid of by replacing their ego ideal with that of the leader, which happens via introjection.

Adorno in his *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda* rightly points out that Freud's concept of ego ideal replacement "clearly foresaw the rise and nature of fascist mass movements in purely psychological categories".[13] However, what Freud did not foresee is that psychological mechanisms interact with economic factors in the rise of the far right today. Today, in neo-liberal capitalist societies, people are confronted with the ideology of "economic success". In such societies what Freud calls "the demand of the environment" is to do well economically despite the fact that meeting such demand has become for most people much more difficult if not impossible, especially since the world economic crisis in 2008 – though even before that.

A scenario where people frequently cannot live up to their ego ideal—the internalized standards of liberal capitalist society, that is economic success, which is moreover rendered as a "personal failure" by the neo-liberal capitalist ideology that covers over classed, raced and gendered structural barriers to economic success—generates narcissistically wounded egos, which far right leaders exploited for their own political gains. By replacing their ego with that of their chosen leader, by a process of introjection, the millions of people who have been left behind by the neo-liberal capitalist economy could get rid of feelings of failure and frustrations that marred the picture of their own ego.

People who vote for far right leaders do *not* identify with them, or take them as their role model, as the literature on the far right suggests. Rather, they have introjected the leader into themselves, which means that they have replaced their ego ideal with the leader, which allowed them to feel satisfied with themselves again. As Freud points out, a psychological mass consists of "a number of individuals who have put one

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13   Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 134.

and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego".[14] The bond between the leader and the followers is the result of ego ideal replacement, and the bond between the followers is the result of identification with each other, which occurs via the introjected leader.

The difference between introjection and identification is an important one, because the result of introjection is a mass of far right followers with impoverished egos, who have uncritically *surrendered* their ego to the leader. This surrender becomes more understandable when considering Freud's characterization of the bond between the leader and her followers as a *libidinal* bond where the sexual impulse is inhibited. For Freud it is "precisely those sexual impulses that are inhibited in their aims which achieve such lasting ties between people".[15] In his application of the primacy of a libidinal bond between the fascist masses and their leader, Adorno states that "it is one of the basic tenets of fascist leadership to keep primal libidinal energy on an unconscious level so as to divert its manifestation in a way suitable to political ends".[16]

Freud's distinction between narcissistic and mature love provides further insight into the nature of the libidinal bond between the followers and the leader. In mature love one choses the love object for the sake of its own merits. Here one identifies oneself only partially with the object and thereby undergoes a partial change using the love object as a model, and becomes enriched with some of the love-object's qualities. In contrast, in narcissistic love the love object becomes, as Freud puts it, "a substitute for some unattained ego ideal of our own. We love it on account of the perfections which we have striven to reach for our own ego, and which we should now like to procure in this roundabout way as a means to satisfying our own narcissism".[17] The bond between the leader and her

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14   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* p. 61.

15   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 59.

16   Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, pp. 136-137.

17   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 56.

followers is akin to narcissistic love, where followers choose the leader as a substitute for their own unattained ego ideal of "economic success."

The far right leader is loved because, via-ego ideal replacement, she allows her followers to "feel great" about themselves again. However, because an alien object (the leader) is substituted for one's own ego ideal, any reality orientation of the ego vanishes and the followers blindly submit to the love object. Furthermore, in the narcissistic love bond between the leader and her followers, the saying "love is blind" predominates and the followers readily excuse any imperfections of their love choice. Freud points out that narcissistic love and hypnoses are intimately connected, since in hypnoses one finds "the same humble subjection, the same compliance, the same absence of criticism, towards the hypnotist as towards the loved object".[18]

For Freud, hypnosis is identical with psychological mass formation, and the conditions of an individual in a mass are hypnotic.[19] The leader of psychological masses is akin to the hypnotist who steps into the place of the ego ideal of each of the mass members, and as a result the mass members find themselves in a hypnotic state, which they experience as a state of "fascination".[20] The core aspect of this hypnotic state of fascination is the disappearance of the conscious personality and the predominance of the unconscious personality. This means that in a hypnotic state the individual is no longer conscious of herself and follows the will of the hypnotizer—in the psychological mass, the will of the leader.[21]

The characteristics of the psychological mass, which Adorno characterizes as being "largely de-individualized, irrational, easily influenced, prone to violent action and altogether of a regressive nature" is the result of the predominance of the unconscious personality. [22] Furthermore, Freud points out that in the unconscious personality of mass members

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18   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 58.
19   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 12.
20   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 11.
21   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 11.
22   Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p 135.

we encounter the uncanniness of hypnoses. For him, "the characteristic of uncanniness suggests something old and familiar that has undergone repression".[23] What has undergone repression is our being an individual member of the primal horde governed by the primal father. The hypnotist awakes in the individual a portion of this repressed archaic heritage, which already made her compliant towards her parents, and which makes her experience the hypnotist as the threatening primal father to whom she needs to submit.[24]

For Freud "the leader of the mass is still the dreaded father; the mass still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force; it has an extreme passion for authority…The primal father is the group ideal, which governs the ego in the place of the ego ideal".[25] The leader, who turns into the group ideal because each of the followers has replaced their ego ideal with the leader, awakens in her followers part of their repressed archaic heritage. Such awakening makes them experience the leader as their dreaded primal father with a dangerous personality, to whom they must submit. Such hypnotic state also makes the followers thirst for an unrestricted force and authority of their leader.

Adorno applies Freud's discussion on hypnoses to elaborate the authoritarian techniques used by fascist demagogues that turn individuals into psychological masses. For him "the techniques of the demagogue and the hypnotist coincide with the psychological mechanisms by which individuals are made to undergo the regressions which reduce them to mere members of a group".[26] He further develops Freud's argument that fascist leaders awaken their followers' archaic inheritance. The relation of the hypnotist to her subject, "defines the nature and content of fas-

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23 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 73.

24 Freud's argument (taken over by Adorno) that our archaic heritage is to fear specifically a 'primal father' seems problematic from a feminist point of view. I suggest that such fear is the result of patriarchy, where men or fathers have dominated women and children. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 76.

25 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 76.

26 Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 137.

cist propaganda. It is psychological because of its irrational authoritarian aims which cannot be attained by means of rational convictions by only through skillful awakening of 'a portion of the subject's archaic inheritance'".[27]

In fascist propaganda leaders promulgate the imagery of the leader as an omnipotent and unbridled father figure through the incessant plugging of names of "great men," instead of discussing objective issues. Such imaginary reanimates the idea of the all-powerful and threatening primal father to whom the followers willingly submit. Adorno suggests that this is the only way for fascist demagogues to promulgate the passive-masochistic attitude, which is "required of the fascist follower the more his[/her] political behavior becomes irreconcilable with his[/her] own rational interests as a private person as well as those of the group or class to which [s/]he actually belongs".[28]

Adorno points out that the immersion into a mass has such an appeal for individuals, because its hypnotic state allows them to throw off the repressions of their unconscious instincts. However, the regression to such a state also bears its dangers, insofar as there is "the affinity of certain peculiarities of masses to archaic traits. Particular mention should be made here of the potential short-cut from violent emotions to violent action".[29] Also today's far right leaders promulgate the imaginary of the omnipotent and unbridled father figure, and via the techniques of the hypnotist, allow their followers to throw off the repressions of their unconscious instincts. It is also here we encounter a short step from violent emotions to violent action promoted by the leader.

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27 Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 138.

28 Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 138-139.

29 Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 136.

3. The Return of the Archaic

We need a strong leader to get back on track.[30]

In this section I apply the theoretical framework developed in the previous section to the thick description of a Trump rally in Louisiana by Hochschild. The rally took place a day before the Louisiana presidential primary vote. Trump won 41 percent of the Louisiana Republican primary vote, beating his evangelical rival, Ted Cruz. Hochschild points at the ways in which Trump was able to elicit in his followers, who felt economically, culturally, demographically, and politically as "strangers in their own land" a giddy, validating release that produced an "ecstatic high".[31] According to Hochschild what led to the rise of Trump was a matter of emotional self-interest of his followers, the wanting to hold on to this emotional high, but many liberals instead focused in their explanations on economic interest.[32] As she puts it, "while economic self-interest is never entirely absent, what I discovered was the profound importance of emotional self-interest—a giddy release from the feeling of being a stranger in one's own land".[33]

I agree with Hochschild that what she calls "emotional self-interest", which I include as part of the socio-psychological factors, are at stake in the rise of Trump and the far right more generally. However, socio-psychological and economic factors interact with each other in such a rise, rather than being two isolated factors. The Trump followers aim at an ecstatic high, because such high allows them to get rid of feelings of failure and frustration that have been created by the neoliberal capitalist ideol-

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30   Janice Arena, Trump supporter. Hochschild, Arlie Russell. (2016). *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right* (The New Press), p. 228.

31   Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 228.

32   Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 228.

33   Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 228.

ogy of economic success and their inability to live up to such standard. Furthermore, although Hochschild provides a sociological explanation of what is going on at the rally via Durkheim, because of her lack of a psychoanalytic and Marxist framework, she cannot quite explain *how* the leader manages to elicit an ecstatic high and a "giddy release" in her followers.

Hochschild points out that the Trump crowd acts as a "great antidepressant. Like other leaders promising rescue, Trump evokes moral conscience. But what he gives participants, emotionally speaking, is an ecstatic high".[34] Hochschild rightly points out that the leader evokes moral conscience. However, her framework cannot explain how and why this happens. It happens because the leader steps into the place of the ego ideal of each of his followers. Insofar as the ego ideal comprises moral conscience, the followers' moral conscious also vanishes, or more precisely the leader's "moral conscience" substitutes for the conscience of her followers. Furthermore, the Freud/Adorno theoretical framework developed in the previous section allows us to grasp how Trump provides his followers with an ecstatic high—because the conditions of an individual in a mass are *hypnotic*.

The leader (Trump) turns into the hypnotist who steps into the place of the ego ideal of each of his followers. As a result of ego ideal replacement the mass members find themselves in a hypnotic state of fascination with their leader, with the result that, as Freud puts it, "all their feelings and thoughts are bent in the direction determined by the hypnotizer".[35] A man at the Trump rally, who seems in a state of rapture, exemplifies this hypnotic state of fascination. He has his arms uplifted, saying to those around him and to no one in particular: "To be in the presence of such a man!".[36] How does the leader manage to elicit in his followers such a state of rapture that makes them feel elated in the "presence of such a

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34 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 226.

35 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 11.

36 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 224.

man", and makes feelings of failure generated by marginalization, despair and poverty, like a mirage, turn into the opposite?

In hypnoses, the hypnotist avoids directing the subject's conscious thoughts towards him and lets her sink into an activity that is uninteresting to her, such as fixing the eyes upon a bright object or listening to a monotonous sound. At the same time the subject is in reality unconsciously concentrating her whole attention upon the hypnotist.[37] When the subject is asked to go to sleep in the beginning of hypnosis, this is an order to withdraw attention from the world and instead unconsciously focus on the hypnotist.[38]

The way the Trump rally is set up creates the conditions for mass hypnoses that puts his followers to sleep to advance their regression. "Red, white, and blue strobe lights slowly glide sideways and up, sideways and up, around the enormous space, as if to encircle the enchanted crowd with a feeling of ascendance".[39] Again, Hochschild's framework cannot explain how the strobe lights that slowly glide sideways and up manage to enchant the "crowd with a feeling of ascendance"—they are nothing else but the leader's attempt to fix the followers eyes upon a bright object as to avoid directing their conscious thought towards him, and instead unconsciously concentrate their attention upon the leader.

Similarly, the loud (and monotonous) music that was playing, "You can't always get what you want", served as a means to have the followers withdraw all conscious attention from the world and its problems, as well as all the things they want and do not get.[40] The strobe lights and the music, as well as the many Trump hats, posters, shirts and boots that most members wear, and which monotonously promise to make "America great again", serve the same purpose—to put the followers into a hypnotic state.

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37 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 74.

38 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 75.

39 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 222.

40 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 223.

What further techniques did the leader use to advance mass hypnoses once he entered the stage to confront the mass? As Adorno explains, fascist demagogues are generally "oral character types, which a compulsion to speak incessantly and to befool the others…language itself, devoid of its rational significance, functions in a magical way and furthers those archaic regressions which reduce individuals to members of crowds".[41] Also Trump's speech, once he appeared on stage, was devoid of any rational significance. He did not address any of the objective issues that the people in Louisiana and individuals in the crowd face—poverty, exploitation, unemployment, exposure to toxic waste, and the loss of their homes, family members, nature, and animals that are the result of environmental disasters due to industrial pollution. Rather, in Trumps' speeches we find the main ingredient that allowed fascist demagogues to put the hypnotic spell on their followers—"constant reiteration and scarcity of ideas are indispensable ingredients of the entire technique".[42]

Trump repeatedly invokes in his speeches the idea that he will make America "great again" without discussing any objective issues, which he insinuates with the repeated statement that "Our country is going to hell. But *we'*re going to make it great again!".[43] At the Trump rally he starts out his speech by describing his own ascent to power. Shortly thereafter he switches to the "We": "We're on the rise…America will be dominant, proud, rich. I am just the messenger".[44] The move from the "I" to the "We" in his speech advances a situation that allows the followers to replace their ego ideal, which plagues them with feelings of failure and frustration, with that of the "great man", their leader. As a result, any such negative feelings vanish and they can feel themselves, via the introjected leader, dominant, proud and rich. They think that if

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41 Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 148.

42 Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 133.

43 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 223.

44 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 223.

their leader is a "great man", then they too will become more like this if he's elected. Certainly, Louisianans would rather feel "dominant, proud, and rich" than how they currently feel— helpless, ashamed, poor, and depressed—which is a result of the economic factors and neo-liberal ideology outlined above, and which helps explain Trump's personal appeal.

Adorno points out that in order to advance ego ideal replacement via introjection (which he confuses with identification), the leader has to appear as absolutely narcissistic. As he puts it, "the leader does not need to love anybody but himself …one of the most conspicuous features of the agitator's speeches, namely the absence of a positive programme and of anything they might 'give', as well as the paradoxical prevalence of threat and denial, is thus accounted for; the leader can be loved only if [s/]he [her/]himself does not love."[45] Trump certainly appears as absolutely narcissistic, as only loving himself and not caring about anybody else, which he underlines with his repeated portrayals of himself as a "great man," and the negative portrayal of everybody else as a "loser". Furthermore, instead of a positive program of the Trump administration, we encounter the paradoxical prevalence of denial, such as in his "promise" to get rid of healthcare and any other social services that directly impact most of the followers, but also threats.

"We're not going to let other countries rip us off!", "We're going to build a high wall and Mexico's going to pay for it!" "We're going to build up our military!" "We're going to knock the hell out of ISIS!"[46] When a black lives matter protestor makes it into the crowd Trump points at the protestor and yells "get that guy out", and that they must get him out fast, which leads to cheering by the crowd. In such speech he promulgates the image of himself as the omnipotent and *unbridled* father figure, to advance the crowd's archaic regression. In such regression the leader turns into the group ideal, which governs the ego of his followers in the place of the ego ideal. Trump's insinuation of the omnipotent and un-

45   Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 141.

46   Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 223.

bridled father, who does and gets anything he wants even if this means that he has to resort to violence, awakens in the followers part of their repressed archaic heritage, which makes them experience the leader as their dreaded primal father with a dangerous personality, to whose will they must submit. Trump further promulgates the dreaded primal father figure at several speeches, where he says in reference to protestors that "I'd like to punch him in the face", and "Knock the crap out of him, would you? …I promise you I will pay for the legal fees. I promise. I promise", and "Their lives are going to be ruined…I'll press charges".[47]

It is in such fabricating of the dangerous father figure where we can see the techniques of the demagogue and the hypnotist coincide with the psychological mechanisms by which individuals are made to regress to an archaic state that reduces individuals to members of the psychological mass. It is the only way for the leader to promulgate what Adorno calls the passive-masochistic attitude, which is required of the followers to reconcile their own rational interests of an individual or the class they belong with that of the leader (Trump), who belongs to the class that is responsible for their misery. The Trump follower that I cited initially exemplifies such passive-masochistic attitude and an extreme passion for authority: "We need a strong leader to get back on track".[48]

Freud aptly points at the problems of the archaic regression of followers advanced by the leader's mass hypnoses: "Just as in dreams and in hypnosis the reality of things falls into the background in comparison of the strength of wishful impulses with their affective cathexis".[49] The wishful impulses for a "strong leader" leads to a dangerous scenario where the reality of things fall into the background—such as the unacceptable call for violence inherent in the actions and "policies" the leader suggests—such as "knocking out" protesters and building a high wall

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47   Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right,* p. 224.

48   Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right,* p. 228.

49   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 17.

for which Mexicans pay. At the same time it is such calls for violence that advance the regression to an archaic state where the conscious personality disappears and the unconscious personality is predominant in the followers.

In Trump's call for violence against protesters in his speeches, we can see a parallel to the technique of the fascist agitator whose core aim is to promote an atmosphere of irrational emotional aggressiveness to transform the people into "crowds bent on violent action without any sensible political aim, and to create the atmosphere of the pogrom".[50] In such a crowd we encounter the potential short step from violent emotions to violent action, which has become vividly apparent as a Trump supporter murdered a person and injured 19 other people protesting against white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 in the United States. Here a follower willingly carried out the violence his leader is calling for. Such real violence is the result of ego ideal replacement, where the leader's lifting of moral restrictions on openly acting out aggressions and even violence against those that protest him, became the moral conscience of his followers. It also underlines the ways in which in mass hypnoses "the individual is brought under conditions which allow [her/] him to throw off the repression of his unconscious instinctual impulses".[51]

4. The Release from Restrictions

Hochschild makes two interconnected arguments concerning the absence of any PC (political correctness) culture in Trump crowds. First, the more conventional sociological explanation, which she defends, is that Trump's ban of Muslims, his aim to expel undocumented people of Mexican origin from the United States of America, and his hesitant repudiation of the notorious Louisiana KKK grand wizard, David Duke, signal that some groups of people (Muslims, Mexicans and blacks) are

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50   Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, pp. 132-133.

51   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 9.

members of an out-group. The out-group, according to her, "reinforces the joyous unity of the gathering. The act of casting out the 'bad one' helps fans unite in a shared sense of being the 'good ones,' the majority, no longer strangers in their own land".[52]

However, she also realizes that there is something else going on that the conventional in-group/out-group explanation does not quite cover. As she puts it, "enhancing elations at the Trump rally was a sense of *release* from the constrictions of politically correct speech and ideas", which Trump fostered with calls such as, "Let's get rid of PC!".[53] She suggests that the release allowed Trump followers to throw out what she calls "feelings rules"—a set of ideas about the right way to feel about blacks, women, immigrants, and gays that have been established on the left—and which render people on the right as not "good" people if they do not feel sorry for these groups of people.

However, there is something else going on which explains why there was such an emotional high, or what she calls elation, that characterizes the Trump rally—namely that his calls to get rid of PC culture allowed a temporary undoing of the separation between the ego and the ego ideal, which was experienced by the followers as a joyful release of the limitations placed upon the ego by the ego ideal via PC culture. As Freud explains, the separation between the ego and the ego ideal "cannot be borne for long either, and has to temporarily undone. In all renunciations and limitations imposed upon the ego a periodical infringement of the prohibition is the rule".[54] In festivals the split between the ego and the ego ideal is temporarily undone, and its cheerful character is a result of the release such undoing brings for the ego.

Trump had such an appeal for people, because he allowed a magnificent festival for millions of frustrated egos, whom he allowed, via abro-

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52 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 226.

53 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 226, my emphasis.

54 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 81.

gating their own ego ideal and replacing it with himself, to feel once again satisfied with themselves or "great again". Such elated feeling of greatness was assisted by lifting the moral restrictions of the "PC culture", which insinuated an imaginary where the followers are above and better than women, blacks, Muslims, Mexicans, gays, etc. As Hochschild describes the Trump rally: "It was a joyous relief that many heard a Donald Trump who seemed to be wildly, omnipotently, magically free of PC constraint. He generalized about all Muslims, all Mexicans, all women—including that all women menstruate, a fact Trump declared 'disgusting'".[55]

That joyous relief experienced by followers at the Trump festival was generated through introjecting a leader who fabricates in his hypnotic speeches, as I showed in the previous section, the omnipotent and unbridled father figure, who is free from any limitations. By replacing one's ego ideal with that of the father figure, one magically becomes oneself free from any limitations. Trump succeeded *because* of his openly classist, racist and sexist behavior, *not* despite it. He liberated his followers from "stifling restrictions of the PC culture", which at the same time gave them wings to do "great things", and which underlines the ways in which the festival, which liberates one from stifling restrictions is connected the feeling that one can do great things—both are the result of ego ideal replacement.

Hochschild furthermore asserts that Trump followers abstain from any criticism of Trump, because they wanted to hold on to the feeling of elation, or the "emotional high" that being part of the Trump crowed generates—of being part of a powerful, like-minded majority, that is released from politically correct rules of feelings: "To do this they fended off challenge. They sought affirmation. One woman with whom I spent six hours talked about Trump continually, countering possible criticisms, leaving no interstitial moments when skepticism might emerge. It occurred to me that the reason for this shield of talk was to protect her elation".[56]

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55 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, pp. 227-228.

56 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American*

Certainly, one reason why this Trump follower counters any possible criticism of the leader is that she wanted to hold on to the feeling of elation that the Trump festival generates. However, there is something else going on which Hochschild's theoretical framework cannot quite explain. This woman spent six hours talking about the leader, because she found herself in a hypnotic state, and it is this state, to recite Freud, where one finds "the same humble subjection, the same compliance, the same absence of criticism, towards the hypnotist as towards the loved object".[57] Furthermore, she fended off any criticism on Trump, because in the hypnotic state we do not encounter critical subjects, but rather subjects whose narcissistic love makes them blind to any faults of the leader, and if such faults are pointed out to them, they fend off any criticism, no matter what the leader does, as a means to protect their own narcissistic gain that they obtain via introjecting the leader.

Here I would like to turn to another example that allows me to further underline the connection between hypnoses and narcissistic love, as outlined in the first section. In an interview with a Trump supporter at a Trump rally, [58] the follower repeatedly outlines that he is "in love" or in a state of fascination with the leader, which he underlines by telling us that he salutes a cardboard standup of Trump every day. However, his love for Trump is not of a mature kind. Rather, it is of purely narcissistic character, insofar as introjecting the leader generated in himself what he calls "an amazing feeling"—this amazing feeling is generated by the hypnotic state where he can feel himself to "be great again".

Ego ideal replacement is evident in his repeated statement that he thinks that "the president is great," and that Trump is a "winner", which implicitly means that Trump is a "winner" in neo-liberal capitalist society, and that, as a billionaire he has lived up to the neo-liberal capitalist ideology of "economic success". By replacing his ego ideal with that of

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right, p. 228.

57   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 58.

58   see: http://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2017/02/18/donald-trump-supporter-gene-huber-intv-nr.cnn.

the leader, the follower can get rid of all the stains of frustration of be-ing placated as a "loser" in neoliberal capitalist society, and love him-self again via the love object Trump. Again, the follower did not merely identify with the leader. Rather, he introjected Trump by replacing his ego ideal with that of the leader, so that he himself, via the introjected love object, can feel "great" and a "winner." Trump further assisted such introjection when he invited him to come on stage where Trump whis-pered in his ears that he (the follower) "is great".

That the leader has stepped in place of the ego ideal like a hypno-tist is evident insofar as in hypnosis the reality of things falls into the background and affectively charged wishful impulses dominate.[59] In re-lation to this example the hypnotic state turns one's real life, where one is confronted with nagging feelings of frustration and failure into the opposite—like a mirage such feelings disappear and one feels the oppo-site—as the Trump supporter puts it, "I am doing fantastic, there are no words to describe it". There are no words to describe such feelings, be-cause they refer to a hypnotic state, where via ego ideal replacement he now himself embodies the "American success story." Furthermore, from an insignificant life, like a mirage one becomes, much like the leader, the center of attention, which the follower underlines with the statement that he "got a lot of media attention."

Like with the case of the woman who incessantly talked about Trump to disallow any criticism of her love-choice, also this follower does not allow any criticism of Trump. Again the difference between identifica-tion and introjection is important here. In mature love the critical ego maintains its functions and the lover only identifies herself partially with the love object, and she is thereby enriched with some of the love-ob-ject's qualities. In contrast, in narcissistic love the lover introjects the love object, which means that she substitutes an alien object for her own ego ideal. As a result the reality orientation and critical function of the old ego ideal vanishes. As Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich point out, in narcissistic love "every command of the idolized object, the leader,

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59   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 17.

becomes ipso facto just, lawful, and true," which underlines that the love object has been put in place of the ego ideal.[60]

No matter what untruths the love object Trump proclaims, and no matter how many people expose Trump as a notorious liar, the Trump follower maintains that what Trump says "is the truth, it comes from his heart". Like the person in love, who finds herself in a state of fascination with the love object, the follower finds excuses for all the bleak imperfections of his love-choice. As such he has been ready to do anything to defend the "truths" proclaimed by the leader, and to counter the "lies" spread about Trump, which he underlines with the statement that he and Trump "stuck together" no matter what.

The problem of narcissistic love is that the followers cease to see anything wrong with the commands of the idolized object. As Freud explains, in ego ideal replacement, "the criticism exercised by that agency is silent; everything that the object does and asks for is right and blameless…in the blindness of love remorselessness is carried to the pitch of crime".[61] The silence of criticism is particularly dangerous when the leader allows and calls for verbal and physical violence against scapegoats, who are in American society today not only Black, but increasingly also Muslim or Mexican, and towards those that oppose him, which has become truth in the recent murder by a Trump protester. In their blindness of love, Trump's commands were carried out by the followers to the pitch of crime.

60   Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, p. 60.

61   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 547.

5. Conclusion

> As we know from other reactions, individuals preserved a variable degree of personal aptitude for reviving old situations of this kind. Some knowledge that in spite of everything hypnosis is only a game, a deceptive renewal of these old impressions, may however remain behind and take care that there is a resistance against any too serious consequences of the suspension of the will in hypnoses.[62]

Adorno, referring to this passage in Freud's *Group Psychology and the Ego*, points out that the game of hypnoses has today been socialized and that we have seen the very serious consequences of it with the rise of fascist movements in the twentieth century. As he puts it, "the leader's appropriation of mass psychology, the streamlining of their technique, has enabled them to collectivize the hypnotic spell".[63] Nonetheless, Adorno agrees with Freud's assertion that some knowledge that the hypnotic spell and that the renewal of archaic impulses is deceptive may stay behind, which he perceives in the 'phoniness' of enthusiastic identification (or more precisely introjection) with the leader.

He further points out, this increase in phoniness "may well terminate in sudden awareness of the untruth of the spell, and eventually in its collapse".[64] The phoniness of the enthusiastic introjection of the leader is also apparent in the previously discussed interview with the Trump follower, who, when he tells us that he salutes a cardboard standup of Trump every day at the same time lets out a laugh. This laugh suggests that there is a slight moment left in his hypnotic state, where he is after all aware that the Trump festival is all a game, and that the leader, which he so enthusiastically supports, merely deceives him about his "great" qualities as a leader.

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62   Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 76.

63   Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 153.

64   Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 153.

Furthermore, when the interviewer asked him what Trump had said to him personally on stage, he slightly hesitates before answering "you're great". In this slight moment of hesitation the phoniness of Trump's and his own assertion that "he is doing fantastic" might become apparent, and the hypnotic spell breaks. Today we must do everything to dispel the hypnotic spell the far right casts on the masses all over the world. For this to happen we must also address the economic factors, as improving those in the long run might make people less vulnerable to the kinds of psychological techniques I have addressed in this essay. But in the short run we need to hasten the undoing of this spell the masses are under.

Trust in the world?
Complex Storytelling in *Memento* and *Inception*

Josef Früchtl[1]

Abstract: This article defends the thesis that aesthetic experiences encourage us to act as if we could trust in the world in an ontological sense. This specifically holds for an aesthetically successful and complex film. This article wants to demonstrate this argument in an exemplary way by referring to Christopher Nolan's films 'Memento' (2000) and 'Inception' (2010). These films are examples of complex storytelling insofar as the narration of the story becomes so multifaceted that it culminates philosophically in epistemological and ontological issues. 'Memento' confronts us with the proposition that one only believes what one wants to believe. Its strength lies in the experience of the reversal of time: it is as if the protagonist had not acted. The strength of 'Inception', on the other hand, lies on a pragmatically dissolved scepticism. Reality is not a matter of theoretical certainty; but neither is it simply a matter of faith. The real is what we are forced to believe from trust.

Unsurprisingly, a person who writes a book entitled: *Trust in the World. A Philosophy of Film* should expect some fairly surprised reactions.[2] Film in general, and then specifically modern film, is to instil trust, and then in the world? And if that author has visited the Frankfurt School both intellectually and academically, the surprised reactions grow to become scepticism. Did Theodor W. Adorno not repeatedly teach us that authentic art expresses negativity and thus profound mistrust in so-

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1   Josef Früchtl is Professor of Philosophy of Art and Culture at the University of Amsterdam and the co-editor of the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* (ZÄK). He is the author of *Mimesis: Konstellation eines Zentralbegriffs bei Adorno* (Würzburg 1986); *Ästhetische Erfahrung und moralisches Urteil. Eine Rehabilitierung* (Frankfurt/M. 1996); *Das unverschämte Ich. Eine Heldengeschichte der Moderne* (Frankfurt/M. 2004), also published in English as *The Impertinent Self. A Heroic History of Modernity* (Stanford University Press 2009); and *Vertrauen in die Welt. Eine Philosophie des Films* (München 2013), also published in English as *Trust in the World. A Philosophy of Film* (Routledge 2017).

2   Cf. Josef Früchtl, *Vertrauen in die Welt. Eine Philosophie des Films*, München: Fink 2013; English edition: T*rust in the World. A Philosophy of Film*, transl. by Sarah L. Kirkby, New York & London: Routledge 2018.

cietal circumstances? And now art – if one is prepared to grant film the honour of being deemed art – is instead to be ontologically affirmative? Would that not be a new, maybe even more perfidious variant of the affirmative character of culture dissected by Herbert Marcuse in the 1930s?

If this were the case – we can answer this point without further ado – then the affirmation would have to include a moment of the negative and the critical. And, indeed, ultimately I would like to claim this. The cinematic-aesthetic experience offers us an experience of trust in the world which, like all trust, not only necessarily remains as fundamental as it is uncertain, but which in turn makes this duplication experienceable. Following on from Kant, philosophical aesthetics addressed this as a theme using the shorthand *as if*. Evidently, aesthetic experiences encourage us to act *as if* we could trust in the world in an ontological sense. They reinforce the attitude of the as-if that belongs to trust. And this specifically holds for an aesthetically successful film. And even more specifically for an aesthetically successful and complex film.

In order to demonstrate this within the framework available here, the most obvious procedure would be exemplary. In other words to focus on a film or films which are not chosen at random but as individual examples of a universal phenomenon. I have chosen two films by Christopher Nolan: *Memento* (2000) and *Inception* (2010). The general reason underlying my choice is that these two films provide an example of complex narration in the modern Hollywood film. This type of cinematic narration began furiously with Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), continued playfully with Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (1997), and then reached its first climax with David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997); David Fincher followed psychodramatically with *Fight Club* (1999), Spike Jonze fantastically and comedically with *Being John Malkovich* (1999), and then once again David Lynch, this time with *Mulholland Drive* (2001), the same year in which Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001) and Cameron Crow's *Vanilla Sky* (2001) – the remake of Alejandro Amenábar's *Abre los ojos* (1997) – also hit the big screen. Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) must also be included, and the list could go on and on.

Complexity is a term which in the last decades has acquired new meaning as a result of the so-called chaos theory. American meteorologist Edward Lorenz coined the now famous expression that the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil can set off a tornado in Texas.[3] Computer-based weather forecasts honour in a mathematical-scientific way what common sense has long been aware of in its own way, namely that little causes can have big effects. Smallest deviations strengthen themselves by positive feedback and lead to large-sized effects. Weather is chaotic because just a small, unforeseen element can make everything turn out differently; it is chaotic and cannot be predicted for sure because the interrelationships are too complex. Saying that a phenomenon is complex means in this context – not only in meteorology but also in medicine (brain research), economics and other disciplines – that prognoses are very difficult and always remain uncertain. To take another simple example, it is impossible to predict when the next traffic jam will occur at a particular motorway intersection, and also when it will ease again. Thus, though chaos and complexity research like all empirical research allows a glimpse into the future by (more or less realized) forecasts, after all the principle is that everything could be different.

Formulated in more general terms, we call something complex – the weather, a situation, a person – when it is not easy to explain or understand. An easy explanation would be reductionistic and causal-linear. In contrast, philosophers since Plato have made a distinction between *nous* and *diánoia*, between the contemplative recognition of ideas as that which truly is, and methodical analysis or progressive thinking. This distinction translates into Latin as the distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio*, and into German as the difference between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. Until Kant, *intellectus*, or *Verstand*, or in English the intellect or understanding mind, was considered the superior faculty; Kant reversed this order, elevating *ratio*, or *Vernunft*, or in English reason or the rational mind, to superiority.

3   Edward N. Lorenz, *Predictability: Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?*, Lecture during the 1972 conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in: Science, Issue 320 (2008).

In this tradition, in the mid-15th century Nikolaus von Kues described God as a *complexio* or *coinicidentia oppositorum*, only comprehensible to the *intellectus*, coining a term which was also to play a role beyond philosophy – Hegel's "dialectic" being the most famous formulation – in the depth psychology of Carl Gustav Jung and the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt.[4]

We can summarise that the philosophical-scientific tradition uses the term complexity to refer to the unity of a plurality made up not only of numerous and diverse elements, but of links between the elements which are also numerous, differing, and in extreme cases opposing.[5] Expressed in everyday language: something is complex if it consists of many, different and yet simultaneously often interconnected elements ("like an intricate network of different channels"). Admittedly, from a scientific-theoretical perspective, we can add that complexity does not any longer mean "the old complexity (*Unübersichtlichkeit*) based on many variables and a consequent multiplicity of possible developments" but the result of "the non-linearity of laws of development". "What is clear (überschaubar) and simple, can be chaotic."[6] The affinity of theories of the humanities and the social sciences to such a kind of research may not surprise because it seems as if – in the broadest meaning of the term - critical theory has reached the natural sciences: Behind the smooth façade of order there is the trouble causing principle of disorder.

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4   Carl Gustav Jung and his School brought popularity to the term 'complex' in a psychological sense: to "have a complex" means to be neurotic. A complex is a complexio oppositorum in the sense that it is an affect-laden association of ideas experienced as ego-dystonic (cf. Albert Wellek, article „Komplex", in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 4: I-K, ed. Joachim Ritter & Karlfried Gründer, Basel/Stutgart: Schwabe & Co, 1976, S. 936); on Schmitt cf. his work *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (1923), in which he describes the Catholic church as a complexio oppositorum, as an all-encompassing unity of contradictions.

5   Cf. regarding this definition the – familiarly complicated – article by Niklas Luhmann, „Komplexität", in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 4: I-K, a.a.O., S. 939-942.

6   Günter Küppers, *Chaos: Unordnung im Reich der Gesetze*, in: id., (ed.), Chaos und Ordnung. Formen der Selbstorganisation in Natur und Gesellschaft, Stuttgart: Reclam 1996, p. 173; as to disorder behind order cf. p. 149.

Correspondingly, we can call films complex when they complicate the telling of the story through a (quantitatively) multiple and (qualitatively) unusual connection of the basic elements (plot, images, music, sound) characterized by the principle of non-linearity. "Complicate" means to make it more difficult, entangled, untransparent. The narrative structure of a movie consists of the specific and non-linear, gradually holistic connection of these elements. Each of them is significant in the literal sense. Films are complex when they complicate the telling of a story to the extent that they become entangled to the point of opaqueness. In other words, the narration of the story becomes so multifaceted that it culminates philosophically in epistemological and ontological issues, that is in questions about how we can know what we know; what we can know at all; and how we can be certain about our world, about being in general, and about the existence of others. Film theory has proposed different names for such complex storytelling: *modular* narrative, puzzle *film*, mind game *film* and, especially popular on the internet: *mind(fuck) film* or, more recently, *mind-tricking narrative*.[7] They are all concerned with audience deception and the logical confusion arising from paradoxes and incongruities. How can a film of this kind instil trust in the world?

The particular reason for my choice of *Memento* and *Inception* is that

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7   Cf. Allan Cameron, *Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 2008; Warren Buckland (ed.): *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, Oxford: Wieley-Blackwell 2009; Thomas Elsaesser: *The Mind-Game Film*, in: Buckland, Puzzle Films, a.a.O., S. 13-41; Jonathan Eig: *A beautiful mind(fuck): Hollywood structures of identity*, in: Jump Cut. A Review of Contemporary Media, 46, 2003. Online at: ULR: http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc46.2003/eig.mindfilms/index.html;   Cornelia Klecker: *Mind-Tricking Narratives: Between Classical and Art-Cinema Narration*, in: Poetics Today 34 (2013), S. 119-146. - Concerning Buckland's term 'puzzle film', it should be noted that for him this term is the superlative after the 'simple' and the 'complex' film: „not just complex, but complicating and perplexing" (p. 3). Buckland is variously criticised, however, for being no less vague in his definition of puzzle than in that of complex (cf. in summary: Miklós Kiss & Steven Willemsen, I*mpossible Puzzle Films: A Cognitive Approach to Contemporary Complex Cinema*, Edinburgh University Press 2016, p. 19-20). – Maria Poulaki has written an extended study about the theoretical potential of a systemtheoretical understanding of complexity that I only use

these two films exhibit a kind of – let us say – intricate experimental arrangement of memory and self-identity, a test of the idea of truth, and a game between dream and reality which revolves around the key philosophical question of whether, and if so how, the spheres of truth and falsity or reality and dream can be distinguished at all, let alone sharply. This question has pursued us since Descartes' *Meditations* (1641), but we have been aware of the concomitant philosophical position, namely scepticism, since the Ancient Greeks. How can we know for certain that what appears to us as real is real? How can we be sure that we are not dreaming? In addition, this philosophical-epistemological question links *Inception* with the cultural-philosophical motif of homecoming, archetypically dictated in the Western tradition by Homer's Odyssey. Homecoming as a narrative topic is, of course, also powerfully present in the cinema of Hollywood.[8] In the case of *Inception*, however, this topos acquires a medial self-reflexive turn, asking whether film, analogue to dreaming, is the only medium in a position to fulfil the homecoming desire, and thereby not really fulfilling it. In other words, whether film, like all art, does not crystallise its own form of wish fulfilment, a practical, trust-based form which has learnt its scepticistic lesson.

Memento, or:
One only believes what one wants to believe

But first let us take a look at *Memento*. This film is another demonstration of scepticism. If the only appropriate response to scepticism is to replace the illusion of certain knowledge with an attitude of epistemic belief or trust, then *Memento* demonstrates, on the one hand, the human or all-too-human danger underlying this attitude, namely self-deception, and yet

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in a preliminary way: Before or Beyond Narrative? Towards a Complex Systems Theory of Contemporary Films (Dissertation University of Amsterdam 2011).

8   Cf. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Heimweh. Illusionsspiele in Hollywood*, Berlin: Volk und Welt Verlag 1999; on the Odyssean narrative motif in Inception cf. Sebastian Lederle, *'Welcome home, Mr. Cobb!' Imaginäre Heimkehr und Skepsis in Christopher Nolans Inception* (unpublished manuscript).

also, on the other hand, the ambivalence of this attitude: if not dissolved one-sidedly, in self-deception, it offers a solution, albeit a precarious one.

Memento tells the story of an act of revenge, starting at the end. Each sequence relates a piece of what has gone before. The "and then… and then…" narrative structure so familiar to us is reversed to give a structure of "and before that… and before that...". To this extent, the continuity of narration is still maintained, just that its direction is reversed. These sequences are shown in the film in colour, but they are interrupted by and compensated with black and white footage which plainly and counter-directionally follows the conventional narrative structure and – in part incorporating flashbacks of the protagonist – reveals background events, hints at true events, peu à peu.[9] These two or (if we count the flashbacks separately) three ways of dealing with time narratively and cinematically are framed by a fourth component, namely the time the audience has to complete this experience, the film of course having a beginning and an end.

At the beginning of the film we see the protagonist Leonard shooting a man called Teddy and by the end of the film we know fairly precisely how this came about. Teddy apparently (in this film we can never be completely certain) confronts Leonard with the truth that Leonard took his revenge on the man who raped and (allegedly) murdered his wife, but that he forgot all of this due to memory loss caused by the trauma.

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9   The narrative structure can be outlined as follows: Credits, 1, V, 2, U, 3, T, 4, S, 5 ..., whereby the capital letters stand for the scenes in colour, in other words the chronologically reversed scenes, and the numbers stand for the black and white chronological scenes. Cf. Andy Klein, „Everything you wanted to know about ‚Memento'" (https://www.salon.com/2001/06/28/memento_analysis/). - The film critic Michael Althen points out that Nolan's retrograde narrative, although it is unique in its consequence, does have precursors in Harold Pinter's theatre play Betrayal (1978), which was made into a film in 1983 (directed by David Jones, in the main male roles Jeremy Irons and Ben Kingsley), and in Martin Amis' novel Time's Arrow: or The Nature of the Offence (1991) (http://michaelalthen.de/texte/themenfelder/filmkritiken/memento/). Whereas for Pinter the background was Marcel Proust's In Search of Lost Time, Amis' work and Nolan's Memento are driven by the psychoanalytical significance of trauma.

During the attack on him and his wife, he was hit on the head so hard that he can still remember what happened before the event, but is unable to form any new memories (anterograde amnesia). Just a few minutes later he can no longer remember a conversation he has just had, for example. He therefore has to write everything down and attach it to photos of the people involved. The most important information of all he has tattooed to his body: "John G. raped and murdered my wife." And in mirror writing: "Find him and kill him!" Leonard does not believe Teddy and notes the momentous sentence on a Polaroid photo of his so-called friend: "Do not believe his lies!" The course is thus set. Leonard will no longer believe Teddy. Once he has written down a sentence, he never questions it again. He holds fast to the conviction, has to hold fast to the conviction that once he has written something down, or in Biblical terms: once it is set in stone, it is a fact. This is his tragic error. Leonard makes a conscious decision in this scene to write down this sentence, even though he at least suspects that Teddy could be right, and that Leonard is only doing what we would all do: namely closing his eyes to unpleasant truths and looking for a reason to keep on living. Leonard does not want to believe Teddy's words and brands them as lies because he suspects that they pronounce the post-traumatic lie he himself has been living.

In a short scene with his wife, we see Leonard with a bare torso. Surprisingly, he already has a tattooed chest, so that we have to ask ourselves whether the tattoos really were a reaction to the rape and death of his wife. Maybe she was not murdered at all. The film shows that she was still alive following the rape, and Teddy confirms this in his narrative. Moreover, the film suggests that Leonard's wife had diabetes and that she died from an insulin overdose, administered by Leonard himself after she wanted to test whether his amnesia would really stretch so far as to kill his own wife because he could give her an injection and then forget just a few minutes later and give her another one. This is precisely the same story Leonard himself tells of a man, an insurance agent, whom he suspected of simulating memory loss, the same disease he is now suffering from himself. This parallel amnesia

story could be a rationalising invention of Leonard's, an unconceded variant of his own story.

How can we be sure of ourselves and the world around us? *Memento* plays through this philosophical question and attempts to clarify it by drawing upon an extreme example. How can we be sure of ourselves and the world around us if we do not have at our disposal a functioning memory, the mental ability to hold on to time and thus to a continuum of self-identity? The practical solution is to take pictures (photos) of people and things and label them with comments. But at the same time, the film shows us that comments cannot be taken as set in stone. "Memories are irrelevant...", the protagonist says with utter empiristic conviction, "...if you have the facts". But the film shows how easily they can be manipulated or unluckily confused.[10] We write something down and in so doing establish something – like a truth. A lesson to be learned from *Memento*, however, would have to be that when we are forced to write something down, we do so in the form of a few words containing different views which are competing for the truth. There has to be a continual and flexible form of self-assurance and assurance in the world – as there is in a detailed text, a novel or indeed a film or screenplay. *Memento* shows us how the protagonist tries to piece together the puzzle of his world, strewn across his hotel bed as photos and notes, like a mosaic. And shows us how a great deal of detailed work, patience, criminalistic acumen and happy coincidence are required in order to piece it together correctly.

The film therefore not only leaves us in a state of epistemological doubt, close to desperation regarding our ability to perceive and remember, but also reinforces with a Kantian undertone the underlying idea of truth, or with a Hegelian undertone the theory that what is true is the whole – albeit an idea which cannot be fulfilled (and this is precisely what makes it an "idea"), a whole which cannot be had; just as necessary as it is impossible. The film reinforces both – the necessity and the

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10   A good example of this is multiple confusion regarding the car number plate, where a number 1 becomes a capital I and vice versa. „SG13 7IU" becomes „SGI3 7IU" and finally „SG13 71U".

impossibility. In the light of this absurdity, we could extol paradoxicality in the manner of recent French (post)modernism. Or we could interpret *Memento* as a demonstrative example of the Deleuzean "time images" which, due to their negation of chronological and causal linearity, no longer permit a distinction between true and false.[11] I believe this to be a dearly held intellectual cliché, however. Deleuze seems to be more aware than his obedient pupils that the field beyond true and false is that of *fiction*, described since the mid-18th century by philosophers, and primarily by aestheticians, not only as the field of deception but also as a separate field outside the alternative of true or false. Scientists speak here of a hypothesis, a statement not (yet) deemed true, but in principle capable of being true. Kant reserves for this the term "idea", a reasoning term referring to an object which is not real, but certainly possible. Finally, both Nietzsche and Heidegger highlight the metaphor as a linguistic-literary medium for this fiction, as the "opening" or "disclosing" of a truth field, as the introduction of a new candidate for literal or propositional truth. The "truth" of art and aesthetical philosophy is accordingly one which is hinted at, which appears possible, which is not yet there; one which – if all goes well – is a truth in the making. Deleuze finds a correspondence to this with his description of philosophy as a kind of *science fiction*, moving within an *interim* area located between – please note – knowledge and non-knowledge.[12] It is that third area which is the most interesting one because it is here where productive thought, "revolutionary science" (Thomas Kuhn), the inventing of the new takes place.

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11   Melissa Clarke, *The Space-Time Image: the Case of Bergson, Deleuze, and Memento*, in: The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2002, S. 167-181; Diran Lyons, *Vengeance, the Powers of the False , and the Time-Image in Christopher Nolan's Memento: A Note on Resentment at the Beginning of the New Millennium*, in: Angelaki 11 (2006), S. 127-135; David R. Cole & Joff P.N. Bradley, *A Pedagogy of Cinema*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers 2016, pp. 104-108.; Manuel Zahn, *Memento – Zur Zeitlichkeit des Films und seiner bildenden Erfahrung*, in: Gerhard Chr. Buckow u.a. (Hg.), Raum, Zeit, Medienbildung. Untersuchungen zu medialen Veränderungen unseres Verhältnisses zu Raum und Zeit, Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag 2012, pp. 67-100.

12   Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, transl. by Paul Patton, New York:

In reminding us about the everyday practice of trust, I would also like to draw attention to this interim area. In this context, trust is an attitude whereby, in the light of different options (we could opt for this or that) and in intersubjective-cooperative orientation (relationships of trust become established as social practices), we believe that something which for us is desirable will occur, without being able to predict with certainty that it will actually occur.[13] Trust always means acting *as if*. Since no sure knowledge about the result of our actions exists and yet we must act anyway, we are forced to act *as if* we had such knowledge. Otherwise, we would not act at all. A film like *Memento* brings this home to us blatantly and forces us very disconcertingly to learn that trust in the world and belief in certainty are unreliable, maybe even extremely unreliable, but that as agents we must act *as if* they were reliable. Acting always means to act *as if*, but this does not mean that this fictional element is its only characteristic. We do actually do something, for example when we open the window to let fresh air into a room. But we would not do this, would not even begin to do it, if we knew beforehand that the result would be seriously opposed to our practically established expectations and that the window, if opened, would fall out of its frame.

This thematic complex does connect *Memento* with the theme of time, but differently from how the Deleuzean School would wish to see it. At the beginning of the film, during the intro, somebody waves around a Polaroid photo which has just been developed. It briefly shows a person covered in blood, and then the colour fades and the image becomes lighter, until ultimately it is as white as the undeveloped image it once was, and then it is finally sucked back into the camera. Correspondingly, a bullet flies out of the head of the corpse and back into the weapon. This scene could be the motto of the entire film: "A deed is made undone

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Columbia University Press 1994, p. XXi); regarding the concept of fiction cf. Früchtl, *Vertrauen in die Welt*, loc. cit., pp. 22 (*Trust in the World*, loc. cit., pp. 12).

13   Cf. here Martin Hartmann, *Die Praxis des Vertrauens*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhr-kamp 2011, p. 56.

by reversing time."[14] The film enables us to see – to experience - what we can never see – experience - in everyday practice: something done being made undone. By reversing the timeline of the narrative, *Memento* attempts to do just this. It too cannot make the done, i.e. the murder, un-done, but it tries to do precisely that; as if it wants with each new image to extinguish what has gone before, until ultimately the audience disap-pears into the black box of its own memories, selectively stored time, the starting point of the action. Like the main character, we too permanently attempt to remember what we have just seen. By the end of the film we can no longer remember (exactly) what we have seen and experienced, and so we want to see it again, albeit reluctantly. In this way, the film provides us not only with an experience analogous to amnesia, but with an ontological experience. Actually the strength of the movie lies in its experiential quality. The reversal of time implies an irrealisation of ac-tions performed. It is *as if* the protagonist – and with him the audience – had not acted. It is *as if* this world had never existed.

Inception, or Welcome home! Welcome home?

In *Inception*, Nolan presents this same theme in a different variation. The film is a business thriller, interwoven with psychodrama and incorpo-rating the science fiction element of dream sharing. The protagonist in the film, 'Dom' Cobb, is specialised in influencing the consciousness of others through shared dreams. During an orchestrated dream, either economically valuable information is stolen from the unconscious of the victim – so-called *extraction* – or, vice versa, information is planted in the subconscious of the victim – so-called *inception*. Cobb is hired for this purpose by a Japanese businessman, Saito, in order to influence a far-reaching decision being made by his most prominent competitor. If Cobb completes the contract successfully, he will be allowed to return home and see his children again. He had to flee after being suspected of murdering his wife. The death of his wife, however, was far more a

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14   Merten Worthmann, *Ich bin, der ich war. Aber wer war ich?*, in: Die Zeit, Nb. 51, December 13, 2001.

tragic accident. With her, Cobb had further developed the phenomenon of lucid dreaming into a technique whereby a few hours of real time appear to dreamers as years. During this long period they can construct a world in line with their wishes, based on their joint memories. When they wake up from a shared dream, Cobb's wife does not want to accept that they are no longer dreaming. Her fall from a window is thus suicide, but because she has previously lodged certain documents, her husband seems to be her murderer. Ultimately the manipulation of Saito's competitor is successful – here *Inception* presents itself in formidable action film style, presenting parallel occurrences at four different dream levels in four different time formats, while at the same time employing Edith Piaf's famous song "Non, je ne regrette rien" to show the exact and therefore in each case different time elapses of the overlapping dreams – and Cobb is able to embrace his children once more.

Inception explores the issue of reality using its counter-concept of dreaming. It is especially concerned with the so-called clear dream or lucid dreaming. In other words, the phenomenon whereby the dreamer knows that he is dreaming and can therefore consciously control the dream. This phenomenon has been described since the late 19th century and is researched today in so-called sleep laboratories, sometimes also with contact to Buddhist meditation practices. *Inception* takes great pleasure in dismantling the seemingly paradox curiosity of wake-induced dreaming. As a film, it is able to show what film and only film can, namely the transferral or that which is thought or imagined to realistic images, a delight not only for cineasts, but also for radical constructivists. A lucid dream, just like digitally animated cinema, fulfils the dream of the radical constructivist to replace objectivity with subjectivity. What we call the world is in each case a subjective creation. Paris, for example, may seem to us to be an elegant city proudly presenting itself in pastel colours; but in a film I can fold it in on itself like a grey egg box.

Inception adds an element to the phenomenon of lucid dreaming, however, which goes far beyond the empirical research available to date, namely so-called dream sharing. From the Ancients to the present day,

it has been assumed that we only inhabit a shared world when we are awake, and our own private world when sleeping and dreaming,[15] but *Inception* gives this distinction short shrift, with of course far-reaching ontological and epistemological consequences. If it is possible to dream together, to act together within a dream, then dreams can no longer be distinguished from (waking) reality. In order to have a distinguishing feature, *Inception* introduces the so-called totem, a small object known in its significance only to its owner. In Cobb's case it is a spinning top: if it spins ceaselessly, Cobb is in a dream, or more precisely in someone else's dream; if it stops spinning and falls over, Cobb is not in someone else's dream, but either in his own dream or in (waking) reality.

(In-)distinguishability between dreaming and reality assumes an additional appeal when a parallel is drawn to (in-)distinguishability between film and reality. *Inception* does this in several ways. Shared dreaming can be taken as a literal description of cinema as the so-called dream factory. We sit with others in the cinema auditorium and dive together (mentally and psychologically) into the dream world presented on the big screen. But this parallel obviously has its limitations. Usually we remain fully aware of the world we are occupying spatially and temporally, in other words: of reality.

Another aspect now assumes even greater urgency, however. Cinema is partly called the dream factory because – according to psychological-political criticism – it is capable of planting thoughts in the subconscious of its recipients and of generating ideological awareness through skilful manipulation. When cinema manages to do this, classical Critical Theorists believe that the last residue of negativity disappears from the affirmative character inherent to bourgeois-autonomous art. Should *Inception* be included in this judgement?

The question of how ideas can be planted into the heads of others is a fundamental question in philosophy, educational science and psycholo-

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15   Cf., with recourse to Ancient sources, Kant's formulation from Anthropologie and the Träume eines Geistersehers: Reinhard Brandt, Kritischer Kommentar zu Kants Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (1798), Hamburg: Meiner 1999.

gy, especially when linked to political, consumer-aesthetic or indeed any other instrumental motives. *Inception* explains such planting by helping itself to well-known psychoanalytical theorems, such as repression or the Oedipus complex. For example, Cobb's team uses a bad father-son relationship in Saito's competitor in order to plant the idea of a solution to this relationship problem in the head of the son. The redeeming idea has to appear *as if* the son had arrived at it autonomously. The best manipulation is one which is not seen through; and it is not seen through if it merges into the subjective conviction of the object of that manipulation. The best manipulation is the one which is believed to be an idea of one's own; *as if* it had emerged from one's own thoughts; *as if* the act of heteronomy had emerged from the autonomy of the person being manipulated.

Transferred to the level of cinema and an audience, we as cinema-goers can identify ourselves as objects of *inception*. How does the film try to plant a mental seed in us? Which idea, which thought experiment does it try to make attractive? Philosophically speaking, the answer would probably have to be: the film tries to trigger an *experience*, in other words to condense individually the epistemic elements of the experience – affection, perception, imagination, cognition, and emotion linking everything else[16]. A conception of film that emphasizes the character of experience, in this context makes it plain again that the narrative content of a movie can never be given by the cognitive element alone. But, of course, this answer is not specific enough. It becomes specific when we take the end of *Inception* as our point of reference.

In *Inception*, the scene which grants us access to the metanarrative is not the first, as in *Memento*, but the last. "So do you want to take a leap of faith?", Cobb asks Saito at the end, at the deepest level of the dream process, a level which the film calls limbo, presumably in reference to Catholic theology, where it refers to a place at the "edge" (Latin: *limbus*) of

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16 Cf. Josef Früchtl, *Communicating Emotions. On the Rationality of Aesthetic Judgements*, in: Beate Söntgen/ Stephanie Marchal (eds.), Judgement Practices in the Artistic Field (forthcoming 2019).

Hell, or right before it, popularly known as being "in limbo". In philosophy, Kierkegaard argued in favour of such a leap, giving reasons why we reach the limits of justification and have to leap over into the realm of faith. In the film, both agents take this leap, and the audience have to take it with them. It is a leap into reality, or what we think is reality, in which Cobb would finally like to return home with Saito's help. Death is helpful here. Dying in a dream usually means waking up in (waking) reality, but it could merely be in another dream, another reality. Saito reaches out for the revolver lying on the table on which Cobb's spinning top is ceaselessly turning. A cinematic cut abruptly catapults us into a different world. Cobb opens his blue eyes. He is back on the aeroplane where the manipulative act began with the aid of the dream sharing technique. He looks around himself somewhat incredulously. His crew is there. Saito is also there, picking up his telephone in order, we may assume, to make that call which for Cobb is all-important. In the following scene Cobb is already approaching a customs officer, who inspects his passport. "Welcome home, Mr. Cobb!" are his redeeming words. For Cobb it seems difficult to believe in what is happening. He moves like in a dream, in a hovering and slowed temporality, carried by orchestral music, synthesizer sounds, interwoven with suffering, but increasingly celebratory. In the very last scene he is then at home. Still apparently unsure, he sets his totem to spin on a tabletop, but then immediately allows himself to be distracted when his children greet him with joyous smiles. The camera pans back to the spinning top. It is still turning, but seems to wobble slightly. At precisely this point the final cut comes; the film is over.

This ending comes like a kick, catapulting the audience straight back into everyday reality. In order to wake up from a dream, Cobb's crew always uses some kind of "kick", for example a sensation of falling, or of diving into cold water. The final cut has the same function for the audience. It transports us abruptly into a state of uncertainty, cutting us off with no warning from our chance to discover whether or not the spinning top will fall over. The criterion which could provide us with certainty can no longer fulfil its function. And so we do not know, in the

strict sense, whether Cobb really has arrived in waking reality or (only) in a new dream reality of his own.

There are clues in favour of both the one and the other theory.[17] But ultimately, and philosophically speaking, we have to admit that we are back in a state of sober scepticism. Here Stanley Cavell offers what I believe to be a convincing solution, namely not only that we should take a leap into a non-theoretical certainty, following on from Hume, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and others, but that film provides us with a useful model in this respect. Each new film proves to us as viewers that we are excluded from its reality through an ontological difference, through our different system of space and time coordinates, and therefore also through our inability to take part in the action; but we perceive this reality mentally and affectively *as if* we were not fundamentally separated from it. The *as if* is crucial here. Every time we go to the cinema and every time we watch a film at home, we accept that we cannot refute the scepticism theoretically, with proof, but can only encounter it practically, with trust. Without making a big fuss about it, we live the precarious certainty always threatened by uncertainty. We call this (non-religious) faith or, less open to misinterpretation, trust.

Criticism of *Inception* cannot be all positive, however. The film certainly expands upon the phenomenon of lucid dreaming as a thought experiment, and to this extent presents itself as a science fiction film, but it fails to shake off the traditional scientific model. The rationality it extols is ultimately not that of another, dream-like order, but is far more

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17 Painstaking analysts have found out, however, that Cobb's totem to differentiate between dreaming and waking reality is actually his wedding ring: in all dream scenes he is wearing it, but in the final scene – if you look very carefully – he is not. Also, the body language of the children playing is slightly different from that in previous scenes when we also briefly see them. And at the end they turn to face their father for the first time. (cf. http://www.inceptionending.com/theory/revolvingdoorproject-inception-wait-what-happened/). Somewhat different is the interpretation that Cobb, towards the end of the film, finally and with a clear conscience takes leave of his dead wife and then stops wearing his wedding ring, both in dream reality and in waking reality (cf. http://felixonline.co.uk/articles/2013-1-18-inception-the-theory-of-the-ring/).

concerned with extension of the dominant causal-logical order. In this it follows a frequently unconceded and yet general intention of dream theory.[18] Thus the albeit action-laden, yet very sedate surrealism of *Inception*. In the dream worlds of this film, time is extended in formidable and fantastic ways, accelerating and decelerating, but otherwise everything remains exceedingly familiar. The film offers neither a threateningly unnerving image-affective surrealism à la David Lynch, nor a puzzling existentialistic (and funny) surrealism à la Luis Bunuel. The complexity of *Inception* is transparent.

The strength of this film is to be found at a different level, namely that of pragmatic and aesthetically dissolved scepticism. Reality is not a matter of theoretical certainty. But neither is it simply a matter of faith.[19] Real is not simply what we believe, but what we are mentally *forced* to believe. Due to his physical injury, trauma and resulting self-delusion, the protagonist from *Memento* cannot help but pursue his own reality. From an external perspective we might have good reasons to criticise this twist, but we also have to realise that it is impossible to be absolutely sure about our reasons and the corresponding background-theory. It only appears to us as the best, most convincing, least contestable model *for the time being*. Thus, reality is – a more exact definition - what we are mentally, i.e. for good reasons, forced to believe, and reasons are good if they are intersubjectively comprehensible, because only in that case they react adequately to resistances of our experience, to the differences ("qualia"), inconsistencies and contradictions, and don't arrange these resistances at random. The real is what we are forced to believe from intersubjectively certified experience.[20] And in everyday practice we call

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18   A dream reality which one can learn to manipulate enlarges the radius of waking reality. Ultimately it is concerned with an understanding of reality aimed at unity (Petra Gehring, *Traum und Wirklichkeit. Zur Geschichte einer Unterscheidung*, Frankfurt/New York: Campus2008, S. 236f.).

19   This is the error of Michael Rennett, *Plugging in to the Experience Machine*, in: Thorsten Botz-Bornstein: Inception and Philosophy: Ideas to Die for, Chicago: Open Curt Publishing Company, 2011, p. 63 & 64.

20   This definition of reality can assure itself of a broad philosophical tradition.

this gentle coercion with concomitant uncertainty: trust. We trust as long as in a certain situation we have no reason not to. Finally, it is the special achievement of art and aesthetically successful films to *present* reality as (holistic) experience instead of analysing it like science, including complexity research, does. Nothing is more complex than the reality of a life-world (*Lebenswelt*). In the words of Marcel Proust: "An hour is not merely an hour. It is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates." The philosophy of mind would say: full of qualia. "What we call reality is a certain connection between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us" – we have to emphasise this – "simultaneously with them – a connection that is suppressed in a simple cinematographic vision,"[21] but which might be regained, so we may add, in a complex one.

Let us finish by remembering the catchy definition by Niklas Luhmann whereby trust has the inherent social function of "reducing complexity".[22] We have trust and we need trust because what makes up our world, our context of life and meaning, presents itself as a network of uncontrollable complexity, in which very different events can take place at any point in time. But to live means to act at any certain point in time, and trust creates the possibility for action by finding good reasons to push uncertainties to one side. Cinematographic narration or the presentation of complex stories then serves, or so we might think, to increase complexity and to counter any trust in our understanding of the world. But it is more correct to say that such films test whether trust can be regained

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It ranges – to name only some prominent representatives – from Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (the real as sensually and conceptually constituted object, in German Gegenstand: that which opposes to the subject) and Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit (the methodologically elaborated „experience" that consciousness has with its „other") via John Dewey's Art as Experience (chapter 1) and Clarence I. Lewis' Mind and the World Order (introducing „qualia" as a term) to Jacques Lacan ("the real" opposes absolutely to imagination and symbolization). – I owe the reference to Lewis to Stefan Niklas.

21   Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Time Regained*, transl. by Andreas Mayor & Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright, London: Vintage 2000, p. 247.

22   Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Vertrauen. Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität*, Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius 2000 (or. 1968).

and thus reinforced. This type of narration is (only) a reflection of what film – like all art – generally does, namely to construct and deconstruct a world, a meaning – an infinite, openly holistic context of meaning which can only be configured in the experiencing of evidence – simultaneously. In such films, the ambivalence of the *as if* inherent to all art is once again elevated to an exhibitionistic gesture. *Inception* reinforces our trust in the world because the film turns its back indifferently on a theoretical refutation of scepticism and a fixation on secure knowledge. We should do as Cobb does and choose to ignore the spinning top.

Isolde, or the Making of the Sublime

C. Stephen Jaeger[1]

Abstract: This essay contests the argument of Erich Auerbach's "Camilla, or the Rebirth of the Sublime." It questions his historical frame and his narrowing of the sublime to classical (Virgilian) and Christian (*sermo humilis*). "Camilla" analyses three grand entrance scenes: Virgil's Camilla[2], the corresponding scene in the OF Roman d'Eneas, and the arrival of the heavenly messenger in Dante, Inferno Bk. 9. These scenes map, for Auerbach, a clear historical trajectory: classical sublime – medieval decline – Dantean rebirth.

"Isolde" answers with three love scenes: the love potion in Gottfried's *Tristan* , the tale of Ghismonda and Tancredi in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*. Repeating the structure of the "Camilla" essay breaks its historical frame, which cannot survive an anomaly like Gottfried's Tristan romance with its abundance of sublime elements, written more than 100 years prior to the "rebirth of the sublime" in Dante.

The sublime as experienced and expressed in the Middle Ages is a religious-aesthetic force in its own right. It is "made" not "reborn" out of a forgotten tradition, fashioned in response to the emotional impetus of individual moments in narrative. It draws extensively on a mode of the sublime, the Judeo-Christian, which has been in the shadow of the mainstream discussion. The "Longinian trail" leads from *Peri hypsous* (Longinus? mid-first century C.E.?) to Edmund Burke and Kant, completely bypassing the Old and and New Testaments, early Christianity and the Middle Ages. The discussion of the Judeo-Christian mode moved onto a side track, after a surge of interest following Lowth, Mendelssohn, Herder and Coleridge. The modern discussion has all but forgotten that trend, which its eighteenth century proponents took to be prior to the classical.

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1   C. Stephen Jaeger is Edward William and Jane Marr Gutgsell Professor emeritus of German, Comparative Literature and Medieval Studies, University of Illinois. He was educated at University of California, Berkeley and has taught at Northwestern University, Bryn Mawr College, University of Washington and University of Illinois. His most recent book is Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

2   *Aeneid* 7. 803-17.

Loosening the conceptual restraints of a classical sublime and the attenuated sublime of *sermo humilis* opens many paths of analysis, encompassing a wide variety of Latin writings, devotional, heroic and hagiographic, and traditions of romantic ennobling love.

The historical framework of Auerbach's "Camilla" loomed large in the post WWII years: rebirth after a period of barbarism. For a generation of German literary and cultural historians that historical scheme became an instrument to reassert long continuities in European values after the Nazi period. While it worked for E.R. Curtius, Bruno Snell and others, it had no validity within the history of the sublime.

> "Les théoriciens font des théories, les écrivains mettent en pratique des principes et des valeurs. Le sublime est une de ces valeurs. Mais il faut bien voir qu'elle n'est pas héritée, toute faite et immuable, de l'antiquité, et n'a pas été imposée… par les théoriciens du Moyen Age. C'est au fond un idéal, qui correspond bien à une certaine aspiration à la grandeur, à l'élévation, sans que ces deux notions soient d'emblée confondues."

> – Daniel Poirion[3]

My title answers to Erich Auerbach's essay "Camilla, or the Rebirth of the Sublime"—in order to contest it. "Isolde" names a heroine sublimely represented in an early chivalric romance, and "The Making" suggests that the sublime was, not reborn, but "made," abundantly, in this work of early courtly literature as a spontaneous response to a grand theme by an inspired poet, not as a function or result of a classical tradition, of rhetorical theory or practice, or of a literary language and its public at any stage of development.

Auerbach compares three scenes in which an imposing figure makes a grand arrival: the warrior woman Camilla in book 7 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the corresponding scene in the Old French *Roman d'Eneas*, and the arrival of the heavenly messenger in Canto 9 of Dante's *Inferno*. He traces an inverted arc in the grandeur of representation of the three scenes, leading

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3   Poirion, 1986, p. 21.

from a highpoint in Virgil to a lowpoint in the medieval romancier, rising again "reborn" in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The conventional "middle" verse style of the medieval author sandwiched between the classical sublimity of Virgil and Dante is a symptom, Auerbach argues, of the absence of a high style and the dominance of a charming, descriptive, moralizing narrative style in chivalric romance. Auerbach's point is that the Virgilian sublime was lost in the Middle Ages, which moved slowly in the development of a literary language adequate to a "rebirth."

Auerbach's "Camilla," along with his "*Sermo humilis*,"[4] has set boundaries around the topic of the medieval sublime that hedge in a wide variety of forms and experiences in which the sublime occurs. My main object is Auerbach's historicizing of the sublime mode in the scheme of *Classical* or *Virgilian Sublime – Medieval Decline – Dantean Rebirth*. The encompassing scheme, a classical age followed by an age of decline, followed by a renaissance of the classical, retains its historical relevance in many areas, but ill accommodates a topic as erratic and individualistic as the sublime, more closely bound to single moments and responses than to cultural traditions.

I begin this essay by analysing three love scenes that repeat the arc of Auerbach's "Camilla": the love potion episode in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, Boccaccio's story of Tancred and Ghismonda in *Decameron*, fourth day, first story, and the balcony scene from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* : grand style – prosaic middle style – grand style. The contrafacture repeats the historical frame of "Camilla" in order to demonstrate its fragility. The comparison gives us a fix on the coming and going, the making, the disappearance, and the remaking, of the sublime in poetry—more an unpredictable eruption than a "rebirth" or any historical trend logically unfolding—and on the dangers of historicizing these vagaries.

More generally, this essay poses the question, where is the sublime located in writings from the Middle Ages? Where does it come from? What forces generate it? Following Auerbach the answers are, classical

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4   Both essays are published in Auerbach, 1958: "*Sermo humilis,*" 25-66; "Camilla," 181-233.

tradition (the grand or elevated style), and *sermo humilis* where Christian mysteries are clothed in ordinary language. The need for other perspectives is underscored in a comment by Porter (2016), 27: "The problem with current histories of the sublime is not the lack of evidence…: scholars have been looking for the sublime in the wrong places." [5] I begin by looking for it in the three love scenes.

Gottfried von Strassburg (d. ca. 1210), author of the high courtly version of the romance of Tristan and Isolde,[6] is a master of the sublime in medieval vernacular poetry. The love-potion scene is one of many that put his mastery on display. It takes place on ship-board during the sea-crossing from Ireland to Cornwall. Tristan is delivering Princess Isolde of Ireland to her future husband, King Mark. Isolde's mother has sent a love potion along for the princess and Mark to drink on their wedding night. But by mistake, Tristan and Isolde drink it.

The episode is dominated by images of the two lovers rapt, snatched out of their normal life by the power of a love goddess who takes control of their lives as if by a sudden attack of an overwhelming force. In the beginning stage of love, they turn inward to moody reflection and self-analysis. Their inner turmoil is represented as allegorical combats in a realm of gods and ideals. *Minne*, passionate love personified, recurs in a number of guises, provocative, combative and tyrannical. She had lurked around Tristan and Isold for some time, Gottfried says, then she sneaks into their hearts—concealed, so to speak, in the Trojan horse of the love potion:

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5   Porter's book represents a rethinking of the nature and history of the sublime for the ancient world. Many of his insights apply well to the Middle Ages. E.g. his point that the exclusive focus on Longinus as the definer of the sublime has narrowed our vision for its varieties. Shuger (1988) experienced the same sense of working against a perspective co-opted and monopolized by Longinus in her important study, *Sacred Rhetoric.*: "There are no studies of a sacred grand style in the English Renaissance because even according to its practitioners, it was not supposed to exist" (p. 3). For the Middle Ages it is possible to vary her observation: "…no studies of a sacred **or a secular** grand style…"

6   Gottfried's version breaks off after some 19,500 lines, about 4/5 of the way to the end as we can infer it from other versions.

> Now when the maid and the man, Isolde and Tristan, had
> drunk the draught, in an instant that arch-disburber of tranquil-
> lity was there. Love, waylayer of all hearts, and she had stolen
> in! Before they were aware of it she had planted her victorious
> standard in their two hearts and bowed them beneath her yoke.
> They who were two and divided now became one and united. [7]

The image of a conquering divinity taking possession of the two, im-
posing her sway on them, is so much the more dynamic, since the re-
lation of the two that preceded the love potion was marked by Isolde's
violent hatred for her future lover. She had discovered that Tristan was
the killer of her uncle Morold. Thus the sudden and swift transformation
from hate to love sets in with the force of a miraculous conversion.

They are slow to admit to each other what force has transformed their
inner world; too much is at stake in maintaining their outer behavior
as it had been. The breakthrough follows long dithering, hesitant and
awkward overtures, which heighten the drama of resistance, break-
through and metanoia. The onset of love has to appear, to the characters
and readers, as a shattering and destructive abandoning of the rational
governing forces of life. What follows is a higher life of spiritual union:
"Love the reconciler, had purged their hearts of enmity, and so joined
them in affection that each was to the other as limpid as a mirror"[8]. This
affection trumps honor and shame, which they still have to acknowledge
outwardly. But inwardly they now share a private realm where the mor-
al strictures of the lower realm cannot intrude.

Gottfried uses the ocean as a metaphor for disorientation, a good im-
age for the irrational and unknown, a shifting medium, vast and sepa-
rate from firm ground and stability, an otherworld realm of mystery, the
hidden, of threat and death.[9] After they drink the love potion, the lady
in waiting, Brangaene, rushes in, finds the near-empty bottle, gasps to

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7   Trans. Hatto p. 195; ed. Krohn, lines 11707-11719.

8   Trans. Hatto, p. 195, ed. Krohn, lines 11721-26.

9   See Boitani's (1989) essay on Dante's image of the ship braving the infinite

realize the catastrophe she allowed to happen, and flings the bottle into "the wild raging sea." [10] In the everyday reality of the narrative, the sea is neither wild nor raging; it had been calm and sunny a few minutes before, but the laws of nature are suspended to make the sea the mirror of the turbulence in the two whose worlds have now been overturned.

They set sail again, and both are stricken with what appears like sickness but is love. Tristan asks her, why are you suffering so, what's wrong with you? "*Lameir*," answers Isolde. Tristan threshes out the meanings: *Lameir* means the sea, *Lameir* means bitterness, and *Lameir* means— stretching phonology—love. The word play connects three dangerous zones: the ocean, suffering and love. The image of the ocean vs. firm land is the counterpart of the two realms between which the lovers are suspended: the ground of normalcy and the oceanic experience into which the love potion has plunged them.

Entrapment is another image that describes the lovers' predicament: they are like the bird that settles onto the limed tree branch and is snared by the hunter's glue. The image also is of loss of normalcy—in this case, of freedom, and it inspires these breathless, beautifully paced lines of MHG verse, here in Hatto's superb translation:

> When she recognized the lime that bewitching love had spread and saw that she was deep in it, she endeavoured to reach dry ground; she strove to be out and away. But the lime kept clinging to her and drew her back and down. The lovely woman fought back with might and main, but stuck fast at every step. She was succumbing against her will. She made desperate attempts on many sides, she twisted and turned with hands and feet—and immersed them ever deeper in the blind sweetness of love, and of the man. [11]

Love takes command and transforms the lovers from their skin to the depths of their being; it makes them appear more beautiful to each other.

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ocean as a touchstone of the sublime in poetry.

10   P. 195; line 11695.

11   Trans. Hatto, p. 196; ed. Krohn, lines 11792-809 .

Like Tristan's father in love earlier[12], Tristan and Isolde live a new life, a *vita nuova*, once they abandon the old. In the early stages love disorients, cuts away the stable ground from beneath them. They become restless and driven, impulses they cannot release as long as they maintain the mask of normalcy.

The dialogue between the two lovers prior to the avowal is also built on the dynamics of resistance, breakthrough and transformation. The pretense of normal conversation is first pressed, then pierced by the forces stifled beneath it: both Tristan and Isolde read "love" in the face of the other, because Love-the-Painter, or Love-the-Make-up-Artist, (*minne diu verwaerinne*), has daubed color on their face that reveals the feeling they are trying hard to hide. And yet they are still far from confessing once they know. They hint at their condition; each tries to lure the other into confessing; the other resists, evades, sticks to the comfort of normalcy. The tortured conversation about *lameir* is the lever that opens the other world. Tristan: "So it is with me, *lameir* and you are what distress me. My dearest lady, sweet Isolde, you and you alone and the passion you inspire have turned my wits and robbed me of my reason! I have gone astray so utterly that I shall never find my way again! All that I see irks and oppresses me, it all grows trite and meaningless. Nothing in the wide world is dear to my heart but you." Isolde answers: "So you, sir, are to me." [13] The poet's tact in language and narrative shows in following Tristan's long and tortured confession with Isolde's simple, half-line of concurrence, which hits with the brevity and force of a door slammed shut, the door on the old life.

The morbidity of this love can also be reckoned among its sublime elements: "It was their lasting sorrow, their never-ending anguish, of which at last they died!" [14] The lady-in-waiting Brangaene injects heavy pathos by connecting love with death. She explains to the lovers what has happened to them: "Ah Tristan and Isolde, this drink will be your

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12   Trans. Hatto p. 53; line 938ff.

13   P. 200; lines 12014-28.

14   P. 194-5; lines 11674-6.

death!"[15] And more explicitly somewhat later, Brangaene to the lovers: "That flask and the draught it contained will be the death of you both!" Tristan's response: "Whether it be life or death, it has poisoned me most sweetly! I have no idea what the other will be like, but this death suits me well! If my adorable Isolde were to go on being the death of me in this fashion, I would woo death everlasting!"[16] The lines are only half ironic. The parodistic evocation of a central Christian mystery ("everlasting life") through Tristan's "death everlasting" (*ein êweclîchez sterben*) puts a sharp edge on the pathos. The non-ironic half is the willing submission to death and suffering in love; life is not too great a price to pay. The sublime element is the obliterating of the morbidity and horror of death through the love, which more than compensates, in fact implies the overcoming of extinction, decay, putrefaction—as does Christian redemption. Even more striking than what is shed is what is gained in the conceiving of death allied with love. Death is exalted, reformed into a consummation, one parallel to physical consummation in the act of love.

   The reversal of the valence on death is restated in Isolde's coming to terms with her post-love-potion mindset. In her first struggles against the onset of love she had thoughts of killing her lover. Reminiscing on the bath scene, she reminds him of her missed chance to take revenge. She had stood over him, sword in hand, torn by the question whether to kill him or not. Then—back on the ship—her remarkable outcry, "Alas, said Isolde, when I had so good a chance and failed to kill you in your bath, God in Heaven, why did I do as I did? **Had I known then what I know now**, I swear you would have died!"[17] Presumably "what she knows now" is a vision of a life filled with betrayal, deception and suffering in the service of love which unfolds before her mind's eye, and for this moment she would trade the life of her lover for a return to the banal innocence of her old life. "Why, lovely Isolde, he asked, why are you so

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15   P. 195; lines 11705-6.

16   Pp. 205-6; lines 12487-12502.

17   rans. Hatto, p. 199; "daz ich nu weiz, wiste ich ez dô,/ binamen so waere ez iuwer tôt"-- line 11958-11963. Emphasis added.

distressed, what is it that you know?" "All that I know distresses me, all that I see afflicts me. The sky and sea oppress me, my life has become a burden to me!" And then with a gesture wonderfully adversitive to her complaint, she leans against him with her elbow, the beginning of her "boldness," as Gottfried puts it [18] She is in a state that Thomas Mann would have called, with Nietzschean overtones, "Erkenntnisekel," revulsion brought on by insight or knowledge,[19] for instance the paralyzing knowledge that had trapped Hamlet in inaction. Her eyes are opened to life under the dominion of Love, and the knowledge plunges her into suffering, despair, murderous and suicidal thoughts[20] She would rather have killed the man she loves than suffer the new life that love inflicts on her.

Few episodes in the narrative bring out what Gottfried conceives as the tragic loftiness of her new life better than this. Isolde's struggle against the "new life" is like that of the hero of ancient tragedy struggling against a pre-arranged inevitable destiny prior to the *peripeteia* and acceptance of fate. The acceptance of tragic doom in the medieval romance puts the hero/ine into a sublime state unique to medieval courtly love, in which the ennobling force of love constantly contends with its inevitable destructiveness, and wins one temporary victory after another until the final inevitable defeat. The sublime conception of romantic love wants love pitted against death (*Song of Songs* 8.6: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm: for love is strong as death"); it sees the greatest sacrifice as trivial if made for love, and it wants to make that sacrifice (as Isolde ultimately does). It is not only the Tristan romance that professed the commitment to love so intense as to override the will to live and even to forfeit redemption. Heloise's claim that she would renounce her salvation to follow Abelard into hell if necessary is grounded

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18 Trans. Hatto, p. 199; lines 11875 -11972.

19 There is also a cognitive element in the experience: as a result of the potion they became "as limpid as a mirror to each other" (trans. Hatto, p. 195).

20 "She found this life unbearable"—p. 196; "ir waz diz leben ouch ande."-- line 11791.

in the same exorbitant love pathos. Aucassin would follow Nicolette on the same terms, and Romeo Juliet.

The redemptive element in the love-death of Tristan and Isolde is driven home eloin the final lines of Gottfried's prologue. The love and death of Tristan and Isolde are represented as eucharistic bread for the reader, their death as "the life of the living":

> Today we still love to hear of their tender devotion, sweet and ever fresh, their joy, their sorrow, their anguish, and their ecstasy. And although they are long dead, their sweet name lives on and their death will endure for ever to the profit of well-bred people, giving loyalty to those who seek loyalty, honour to those who seek honour. For us who are alive their death must live on and be for ever new. For wherever still today one hears the recital of their devotion, their perfect loyalty, their hearts' joy, their hearts' sorrow—

> *This is bread to all noble hearts. With this their death lives on. We read their life, we read their death, and to us it is sweet as bread.*

> *Their life, their death are our bread. Thus lives their life, thus lives their death. Thus they live still and yet are dead, and their death is the bread of the living*).[21]

The sublime conception of love is framed in language that is appropriate to its grandeur, a "fit" which is comprehended in the Greek rhetorical term for the grand style, *megaloprepeia*. In the original of the passage just cited we hear the musicality of the language and the alignment of heightened speech with heightened theme:

> Wan swâ man noch hoeret lesen
> Ir triuwe, ir triuwen reinekeit,
> Ir herzeliep, ir herzeleit,
> Deist aller edelen herzen brôt.

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21   Trans. Hatto, p. 44. Hatto sets the final eight lines in cursive to indicate the shift from rhymed couplet to quatraines rhymed *abba*.

Hie mite sô lebet ir beider tôt.
Wir lesen ir leben, wir lesen ir tôt
Und ist uns daz süeze alse brôt.

Ir leben, ir tôt sint unser brôt.
Sus lebet ir leben, sus lebet ir tôt
Sus lebent si noch und sint doch tôt
Und ist ir tôt der lebenden brôt. [22]

This ecstatic swell of assonance and rhyme punctuates the implied parallel between the suffering and death of Tristan and Isolde and that of Christ. The lines give the love story a life-sustaining, eucharistic force, and the music of its rhetoric is in line with that extravagant claim. [23] The adaptation of the language and concepts of Christian belief and ritual to the life of the lovers is a favored, much discussed, technique of Gottfried.

<div align="center">***</div>

Boccaccio's story of Prince Tancredi and his daughter Ghismonda, her tragic love for a courtier, her father's valet, in *Decameron*, day 4, first story, seems to have programmatically erased the sublimity of the Tristan story. It subjects the passion of the lovers to sober rationalism. Boccaccio's story is in part an adaptation of Tristan and Isolde. The common elements are: a young woman watched jealously by an older man in authority over her (her father in this case), a clandestine and dangerous love affair with a courtier in close service to his own lord and his beloved's father, a love-message concealed in a reed, a bold double-entendre of

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22 Lines 218-40.

23 The commensurability of sublime subject and sublimity of language is a topic in medieval discussions and debates on the sublime. In Augustine's clipped phrase, quoting Cicero: "magna granditer dicere" (*De doct. Christ.* 4. 17, PL 34, 105) and in relation to Christian subjects: "grand emotion" felt and expressed in the "fervor of eloquence" (4. 20. PL 34, 109). Anselm of Canterbury virtually rejects *sermo humilis* in treating topics "that are above human understanding" and calls for language suited to the theme (PL 158, 363B). And Richard of St. Victor, (PL 196, 798C-D). For the debate on the topic in the early modern period, see Shuger (1988); also, following Shuger and broadening the discussion, Till (2006).

the woman to provoke the man's attentions, a cave that facilitates the lovers' meetings, the couple caught in the act of love by the older man, a "love" potion, in this case poison, which the woman drinks in order to join her lover in death, that is, a love-death, where the two lovers "unite their souls" in the other world. And finally, the two lovers buried in the same grave.

So much for the shared narrative elements. When we move to its representation of love, we are in a different world. Ghismonda falls in love because she decides to: she is widowed young and held by her father in an enforced celibacy. She has tasted the pleasures of love and enjoyed them. But her father will not approve a second marriage, and so "she decided to see whether she could find herself a secret lover who was worthy of her affections." ("…si pensò di volere avere, se esser potesse, occultamente un valoroso amante"[24]

Having scouted through the various men at court "she was attracted to one above all." These are not star-crossed lovers, clearly. Falling in love becomes a process initially without a love object, desires encumbered with reflections, pondering, decisions, and it is not the melancholy pensiveness of Tristan and Isolde ("What has happened to me?"), but rather calculated planning ("How shall I reach my goal? whom shall I pick? what is the wisest and shrewdest way to arrange this?") It is closer to that chivalric convention where a young man can say, "I decided to become a lover; therefore I set out to find a woman I could love."

Like virtually every motive in Boccaccio's story, Ghismonda's pursuit of a lover is rationally thought out. She articulates this cautious run-up to passion to her father after he catches the two lovers in the act and has the man arrested: "I am still a young woman... I am full of amorous longings, intensified beyond belief by my marriage, which enabled me to discover the marvellous joy that comes from their fulfilment. As I was

24   Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam, (Harmondsworth UK, 1984), p. 332. Original text available in the online version of Vittore Branca's standard text: Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decamerone*, ed. Vittore Branca, (Torino, 1992); online: http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecShowText.php?myID=nov0401&lang=it

incapable of resisting these forces, I made up my mind, being a woman in the prime of life, to follow the path along which they were leading, and I fell in love" [25]

This is the conception of love of a high-minded rationalist. She is no prude; she has an acceptance of sex derived from nature rather than virtue; her "amorous longings" (*concupiscibile disidero*) are a licit part of the economy of the self. True, she "could not resist these forces," but instead of letting herself be overwhelmed and taken captive, she resolves to manage them wisely. Her father is far from the paradigm of virtue and wisdom, since being old he has forgotten the force of love. As in other stories of the *Decameron*, a father who enforces his child's chastity is acting foolishly. Ghismonda possesses a comprehensive wisdom of body and soul, but her father's tyranny requires that she conceal her new life discreetly, manage her love with prudence and foresight.

For Ghismonda, it follows logically from her powerful desires that she should seek a lover. Love is not governed by transcendental powers, no magical potion that senses affinities of soul and destiny, no goddess of love, no ethical realm set apart and above conventional morality; no magical forces that snatch up lovers and transport them to higher realms. They stay in the ordinary world with feet firmly planted and manage their affairs wisely. Calculated decisions, careful planning and secrecy allow lovers to gratify their desires and not succumb to the dangers of love—at least imagine themselves secure from those dangers. Ghismonda excuses herself for deceiving her father by her appeal to the rational calculation which led her to Guiscardo: "I did not take a lover at random, as many women do, but deliberately chose Guiscardo in preference to any other, only conceding my love to him after careful reflection; through patience and good judgment of us both, I have long been enjoying the gratification of my desires."[26] Pleasure is an earned reward for caution;

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25   P. 337.

26   *Decameron,* tr. McWilliam, p. 338; ed. Branca: "Guiscardo non per accidente tolsi, come molte fanno, ma con diliberato consiglio elessi innanzi a ogni altro e con avveduto pensiero a me lo 'ntrodussi e con savia perseveranze di me e di lui lungamente goduta sono del mio disio").

love itself is, powerful though it is, not an emotion that hits with the explosiveness of a "coup de foudre." It is a powerful desire, mastered and gratified by an intelligent woman who sets precise criteria for her lover (nobility of body, mind and soul) and stakes out boundaries that respect social and familial obligations. A "new life" is out of the question in this world of sensible people managing their affairs intelligently.

Boccaccio gives a detailed map of the planning process by which Ghismonda arranges her meetings with Guiscardo. She recalls that a secret staircase attaches her room to a cavern "formed at some remote period of the past" (like the cave of lovers of *Tristan*). She picks the lock to this staircase "by various implements" so that no one would know what was going on. (The cave in *Tristan* selected magically who could open its door.) She goes into the cavern, and discovers a shaft leading from the roof of the cavern to a deserted place outside the palace walls. Of course, she plans for his safe descent, sending him word of the height of the shaft and the length of rope he will need. Guiscardo prepares the rope by tying knots in it to ease his descent and ascent and mark his progress. Every moment is taken command of, governed, managed by a foresight that would do justice to a well-planned bank robbery. Ghismonda and Guiscardo are at the same time lovers and administrators of their love. Clearly in this world only foolish lovers get overwhelmed by love. No danger is forgotten; every risk is managed. Guiscardo even anticipates harm to his rear end and legs from the brambles in the bushes surrounding the cave, and so wears a suit of leather, ultimately a bad decision—it is so thick it prevents him from getting away from his pursuers. Their lovemaking is ceremonious and cursorily described. Of their parting words we hear only about their planning: "Before parting, they agreed on the wisest way of pursuing their lovemaking in future..."[27]

Those few glances into the text characterize a love tragedy whose governing law is *ethos*, that is, morally controlled behavior, which rules absolutely over *pathos*. Even Ghismonda's decision to take her own life after her lover's death is a rational decision, justified in a long speech

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27   P. 334.

full of argumentation that might have been at home in a law court or a scholastic disputation. So while her love is "stronger than death," its representation seems frosty and staged. At no point during the love affair do these lovers either challenge or embrace death (as does Tristan: "If this is my death, I want to go on dying!"). They want to live and gratify their "amorous longings" in secret, not experience some inexplicably lofty, love-affirming death. The tragedy of their love is its discovery, not a destiny built into the irrational character of love itself.

Guiscardo is executed at the command of Tancredi, his heart brought to Ghismonda in a golden chalice. She holds a speech to her dead lover, weeps a measured length of time, then pours herbs into the chalice and drinks poison seasoned with her lover's heart. The will to live wisely having failed, it is replaced by heroic resolve. This act of self-sacrifice for love in the end has the character of a sublime act, transgressing normal human action, but Ghismonda's self-control returns it to a world of prose, social obligations, and decorum. She arranges herself on her bed, "decorously," and waits in silence for death. She has just time to hold a speech to her father and to arrange her burial next to her lover, a last act of planning.

Such reasoned control of the emotions resists moves from the prosaic to the sublime. Her love led to tragedy because it got out of her control, not because it was in itself sublime. Sublime love has to appear to a rational human as a dangerous intrusion of irrational and ungovernable forces. In the world of Boccaccio's story that force could only exercise its grip on fools, not on the wise.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* returns us to an exalted conception of love close in loftiness to that of *Tristan*. The balcony scene is charged with a dizzying emotional energy; the dialogue at every turn gives voice to the ecstatic character of their love. Their lives, earlier governed by honor, morality and social convention, are shattered as by a bolt of lightning. Romeo appears in Capulet's orchard at peril of his life. Passion overrides

common sense. He does not plan anything. Juliet worries, as Ghismonda might have:

> How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
> The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
> And the place death, considering who thou art... [28]

But Romeo is far from calculating the height of walls and the dangers of jealous fathers:

> With love's light wings did I o'er perch these walls;
> For stony limits cannot hold love out,
> And love can do that dares love attempt. [29]

Cautious Guiscardo knew stony walls could scratch his legs and brambles prick his bottom, and so he wore his heavy leather pants. His practical intelligence told him that "love's light wings" would not prevail against the law of gravity, and so he measured out and indexed the knots on his rope with the caution of a spelunker. Romeo takes no precautions; he flaunts his defiance of dangers; the thought of love's miraculous power removes any fear of stone walls and angry fathers. He has lost rational control of his actions; also of his imagination, which inflates his perceptions into cosmic and divine realms. One glance at Juliet on the balcony, and he sees an angel:

> O, speak again, bright angel! For thou art
> As glorious to this night, being o'er my head
> As is a winged messenger of heaven
> Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
> Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
> When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
> And sails upon the bosom of the air. [30]

His vision now takes in higher worlds; he is in the grip of that trans-

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28 2.2. 62-64.

29 2.2. 66-68.

30 2. 2. 26-32.

forming, elevating force that makes Tristan and Isolde appear more beautiful to each other after the potion and that turns the loved person into a god or goddess. The lines just quoted not only match sublime vision with grandly appropriate language; they also show an observer's reaction to the angelic Juliet: the mortals look on with "white-upturned wondering eyes," rapt with amazement.[31]

Romeo's vision and his language raise her to the cosmic: she is the bright sun; the moon is pale because it is jealous of Juliet; her eyes are the stars in heaven. The transferring, carrying-across effect of metaphor is at work transporting the woman from the mortal into the immortal sphere. The passage also models the response of the audience to the transfigured Juliet, proposes to the viewer amazement, wonderment, ecstatic gazing, the sense of being drawn into a higher realm, where people look, walk, and speak like the gods. And in their rapt condition, both lovers speak the language of religion commensurate with their feeling for their new love:

> Romeo: "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized"[32]

Juliet is an angel, a saint; her eyes are "Two of the fairest stars in all the heavens" [33]

> Romeo is "the god of [her] idolatry" [34]

Love gives both lovers miraculous powers: they leap walls and conventions. The threshold from a law-governed world to a realm of angels bestriding clouds and soaring through the heavens, was crossed before the garden scene. Juliet can abandon the social niceties of court-

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31 "Illam omnis tectis agrisque effusa iuventus / turbaque miratur…et prospectat euntem,/ attonitis inhians animis…" (*Aeneid* 7. 812-814). However the angel "bestrid[ing] the clouds" and "sail[ing] on the bosom of the air" resonates clearly with images from the Old Testament (prophets) and the New (*Revelation*).

32 2.2.50.

33 2.2.15.

34 2.2.114.

ship—holding the wooer at arms length etc.; modesty and custom are already overwhelmed by love [35]. Behavior that would be condemned as shameless and punished is licit in the lovers' transformed universe of sentiment. Transgression is an act of devotion, a sacrifice to love, as it is throughout the Tristan romance. Images of boundlessness and vast oceans are at hand, as in *Tristan*:

> Juliet:

> My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
> My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
> The more I have, for both are infinite. [36]

So is the image of lightning::

> this contract is … too sudden,
> Too like the lightning which doth cease to be
> Ere one can say it lightens. [37]

The lightning strike, later a commonplace of love language ("coup de foudre") also resonates with classic formulations of the sublime. [38]

As in *Tristan*, so in *Romeo and Juliet*, the lovers are bound in a love that overturns the laws binding humans in society: familial, social, moral. Desperate means lead to tragic death. Both couples, having been thwarted in life, envision their union in death.

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35 2. 2. 88-97.

36 2. 2. 133-35.

37 2. 2. 117-120.

38 Longinus (1999), 1.4, p. 163; "a well-timed flash of sublimity shatters everything like a bolt of lightning…"; Psellos (1936), vol. 2, 220-21; Richard of St. Victor (1996), 5. 5. p. 129; (1979), p. 316: "…the human soul is led above itself when, as it is irradiated by divine light and suspended in wonder at supreme beauty, it is shaken with such overpowering awe that it is altogether driven out of its normal state. As when a bolt of lightning flashes forth [*in modum fulguris coruscantis*], the more deeply the soul is cast down into the depths by despising itself with regard to that invisible beauty, then all the more sublimely, all the more quickly it is elevated to sublime things when it rebounds through the desire of highest things and is carried away above itself."

Shakespeare's drama compresses the course of love into a single tragic sequence of events, and so the impact is more forceful than the epic extension and episodic character of *Tristan*. Likewise, the ecstatic, breathless temper of the balcony scene is a very different mood from the languid, pessimistic melancholy of *Tristan*. But the representation of love as an overwhelming force, backed and represented by transcendent figures (goddesses, angels) set metaphorically parallel to religion, the intrusion of a supernatural force that takes command of the lovers, the atmosphere of miracle; the transgressiveness of the love; the challenge to death; the suggestion of a redemptive force that overcomes death; the suspension, imagined and real, of the laws and conventions of everyday life, and the intensifying of language and metaphor to a level fitting the grandiose love their characters experience, are shared features of *Tristan* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Those common features can stand in place of a formal definition of the sublime in this essay. The approach through textual commentary rather than closely defined concepts is consistent with Auerbach's method. Nowhere in "Camilla" or elsewhere does he theorize the sublime; and nowhere in *Mimesis* does he theorize "mimesis" or "realism." The reader is left to draw the larger conception from the texts as presented. It is an approach that has troubled some readers. [39] But the problem of rendering a broad definition of the sublime is no less troubling. An inductive approach is especially justified in the case of a phenomenon as slippery as the sublime. Focus is best gained through close reading of the text and its effects on an observer. [40] The passages from *Tristan* and *Romeo and*

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39 Curtius (1952), 57-70. Wellek (1954), 299-307. Auerbach responded to Curtius: "Curtius sees in [*Mimesis*] a theoretical construct, from which he seeks to extract theses in order to refute it. But the book is no theoretical construct… The very elastic thoughts or ideas that hold it together then cannot be grasped and proven wrong in single isolated phrases" (Auerbach, 2003, p. 562). Also Doran (2007), p. 354 and n. 12 (Auerbach's "distaste for theoretical or conceptual vocabulary.")

40 For antiquity and the Middle Ages the best guides are Longinus, *On the Sublime;* Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* Bk. 4, chs. 17-24; Richard of St. Victor (1996), *Benjamin maior*. Porter (2016) begins *The Sublime in Antiquity*

Juliet are distinct epiphanies of the sublime; the absence of that mode in Boccaccio speaks by contrast more distinctly and less open to misunderstanding than abstract definitions of "the sublime" and "realism."

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It would be possible to put a historical frame around these three works and their use and disuse of sublime elements. Then I could call this essay, "Isolde, or the Rebirth of the Sublime" or "Juliet, or the Rebirth of the Sublime," and claim that the cult of romantic ennobling love made possible a language and feeling for the sublime which faded as literary culture developed into the bourgeois, prose world of Boccaccio, but was "reborn" in the tragic-heroic world of Shakespeare. It would be bad historicizing based on choices that are not paradigmatic, only made to seem it by my selection of texts. But I believe that that is what has happened in Auerbach's essay "Camilla, or the Rebirth of the Sublime."

What my three texts observe is not a historical development, but an idealized conception of love opposed to a rationalized conception. There may be historical considerations that bear on the alternation here of poetic sublime – prosaic rational – return of the poetic sublime, but we would have to give up any rigorous sense of historical development to claim the sequence, birth, loss, rebirth of a concept of sublime love (Petrarch is the big anomaly thwarting that scheme). And Auerbach's leading term "classical style," of little or no use for analysing these love scenes, is what ties Camilla's arrival to that of Dante's angel. By restricting his paradigm texts to the three he has chosen, Auerbach can claim the loss followed by the recovery of classical style. And yet the claim rests on a single pas-

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with a penetrating reflection on the definition (pp. 5-7), which however also illustrates how indefinable the phenomenon is: "More a stumbling block than an object of thought, the sublime can be suggested by whatever appears in nature as preternatural, by a quality of the human that appears suprahuman and virtually divine, or by a magnitude that exceeds the bounds of all measure." (p. 6); and again, "At any historical moment the sublime is hard if not impossible to define" (p. 34). Henry Day (2013) quotes Porter in the epigraph to his *Lucan and the Sublime:* "The sublime is a nameless and mercurial event."

sage in the *Aeneid* influencing a single passage in the *Divine Comedy*. The twelfth-century *Roman d'Eneas* includes the scene of Camilla's arrival, but has no echo of the sublime striding of Virgil's Camilla or the amazed enthusiasm of her observers. The Old French author's interests were a moralizing personal description based on conventional courtly forms of "Personenbeschreibung." A "quiet middle style" replaces the "grand and sublime" style of Virgil. The medieval poet moved "with great assurance and ease in what is clearly an established stylistic tradition, to which the ancient conception of the sublime had become alien"[41] Virgil and Dante both rise to the sublime throughout their poems and the Old French poet never does.

Auerbach is brilliant as always in his stylistic analysis, but off the mark in its historicizing. He posits an embracing "conception of the sublime" of which Virgil is representative, and claims that late antiquity and the Middle Ages lost that conception; that it lived on in the diminished form of rhetorical ornament; and that the shift is imbedded in greater cultural-historical changes, a decline of culture: "A growing weariness corroded men's feeling for the grandeur and tragedy of human events. This exaggerated use of rhetoric carried over into the medieval Latin tradition of the Church schools, for which, moreover, 'grandiose subjects' in the ancient sense were virtually nonexistent." Without explanation, Auerbach makes "the schools" into the locus of decline: "Through the inbreeding of the schools, the lofty style degenerated irrevocably into mannerism"[42] Finally, a sublime supplanted by rhetoric was inherited by the vernacular poets of the twelfth century, says Auerbach, who were "almost all clerics or educated by clerics."[43] From late antiquity into the twelfth century, a downhill progress of the sublime was set in motion within which no reminders of the ancients "could prevent the invasion of rhetoric from destroying the sublime style."[44]

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41 Auerbach, 1958, "Camilla," pp. 190-91.

42 P. 199.

43 P. 192.

44 P. 193.

In positing a "classical style" of ancient Roman epic versed in the sublime Auerbach reaches more broadly than its object now appears after several decades of study of the sublime. His "Camilla" essay makes the impression that there was a widely shared "conception of the sublime" among Virgil's near contemporaries. But Auerbach cites only one representative in classical Latin, Virgil. He mentions Horace as a poet who resists a trend to rhetoric, but not as a representative of ancient Roman sublimity. Ovid was "lured into rhetorical devices and tricks." Seneca, Statius and Lucan created "a kind of rhetorical sublimity," which ultimately generates "a feeling of weariness and surfeit"[45] Curiously, Auerbach never mentions Catullus and Lucretius, [46] either in this, in his other essays, or in *Mimesis*. So while those two might have served in addition, a single Latin poet stands as the benchmark of classical sublimity in Latin poetry, and the other potential candidates fall off from that mark. That inventory may well take readers by surprise, to whom it must appear that "grandiose subjects" were as plentiful in ancient Rome as blueberries in summer. Add the grand style in classical Latin oratory and historical writings, and the inventory grows, but the sublime remains an element in Latin poetic narrative style that seldom confers grandeur but often turgidness on its object.

Its relative limits in Latin are underscored by comparison to its Greek antecedents. Longinus, supposed author of the tract in Greek *On the Sublime*, can cite many examples from Homer (his primary witness), Sappho, the tragedians, Herodotus, Hesiod, Xenophon, Plato, Demosthenes, Thucydides. He does not cite any Latin poet, though, writing probably in the mid-first century CE, he had at least the poets of the Republican and the Augustan age at his disposal. He does quote the beginning of Genesis, crediting "that great law-giver of the Jews." So his dearth of reference to Latin sources is not due to excluding other traditions than Greek. He makes a single reference to Cicero whom he compares, with ironic con-

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45   P. 193.

46   On Lucretius and his influence see Hardie (2009) and Porter (2016), pp. 445-457.

descension, to Demosthenes.[47] But that completes the list of Roman writers included in *On the Sublime.* He also explicitly comments to his Roman friend, whom he addresses throughout his (now fragmentary) tract, that Rome has fallen short.[48] He wonders in that same passage why there are so few men of genius in his age and decries the "world-wide sterility of utterance."

In fact, within a broader history of the sublime, very few would question that Roman literature as a whole represented a serious decline in comparison to Greek, and many would agree, Cicero, Virgil, Lucretius, and Longinus among them.[49] Before expanding the "classical sublime" beyond Virgil, then, it would be good to note the position of ancient Latin literature within a much broader decline from Greek. [50]

Auerbach's essay, however, creates the impression that the sublime was prominent in the poetic practice of Roman poets. The impression is misleading. But Auerbach needed it. Otherwise what would be lost in the Middle Ages? And what would be reborn in Dante? For the very conception of "classical Latin sublime" to have any weight, it needs more than Virgil. While other classical Roman writers can be mentioned as imitators and lesser practitioners of the sublime, the same could be said of medieval poets. Auerbach might well have mentioned Sigebert of Gembloux, Bernard Silvester and Alain of Lille as poets, who, like Seneca, Statius and Lucan, composed epic-like works based on grand con-

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47 Longinus (1999), 12.4: "I feel, my dear Terentianus, if we Greeks may be allowed an opinion…" Prior to assigning sublime subjects to Demosthenes and "commonplace" to Cicero, he softens the sharp edge by saying "You Romans, of course, can form a better judgment on this question."

48 Ch. 44.

49 The relative treatment of Greek and Roman sublime in Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity,* confirms an imbalance steeply favoring the Greek. While Porter's topic is both Greek and Latin sublimity, the latter, Virgil included, hardly gets more than a mention.

50 Porter's summation of classical Roman literature is notably unenthusiastic: "There are some hints that sublimity achieved a kind of voguish appeal in Roman literature and in some obliquely related scientific literature in Greek from around the Augustan and early imperial eras, a phenomenon that might be called the bubble of *hupsos*" (p. 25, again, p. 32).

ceptions, seeded with "a kind of rhetorical sublimity," which ultimately generates "a feeling of weariness and surfeit." But the poor anonymous twelfth-century adapter of Virgil, author of the Old French *Roman d'Eneas*, must stand alone on the stage of Auerbach's essay, with its large and grateful audience of medievalists, to play the unenviable role of representative of a culture, an age, indeed several ages—the secular poetry of the entire Christian Middle Ages—which had lost the conception of the sublime. And a historical claim of some weight is posed precariously on the assumption that the absence of Virgilian sublimity in the OF Aeneas epic was symptomatic of a missing sublimity in the collective imagination of medieval secular poets.

A factor that further unsteadies that assumption is the status of the "Camilla" essay among Auerbach's writings: it stands in curious isolation. Of the paths that Auerbach trod, the topic of this essay seems on the surface of it particularly unlikely to wind up a dead end. It touches on his major interests: history of style, Virgil, Dante, courtly literature, antiquity in its relation to the Middle Ages. And yet it did not form part of that synthesis that shaped Auerbach's writings from the earliest to the latest into a coherent whole.[51] Nothing in his oeuvre led up to it and nothing led away from it.[52] Throughout Auerbach's works the sublime is the prisoner of *sermo humilis.* Longinus, his subject and his reception in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and beyond, received hardly a glance from Auerbach, apart from "Camilla." [53] It may be his consis-

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51 On Auerbach's "synthesis" and the slow road of specialized reviewers towards recognizing *Mimesis* as something other than a collection of high quality essays on a seemingly random selection of works, see Bové (1986), pp. 79-129.

52 "Camilla" appears in *Literatursprache und Publikum* (1958) and nowhere else in his published oeuvre, in contrast to "*Sermo Humilis*" (first published in 1941) and "*Figura*" (1938), both republished/reprinted 3 times, translated into English twice. The early essay "Dante und Vergil" (1931) shows no interest in the classical sublime and its rebirth. "Camilla" was bypassed in the late collections *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (1959) and in *Studi su Dante* (1963), *Selected Essays* (2014), and his *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (1967), though "*Figura*" and "*Sermo Humilis*" are included.

53 In *Mimesis* ch. 5 ("Roland against Ganelon"), Auerbach notes briefly

tent orientation to the real, to realism and the everyday[54] that weighted down this airy and "mercurial" concept. The sublime separated from the humble, alone at the top of the hierarchy of styles, was hardly a blip on Auerbach's radar. By contrast, the mixing of the sublime and *sermo humilis* was, along with *figura,* sustaining, coherence-giving elements over the full range of his mature writings, fundamental to his ideas on the development of literary realism. [55] German readers of his essay, "Baudelaires *Fleurs du Mal* und das Erhabene," will have been surprised, once, finding the term applied to Baudelaire, a second time, finding no mention of the mighty intellectual forces whose thought that term evoked—Kant, Hegel, Schiller, Schopenhauer—but rather a reading of a poem characterized as "ugly," "terrible," "grim," packed with imagery "of an extreme realism," misery and wretchedness, "utterly obnoxious to earlier taste," a world without transcendence, the very opposite of exalting or terrifying in the sense of Kant on the sublime, but nonetheless composed in "the grand style." [56]

A plausible explanation of the peripheral position of "Camilla" is that Auerbach was stepping into a historical scheme in which his great antipode Ernst Robert Curtius was far more at home. [57] "Camilla" got its

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Longinus's reference to the beginning of Genesis in order to contrast a dense paratactic style to "a magnificent display of rolling periods" and "the splendor of abundant figures of speech" (p. 110).

54 See Gumbrecht (2002). Also James I. Porter's introduction to the volume, *Selected Essays* (2014), esp. pp. xiv-xxi ("Earthly Philology").

55 Auerbach identified them as such. See his comments in the Epilogue to *Mimesis*, p. 554. His topic was literary realism, and that topic was "located, especially in earlier texts, at the nexus of the humble and the sublime." (Seth Lerer in Auerbach, 1996, p. 5). See also Bové (1986).

56   The essay was published four times in three languages. *Das Erhabene* occcurs only in the German title, though not in the text of the essay: "La Dignità estetica delle 'Fleurs du mal'," *Inventario* 3 (1950); "Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* und das Erhabene," in Auerbach (1951); "The Esthetic Dignity of the *Fleurs du Mal*," *The Hopkins Review* 4 (1951), rpt in Auerbach (1959)

57 While the two disagreed on "Stilmischung" and the hierarchy of styles, Auerbach admired Curtius, and their personal relations were collegial. See Jaeger (2016).

contextual strength not from Auerbach's great syntheses, but from ideas central to Curtius's opus magnum *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (= ELLMA)*. The historical scheme which undergirds "Camilla" is a major conceptual force in understanding the cultural history of the west, and in Curtius, the scheme had weight by embracing the entire range of classical and medieval Latin poetry—whereas Auerbach used it to frame the niche element of the sublime. The scheme had been in the air since the nineteenth century created it[58], and it had reemerged from the obscuring Aryan perspectives of fascist scholarship when Curtius and Auerbach wrote. Its influence in humanistic studies grew great in the post-WW II German scholarship in part because it was predictive of the rebirth of a new humanism after the barbarism of the Nazis. [59] The idea of birth or rebirth after barbarism was present or implied in the writings of a generation of scholars who found their way out of the fascist nationalist histories to a new, comparative European basis of the study of antiquity and the Middle Ages. The pan-European perspective gestated in the work of Werner Jaeger and Erwin Panofsky and was mid-wifed in the work of Auerbach, Curtius, Leo Spitzer, Bruno Snell, Friedrich Ohly and Ernst Kantorowicz. Curtius's scheme of the history of European culture is congruent with the life-experience of his generation: age of Goethe – decay in the Nazi period – longed for rebirth. That historical shaping of intellectual aspirations gave it a powerful hold on the postwar generation of German scholars. In that context "tradition" became an elastic concept, which could accommodate the whole apparatus of classical education, poetics and aesthetics. However, it brought with it the relegation of the Middle Ages to the role of a passive, receptive era, incapable of classical greatness but just up to the task of transmitting it, that period of decline that had to exist in order to precede rebirth and

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58   Ferguson, 1948.

59   While Curtius proclaimed his anti-fascism loudly, Auerbach's was asserted quietly in a coded rehabilitation of the Old Testament present in "*Figura*" and *Mimesis*. Zakai (2017) argues this thesis strongly.

renewal [60]. Belief in the grand unity of European civilization was a powerful heuristic concept, but also a badge of participation in a redemptive view of history, membership in a cosmopolitan republic of letters devoted to bringing a nearly dead past back to life. It was a rare and brief moment in the history of literary criticism when intellectual labor could also see itself as engaged—and in one case at least, directly engaged [61]–in the creation of a new European union. In this climate, the momentum of the scheme, classical (authentic greatness)– medieval (loss and uncomprehending conservation)– Renaissance (rebirth), could easily sweep along the comparatively specialized topic of the sublime. That same climate of ideas holds in place, tenuously, the vision of the classical sublime and its medieval decline. The grand unity of European culture from the ancient to the modern world, the continuity of culture provided by the Latin language, rebirth and renewal, the "discovery of the mind" and restoration of reason after a period of decline and barbarism. Erich Auerbach addressed these more general presuppositions, though sparingly. The last paragraph of "The Western Public and its Language" was framed so as to evoke the crises and triumphs of Auerbach's generation:

> When once again [after the disintegration of the Western Roman empire] a society came into being that possessed self-awareness and a will to cultivate its humanity, it was not one but many [cultures], each possessing its forms and its language. Nevertheless we may venture to speak of a European society… What unites them is their common root in antiquity and Christianity. For this combination contains the dialectical force which—even if Europe, like Rome before it, should now

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60 Jaeger, 2016.

61 Bruno Snell was a classicist and ordinarius at University of Hamburg 1931-1953, author of *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought* (1982); German original 1946: *Die Entdeckung des Geistes: Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens*. At his initiative the Europa-Kolleg, an "institute for European Integration," was founded in Hamburg. It was based on Snell's vision of a "democratic, united Europe." https://europa-kolleg-hamburg.de/stiftung-europa-kolleg-hamburg/geschichte/

lose its power and even cease to exist as such—has prefigured the forms of a common social and cultural life on our planet. [62]

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But those ideals also helped mask a large field of inquiry into the sublime in medieval style, Latin and vernacular, to which we can now return. What Auerbach's "Camilla" in three instantiations shows is not a historical development of the sublime from decline to rebirth. It does show that Virgil and Dante are great poets, and the poet of the *Roman d'Eneas* is ordinary and conventional. Auerbach was, as James Porter put it, "looking for the sublime in the wrong place."

His argument in "Camilla" is historically nuanced once he steps outside of the three texts at its core. He knew the literature of courtly love and *dolce stil nuovo* well, of course, and anticipated that a medieval concept of romantic love, one with no analogues in antiquity, would have suited that Longinian concept of the sublime constituted by a grandiose subject represented in a style of passionate emotionality.[63] The author of the *Roman d'Eneas,* he says, paved the way for "the elevation of love to a theme worthy of the sublime style, indeed, to its principal theme. This is one of the most important developments in the history of European literature." [64]. But in his view this development had to progress through a gradual maturing of the "literary language and its public," at the beginning of which stood the troubadours and romanciers and at the highpoint, Dante. An important precondition for the rebirth of the sublime, says Auerbach, is "the liberation from Latin culture" without which the high courtly style could not develop. Chrétien de Troyes marks "the beginning of liberation from clerical Latin culture…needed to complete the development of the courtly style, the first style of a social elite to emerge since ancient times"[65] He mentions the "lofty style"

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62   Auerbach, 1965, p. 338.

63   Longinus, 8. 1, 1999, pp. 180-181.

64   Auerbach, 1965, "Camilla," p. 215.

65   P. 216.

achieved by Marie de France. He notes that the "greatest heights" of the courtly style "are probably attained in the poems dealing with Tristan"[66] The Tristan material introduces an "intensity of feeling inconceivable in the Middle Ages before the days of chivalric love." He mentions the OF *Folie Tristan*, but neither Thomas of Brittany's Old French nor Gottfried's Middle High German version. He concedes that "the *stil nuovo* is a sublime style, though separated by its "feminine sweetness" and occasional didacticism from "the ancient sublime style."[67]

The limits of Auerbach's argument in "Camilla" are especially evident in this line of thought. A Gottfried von Strassburg, writing in the late twelfth and first decade of the thirteenth century, practicing in a self-conscious, reflected way an exalted style in concert with a grand theme, strongly contradicts it.

Also, the idea that the development of the language of courtly literature depends on the liberation from clerical Latin culture is starkly contradicted both by Gottfried and the earliest authors and originators of courtly romance, for the most part clerics. [68] Gottfried was steeped in the clerical Latin tradition alongside classical Latin literature, as was Dante, and their works are incomprehensible in the depths of their literary, poetic and religious obligations without reference to that culture.[69] Latin clerical culture is the point of origin of the language of courtliness and courtly love [70], to mention only one important point of contact. Any serious reader of *The Divine Comedy*, Auerbach included, recognizes Dante's immense debt, alongside *dolce stil nuovo*, to that culture, to Alain of Lille and Bernard Silvester, to mysticism, to Thomas Aquinas, and to the main formulator of the medieval sublime, Richard of St. Victor.[71]

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66   P. 218.

67   Pp. 223 and 224.

68   See Jaeger (1977) and Reuvekamp Felber (2003) on clerics as authors of courtly lit.

69   Huber, 1988; Seggewiss, 2012.

70   Jaeger, 1985 and 1999.

71   Jaeger, 1010, 157-78. Dante placed Richard in Paradise.

The sublime elements of The Divine Comedy stretch across many cultural spheres. The arrival of the heavenly messenger in Inferno 9. 64ff., the same passage Auerbach highlights to show reborn classical sublime, exemplifies that mix of sources more clearly than it reveals a rediscovered Virgilian sublime. Dante's debt to Virgil here is evident in the motif of the soles of the warrior woman's / messenger's feet, gliding dry across wind-tossed waters: "nec tingueret aequore plantas"[72]; "per le torbid' onde…un ch' al passo / passava Stige con le piante asciutte"[73] and in the dynamism of the scene. But the divergence is also striking: Camilla arrives with god-like speed but noiseless; the arrival of the messenger is thunderous and shattering: "And now there came across the turbid waters a crash of fearful sound…a sound as of a violent wind…which smites the forest and shatters the boughs [of the trees]."[74] The crashing sound (fracasso) crosses "the turbid waters" and "smites the forest and shatters the branches."[75] Compare these lines from Psalm 28: "The voice of the Lord above the waters; the majesty of God thundered; The voice of the lord in power…The voice of the Lord shatters the cedars; the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon… The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh." [76] And from Isaiah 10. 33: "Look, the Sovereign, the Lord of hosts, will lop the boughs with terrifying power…" [77] The "violent wind" has a close analogue in Acts 2,

72   *Aen.* 7. 811.

73   *Inferno* 9. 64, 81.

74   "E già venia su per le torbid' onde / …un fracasso d'un suon, pien di spavento / …non altrimenti fatto che d'un vento / impetuoso… / che fier la selva e … / li rami schianta… "—9. 64-70.

75   "…che fier la selva e…li rami schianta" – 9. 69-70.

76   Psalm 28. 3-8: "Vox Domini super aquas; Deus majestatis intonuit: Dominus super aquas multas. Vox Domini in virtute… Vox Domini confringentis cedros, et confringet Dominus cedros Libani… vox Domini concutientis desertum: et commovebit Dominus desertum Cades."

77   Isaiah 10. 33-4: "Ecce Dominator, Dominus exercituum, confringet lagunculam in terrore." *In terrore* is rendered in the modern Italian Bible (Conferenza episcopale Italiana) *fracasso.* Psalm 29 (Vulg. 28). 5-7: "Il tuono del Signore schianta I cedri di Libano, Il Signore schianta I cedri del Libano." Dante 9. 67, 70: "…un vento impetuoso … che…li rami schianta." This word

the coming of the holy spirit on pentecost: "And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind."[78]

Auerbach cites analogues from Homer and Longinus, neither of whose writings Dante could have known. The descent of Poseidon from Olympus and his triumphal chariot ride across the ocean[79] do share the dynamism of the sublime—crashing, destructive and terrifying—with the arrival of the heavenly messenger, but direct influence is not an issue. The resonance of *Inferno* 9. 64ff. with what Auerbach calls "the Greek model"[80] is minor compared with related biblical passages. In Homer, and Longinus's citations of Homer, there is no thundering sound and no wind; and the violent force of Poseidon's gigantic footsteps shakes mountains, ships and a city, but does not "shatter the branches." Dante's heavenly messenger arrives with "dry soles" having passed wind-whipped waters, as did Camilla. But in the mind of Dante's readers, at least those not as versed in Virgil as Dante himself, the feet skimming troubled waters would probably evoke more immediately Christ walking on the sea of Galilee[81] than the striding of Camilla or Poseidon. In the gospel, as in Dante, the sea is whipped up (*jactabatur fluctibus*; *le torbid' onde*); in Acts 2, Matthew 14, and in Dante, there is a rushing or violent wind (*de caelo sonus, tamquam advenientis spiritus vehementis*; *contrarius ventus; un vento impetuoso*). None of this imagery is present in the Greek antecedents that Auerbach cites. The biblical analogues are more strongly at work creating the atmosphere of the scene than the classical.

The writings of Homer and Longinus, unknown to both Dante and his audience, may still bear comparison with the heavenly messenger as independent compositions linked by the motif of superhuman motion,

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choice of Dante and the modern translators shows affinities of the *Inferno* passage with prophetic/psalmic utterances of the Old Testament. The similarity points to shared contexts, not, of course, influence.

78   Acts 2.2, NRSV; Vulgate: "factus est repente de caelo sonus, tanquam advenientis spiritus vehementis…"

79   *Iliad*, 13. 18-29; 20. 60; cited by Longinus, *Peri hypsous,* 9.8.

80   "Camilla," p. 229.

81   Matt. 14. 25-6.

striding or gliding, while Biblical passages, which Dante undoubtedly did know, appear to be at work shaping his imagery. The classical/Virgilian elements are effectively enveloped in Biblical resonances. [82]

Auerbach makes a strong claim based on his reading of *Inferno* 9. 64ff.: "Dante revived the ancient conception of the sublime in a European vernacular language; he created a sublime poetry on a level with the great models of antiquity."[83] Any informed reader of Dante can agree that *The Divine Comedy* "equals or even surpasses the sublimity of the ancients," but the claim that a classical rebirth accounts for that excellence, that Homer and Longinus are in any primary way a "Greek model" for the sublime in Dante stands on a weak footing.

The Divine Comedy in its entirety represents much more clearly the large scale eruption of the **medieval** sublime, crossing many points of origin, made out of poetic genius and largely from available materials from Judeo-Christian traditions, not reborn from classical.[84] The sublime occurs in *The Divine Comedy* in many forms unrelated to classical tradition. There is that form that rises above individual cultural traditions studied by Piero Boitani. [85] There is the tradition of the idealizing of romantic love. There is also a culturally determined sublime unrecognized by medievalists, which is vigorously at work in *The Divine Comedy*, the Judeo-Christian tradition. The eighteenth century had discovered, recognized and presented critically this form of the sublime rooted in religious imagery. Robert Lowth, Oxford professor of poetry (d. 1787), expounded it in his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* [86]. He was followed by Moses Mendelssohn, J. G. Herder and S. T. Coleridge, to mention only the most prominent. That line of inquiry opens a way into the medieval sublime, but it was overshadowed by the prominence of Longinus.

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82   On Dante's abundant use of the Latin bible, see Kleinhenz (1986). The author quotes Charles Singleton: [Dante chose] "to imitate God's way of writing" (p. 225).

83   "Camilla," *LLP*, p. 232.

84   I will develop this argument in a book in progress on *The Medieval Sublime.*

85   Boitani, 1989: " 'L'aqua che ritorna equale': Dante's Sublime."

86   2 vols., Engl. Trans. 1787.

The mainstream of inquiry followed Longinus, Burke and Kant. The Judeo-Christian was hardly recognized as a rivulet.

A critique of Auerbach's "Camilla" is useful as an entry into that other sublime, but also because it is one of two mighty pillars that prop up the assumption that the Middle Ages knew no form of the sublime other than *sermo humilis*. The chasmic silence of the Virgilian sublime across the stretch of the thirteen centuries separating Virgil from Dante was a given of the historical scheme of "Camilla." It was fundamental also to the second prop of that assumption, Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.* Curtius acknowledged a sublime style in the Middle Ages only as a shriveled remainder of classical sublimity. [87] The work of these titans, needless to say, has shaped our thinking and significantly enriched medieval studies. But the assumptions on which they are based, now widely shared, have also helped create an anaesthetized space in the medievalist mind. The feeling for a certain aesthetic level of expression is gone or dormant, or shunned as if discredited even before the bare existence of that level is recognized. The subtitle of a recent essay by Mary Carruthers (2014) speaks clearly: "Why There is no Medieval Sublime." It is symptomatic of the casual acceptance of that supposed absence. Medievalists write about literary forms in terms of continuities, traditions, and the topoi that transmit them (Curtius) or history of style (Auerbach) or rhetorical precepts (Carruthers). But the sublime originates outside of those frameworks, though in its elaboration never completely divorced from them. On this I agree with Daniel Poirion, whom I quote in the epigraph to this essay: "One must see clearly that it [the sublime] is not inherited, ready-made and unchangeable, from antiquity, nor was it imposed by any theory from the Middle Ages. It is fundamentally an ideal which corresponds to a certain aspiration to grandeur, to exaltation…" There could hardly be a better illustration of the captivity of an important

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87 See Curtius, 1990, pp. 474-5, Excursus 8 "The Poet's Divine Frenzy," and "The Medieval Bases of Western Thought," pp. 593-598. Articles by Shanzer, Binski and Jaeger in *Magnificence and the Sublime,* (ed. Jaeger, 2010), address the question of the influence of Auerbach and Curtius in silencing discussion of the sublime in the Middle Ages.

topic in an irrelevant category than the claim that it does not even exist. Look for it "in the wrong place," and it will not appear to be there.

The current blossoming of interest in the sublime in other areas of pre-modern studies, [88] and in aesthetic theory and history of style generally, may help restore feeling to that an-aesthetized space in the medievalist mind.[89] To deny a medieval sublime by reference to sermo humilis, or to a discourse on terror, horror etc. is like claiming that Christianity knew only the personal style and culture of Christ, Saint Francis, Savonarola, Mother Theresa, and the present Pope Francis. A look at Gothic and Baroque architecture and religious art, at St. Peter's in Rome, papal dress, bishops' palaces, ritual, jeweled crosses endowed with anagogic power, suffices to refute that claim, though no one makes it, since that level of "style" is so prominent and visible. Whatever mores dominate in the Christian life of humility, the style and culture of major elements of its institution are grandiose. Those two style options are also present in its written discourses.

A return to the topic beyond the presuppositions of Auerbach and Curtius turns up a large variety of sublime expression that has nothing or little to do with classical sublime or the attenuated sublime of *sermo humilis*.[90] Unobserved and unstudied, the sublime occurs frequently in

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88   Jaeger, 2010, pp. 5-7; Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity*, and bibliography.

89   If the output of Cambridge University Press is an indication, we are in the heyday of studies of the sublime in the ancient world. Along with Porter's book (2016) that press has published, since 2000, seventeen titles on the topic. For other publications on the sublime prior to 2010, see the "selective bibliography" in *Magnificence and the Sublime,* pp. 263-65, and the extensive bibliography in Porter, *Sublime in Antiquity.* And in post-medieval studies, the list of more than 1800 titles of articles, books and dissertations on the sublime since 2000 in the MLA International Bibliography speaks clearly: commentary has mushroomed in the past two decades. In the area of medieval studies I can name only 4 titles, Poirion (1986) and Piero Boitani (1989), the essays in *Magnificence and the Sublime* (2010), and the article by Mary Carruthers (2014).

90   Paul Binski warns against the "overpromotion of *sermo humilis* in art history." The sublime, he argues, was far more prominent and useful for Christian topics than Auerbach supposed. Also: " 'Commonplace' or 'low' may be the style of Gospel language, but in much of the Bible, and in the grandiose

medieval writings, Christian and secular, vernacular and Latin, asserting itself in modes called by name *stilus grandis*, *grandiloquentia*, *sublimis*, *sublimitas sermonis*—in prayers, sermons, meditations, contemplative and prophetic writings, worldly epic, chansons de geste[91] and courtly literature, in forms of the sublime that call for treatment outside of the presuppositions of Curtius and Auerbach and outside of any notion of classical tradition.

A rethinking of the sublime and its appearance in courtly romance and in medieval writings of many genres would help recover the sublime as an element in medieval aesthetics. Its formulation will certainly call on rhetoric and will adapt traditions, if such an adaptation fits the impetus and emotional force driving the author, but whatever the source of the language that conveys it, the sublime is newly made each time it occurs. Otherwise it would not be sublime; it would be bad poetry.[92] It comes from the heart of a grand conception; it results from a spontaneous vision and an intense emotional experience put into words.

The rethinking of the topic is not a minor task. At stake is nothing less than the quality of the medieval imagination. The present state of aesthetic apprehension among medievalists would lead us to believe that the medieval audience had virtually no ability to be astonished, elevated, to have their minds and hearts expanded, and that medieval artists and poets had virtually no interest in rousing those responses, or the ability or skill to do so.[93] A pursuit of the sublime where it actually occurs would rescue that experience and literary mode from the misconceptions that obscure it.

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liturgical language derived from it, we find that compulsion to unified uplifting wonder which in turn united the Church." See Binski, 2010, p. 136. Binski speaks of the "entrapment, of a Christian aesthetic in representation by the idea of *sermo humilis*" (p. 131).

91 See Poirion's (1986, p. 23f.) discussion of the *Song of Roland* offering examples of *stilus grandiloquus.*

92 Longinus (1999, chs. 3-5) discusses a string of various failed attempts at sublime that end in overblown, foolish, turgid, frigid poetry.

93 Paul Binski confronts this silently accepted presupposition in exquisite detail in *Gothic Wonder* (2016).

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Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT) is a peer-reviewed journal which is published in both electronic and print formats by Xenomoi Verlag in Berlin. The goal is to focus on the critical theory of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and to extend their theories to our age. Unfortunately, it seems that most of the concerns and theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are neglected in its second and third generations.

We believe that the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are still capable of explaining many social, cultural, and political problems of our time. However, in some cases, we need to revise those theories. For example, the culture industry in our time can also work with a different mechanism from that described by Adorno and Horkheimer. In our age, the majorities can access the media and even respond to the messages which they receive – this is something which was not possible in Adorno and Horkheimer's time. But this doesn't mean that the culture industry's domination is over. Thus, we may need to revise the theory of the culture industry to explain the new forms of cultural domination in our age.

Therefore, we are planning to link the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt school to the problems of our age. This means that we are looking for original and high-quality articles in the field of critical theory. To reach our goals, we gathered some of the leading scholars of critical theory in our editorial board to select the best articles for this journal.

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