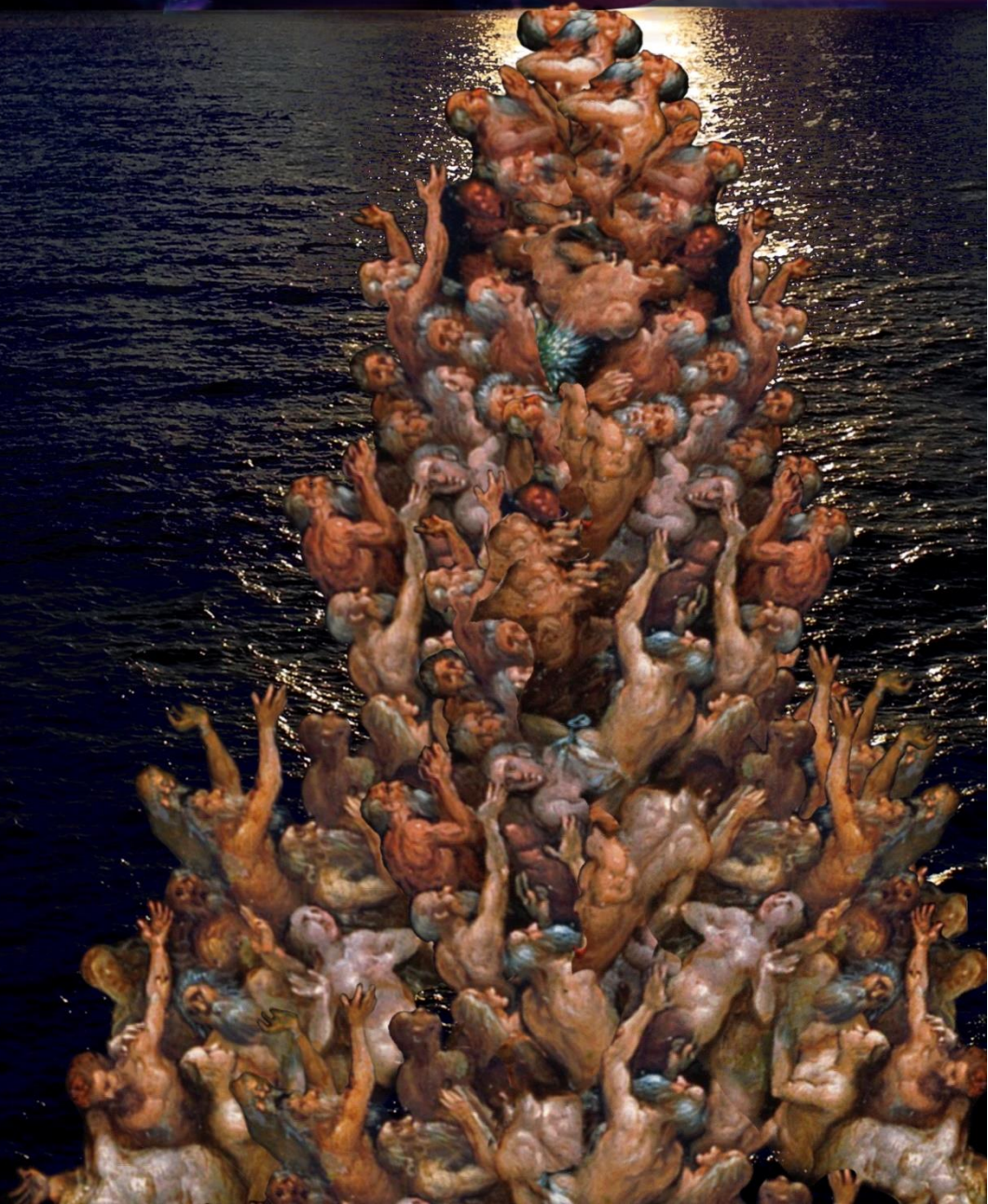


Der Führer is Your Daddy

Reflections on politics, the news industry and social media from inside the pandemic vortex



Gustavo Jalife



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inside the pandemic vortex*

By Gustavo Jalife

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Art cover
The Mask
Liliana Coval
@elbenteveoesarlata
www.behance.net/LilianaCoval

About the Author

Gustavo Jalife is a bilingual columnist and author.

Over the last forty years he has written articles and essays on politics, literature and cinema for a variety of publications. He is the author of numerous short stories and three plays. He also worked as news producer at Channel 9 (Buenos Aires).

From 1992 to 2018 he was the executive director of the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, an educational NGO based in New York.

A heavy reader since adolescence, he is particularly devoted to English literature as well as the Greek and Roman classics. Evelyn Waugh, Lytton Strachey, Arthur Conan Doyle, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Julio Cortázar and Guillermo Cabrera Infante are among the writers he usually revisits.

In 1985, he had a two-hour one-on-one conversation with Jorge Luis Borges in what was to be one of the last interviews granted by the legendary author before his final trip to Geneva.

From 1992 to 2018 he was the executive director of the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, an educational NGO based in New York.

Gustavo regularly follows American, British and European politics as well as issues related to the news industry.

Der Führer is your Daddy is his first published book.

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Introduction

If politics is understood as a concerted endeavour to achieve the greatest possible degree of autonomy and well-being for the greatest number of people, then politics has been dying for a long time. As a matter of fact, at least when it comes to the highest levels of decision making, it probably was a stillborn venture, another ideal out of so many that never had a real existence outside the minds of philosophers and the pages of books. Be it as it may, today its demise is probably more evident than ever in the so-called Western countries where democracy and the separation of powers are meant to be cornerstones of a social organization that professes to stand for individual freedoms. The rescue of politics is of paramount importance.

The reflections that follow, mainly written between December 2020 and April 2022, were inspired by the conviction that the absence of politics is a global phenomenon that stands out with paradoxical intensity in those countries where liberal democracy, allegedly, has been in force since it took hold at the beginning of the 20th century. These ten pieces are a feeble attempt to deal with the way power is abused and how it is exercised against the majority in the name of which a minority rules. Even though the subject is not related to the object of the book, I decided to include the article *Montaigne in New York*, first published in *Varúa*, a quarterly magazine, in the manner of a contrast to so many coarse characters and slime.

Aristotle used the term *ὀλιγαρχία* to designate the government by the few and corrupt. Oligarchy is the deviant constitution of aristocracy, the rule of the best, whereas democracy, rule of the mob, is the corrupt form of polity, the best attainable state typified by a constitution and where the best-qualified citizens govern with the consent of all, poor and rich alike. However, in the following reflections and for the sake of simplicity the word *democracy* will be used in a loose manner, as it is employed in the common parlance these days, as the best way—albeit clearly

ineffectual— modern societies manage to organize themselves. On the other hand, the word *bureaucracy* will be used as its corrupted deviation, i.e., the tyranny of an unchecked minority over an indifferent majority that accepts and encourages such a relationship—a regime where the bureaucrat takes the place of the politician.

In strictly practical terms, what is the specific, real meaning of the word democracy? It means a kind of order where unconditional pluralism and unreserved respect for individuals rule, administered by a staff of honest civil servants in an atmosphere of frugality, transparency, uprightness and a very limited term of office for all elected and nonelected officials without exceptions. The individual, not *the pack*, not *the people*, not *society*, is the cornerstone of any community worthy of the name. Over himself, over his own body, property and mind, the individual is the uncontested sovereign. A true democratic system upholds the indisputable supremacy of the individual over the collective.

However, as I try to demonstrate in the reflections that make up this volume, true democracy today looks more like a chimera than the system that is proclaimed to be in force. Worse still, as time goes by it seems the chances of it being put into practice are increasingly slim and remote.

In the Western Hemisphere liberal democracy blossomed with force following the hegemony of European nobilities and their decadence from the second half of the nineteenth century and, in particular, after the end of the First World War. The dawn of a brand new order promised fairer conditions for the common man, for the people with no access to the mansions, palaces or country houses where decision-makers clad in white tie and tails laid out their plans over Cuban cigars and French cognac. Nevertheless, it unfolded in a way that changed the setting and props but not the substance of the regimes that had preceded it. The cornerstone of

its legitimacy is the *one voter-one vote* formula that from the start turned out to be a well-meaning but ineffectual formula.

Regrettably, history shows that not all the ballots cast are worth the same. Without that illusion at work the whole system would collapse like a house of cards built on a seaside cliff. The new era brought with it what could be called a new set of aspiring politicians. Old aristocrats were replaced by another breed of peers and the man on the street was, again, left on the street, watching the show through a double-glazed window. Then, along with the rise of social media and the colossal degradation of the news industry, worse began and bad remained behind. Thus, in keeping with the classic tradition, the worst possible combination is in force today, a mix of hereditary oligarchy on the one hand and chaotic ochlocracy on the other—a paradoxical mix of the rule of the few, usually inept and permanently inaccessible, oftentimes pandering to the crowd in order to retain control of every instrument of control at hand. The absence of true politicians at the highest decision-making levels continues to be the invariable constant.

Modern democratic countries are run on a regular basis by a number of people not much larger than a gentlemen's club membership. As if it were the most natural thing in the world the people in charge at the top of the hierarchic pyramid, tier one elected officials plus battalions of appointed officeholders, are used to leading a life that an 18th century aristocrat would envy. In practice, members of this exclusive society conduct themselves like highly qualified voters who arbitrarily decide how things should be done, usually showing complete disregard for rules or party platforms. They are practically unaccountable and there is nothing anyone can do about it except for paying the bill they left behind. They never dare to put their hands into their own pockets.

Leaders present themselves as representatives of the average citizen, as if they were a savvy projection of everyone, an avatar,

a symbol of the whole population. However, with every passing day more people realize that they represent anyone but themselves and that their presence is more of a hindrance than a help. The 2020 pandemic laid bare the evidence as never before. Today, the cynical maxim rings truer than ever: Countries thrive at night, while state bureaucrats sleep.

For over more than a century, Western nations were relentlessly corroded by demagoguery and corruption fuelled by an uncritical submission of billions lured by a sort of fanatic cult of the word democracy—just the word and nothing but the word—an empty shell that has nothing to do with what its promoters peddle. On top of that, in the last decade allegedly *democratic* societies turned into rabid totalitarian-police entities—the culmination of progressive degradation and deceit.

Paper rulers pretend to rule and most people, immersed in a bottomless ocean of impotence, pretend to believe them. Nonetheless, the winds seem to be changing. After all, the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of nihilism, an overwhelming force of invisible codes of chaos hiding behind the menacing face of order. What a disturbing universe.

The always misleading statistics confirm, time and again, that the superstitious belief in the word of *leaders* weakens as new generations show up. Nonetheless, independence is not easily achieved. It takes the luckiest ones at least five tries before they kick the pimp in the ass. Be it as it may, it will not be at all surprising if the disintegration of *social contracts* accelerates at a speed never experienced before.

Would it be reckless to claim that in the last twenty years *Western Civilization* has retraced much of the path travelled throughout its recorded history? Progressively, obscurantism impregnates all the areas of knowledge arduously conquered in the last twenty-five centuries. Today, it is not the best speaker who wins an election, but the one who produces a new set of delusions that debunks the hegemony of the previous ones.

However, it is not all doom and gloom. On the contrary, it is a fact that, little by little, newcomers are becoming aware that their parents and grandparents were driven by an illusion of safety that, like Beckett's Godot or Buzatti's Tartars, never shows up and never will. Millennials and their successors are appalled by the way their elders naively relinquished their liberties in the belief that they would be protected by complete strangers only because they hold a public office. Many of these newcomers carry the flag of pragmatism, even though most of them are not even aware of the existence of the word. They have the strong conviction that so-called rulers do not rule except for themselves and their associates, and that the people that fund the show are regularly left in the lurch.

Now, it is their turn. Let us see how it turns out.

GJ

A spectre is haunting the world

For a long time I have not said what I believed, nor do I ever believe what I say, and if indeed sometimes I do happen to tell the truth, I hide it among so many lies that it is hard to find.

Machiavelli

Works of high narrative complexity are the ones that best train discernment and critical thinking. Reading with fierce determination is essential to develop a vertebrate reflection.

It is often said that the Internet is like a flashlight that illuminates what was previously hidden: the mass in action in real time. Beautiful though flawed poetry of the chiaroscuro to name a hecatomb.

A postmodern Prometheus bequeathed the Internet to humanity to do good and be wiser but the Multitude—a barbaric albeit invisible collective—has abused the prodigy and declared itself as the dominant species. The masses, the ancient illusion of a classist subject, are no longer the makers of history. Unlike the Marxist masses, a paper tiger, the Multitude is a chaotic flesh-and-blood steamroller whose existence as a leading actor is consecrated in the digital field. Compared to it the sum of all the tyrants of the past resembles a harmless breeze.

In the age of digital, global, chaotic and encyclopaedic ignorance, the Multitude, dispersed but associated, ruthlessly issues drill commands. Its insatiable voracity is the metronome of modern banality. The hegemony of the ephemeral is created and recreated by dint of volume, noise and fleeting flashes. The totalitarian push, a disgrace formerly reserved to a select portion of the world population, is now a regular trend in Western and foreshortened democracies. There is no corner of the world immune to this gigantic wave.

What is the Multitude? It is a rabid minority that, for commercial reasons or blinded by ideology, is promiscuously crammed in the

social media lair favoured by the vast majority that meekly relinquishes their individuality to a bunch of complete strangers brazenly barricaded inside a public office.

The Multitude, a sort of organism made up of numerous clusters of vocal minorities, harasses, persecutes and intimidates. The illiterate always feel at home in a pack. Yet, paradoxical as it may sound, these people do not yearn for the freedom or strict education they usually claim; on the contrary, they cry out for a firm hand, for a father to keep them in line, the more authoritarian the better, and for hollow pastimes and superficial distractions.

Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

*What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared that the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared that we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions". In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. 1*

Neil Postman read these lines for the first time at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1984 when there was not a whiff of social media or even of the Internet. The development of the Hypertext Transfer Protocol, the foundation of data communication for the World Wide Web, was initiated by Tim Berners-Lee at CERN in 1989. Three years later the Internet was populated by just fifty websites. Cable TV was in its infancy, the CD was a novelty that already posed an ominous threat to the hegemony of the LP vinyl record and the IBM Selectric model was the favourite typewriter among journalists, writers and scholars. When it comes to mobile phones, the Motorola DynaTAC 8000X, launched in 1983, was a clumsy contraption that only millionaires could afford. It weighed 28 ounces, was 10 inches high, not including its oversized rubber antenna, a full charge took 10 hours, it offered just 30 minutes of talk time and cost 4,000 dollars, equivalent in purchasing power to over 10,000 dollars in 2021. Mobile phones as we know them today did not exist even in the most far-fetched sci-fi movies.

To say it, then, as plainly as I can, this book is an inquiry into and a lamentation about the most significant American cultural fact of the second half of the twentieth century: the decline of the Age of Typography and the ascendancy of the Age of Television. This change-over has dramatically and irreversibly shifted the content and meaning of public discourse, since two media so vastly different cannot accommodate the same ideas. As the influence of print wanes, the content of politics, religion, education, and anything else that comprises public business must change and be recast in terms that are most suitable to television. ...

I believe then, as I believe now, that he (Marshall McLuhan) spoke in the tradition of Orwell and Huxley—that is, as a prophet, and I have remained steadfast to his teaching that the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation. I might add that my interest in this point of view was first stirred by a prophet far more formidable than

McLuhan, more ancient than Plato. In studying the Bible as a young man, I found intimations of the idea that forms of media favour particular kinds of content and therefore are capable of taking command of a culture. I refer specifically to the Decalogue, the Second Commandment of which prohibits the Israelites from making concrete images of anything. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth." I wondered then, as so many others have, as to why the God of these people would have included instructions on how they were to symbolize, or not symbolize, their experience. It is a strange injunction to include as part of an ethical system unless its author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of a culture. We may hazard a guess that a people who are being asked to embrace an abstract, universal deity would be rendered unfit to do so by the habit of drawing pictures or making statues or depicting their ideas in any concrete, iconographic forms. The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking. Iconography thus became blasphemy so that a new kind of God could enter a culture. People like ourselves who are in the process of converting their culture from word-centered to image-centered might profit by reflecting on this Mosaic injunction. But even if I am wrong in these conjectures, it is, I believe, a wise and particularly relevant supposition that the media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social preoccupations. 2

Postman's scathing criticism of popular culture—if that kind of sphinx ever existed—addressed with such accuracy one of the most decisive issues of the last two centuries that it appears to have been written so that its fullest meaning would not be activated until forty years later.

In all fields of activities there are disguises that no one dictates but that the people wear for fear of being discriminated. What a cruel paradox. Fear does not appease the abusers but rather emboldens them. The imperative need to belong to a herd nips in the bud any likelihood of exercising critical thinking without which individuality does not stand a chance. Its absence is the royal road to a field where the cattle counter rules.

Let us consider what happened in Spain only days before a Catalan regional election.

During the course of an interview given to a Catalan secessionist radio station, Pablo Casado, then president of the Popular Party, the main opposition force in Spain, caressed, as a benevolent father might, the heads of the Catalan separatists, a clear minority in Catalonia's population, despite the fact that in 2015 Spain's constitutional court had struck down the Catalan parliament's motion to begin the secession process and hold a vote on independence. The court ruled that the separatist legislation ignored and infringed on the rules laid out in the 1978 constitution.

Casado's gesture recalls Neville Chamberlain's policy of concessions anchored in the belief that Nazi thugs would be weakened by feeding them. For those far from history books the strategy may sound like the delusion of a mental patient, but it actually happened. Human rights activist Vladimir Bukovsky maintained that the middle ground between the big lie of Soviet propaganda and the truth was itself a lie. A sound mind should not be looking for middle ground between information and disinformation, between tyranny and democracy, between collectivism and individualism. Appeasement is the Stockholm Syndrome by another name.

Mr. Casado not only miserably failed to condemn the violent demonstrations against an opposition party that took place in Gerona a week before the election day—he also expressed his sympathies for heavily weaponized symbols—flags, language—fostered by members of a deranged provincial minority. When snobbery dabbles in politics the most flamboyant pipe dreams lurk around the corner.

During the course of his bizarre and flimsy rhetorical cruise Mr. Casado came up with the classic professional appeaser dictum: Empathizing with the point of view of the sectarian helps create conditions for mutual understanding and constructive negotiations. This formulaic idea, devoid of any relevant substance, makes no mention of hierarchies and responsibilities. There are no perpetrators and any differences are abolished. As is always the case with appeasement, allies are daunted and adversaries emboldened.

Extreme and pervasive social conflicts are not caused by disparate views or opposing opinions. That is the illusion that equates political unrest to personal disagreements. Social conflict is fuelled when violence and persecution are encouraged from a position of power.

Meanwhile, almost all the other democratic Spanish actors exercised passive demagogy. They carried on without a hint of reaction, thus setting themselves up as de facto supporters of the separatists' treacherous eccentricity. Unsurprisingly, the corollary to Casado's blunder struck like a thunderbolt on 14 February 2021 when Catalonia's regional elections were held. The Popular Party won just three seats in its worst election since its foundation in 1989.

In referring to the famous ironic reversal, a seasoned pundit declared that the President of the Popular Party had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Be that as it may, it is evident

Mr. Casado is unfamiliar with one of Winston Churchill's most celebrated quips: *An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile—hoping it will eat him last.*

On the other hand, Vox, a conservative party founded in 2013, not only won eleven seats, more than the PP and Ciudadanos put together, but was consolidated as the Spanish political force with the least ideological load.

With a few honorable exceptions—Isabel Díaz Ayuso among them—the Spanish political realm looks like a neglected, second-rate provincial hotel run by its owners, a cadre of shysters who, like disciples of Basil Fawlty, treat taxpayers as if they were a hindrance to their business.

Where did common sense go?

In his weekly column for The Mail on Sunday, Peter Hitchens gave a convincing answer to this unfathomable question. His reflection refers to the United Kingdom but has a universal value.

Common sense has now been defeated in this country. There is really nowhere to turn if you still believe in it.

For years, many have assumed that a reasonable, conservative, Christian view of life was still upheld in several important places. But they have been wrong.

The Long March of the Left through the institutions of Britain has included almost all such places. The buildings still stand, the lawns are still neatly mown, the windows sparkle and the people look the same.

But put them to the test and it is as if you have wandered on to the set of Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Normal-seeming

*people mouth the mad slogans of the ultra-Left. And they are in charge.*³

Although *left* is an abused word, devalued by hasty use—banalization has turned *right* and *left* into mere terms of disparagement as well as comfort zones from where shallow rhetoric can be easily dispatched—Hitchens made his point abundantly clear.

Today's *identity politics* is one of the fashionable fads that most viciously violate common sense. Its genealogy, lost in the mists of antiquity, can be traced to the origin of language and the original sin: the vicious violation of the verb *to be*.

Vacuous patriotism is a virus inoculated directly into people's brain from childhood. The founding myth of *identity politics* is the national being, a ruinous hallucination. It is not about identity and most certainly does not involve politics at all. Would Plato or Machiavelli call politics the activity of people shouting indiscernible words while running on the streets brandishing phones and stones? Nor can they be called activists. Would a real political activist follow someone into a bathroom demanding the support of a bill? They are just little people with meaningless lives who, thanks to social media, have the opportunity to believe they are someone, all because the product of their frantic ramblings glows and flickers permanently on a screen. After all, what are nationalities but inconsequential accidents?

Social visibility is far more important than personal responsibility these days. Supporters of this superstition should wear one of those Formula One racing suits covered with an assorted array of logos, colours and attractive lettering. Such outfits would save us the trouble of having to listen to them.

Identity politics has little to do with identity and nothing to do with politics. Actually, it is a bait and switch tactic to stir up

emotions, a mere gimmick perpetrated by numerous pressure groups which assert that certain distinctive characteristics shared by large numbers of people constitute traits that deserve differential treatment and special legislation. These claims are based on illusory, unsubstantiated ideas about gender, race, religion, skin colour, genre, regionalisms, language, socioeconomic status or simple personal preferences. On the one hand, these groups concur in influencing public opinion by appealing to sentimentalism, victimization and other primary instincts. On the other hand they exercise pressure on policy-making by constantly mobilizing large numbers of people. The true goal of their ideologues, who usually hold high positions in academic institutions, traditional news outlets, large corporations and, increasingly, in government and other state-paid jobs, is to gain massive notoriety and a great deal of political, commercial and financial leverage.

It so happens that these ideas have never achieved the category of arguments and, therefore, are not developed at any length. They are merely assertions imparted by one celebrity to another until by sheer repetition they come to be accepted as an unquestionable truth. In a world where wilful ignorance is the rule, all that counts is fatuous identities, banal segmentations and easy-to-memorize lines that might come in handy.

The Babylon Bee, a satire website, puts it better: *Humans are varied. Some are old, some are fat, some are from Kentucky, and others are from Kenya. Some can touch the tip of their nose with their tongue, and others can flatulate on command. We all have intersections of privileges and disadvantages. The point is not to see each of us as unique individuals, but to parse all of humanity into groups based on these obscure and often meaningless attributes so that a new minority group can be created.*

Speaking of intersections, many people claim that *wokeness* is the exact place where demagoguery and the will to be a slave

converge. Although the alliance between demagogues and entire confederations of dunces is as old as the world, the intensity of the fatal cocktail was relatively stable. However, since the massive irruption of social media platforms the combination has started to grow exponentially. Like the Blob, it becomes more aggressive by the day.

If one agrees with the claim that the real crime of politics is that it makes people lose their sense of the ridiculous, it is inevitable to conclude that the real crime of pseudo politics is that it makes people lose their sense of dignity.

Apparently, Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, has no problem losing one or the other as long as he can hold on to power. His social media posts are a collection of vulgarities that serves the undisguised objective of promoting illiteracy. If the posts were anonymous, 9 out of 10 people would say they were written by an inmate of a mental hospital.

Be that as it may, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. On 4 October 2021 he concocted the following indecipherable string of words: *People across the country are lighting candles to honor Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people who are missing or have been murdered. We must continue to work together, raise awareness, and advocate to end this ongoing national tragedy.*

On the other side of the pond something quite different was delivered by another Prime Minister. It was not a post on Twitter—it had not been invented yet—hence the abysmal difference.

This mood is encouraged by the race of degenerate intellectuals of whom our island has produced during several generations an unending succession—these very high intellectual persons who, when they wake up every morning have looked around upon the

British inheritance, whatever it was, to see what they could find to demolish, to undermine, or cast away. 4

Just substitute *British* for *world* and the remark is as current today as it was then.

This is a three-sided polyhedron. On one side are the people in positions of power who set up parallel universes of absolute nonsense in order to make a killing out of it via social media—big companies always make massive donations where big numbers rule. On the second side, are the ones that consume manure as if it were caviar, not even bothering to check the condition of the food they put in their mouths. And on the third side are the elected and unelected officials, a power elite always ready to have the Multitude on their side to which end they only need to comply with fashionable causes.

Daniel Henninger provides an optimistic note on this issue.

Reality resets have become commonplace. In Chicago some days ago, Cook County State’s Attorney Kim Foxx declined to prosecute any of the gang members who staged a broad-daylight shootout in a residential neighborhood. Among the reasons her office gave for not bringing charges was that the gangs were engaged in consensual “mutual combat,” like in the movie “Fight Club.”

The relevant point here is that in our time more and more people—and not just in politics—think they can say anything. We’re living in a Peter Pan world: “You just think lovely wonderful thoughts and they lift you up in the air.” The credibility cost is zero. ...

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram enabled people to assemble personal alternative universes, which became “real” when their friends embraced the fake persona. A similar

manipulation away from plain reality has happened to politics on Twitter.

At Facebook's scale, these reality-shifting habits and forces are unprecedentedly powerful. Conspiracy theories proliferate, from QAnon to the Russia-collusion narrative.

Euphemisms are an important tool for asserting alternative realities. Two of the most important are "reframe" and "reimagine."

The New York Times's "1619 Project" said its purpose was to "reframe the country's history." Reframing is about displacing a proven reality with mere assertion, something previously difficult but now normalized.

Wokeness, in its many manifestations, says it is about "reimagining" the status quo. It has reimagined sex by asserting new pronouns; reimagined race as a national "DNA" problem ("1619" again); reimagined merit in college admissions; and reimagined crime control from Seattle to New York.

... Can the constant assertion of alternative realities on such a scale endure? Maybe. They got this far. But cracks in this facade are starting to appear. 5

According to Ronald Reagan, status quo is Latin for the mess we are in.

The perpetual downfall of corporate media is an allegory of the collapse of the society that consumes them. When illiteracy spreads, when social networks replace the great works of thought, when discernment becomes a rare word, then the place of knowledge is appropriated by coarse particles that move and condense—as in dreams, as in nightmares—into an impeccable

set of teeth and fashionable wardrobes. Unless the CEO's of traditional TV, network and cable, are hopeless hostages of a travelling, brain-sucking gelatinous mass, it cannot be understood what handbook has given them the idea that putting nice faces and expensive ties in front of a camera is better than appointing well trained journalists. The written letter is not the ideal medium for a display of irony, but in this case the experiment may have been moderately successful.

Indifference is what news corporations deserve. However, indifference to public opinion or what is wrongly called public opinion—i.e., the views put forward by mainstream news media and the higher echelons of state bureaucracy—is a virtue very seldom exercised. As a matter of fact, there is almost nothing refined left in the realm of Big Media.

A Wikipedia article reports that *the term Big Pharma is used to refer collectively to the global pharmaceutical industry. ... Professor of writing Robert Blaskiewicz has written that conspiracy theorists use the term Big Pharma as “shorthand for an abstract entity comprising corporations, regulators, NGOs, politicians, and often physicians, all with a finger in the trillion-dollar prescription pharmaceutical pie”.*

According to Blaskiewicz, the Big Pharma conspiracy theory has four classic traits: first, the assumption that the conspiracy is perpetrated by a small malevolent cabal; secondly, the belief that the public at large is ignorant of the truth; thirdly, that its believers treat lack of evidence as evidence; and finally, that the arguments deployed in support of the theory are irrational, misconceived, or otherwise mistaken.

Speaking of *Big*, it might be worth asking professor Blaskiewicz what conspiracy theory is more plausible, the one he portrays or the one that claims that laboratories are out there trying to save lives. As for the belief that the public at large is ignorant of *the*

truth, well, that is a fact anyone with a modicum of discernment will not dispute. It is not a mystery at all. Moreover, since when does someone need evidence to have knowledge of something? Does the professor need evidence to be aware that government officials are usually corrupt and immoral by regularly doing exactly the opposite of what they pledged to do? It would be surprisingly shocking if professor Blaskiewicz were to answer in the affirmative.

Anyway, trifles aside, *Big* here means power, money, a sort of Machiavellian machination that only cares about the ends but seldom or never about the means.

Social media is all about hollow trends and utter ignorance—the more you shout the more you debase yourself. But, as everyone knows, in a market the one who shouts the loudest is the one who sells the most.

In turn, Big Media—aka news industry, corporate news media, major news outlets, establishment media, etc—are out there just for business after stabbing journalism in the back. Everyone knows it. Journalism has no place on their agenda. Clicks and ratings are the main components of their diet and, in order to get them, they are willing to dive into uncharted depths. They are as bold as they are irresponsible. They play with fire.

After all, what is Big Government but a ring of elected officials and perennial state clerks controlling the lives of the people who feed them via confiscatory tax systems as well as oceans of regulations that pry into every movement a citizen makes. Thus, the taxpayer who funds the party is viciously ripped off, forced to watch fun and frolic from across the street and, on top of it, deprived of his most sacred asset: his privacy.

Resisting arrest is another fad fuelled by identity extortion—to call this despicable manipulation *identity politics* would mean

unconditional surrender. This reckless disregard for the safety of the population, particularly the younger ones, cannot be ruled out as the main cause of many of the fatal incidents that currently take place in the United States.

Defying the authority of police officers involves consequences, some of which might be tragic—for civilians and officers alike. If that were not the case, the police force, a body of trained personnel entrusted with law enforcement and crime prevention responsibilities, would have no reason to exist.

Nevertheless, corporate media keeps misinforming with flagrant disdain for the proper practice of journalism. They mislead the public by airing not the entire story but just a few frames, usually the ending—namely, the moment when the police officer takes a person down, handcuffing the offender and, oftentimes, reverting to the use of force. What TV news shows frequently fail to air is the first part of the story, when people are stopped and resist arrest, a reaction that is gaining momentum as the traditional news outlets keep promoting just an infinitesimal fraction of all the incidents taking place daily in America.

According to researchers of the Stanford Open Policing Project police pull over about 20 million drivers across the United States each year. And while the extreme cases grab the spotlight, such as the fatal police shootings after traffic stops of Walter Scott in South Carolina, Samuel DuBose in Cincinnati and Philando Castile in suburban Minneapolis — all black men — most end without anyone getting hurt.

While the research focuses on the racial question, it makes it clear that the numbers of stops ending violently are far from comprising a trend.

Twenty million stops a year means more than fifty thousand a day. However, in their quest for clicks and high ratings corporate

news outlets highlight an infinitesimal percentage of the total presenting their audience with a heavily biased clipping that passes as a tendency, as if abuse of police authority had become the norm.

Thus, and notwithstanding the irrelevant amount of stops that end tragically, more people feel compelled to resist arrest and even to attack police officers as a sort of preventive strike, as if policemen had suddenly developed the bad habit of assaulting people wantonly, just for the sake of it.

Eroding police authority is an alternative avenue that mainstream factors explore to ingratiate themselves with the authoritarian populace lurking in the gaseous digital dimension. America is not a totalitarian country. It is not ruled by a despotic regime that curtails citizens' freedom of expression and incarcerates those who do not comply with an abusive set of regulations enforced by a coterie of despots.

Left, an institution cherished by a considerable number of pundits, no longer exists, if ever existed at all beyond the boundaries of the French Revolution. These days the dichotomy is between the authoritarian push and those who oppose it.

The word "left" does not mean what it meant for a century anymore. It is true that this in Spain is not exceptional either. From so much intimacy with identity politics, the left in almost all parts of the world has lost its identity, which was the demand for equality. Today, the old social democratic parties are shells stuffed with reactionary and failed ideas. 6

In a nutshell, the mockery called *identity politics* is another volley of condensed ignorance fired by the Global Totalitarian Drive with the aim of controlling minds and institutions. The masterminds behind the GTD operate from their main

headquarters: the social media dimension provided by the largest corporations on earth. The push is clearly functional to the interests of Big Tech—the oligopoly of global corporations that dominate the information technology industry—and their need to have a firm grip on a multibillion dollar business. They are thick as thieves. Their motto could be the sentence coined by a champion of classical liberalism: Friedrich von Hayek. *It is, as it were, the lowest common denominator which unites the largest number of people.*

All in all, this unique state of affairs appears to be a new political variant. A sort of global *democratic authoritarianism* is gaining momentum in every country with a solid electoral system, individual freedoms guaranteed by a consolidated set of laws and a tradition of separation of powers. How can this ominous oxymoron be possible? The answer is simple and comes from the most ancient lineage of economics: the law of supply and demand. Wherever there is a market there is also a willingness to satisfy it. Social media is the largest marketplace the world has ever had. It is not only the biggest market humanity has ever seen but is also just one click away from anyone, anywhere, anytime. It is the place where people voluntarily give away tons of private data for free. In turn, political wannabes as well as members of other elites feast themselves into a sort of Bacchanalian inebriation and bid for the biggest audience offering the most palatable catchphrases to gain the endorsement of the largest number of supporters.

Something entirely new is happening in the world. Just in the last five or ten years, nearly everyone started to carry a little device called a smartphone on their person all the time that's suitable for algorithmic behavior modification. A lot of us are also using related devices called smart speakers on our kitchen counters or in our car dashboards. We're being tracked and measured constantly, and receiving engineered feedback all the time. We're

being hypnotized little by little by technicians we can't see, for purposes we don't know. We're all lab animals now. Algorithms gorge on data about you, every second. What kinds of links do you click on? What videos do you watch all the way through? How quickly are you moving from one thing to the next? Where are you when you do these things? Who are you connecting with in person and online? What facial expressions do you make? How does your skin tone change in different situations? What were you doing just before you decided to buy something or not? Whether to vote or not?

Everyone who is on social media is getting individualized, continuously adjusted stimuli, without a break, so long as they use their smartphones. What might once have been called advertising must now be understood as continuous behavior modification on a titanic scale. 7

Books have not died, as is often unthinkingly repeated. Bookstores overflowing with thousands of copies of classic and modern literature are the evidence that cannot be denied. However, their existence, whether physical or digital, is no longer relevant.

Probably never in human history has so much been read and written as in the last decade. The countless comments posted on social media by the minute prove the assertion. Nonetheless, the quality of what is written and read would not pass even the most lenient of tests. We live in the era of mechanical writing and narcotic reading.

Michel de Montaigne and Percy Shelley, among other voracious intellectual predators—Shelley used to read fourteen hours a day—were hedonic, active readers. Although higher education, the intensive study of works, is insufficient to produce a great writer, it is necessary in the manner of a master key that releases vectors of thought with precision and efficiency.

Critical reading is agonizing. Its domain is no longer an instrument of subsistence.

Every time I remember that illiteracy haunts the world, my memory recalls the advice a lady, a communist as well as a seasoned old school intellectual, gave me when I was in my twenties: *Read the classics, they help develop a critical mind.*

1. Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985)
2. *Ibid.*
- 3 *The Mail on Sunday*. 15 May 2021
4. Winston Churchill. House of Commons. 28 October 1948
5. Daniel Henninger. *The Wall Street Journal*. 13 October 2021
6. Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo. *Políticamente Indeseable*. 2021
7. Jaron Lanier. *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*. 2018

Zugzwang

An independent mind is cultivated by a tradition of intellectual independence and enabled by a society that allows such minds their freedom.
Ruth Wisse

It has become customary: Celebrities have taken over the political analysis. Submitting no arguments they pontificate with romantic rhetoric, always timely when it comes to building up wholesale affection. What irritates the most is not the improvisation and the brazenness of the upstarts but the conviction that they do it to boost their visibility and promote their merchandise, all dressed up in the language of *social justice*, an entelechy whose meaning they themselves are unaware of.

And yet they are not accountable.

In their effort to attract the largest possible audience, traditional news outlets have turned into click harvesting machines, dumping journalism in a bag and the bag in the river. Once upon a time, journalism was not only the beginning but an end in itself as a vehicle of progress. However, during the last two decades it has been devalued to its minimum expression, its zero degree. Levels of promiscuity have skyrocketed as never before and corporate media have worked their way downward from mediocrity to ludicrousness.

Reading books written by the greatest minds paved the road to wisdom and common sense. And not just reading but browsing and mulling over, attentively, as a detective might. In the manner of a palimpsest, trails of other stories survive under the observable letter of great works, unwritten but drawn with vigorous flourishes. Associations from past readings voluntarily

or involuntarily create and recreate them, eluding the dictatorship of literality, the dead letter. They are there, in plain view, but only for the learned reader to enjoy. *Nothing is more hateful to wisdom than excessive cleverness.* On the other hand, a merely functional narrative is no more than a communicative device that uses words as if they were nuts and bolts.

Etymology is an indispensable resource in relativizing the one-dimensional use of language. It helps to avoid reducing the meaning of a word to its contingent role and the illusion that the word is to be taken only at face value. This, in turn, leads to one-way thinking and to renouncing the option of discovering the many faces of meaning. Differences are flattened and uniformity of opinions prevails, even in apparent divergences.

In a passage of his speech *Rules for the Human Zoo*, philosopher Peter Sloterdijk pays tribute to the glories of writing and reading:

Books, as the poet Jean Paul once remarked, are thick letters to friends. With this phrase he aptly named the quintessential nature and function of humanism: It is telecommunication in the medium of print to (form and strengthen) / underwrite friendship. That which has been known since the days of Cicero as humanism is in the narrowest and widest senses a consequence of literacy. ...

In fact, it was from 1789 to 1945 that reading-friendly national humanism had its greatest period of influence. At its center, powerful and self-satisfied, resided the caste of classical and modern philologists, who were entrusted with the task of initiating each new generation into the circle of recipients of the authorized standard thick letters. The power of the professor in this period, and the key role of the philologists, had its root in their privileged knowledge of the authors who were considered senders of the letters that undergirded solidarity. As far as its content went, national humanism was nothing other than the

power to incline the young toward the classics and to reaffirm/confirm the universal validity of the national canon. [as well as the national validity of the universal canon...] Thus the nation-state itself was to some extent a literary and postal product: the fiction of a fateful friendship with distant peoples and sympathetically united readers of bewitching/enchanting common (or individual) authors.

If this period seems today to be irredeemably vanished, it is not because people have through decadence become unwilling to follow their national literary curriculum. The epoch of nationalistic humanism has come to an end because the art of writing love-inspiring letters to a nation of friends, however professionally it is practiced, is no longer sufficient to form a telecommunicative bond between members of a modern mass society. Because of the formation of a mass culture through the media—radio in the First World War and television after 1945--and even more through the contemporary web-revolution, the co-existence of people in the present societies has been established on new foundations. These are, as it can incontrovertible be shown, clearly post-literary, post-epistolary, and thus post-humanistic. Anyone who thinks the prefix "post" in this formulation is too dramatic can replace it with the adverb "marginal". Thus our thesis: modern societies can produce their political and cultural synthesis only marginally through literary, letter-writing, humanistic media.

Of course that does not mean that literature has come to an end, but it has split itself off and become a sui generis subculture, and the days of its value as bearer of the national spirit have passed. The social synthesis is no longer – and is no longer seen to be -- primarily a matter of books and letters. New means of political-cultural telecommunication have come into prominence, which have restricted the pattern of script-born friendship to a limited number of people. The period when modern humanism was the model for schooling and education has passed, because it is no

longer possible to retain the illusion that political and economic structures could be organized on the amiable model of literary societies. 1

Again, what is journalism?

Though Merriam-Webster dictionary provides six different definitions, the only one which might come close to being accurate is the following: *The collection and editing of news for presentation through the media.*

Big Media matrix sets the hegemonic and universal news narrative standard. It encompasses a large collection of modules; among the most conspicuous are homicides, scandals, large fires, plane crashes, natural or social catastrophes, gossip and sports. The daily combination of these elements ensures the endorsement of large audiences. If an audio were edited with the number of times the word *death* is pronounced or written in just one month, the result would reflect with unquestionable certainty what once respected news media outlets have become.

Even formerly well regarded newspapers, institutions once deemed beacons of higher learning where journalism was nurtured and protected, have switched to trash mode in the digital era. Journalism is an extinct species living only inside the mainframe's razor-thin margins. A situation that leads to the proverbial query: Is there freedom of the press? The question is as pretentious as the question about the existence of God. Corporate media outlets conducted with partisan criteria rather than with journalistic conviction, sets the agenda and the trend. And even if the answer were affirmative, freedom of the press does not necessarily guarantee the exercise of journalism as such; that is, a work process that begins with the investigation of current events for the production of a report *of the best obtainable version of the truth* (Carl Bernstein) with the aim of making it public. Along with the chronicle, the journalistic

species par excellence, research, the cornerstone of journalism, has been ostracized by the dynamics of demagoguery.

Any given opinion does not necessarily qualify to gain news status. The explanation is simple: if all the products of pure fancy on all imaginable topics were edited, not even the Library of Babel would have space for the news of a single day. Excess profanes the *raison d'être* of journalistic practice: selection and exclusion.

There are three main vectors feeding public opinion by the nanosecond.

On the one hand tons of rubbish are daily dumped on social media platforms. On the other, corporate media is a force that colludes with the Multitude. The picture is completed with state employees that never miss the opportunity to ingratiate itself with the Mob & BM. The situation arguably was the same thirty or forty years ago. The answer is yes, but with a strategic difference: the Internet didn't exist then.

The Multitude is the largest pressure group that has ever existed. Its lobbying power is both formidable and unprecedented. It is composed of vocal minorities that speak the same lingo and believe in the same superstitions. It is ubiquitous—every single day of the year, twenty-four hours a day—and its presence is far more ominous than a thousand swords of Damocles.

Legitimately, heads of state fear the crowd more than death and *leaders* everywhere are reasonably entitled to imagine they are permanently surrounded and harassed by demanding lunatics.

Big Media cafeterias are rife with employees talking about journalism with a tad of nostalgia, as if referring to some ageing cinema star. Journalism has never been treated amicably by large media companies—its practice is extremely menacing, let alone

harmful, to corporate interests. However, until twenty years ago the search for the best obtainable version of the truth was still a luxury that oftentimes corporate media could ill-afford. Until the Internet took the world by storm and everything changed.

The progressive annihilation of journalism and the transition of corporate news outlets media into propaganda machines could be divided into four stages.

1. When research was dropped and its place was taken by mere headlines followed by basic reports.
2. When traditional news outlets began to reproduce, regularly and profusely, any kind of trash uploaded on the Internet instead of producing major displays of facts related to topics affecting people's lives, a practice also known as proper journalism. At this stage a multi-panel social media array became the main source of information for Big Media.
3. When major media companies began to ingratiate themselves with the mob in a desperate attempt to recapture their lost audiences. Determined to have the crowd on their side, they expelled journalism from their premises and turned their news portals into an indiscernible hoarding of images, headlines and basic, heavily biased opinions.
4. When they opened their on-line content to readers' comments. Cacophony took centre stage and chaos broke loose.

The fifth stage, if it finally occurs, could be the last slab sealing the tomb of journalism.

On 15 March 2021 The Guardian newspaper revealed that The Daily Telegraph was planning to link some elements of journalists' pay to the popularity of their articles in a plan said to

have “*alarmed and dismayed*” staff who fear it will “*seriously warp our editorial priorities*”.

An email sent by editor Chris Evans on 11 March 2021 told staff that *in due course* the outlet wants to use the *Stars* system by means of which stories published online would be awarded scores according to factors such as how many subscriptions they achieve and how many clicks they get, *to link performance to reward* using subscription data.

Evans said: “It seems only right that those who attract and retain the most subscribers should be the most handsomely paid,” and noted that working out the details would be “complicated” so that “we’re not ready to do that ... yet”, The Guardian newspaper reported. 2

Yes, complicated, to say the least.

In the pre-Internet era people resorted to cinema, TV series, magazines and crosswords when they wanted to kill boredom. Newspapers and TV news were entirely out of the entertainment's menu—they were considered an outright bore. Thus, a vast chunk of the population was immune to the gravitational force of journalism and news programs. Newspapers, news shows and political magazines were followed only by highbrow and middlebrow audiences.

With the explosion of the Internet first and social media later, news corporations panicked. Corporate media self-preservation reflexes were activated like a lightning bolt. It was not an overreaction. The stakes were high. Suddenly, everyone, without exception, no matter their education level, economic status or inclinations, was cornered inside the digital cage. Sharp executives immediately saw the change as one of those once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. They supposed they had the goose that lays the golden eggs at their fingertips. It would be like hunting

at the zoo, they presumed. Thus, began a new and frantic race to improve ratings and readership. Newspapers and TV news stations decided to feed on what is scribbled with a pen-knife on those modern public toilet stall doors called social media. Determined to have the crowd on their side, they began to replicate the chaotic reality of the Internet, gave up the practice of journalism and turned their papers and programs into an indiscernible hoarding of images and coarse headlines, all wrapped up in toxic partisanship. They understood that the future was coming for them and that they no longer own the people. Gone were the days of the family gathered around a table watching TV. Audiences were no longer at their beck and call. Almost two centuries of captivity came abruptly to an end, as if hit by a mountainous asteroid. Cultured people, en masse, turned to the Internet, delighted to be no longer enslaved by a handful of sources that set a monolithic agenda. Like a bunch of desperados, corporate media outlets strived to be popular at all costs by reproducing the most shocking information they could find on the web. Journalism was replaced by sheer impact and vulgarity.

Be it as it may, the plan was doomed from the start. Its weakness was fatal and irremediable due to a blind spot, a place invisible to the gaze of the strategists where the object of desire is hidden in broad daylight. Educated and unlearned alike, inveterate book-readers and mobile phones maniacs, migrated to the digital district; the former in search of the magnificent trove of information and knowledge flickering at their disposal, a feast fit to blow the heads off the most sophisticated Renaissance minds; the latter because their entertainment routines have nothing to do with clumsily assembled patches of irrelevant information. Both, the learned minority once an avid audience for newspapers and TV news, and the vegetative avalanche, Millennials and their successors, started living on a tailor-made diet of texts, audio and video provided by the modern Gutenberg printing house—the Internet. Thus, the mission to win over the newcomers while keeping the old-timers became a sheer chimera. Old Big Media

was overcome by the force that rules the world: inertia. It lost the audience it once had, and any it could ever have. Whatever the case, both sides whether apocalyptic or integrated, wasted no time in wishing Godspeed to the Ancien Régime.

However, while its existence is increasingly irrelevant, Big Media still have considerable gravitational pull over massive audiences and enough firepower to cause severe damage. Misinformation is the essence of their business.

If the move announced by The Guardian becomes a reality, it will not be adopted solely by The Daily Telegraph. All Big Media juggernauts will perform the final stage-dive into the arms of ignorance and improvisation. Once inside that abyssal zone of perpetual darkness they will reach the nadir of their existence whence there is no way out. As a matter of fact, prestigious brands that once were beacons of wisdom for generations of journalists are already there, interred in some kind of warp zone.

A robust statement about the degradation of journalism and the once respectable news industry was made by Bari Weiss, former op-ed staff editor and writer for culture and politics at The New York Times, until not long ago almost unanimously considered the gold standard for the print media. In July 2020 Weiss published a resignation letter addressed to Arthur Sulzberger, then chairman of The New York Times Company and publisher of its flagship newspaper. The piece is a first-hand testimony and speaks for itself.

I joined the paper with gratitude and optimism three years ago. I was hired with the goal of bringing in voices that would not otherwise appear in your pages: first-time writers, centrists, conservatives and others who would not naturally think of The Times as their home. The reason for this effort was clear: The paper's failure to anticipate the outcome of the 2016 election

meant that it didn't have a firm grasp of the country it covers. Dean Baquet and others have admitted as much on various occasions. The priority in Opinion was to help redress that critical shortcoming.

But the lessons that ought to have followed the election—lessons about the importance of understanding other Americans, the necessity of resisting tribalism, and the centrality of the free exchange of ideas to a democratic society—have not been learned. Instead, a new consensus has emerged in the press, but perhaps especially at this paper: that truth isn't a process of collective discovery, but an orthodoxy already known to an enlightened few whose job is to inform everyone else.

Twitter is not on the masthead of The New York Times. But Twitter has become its ultimate editor. As the ethics and mores of that platform have become those of the paper, the paper itself has increasingly become a kind of performance space. Stories are chosen and told in a way to satisfy the narrowest of audiences, rather than to allow a curious public to read about the world and then draw their own conclusions. I was always taught that journalists were charged with writing the first rough draft of history. Now, history itself is one more ephemeral thing molded to fit the needs of a predetermined narrative.

My own forays into Wrongthink have made me the subject of constant bullying by colleagues who disagree with my views. They have called me a Nazi and a racist; I have learned to brush off comments about how I'm "writing about the Jews again." Several colleagues perceived to be friendly with me were badgered by coworkers. My work and my character are openly demeaned on company-wide Slack channels where masthead editors regularly weigh in. There, some coworkers insist I need to be rooted out if this company is to be a truly "inclusive" one, while others post ax emojis next to my name. Still other New York Times employees publicly smear me as a liar and a bigot on

Twitter with no fear that harassing me will be met with appropriate action. They never are. ...

Op-eds that would have easily been published just two years ago would now get an editor or a writer in serious trouble, if not fired. If a piece is perceived as likely to inspire backlash internally or on social media, the editor or writer avoids pitching it. If she feels strongly enough to suggest it, she is quickly steered to safer ground. And if, every now and then, she succeeds in getting a piece published that does not explicitly promote progressive causes, it happens only after every line is carefully massaged, negotiated and caveated. ...

The paper of record is, more and more, the record of those living in a distant galaxy, one whose concerns are profoundly removed from the lives of most people. This is a galaxy in which, to choose just a few recent examples, the Soviet space program is lauded for its “diversity”; the doxxing of teenagers in the name of justice is condoned; and the worst caste systems in human history includes the United States alongside Nazi Germany.

Even now, I am confident that most people at The Times do not hold these views. Yet they are cowed by those who do. Why? Perhaps because they believe the ultimate goal is righteous. Perhaps because they believe that they will be granted protection if they nod along as the coin of our realm—language—is degraded in service to an ever-shifting laundry list of right causes. Perhaps because there are millions of unemployed people in this country and they feel lucky to have a job in a contracting industry.

Or perhaps it is because they know that, nowadays, standing up for principle at the paper does not win plaudits. It puts a target on your back. Too wise to post on Slack, they write to me privately about the “new McCarthyism” that has taken root at the paper of record.

All this bodes ill, especially for independent-minded young writers and editors paying close attention to what they'll have to do to advance in their careers. Rule One: Speak your mind at your own peril. Rule Two: Never risk commissioning a story that goes against the narrative. Rule Three: Never believe an editor or publisher who urges you to go against the grain. Eventually, the publisher will cave to the mob, the editor will get fired or reassigned, and you'll be hung out to dry. 3

So-called politicians are wearing nothing at all but major media companies inform they are clad in the finest clothes. *So ist der Lauf der Welt.*

Let us now dissect one of the most common fallacies unleashed on an almost daily basis:

We will defeat this pandemic

The sentence, pronounced unrestrainedly by government officials and the news industry around the globe with similar intensity, comprises three fallacies. Three fallacies in five words may seem a little over the top, but so it is.

WE

Who is *we*? *We* is one of the words most frequently violated by professional climbers in their attempt to make as many people as possible believe that *we* are all equals. It is a way of saying *I am your peer, we are all in the same boat*. The patronizing *we* is, indeed, a basic way of luring addressees into an imaginary club to which, needless to say, they do not belong. Of all the pronouns, *we* is the most deceptive of them all. *We* is a crack through which collectivism seeps.

WILL

In this case the verb *will* is used as a means to strengthen the strategy. *Will* stands for reassurance. *Will* means there is no room

for doubts. A blatant illusion expressed with complete disregard for the truth. On 4 June 1940, when Winston Churchill had the task of explaining to the Commons an extraordinarily difficult situation he produced *We shall fight of the beaches*, an oratory piece which ranks alongside those delivered by Cicero or Abraham Lincoln as one of the greatest addresses of history. *We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender ...*, reads the most famous passage of the speech. But then there was a real enemy and the actions that Churchill mentioned with elaborate flourishes were not only possible but the righteous road to pursue in order to expel a potential invader.

DEFEAT THIS PANDEMIC

The formula gives the subject a fictional treatment, i.e., personification. The technical name for this metaphor since ancient Greece is prosopopoeia. As a literary figure, this specific trope bestows human quality on objects and beasts. Regularly used by political and media factors, prosopopeia appeals to the most basic emotions—*argumentum ad passiones*—in order to easily manipulate the recipients.

Appealing to emotion is a fallacy *very common in politics and it serves as the basis for a large portion of modern advertising. Most political speeches are aimed at generating feelings in people so that these feelings will get them to vote or act a certain way. In the case of advertising, the commercials are aimed at evoking emotions that will influence people to buy certain products. In most cases, such speeches and commercials are notoriously free of real evidence.* 4

No one can *defeat* a pandemic because it is not an actual enemy—neither an earthling, nor an extra-terrestrial. A real

enemy is endowed with volition. A pandemic, as far as we understand, is not equipped with that faculty.

There is no flea market that offers more rubbish than that owned by governments and major news media outlets.

Going back to hollow celebrities, in 2003, before the social media tidal wave overflowed the planet, Deborah Potter, a former network correspondent, wrote *A Story for all Seasons*, an article published by the American Journalism Review.

What's the attraction of stories like O.J. Simpson, Chandra Levy, Elizabeth Smart, Laci Peterson and Kobe Bryant? They're true crime stories in which the victims are attractive, young, female and white. Many of the accused or implicated are prominent and well-to-do. And there's something else: They're all stories of no great significance to anyone except those involved, yet journalists won't admit it.

O.J. wasn't just a celebrity murder, remember, it was a compelling story about race and power in America. And covering Chandra Levy's disappearance was "just as legitimate as covering the patients' bill of rights or campaign finance, maybe more so," Maureen Dowd wrote in the New York Times, "because here the press has a crucial role in forcing out the truth." Say what?

Sure, these stories have a veneer of drama and mystery that make them interesting, in a prurient sort of way. Of course, we can't expect news organizations to ignore them entirely. But are they more deserving of coverage than health care or the deficit? No way.

To their credit, most TV news managers won't stretch that far to justify their decision-making. Summers usually are slow, after all. There's not much real news and we have so much airtime,

they argue, it's almost unavoidable that some scandal or calamity will fill the void.

Shaquille O'Neal, a former NBA star and philanthropist, is the exception that proves the rule. He is a pragmatic individual inclined to put into practice the least common of all senses. In September 2021 Shaq gave proof of his cleverness by resigning his celebrity status. His statement implicitly laid bare the way charlatans make fools of themselves when they speak from a presumably morally superior stance as well as the relationship that links them to corporate media concerned only with harvesting clicks and ratings.

These celebrities are going freaking crazy and I don't want to be one. I denounce my celebrity-ness today. I'm done with it. I don't want to be in that category. Celebrities are crazy, they really are. Don't call me that anymore. These people are out of their freaking mind with how they treat people, what they do, what they say. That's never been me. I never want to be looked at like that. All my life, everyone probably gets stereotyped, but us celebrities, we get stereotyped because most of these celebrities are out of their mind. I don't do that. I'm a regular person that listened, followed his dreams and made it. I came from nothing. But, just because I made it doesn't mean I'm bigger than you, smarter than you — just because I have more money doesn't mean I'm better than you. I've never been that way and I never will be that way. So I don't want to be in that category of people.

5

Irrelevant celebrities work as alternative spurious beacons of hope for people devoid of a meaningful existence.

Shaq's words and actions, meanwhile, help recall the old maxim: A genuine leader leads by example or does not lead.

1. Peter Sloterdijk. Rules for the Human Zoo. 1999

2. The Guardian. 15 March 2021
3. www.bariweiss.com
4. The Nizkor Project
5. Shaquille O'Neal. New York Post. 24 September 2021

The death of Pericles

I contend that expecting freedom and prosperity by entrusting the government to a gang of bureaucrats is as foolish as trying to lift oneself by the handle while standing inside a bucket.

What is political correctness?

It is the way authoritarian societies silence dissent. As happens with a scratchcard, it is only necessary to scrape the word *correctness* in order to find what is concealed below—i.e., the real name of the game: *ensorship*.

The reason for which independent thinkers are permanently on trial is their incapacity to come to terms with the rules set by the local censor. To a brain blackened by thought control, the arguments of an open-minded person are equal to some kind of scandalous behavior. No fact-finding, no chance for defense. To what end? The goal is to tag the imaginary foe as a disgusting danger that must be excluded, a regular practice in the Dark Ages that is gaining momentum in the presumably most advanced era of mankind. What a cruel paradox.

Authoritarianism, in any of its forms, from the mildest to the most severe of its variants, is a road that inexorably leads to the substitution of the word by guttural sounds, grim looks and violence. The instinct to annihilate anyone who challenges the ideas consecrated by tribal chieftains is always a stone's throw from being triggered.

Instead, critical minds are cultivated by a tradition of intellectual independence enabled by an environment that stimulates ingenuity and dissension. But, are there anywhere on this planet conditions that stimulate the development of a person as an individual rather than as a member of a pack? Leo Strauss deals wonderfully with this riddle in one of his most celebrated essays.

A large section of the people, probably the great majority of the younger generation, accepts the government-sponsored views as

true, if not at once at least after a time. How have they been convinced? And where does the time factor enter? They have not been convinced by compulsion, for compulsion does not produce conviction. It merely paves the way for conviction by silencing contradiction. What is called freedom of thought in a large number of cases amounts to—and even for all practical purposes consists of—the ability to choose between two or more different views presented by the small minority of people who are public speakers or writers. If this choice is prevented, the only kind of intellectual independence of which many people are capable is destroyed, and that is the only freedom of thought which is of political importance. Persecution is therefore the indispensable condition for the highest efficiency of what may be called logica equina. According to the horse-drawn Parmenides, or to Gulliver’s Houyhnhnms, one cannot say, or one cannot reasonably say “the thing which is not”: that is, lies are inconceivable. This logic is not peculiar to horses or horse-drawn philosophers, but determines, if in a somewhat modified manner, the thought of many ordinary human beings as well. They would admit, as a matter of course, that man can lie and does lie. But they would add that lies are short-lived and cannot stand the test of repetition—let alone of constant repetition—and that therefore a statement which is constantly repeated and never contradicted must be true. Another line of argument maintains that a statement made by an ordinary person may be a lie, but the truth of a statement made by a responsible and respected man, and therefore particularly by a man in a highly responsible or exalted position, is morally certain. These two enthymemes lead to the conclusion that a statement which is constantly repeated by the head of the government and never contradicted is a truth of at least the second power.¹

Eighty years ago, neither Strauss nor anyone else could have predicted the emergence of the Multitude as a first-order political subject. Strauss’ definition of persecution is still in full force. Nowadays, however, there are not one but three instances where

truth is legitimated. Large sections of the population perceive the government-sponsored views as true and, at the same time, accept at face value what flows from the news industry as well as from countless, dubious, digital sources. *Social questions are the vital questions of today: they take the place of religion*, wrote Beatrice Webb, one of the founders of the London School of Economics. Each of these forces completes and feeds the other creating a prodigious narrative that covers every corner of society and muffles any attempt to challenge it. Thus, these three powerful ideological dynamos give shape to a pool that is the main massive broadcaster of illusions. Needless to say, the digital theater is a coven of zeros—ones are never admitted—that give shape to the Multitude, the alpha and omega for paper rulers, the safe combination that paves the way to legitimacy for modern oligarchs, top brass elected officials incorrectly known as politicians, among other glamorous aliases. Social media is the apotheosis of ochlocracy.

Educated instinct prompts us to search for meaning, and if there is none an imaginary one is created. Thus, every time significance does not come to mind instantly like a pop-up ad people prefer to lie to themselves rather than put in a little effort and accept the facts sparkling before their eyes and minds. Consider a mob rambling around, mumbling and bumbling, yelling at each other and oozing superstition through their every word. All of them are controlled and punished by a superior force, fully legitimized by the crowd itself. Nothing resembles an absolute monarchy regime more closely than the digital realm. In terms of intellectual prowess the world has relapsed hundreds of years in just one low dishonest decade.

Like a stately manor in the English countryside, social media is inhabited by a handful of masters and an underworld where legions of servants dwell and duly provide for them. However, the staff does not get paid these days but rather it is they who stretch out their hands to put money into the pockets of their wealthy *rulers*.

As in Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell's dystopian novel, social media regulars fulfilled the task of the *Thinkpol*, the secret police that detects people who entertain politically unacceptable thoughts, an illegal action known as *thoughtcrime*. Thus, individuality and independent thinking incompatible with the consecrated narrative and rhetoric are severely penalized. Social media and Big Media are the way Orwell's sick imaginations came to life.

People cannot live interconnected to a mainframe computer, no matter how much top oligarchs want them to. The belief that underpins the degenerate drive known as political correctness is that the entire population belongs to the Government, or to the state, or to both, as an object that can be hauled, transported, silenced, inventoried, locked up and even, if necessary, dismantled. State is the name totalitarian collectivism gives to the public sector turned into a police machine to manipulate, surveil, confiscate and discipline, among other means of control and subjugation. In a democratic environment politicians limit themselves to administering the public sector. In an oligarchic regime bureaucrats are in charge of the state.

True democracy is incompatible with a society of millions. But, although it is not feasible to radically change demographics, it is possible to try to deconstruct and rebuild the failed structure by converting the state, a totalitarian preacher, into a public sector that respects individuality. Until that happens it will be more appropriate to call the system *democracy* or *deimocracy*, after Deimos, the god of dread and terror in Greek mythology. As it is experienced these days, *democracy* may be either an object of mockery or a tool of control and persecution.

Meanwhile, Big Media corps, nattering nabobs of negativism and necromancy, keep overturning traditional standards of journalism in the service of a politically correct narrative, the modern euphemism for a classic nomenclature: propaganda.

The Multitude is far more superstitious than the vassals of the feudal system used to be since they believe they are free and that the web is a democratic medium that serves them. The truth is that they are the ones that serve the very few who control the platforms in a 100% hierarchical machine. In a way, the Dark Ages could be deemed enlightened compared to what the world has become in the Social Media Ages. As with smoking, social mediaing is a sign of extreme weakness.

Today, probably more than ever, the first stanza of Yeats' poem reflects the way of modernity:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. 2*

Each person has an existence, real, empirical, uncontested, whereas society is a concept instrumental to the expansion of the herd culture, an oppressive blanket enfolding every nook and cranny of people's activities. Collective memory, collective responsibility and other derivatives are stratagems deployed by the PC machine aimed at seducing layers of uneducated people. Collectivism is a concoction for consumption by the most basic of minds, an overt commercial endeavor that deals in bulk and whose ultimate objective is the liquefaction of individuality. Within the mob a person ceases to be a unique, unrepeatable precipitate, and becomes something less than a nebulous entity.

Nationalism is the main ingredient in the formula to exterminate every last trace of individuality. It is a toxin that can work miracles when it comes to the process of crippling a mind. Can a person be naïve at the age of four but still be innocent at twenty? What does naïve mean? It means having no opinions of one's

own. It means blindly believing in anything people in a position of power do and say. And yes, everyday unambiguous reality clearly shows that most adults are not adults, in the sense of individuals, i.e., indivisible units capable of wielding their own, specific and distinctive way of leading their lives, but rather children mechanically repeating everything and anything they hear because someone, presumably prominent, says so.

Take the example of the most celebrated event, held in high regard by major media companies and governments across the globe: the Olympic Games. They are, doubtless, the apotheosis of collectivism involving a bottom-up-top-down dynamics. Hans von Tschammen und Osten, among others Third Reich master brains, understood their quintessence and exploited it when organizing the 1936 Summer Olympics. The games marked Germany's return to the world community after the country's humiliating defeat in World War I and turned out to be a boost for the regime. The New York Times reported that the games put Germany *back in the fold of nations* and even made the Germans *more human again*.

One must govern well, and good government needs good propaganda, Joseph Goebbels proclaimed in a 1933 speech.

This is the way power mechanics works, as a two-way relationship where one side fuels the other. There are neither culprits nor innocents. Democracy and the separation of powers are great ideas, but bare ideas are as inert as pieces of furniture. Regrettably, the way these lofty, heavily complex guides of action are permanently raped spawns grief and despair. Surprisingly for many, what is currently in force in most of the countries that claim to be democracies looks more like tyranny clad in finery.

Regardless of the use of the illusory *we* and *you*, Peter Hitchens knows that the black clouds on the horizon are not about to dissipate anytime soon. His 13 March 2021 column in The Mail on Sunday makes the point abundantly clear.

We'll be sorry when the Monarchy is gone, which it will pretty soon be if we all go on behaving like this. If you want a Monarchy, you need grown-ups, not just to sit on the throne, but to support it.

Sentimental slop won't keep it going, and nor will cheap temporary popularity or glamour. It doesn't matter to me if the King or Queen are ugly or unfashionable.

Personally, I have no wish to know my sovereign's private thoughts or tastes. What would save it would be the realisation that what will come after it will be worse.

For the republicans are waiting, filled with glee and hunger, for that moment. They know that the present Queen is beyond their reach. They cannot pull her down and they will not try.

But afterwards they will do all they can to destroy the Crown.

More than three centuries ago, this nation had an amazing stroke of luck. It invented constitutional monarchy.

Based on that marvellous and forgotten charter of liberty, the 1689 Bill of Rights, we created a new type of state that was the wonder and envy of Europe.

We had a monarch who was the object of loyalty and pride, but who could not be an autocrat because the law and Parliament together prevented it. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 had sent our last despot, James II, scurrying off to France.

Social media could be defined as the sum of all the fatuous things said in bars, markets and salons amplified by gigantic loudspeakers. Its intellectual value is in the vicinity of zero, at best. However, major news outlets decided to turn a promiscuous tavern into a strategic partner of their multibillion dollar businesses. Getting along with the crowd guarantees audience and sales.

The insubstantial conversation between a pretentious, high maintenance couple desperate to gain matinee idol status and an ephemeral TV star—*nothing but shadows in a sunshine day*—would have gone unnoticed thirty or forty years ago, in a moderately read society. Today, irrelevant exchanges between celebrities rapidly gain unanimous approval and worldwide standing ovations. Social media works as a sort of psychoactive hideout. It makes people believe that they have friends on Facebook, that they are smart because they spurt rubbish on Twitter and that they are accomplished photographers because they post phone captures on Instagram.

Speaking of Hitchens, the situation recalls his 1999 book *The Abolition of Britain*, a work that examines the decline in British morals and manners as the cultural reforms between the 1960s and Labour's 1997 general election win took place. Hitchens asserts that the reforms facilitated radical constitutional changes and that Blair's government amounted to a slow-motion coup d'état. A thesis that prompts the question: How did all this come about?

*Above all I regret not having foreseen the extraordinary assault on liberty that was about to begin. I had noted the use of the Omagh bomb as a pretext for oppressive laws. But I had not realized the menace contained in the Civil Contingencies Act, nor understood Mr. Blair's personal enthusiasm for a strong state, which he felt able to display after the outrages on 11 September 2001. I dealt with these dangers in *The Abolition of Liberty*, but would emphasize that they are not in any way separate from our moral and cultural decline, and from the sustained effort to cut us off from our past. State power will always be needed when self-restraint is weak, and those who neither value their liberties nor (in many cases) even know that they possess them, or how they came to do so, will not be good at defending them. Resistance to these changes, though often brave and articulate, is feeble. The dismantling of our liberties is actually popular. 3*

In an effort to identify the causes leading to the annihilation of traditions that deeply affected the sense of belonging to a community, Hitchens explains:

When I first wrote the book I was looking for a cause, something which you can put your finger on and say: This was the cause of it, this idea, this person. And I came more and more, as I wrote it, to see it much more that what has happened was an absence, that there has been a gap, that people no longer believed in certain things and that into this vacuum all kinds of stuff rushed.⁴

A recollection that immediately draws to mind Nietzsche's aphorism: *A Nihilist is the man who says of the world as it is, that it ought not to exist, and of the world as it ought to be, that it does not exist.*

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), friar, philosopher, mathematician, poet, cosmological theorist, and Hermetic occultist, dared to antagonize the Catholic doctrine, perhaps the most powerful state-sponsored narrative machine that has ever existed. He maintained that the stars were distant suns surrounded by their own planets, and raised the possibility that some of them might harbor life. He contended that the universe is infinite and that the earth was not its centre but just another planet that orbits the sun once every year and not the other way around. In 1583 he was tried for heresy by the Roman Inquisition on charges of denial of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ and the virginity of Mary. He was found guilty and was burned at the stake in Campo de' Fiori, just a few steps away from today's Piazza Navona.

Political correctness is the gateway to the new ostracism for freedom of speech. The digital era marks the rebirth of the Inquisition, with a twist. Today the penalty is not physical torture but psychological torment: the culprit becomes a social pariah. Social media's power of destruction and promotion of ignorance

equals that of the Church five centuries ago, indefinitely multiplied.

With this evidence in mind, what would a real politician do? No doubt he would try to stimulate people's brains by putting an end to the ocean of regulations that make daily life a comfortable first class carriage bound for a comfortable graveyard, among them the laws that curtail freedom of speech. A true politician is not a shepherd but rather a person who gives individuals their roar. Sadly, politicians are completely AWOL, missing, out of the picture.

What kind of world is it in which certain combinations of words are punished? A rhetorical question, indeed. Is there something that better depicts a desolate, brutish existence than the banning of words? Maybe there is—the bovine acceptance of prohibition.

Let us attempt a thought exercise. Let us imagine that a top rank official, a head of state for instance, tells the nation the truth. It is difficult to imagine such a portentous event but for the sake of the exercise let us use our imagination and picture the head of government in front of a camera in the middle of the worst pandemic any living creature on this earth has ever witnessed. In order to make this eccentric foray a tad more plausible let us assume that his mind has been inhabited, if only for ten minutes, by the spirit of Pericles.

Action!

Good evening.

Tonight I address the nation in the midst of one of the gravest health and social emergencies ever recorded in modern history.

Let me be clear and straightforward: this administration knows nothing about the nature of the scourge. Likewise, my government is completely in the dark about its origin.

My ministers and I do not know how to deal with the pandemic and we do not know how, when or why it broke loose.

I must confess that it is a complete mystery that neither politicians nor scientists are able to solve.

I am not even in a position to tell you whether it will be possible to put an end to it.

On the contrary, it not only seems that it will not come to an end but that it will get worse. The number of variants that have been detected since the start of the pandemic indicates that the situation is out of control everywhere. How many variants are going to appear? We don't know. Will these variants be more aggressive? We don't know. Are we going to have vaccines against the new variants? We don't know. Yet, what we do know is that this virus is keeping us on edge.

On the other hand, rest assured that this administration is not confident of the efficacy of the many vaccines that have been produced in recent months. As you may know, a vaccine is a biological preparation that provides active acquired immunity to a particular infectious disease. Developing a new vaccine from scratch takes considerable time. It depends largely on how much information is available about the disease itself, how it infects people and spreads, and many others extremely complicated factors of analysis. Traditionally it has taken between 5 and 10 years to produce a new vaccine. These current vaccines have been developed in just a handful of months. Therefore, and since practically nothing is known about this heavily mutant agent it would be contrary to common sense to trust them. Massive vaccination programs are not the panacea that mainstream media and governments around the world have led the people to believe, even if the unrealistic goals set by the authorities were met.

My administration considers that lockdowns are not a solution but a way of worsening the problem. Lockdowns are marketing gimmicks designed only to give people hope. Hope, my grandmother used to say, is a tease designed to prevent us accepting reality. The truth is quite the opposite. Lockdowns are

the way incompetent rulers buy time and protect themselves from the anger and despair of the population. Bear this in mind and don't let anybody fool you: nobody knows what to do.

Just look around. It is clear that lockdowns are not working. A draconian lockdown recently failed miserably in California, a state that has some of the toughest restrictions. In spite of that it has become one of the worst epicentres, setting new records for cases, hospitalizations and daily deaths. A general lockdown also failed in Germany, a country that is a model of management. These failures come on the heels of multiple examples all around the world.

Incompetent government officials pass the buck when they hold citizens accountable for the collapse of the health systems. On the contrary, if the systems collapse it is because the authorities are not up to the job. They hold primary responsibility for organizing and delivering health services and medical care equal to the task.

Allow me a final word: Do not take at face value what mainstream media says. They profit by exploiting sentimentality and promoting explosive headlines. In a nutshell, they systematically misinform. Regrettably, truth is no longer the magnetic north in newsrooms.

My dear fellow citizens: All I can say to you is take care, reach out to your neighbour in need and enjoy life while it lasts. Life is short and its end might be around the corner. Today more than ever.

Better to live bravely than die like a coward.

Good night.

After reading the speech a friend told me that if there were real politicians this is the kind of speech citizens would oftentimes hear. Seated at another table, a contrarian who overheard the remark replied: *This is the kind of speech we would hear*

frequently if there were real citizens. If there were individuals instead of “people”, not a single elected bureaucrat would dare to dump on the population even a fraction of the bullshit we usually have to endure.

Real politicians consecrate their life to serving the public and will never take personal advantage during their tenure. On the other hand, overpaid, unaccountable elected *rulers* who assault politics on a daily basis float inside a sort of Kafka’s castle completely disconnected from the reality beyond the battlements. They are a gang and not a caste, as they are usually called. A caste system involves a social stratification that has nothing to do with lying and looting. Gangs are not answerable to their victims. They just follow a protocol that drives them through mainly unsubstantial routines and, no matter the kind of disasters they may commit they are practically never accountable. On the other hand, ignoring a traffic ticket can lead the average citizen to a suspended license or even jail time. No intelligent person needs a ruler, geometers aside. What decent people ask for are honest civil servants who, for a very limited period of time, will accompany and tidy up the natural disorder that any supersized and frenetic activity produces. However, *leaders* are as interested in people as vampires are interested in sex. As the saying goes, *the three known branches of government are money, television and bullshit.*

The reason why self-proclaimed politicians behave as certified psychopaths is that they are not accountable, hence, they know no limits, they feel no remorse, and have no sense of guilt. What is mandatory for any average person is not mandatory for them. Worst case scenario: their peers send the culprit home without dinner. They are all Nixonians: *When the president does it, that means that it is not illegal.*

After the release of a 165-page report by New York Attorney General Letitia James detailing multiple allegations of a pattern and practice of sexual harassment against women, Governor

Andrew Cuomo resigned and quietly left walking on a red carpet provided by the dominant news corporations. Not just that, before leaving he pocketed a 50,000 dollars annual pension. It was not an honorable resignation. He didn't accept the allegations and emphatically denied any wrongdoing. Eventually, he resigned in order to ward off the impeachment that would surely have occurred if he had insisted on clinging to the frame of his office's door. The moral of the story: As long as elected officials just keep resigning after being caught, decent people will remain hostage to a quasi lord-vassal system where the few enjoy the fruits of the labor of the many. On top of that, Cuomo actually dared to give a farewell speech as if he was departing to the trenches ready to give his life for the cause of freedom. Michael Goodwin gave an accurate description of what the last adieu looked like.

The interest in watching Andrew Cuomo's farewell speech recalls a story about the death of Hollywood mogul Louis B. Mayer. His funeral was mobbed, but not necessarily by admirers. As one of his detractors put it, people came to make sure the bastard really was dead.

Cuomo inspires similar sentiments and those who endured his grating final salute to himself were rewarded with the certainty he really is leaving. By the time New Yorkers wake up Tuesday morning, Kathy Hochul will be the governor.

Any inclination to feel sorry for Cuomo over how he destroyed himself was overwhelmed by his cringe-worthy good-bye. Indeed, the very idea that he would even presume to give a farewell speech, as if he was some kind of beloved hero like George Washington or Winston Churchill, is a sign of his detachment from reality.

Haven't New Yorkers suffered enough by being forced to wait two weeks for him to leave after he said he would? At least have the decency to go quickly and quietly.

No such luck. Watching the 15 minute taped speech was worse than a root canal because he assumed the posture of a trusted and wise leader, as if he hadn't been driven from office in disgrace by his own party and public acclaim.

There was not a scintilla of remorse for the pain he caused his sexual harassment victims or the careers he wrecked among those women and the suckers who protected and lied for him. Nor was there an apology to his voters and donors about letting them down, or to the citizens of New York, including his family, for the trouble and expense he caused them.

Like any narcissist, he feels only his own pain. 5

The Cuomo scandal is one the latest chapters of a tragedy that might properly be called *The Rape of Politics*. It clearly showcases what is obvious for many but invisible to people at large. As long as real politicians are missing, the best that elected officials can do is sit in their chair and, occasionally, do something related to their work when a problem arises instead of making matters worse. In short: the less they meddle with the public affairs, mind you, without privileges, without expenses, without cars, without drivers and without lavish salaries, the better. And at the end of their tenures they should all go back to their homes, take a regular job somewhere and never bother anyone again.

The most beautiful reward a public official can receive is the recognition and affection of the people. A true elected official must necessarily end his term poorer or less rich. This is an uncontested truth. Regrettably, these cases are the exception to the rule; they do not abound in the tier one league. As the wit

would have it: *Now and then an innocent man is sent to the legislature.*

Political correctness is the favorite shenanigan state bureaucrats engage in once they land in the desecrated political arena. Nothing is more deceiving than a head of state talking like a socialite at a cocktail party.

Understandably, the epigraph to this essay is a paraphrase of one of the best quips delivered by Winston Churchill, a man that minced no words when it came to looking problems in the eye.

Eventually, all the grand-guignolesque tricks pulled by the modern Holy Trinity—social media, Big Media and first rank government personnel—will only make them all less credible, less respectable and more edible to the insatiable voracity of ignorance.

1. Leo Strauss. *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. 1941
2. William Butler Yeats. *The Second Coming*. 1919
3. Peter Hitchens. *The Abolition of Britain*. 1999
4. Peter Hitchens. *Conversation with Dan Pugh*. 2018
5. William Goodwin. *New York Post*. 23 August 2021

Der Führer is your daddy

By a free country I mean a country where people are allowed, so long as they do not hurt their neighbors, to do as they like. I do not mean a country where six men may make five men do exactly as they like. That is not my notion of freedom.

Robert Gascoyne-Cecil

Für Ihre Sicherheit.

For your safety was a byword commonly used in Germany between 1933 and 1945.

From the catacombs of power rises the *leader* with an air of superiority.

The subjects beg him for protection, as if they were terrified children trembling in the darkness of a room, as if the *leader* were the local mobster. The ruler's source of power is the toxin that home and school instill into the child's brain with an obsessive dropper even before he is born. Thus, buds never bloom, although their bodies claim the opposite. Founding Father is the metaphor that best expresses this harmful illusion.

A true leader is an honest, hard-working, highly knowledgeable individual. Due to his moral excellence he gains the status because his peers bestow the title upon him and by doing so choose him as their skipper. Authority is an asset that cannot be bought or appropriated or inherited. However, these days *leader* is a word used lightly by government officials, poured forth liberally by corporate media and robotically repeated by swarms of people educated in the values of sloth and subservience. Following former chess wonder Garry Kasparov it could be said that those who are generally called *strong leaders* by Big Media & Assoc. are strong in the same way arsenic is a strong drink. As a matter of fact, nowadays *leaders* resemble *dealers* rather than true politicians.

Family, school and governments are the great promoters of the Father of the Nation myth, a grotesque figure, an incomplete embryonic substance kneaded with the mud of collectivism. The National Hero breathes in bank notes, coins, stamps and is even carved into the granite of mountains in order to demonstrate that he is way above the human condition—he is bigger than nature and immune to the force of the elements and the ravages of time. Totalitarianism is authoritarianism in writing, or in stone, come to that.

The Nazi slogan is no longer necessary. From the social media cavern modern Morlocks implore their masters for protection even though they are the ones who maintain the freeloader. Deprived of the word as the differential element that configures human beings as such, they barely growl while they pound phone screens. They don't know what politics mean. They don't care. They crave for adoptive parents. The biological ones are not enough.

As the wit has it: *Average people do not want to be free—they simply want to be safe.* True. However, the sentence needs a conclusion: *But they always end up empty-handed.* Average people are not thoughtful enough to understand that they will never be safe if they give up their autonomy to the ruler of the day. On the contrary, as happens when a gullible person bargains with a gangster, they will always end up ripped off, devoid of autonomy and safety.

People who lack the command of language are also deprived of volitional power. Somnambulists are not in a position to want anything, they act out of instinct. Stating this isn't exactly going out on a limb. However, the first sentence may be construed as accurate. Most people can't live without being reprimanded by an abusive parent. Thus, by accepting the official version of everything and pursuing an illusion of security whole generations

wound up leading miserable lives that could otherwise have been flourishing—or not.

We want an adult at the wheel, is a line often heard in bars and TV shows. As if being an adult were some kind of assurance, as if it meant anything at all. In any case, adults are precisely the ones who get the whole pack in trouble, always, with no exceptions. There is no education more degrading than that which teaches people to behave like cattle.

Every time physical reality persists in defying our whims, our educated instinct resorts to trompe-l'oeil, anamorphosis and other forced perspectives tricks aimed at creating imaginary worlds that can fit into our most capricious fantasies. The results are always painful. Going through walls cleanly, without shock or pain, is still beyond the capabilities of human abilities. Nevertheless, there is a safe place all those who want to avoid a destiny of shame and misery can turn to.

It becomes all men, who desire to excel other animals, to strive to the utmost of their power, not to pass through life in obscurity, like the beasts of the field, which nature has formed groveling and subservient to appetite. All our power is situated in the mind and in the body. Of the mind we rather employ the government; of the body, the service. The one is common to us with the gods; the other with the brutes. It appears to me, therefore, more reasonable to pursue glory by means of the intellect than of bodily strength, and, since the life which we enjoy is short, to make the remembrance of us as lasting as possible. For the glory of wealth and beauty is fleeting and perishable; that of intellectual power is illustrious and immortal. 1

This passage should be mandatory in all schools at any level. It could be complemented by Dr. Johnson's famous dictum: *He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.* Unlike the road to servitude, the road to individuality is the only

path that gives a chance, in the midst of an ocean of uncertainties, of achieving intellectual prowess. True autonomy only comes, if it comes, with knowledge and knowledge is attained with rigorous discipline. Living in a pack, instead, often assures comfort, brutality and submission.

We live in a period in which politicians are not very popular. And believe me, you have my sympathy. Politicians are regarded as people who have learned to talk but not to act.

Oswald Mosley, founder and head of the British Union of Fascists, was dead right. But he is dead and was not the right bloke. The people he referred to were certainly not the best role models of politicians. As it happens, they were loathed not only because they failed as politicians, singled out as the culprits for the misery brought about by the collapse of the economy in 1929, but mainly because they were not paternalistic enough. Mosley's plan was to fill the gap by becoming Father of Great Britain. If Churchill hadn't beaten him to it by turning the Third Reich into a despicable foe, Mosley's chances of success would have been reasonably high.

In his novel *Le Surmâle*, Alfred Jarry presents the exploits of André Marcueil, a man capable of prodigious feats of strength and sexual athleticism. The novel, published in 1903, is a satire on the turn-of-the-century fixation with the machine revolution and records of endurance in all their infinite and futile variety.

Marcueil is the parodic incarnation of the Indian of Theophrastus who, according to Rabelais, *with the aid of a certain Herb, did it in one Day threescore Times and ten, and more*. In the parlance of these hectic days, his vacuous exploits would have made Marcueil something akin to an acclaimed *woke leader* in his own right.

The novel also features a stand-alone chapter involving a ten-thousand-mile race between a train and a five-man team of cyclists powered by a synthetic drug. *The Perpetual Motion Food Race*, set two decades into the future from Jarry's actual date of about 1905, is an allegory of the world in which Jarry lived, a place very different and very similar to the current one. Others are the fashions, but the constant remains unvariable. *What most deserves to be thought about in our troubled times is the fact that we do not think.*

But, while Jarry, a cultured and intelligent man, exposes the myth of the supermale with humor, revealing it as a ridiculous artifice, the current political environment is rife with hustlers that take the story seriously and by impersonating the character become the caricature of the caricature.

Supreme leaders, as well as other specimens of the sort depicted on canvas with distorted accuracy by Francis Bacon, harass, lie and steal. Bosses at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy are above the law because the public grants immunity and impunity, safeguarding them from any mundane eventuality. They are spooks created by millions of minds connected to the same autocratic brain; projected shadows of ancestral fears flowing from an unfathomable web of arcana. Despite their ethereal substance, no one, ever, not even those who despise them would dare to challenge them. Father can be loved or hated but, above all else, he must be feared.

Many people, some of them honest politicians who abhor the tide of extreme mediocrity spurted by social media and corporate news outlets, repeat with tender innocence a platitude as familiar as it is overrated. *We must wage the war of ideas*, they exclaim with enviable enthusiasm. There is not and cannot be anything that even resembles a *culture war* in an environment ravaged by ignorance. Only competent people can engage in such an enterprise. What is taking place in major media companies, once a moderately respected sector, as well as in the social media

nebula is nothing but a pitched battle where sticks and stones are the only weapons available. And even if a symbolic skirmish were to take place, tin-pot warriors would have to overcome a major obstacle first—convincing themselves and the public that Father ought to be killed. God may be dead, his throne is not.

We've always been in the hands of impostors. Thanks to the virus their incompetence is more visible than ever. I overheard this remark on the street a few days ago.

The history of demagoguery is as old as History. But, while since the birth of philosophy demagogues are the customary culprits, responsible for all the evils in the world, the truth is that it does not serve justice to put the blame entirely on one side of the counter. Alphonse Gabriel Capone was a clever man overshadowed by his own legend who could have been an acclaimed philosopher had he been born in another time, used to say: *All I do is supply a demand.*

As if they were a residue of the feudal era, people are taught to be blindly subordinate to the ruler and to believe in his word as if it were a verse in a holy book. A critical mind, the best ally to distance oneself from common places and to question received knowledge to avoid repeating it narcotically, is further out of reach than ever these days.

From the cradle we are condemned to excel in laziness. We are brought up to believe the ruler is our father. Or mother, for that matter. This incontrovertible fact is the cornerstone of all forms of authoritarianism. Angela Merkel's nickname *Mutti* speaks for itself. Thus, from an early age men and women alike yearn to be adopted by a tribal chief able to keep them to the path designed by school, family and other ideological apparatuses—formal learning, marriage, home, children, employment, retirement and a holy hole in the graveyard. There is nothing more dystopian than the average life of an average person.

This kind of upbringing is the cornerstone of wilful serfdom, the stem cell of wilful ignorance. These forces are distinctive traits of liberal democracy as a failed experiment in social organization. Though almost a cliché, few people dare to say it publicly: When ignorance ceases to be marginal and starts to prevail and populations skyrocket from the thousands to the millions, democracy, the worst form of government except for all the others, becomes an exercise in futility.

The consecrated road, an alleged *via regia*, is so narrow that far from teaching people to be free and honorable, it creates cowards who fear life more than death. Entire populations desperately beg their *leaders* to dispose of everything on its margins—a nothing of which nothing is known, imaginary ghosts that lurk threateningly the minds of the afflicted. It is worth remembering: no virus mutates more than fear. Fear is life's ruling vector and ruthless victor.

People want to believe that elected oligarchs are the new messiah claimants and the state their almighty mothership. Cornered by desperation and trapped inside the labyrinth of a flat life offering no alternatives, people resort to them, even though top hat *rulers* can bring little but misery and sorrow, particularly to the lives of the neediest. However, gangsters are like totems—sacrosanct and untouchables—until they are not. If the state is a mothership it surely is of the harvester type, designed for stripping people of their resources, material and intellectual alike. People love to be fooled.

In an instinctive reflex we all attempt to flee from suffering. Nobody wants to carry the burden of lifetime problems that cannot be solved and are too big to handle—particularly when these problems cannot be articulated, not even on an emotional level. Abuse happens not just because someone controls and manipulates, but because another one allows the abuser to act that way. This unvirtuous relationship comes as no surprise given

the thousands of years of indoctrination based on fear and submission to the word of *glorious leaders*.

However, while this is happening something more complex is taking place. *Rulers* tend to appease the public by pandering to their basest emotions and meaningless requests. Anything goes when it comes to preserving and increasing power. It just takes common sense to understand that when a society is run according to subpar standards a permanent state of neglect and disorder tends to be the norm. Comfort or freedom? That is the question.

It comes as no surprise, then, that this overwhelming superiority of the emotional manipulation over the rational persuasion prompts Big Media to appeal to the hearts rather than the heads of their audiences in their banal quest for clicks and ratings. The round-the-clock informative bombardment on completely irrelevant topics, e.g., the death of celebrities no one ever knew or even saw in the flesh, ends up convincing the public that any banality deserves to be taken into account. Worse still, since the emergence of social media news shows have definitively put journalism aside and become a sort of a soap opera parody comprising infinite episodes.

Roger Kimball, American art critic and editor of *The New Criterion* literary magazine, brings up a poignant anecdote of the (sur)real world.

Consider the case of James Damore, the now former Google engineer who wrote an internal memo describing the company's cult-like 'echo chamber' of political correctness and ham-handed efforts to nurture 'diversity' in hiring and promotion. When the memo was publicized, it first precipitated controversy — then it provided Google CEO Sundar Pichai a high horse upon which to perch, declare Damore's memo 'offensive and not OK,' and then fire him. For what? For expressing his opinion in a company discussion forum designed to encourage free expression!

In one way, there was nothing new about Google's actions. Large companies have always tended to be bastions of conformity. Decades ago, everyone at IBM had to wear a white shirt and was strongly encouraged to espouse conservative social values. Today, everyone in Silicon Valley has to subscribe to the ninety-five theses of the social justice warrior's creed, beginning with certain dogmas about race, fossil fuels, sexuality, and the essential loveliness of jihadist Muslims. If you are at Google and dissent from this orthodoxy, you will soon find yourself not at Google. 2

Aside from the fact that political correctness is a condition that blooms in the absence of intellectual activity, the grotesque anecdote reflects the current global hysteria. Had the 2020 pandemic taken place before the widespread growth of radio broadcasting people would surely have behaved in a decent, honorable way.

Top-tier *leaders* only care about themselves, the preservation of their enormous privileges and an iron-fist control of the population. This imposture is registered from Plato onwards and is inevitable as long as the places that configure power remain unchanged. Relative positions determine conditions that in turn regulate behaviors. By allocating exorbitant spending and an almost unlimited amount of resources to the incumbent, with no term limit and no accountability, modern bureaucracies perpetuate chronic corruption that should not catch anyone by surprise. Even the most pure heart can rot in a house of ill repute. The man on the street was dead right: Today, a virus has made the aberration more evident than ever.

As happens with magicians, autocrats perform tricks of illusion to mystify and entertain audiences. After all, the art and craft of illusion consists in transporting people into a world in which the impossible appears possible. Modern elected officials are equipped with tailor-made tricks specially designed to oppress, curtail, forbid, incarcerate, murder and pillage. The standard

magic box includes the following tools: nation, country, fatherland, flag, family, common good, external enemy, national interest, crown and country. They are also alchemists: they master the formula of turning gold into excrement. Autocracy is a magic trick that comes in an assorted palette of degrees.

The classical motto *Nullius in verba* means *Take nobody's word for it*. It expresses the resolution to withstand domination by appealing to facts certified by experience. The phrase comes from Horace's Epistle to his benefactor Maecenas, where he claims not to be devoted to any particular sect or bound to any philosophic school. The motto was extracted from the first of two hexameters: *Nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri, – quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes*. “I am not obliged to swear allegiance to any master. Wherever the storm drags me I turn in for shelter.”

The first step in virtue and wisdom is to eschew vice and folly. Men are anxious to avoid poverty and ought to be quite as eager to escape from evil desires, especially as the prize offered is so much greater.

True, the world takes a different view, but the children who sing ‘You’ll be king, if you do right’ should teach us how much better than riches is the power to stand erect and free and to fling defiance at Fortune.

If I were asked why I do not go along with the world and share its opinions, I would recall the fable of the fox declining the lion’s invitation to enter his den, because the footprints point in only one direction. The man who once gives in to popular opinion becomes the victim of a hydra. Cutting off one head does no good. Men are capricious, and even the same man changes his views from hour to hour. 3

The difference between a politician and a bureaucrat is that the former is in charge of public affairs while the latter is in charge of people—because the people beg him to.

Syntactic constructions that use the verb *to be* followed by a demonym (*I am English*)—as well as other collectivist identities ostentatiously displayed as virtuous attributes—tend to be one of the main components that trigger social violence, educational degradation, political regression, bigotry, authoritarianism and, ultimately, totalitarianism. The verb *to be* does not become the mindset of any sensible individual when related to nationalities or any other imaginary, collective subject.

Perfectly aware that this virus, almost as old as humanity, is deeply rooted in the social media mental asylum, a new breed of petty despots fuel massive doses of nationalism, separatism, inclusive language, racism, genre and race identity delusions, victimization, the proclamation of tribal tongues over the national languages and other divisive tools. The barrage of toxic rhetoric is promoted by well-fed power elites completely detached from the lives and problems of the average person and picked up by the other elite, the one in power, that replicates banalities in order to gain visibility and the favor of the Multitude constantly gathered at the social media arena. A noisy minority is far more melodramatic than a silent majority.

Privileged minorities chronically loathe freedom of speech. They only stand for one thing and one thing only: themselves. However, their absurdities are parroted by the huge masses of people always avid for new trends and one-digit passwords. There is always the temptation to cut corners when ignorance is pressing. Someone said that the will for ignorance turns people into mushrooms—they multiply by consuming crap and groping in the dark.

So far, experience shows that whatever the system of government, ruling elites tend to exercise power on behalf of their network of cronies, business partners, relatives, life-long acquaintances and other close associates, all of them bound by trust or money. The modus operandi is particularly repulsive in underdeveloped, ill-managed countries where governments are in

cahoots with uncompetitive industries and hold hostage entire populations forced to choose between a meagre variety of low-quality and grossly overpriced products. As happens with organized crime, machine bureaucrats received protection payments in the form of taxes and other not so transparent emoluments. However, it might be riskier to miss a tax return deadline than to owe a thousand bucks to a mobster. *Let us protect the many at the expense of the many* is the flagship motto of the champions of the oligarchic democracy.

Extremism is the opposite of intellectual discourse. Absolutes are the main resource of bigotry. The current fad: The word racist thrown at anybody for any reason. *Racist is one of the modern terms of abuse and a term of abuse is the more effective the less defined it is.* Major news corporations and governments alike fuel the rubbish in order to have the Multitude on their side.

Someone should deconstruct the substance and the meaning of these summary public executions before a mock jury that rapidly sentences those who, allegedly, said or did something wrong. Suspects are presumed guilty as soon as they are accused. They stand little hope of exonerating themselves, even if they are innocent. The Multitude and major media corporations deprive them of fair means to mount a defense and clear their names. A guilty fellow yields millions. An innocent one is worth nothing. To add color to the circus, the person marked by the inflamed mob is forced to wear an invisible, but clearly distinguishable hat, similar to the one that Jews were forced to use in the Middle Ages. Finally, *opprobrium summum*, the culprit must testify before the mass huddled around a television set and declare, as Galileo Galilei did, terrified by the stench of Giordano Bruno's charred body: *I abjure with a sincere heart and unfeigned faith, I curse and detest my errors and heresies.*

The reverse variant is the other side of the same abomination: TV shows bestow the attributes of the victim upon the chosen one. The audience accepts the staging at face value. They want to

believe in their *rulers*, no matter how many times they have been raped by them. Case closed. Certainty generates more rating than uncertainty. Assertions, it doesn't matter whether they are unfounded or outright wrong, sell much more than questions. For Big Media the judiciary, the only instance in conditions to settle disputes—this is what civilization is about—is a nuisance, a contraption too slow and complicated for the understanding of the average audience.

Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo, a member of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, accurately commented on a very popular TV program entirely dedicated to the victimization of the daughter of Rocío Jurado, legendary Spanish singer and actress, and the public lapidation of her former husband that followed suit. As in the Dark Ages, the crowd, gathered no longer in the square but in front of a screen, has replaced the court of justice.

How many of those who set themselves up as the ultimate popular instance have stopped one second to think: "What if the miscreant on the set was me?" Look at the slogan the mob spreads around: "I do believe you, sister!" It has absolutely everything: "I do" affirms the subjective voice; "I believe you" puts the mere opinion - a quasi-religious faith - before proven facts; and 'sister' vindicates the collective identity, in this case a feminist movement that has become bully and prudish. Together, these three elements challenge the rule of law and promote social conflict. They make peaceful coexistence impossible. In such a jungle anyone has the right to ask: "Why is your conviction worth more than mine?" and then rush into the public square to shake the emotions of the people. And then: Who is innocent? The one who cries the louder or the one that gets a larger audience? And who is guilty? Will the oligopoly viewers decide by voting, click, click? 4

Speaking of which, it is inevitable to mention one of the most graphic allegories of a world intellectually lost. Bloomberg L.P., not precisely a bastion on anti-capitalist sentiment, has named

one of its newsletters Equality. The company, founded and owned by multibillionaire Michael Bloomberg, presents the initiative as *the* latest on how companies and institutions are confronting gender, race and class. Freedom of speech or fear of speech? Pick your poison.

The witch-hunt is back. Wilful illiterates have already taken over the town hall. As they say, the brutes live voluntarily locked in a binary universe. They only understand elementary pairs of opposites—bad/good, left/right, us/them, rich/poor, Liverpool/Arsenal. They own you the moment you uncritically begin to use their parlance. If you speak like them you are one of them.

Digital technology preserves for the foreseeable future the data of all living individuals, and of the dead, for that matter: incomes, routines, purchases, investments, travels, medical records, preferences and tons of information that the most fertile mind could not imagine and which nobody is sufficiently aware of. In a fraction of a second a grey office clerk can produce dozens of lists sorted according to any given category. Thus, the life history of all the citizens in a democratic country, at least on paper, is just a laptop click away from corrupt and incompetent *rulers*, always inclined to pursue the authoritarian road. A smooth transition is taking place in full daylight: from George Orwell's nightmare to Aldous Huxley's ultimate inferno.

Privacy is a luxury already extinct. People are not fully aware that everything they are doing online and offline can be easily watched, tracked and measured. The records are as exhaustive as they are perpetual. High-resolution facial recognition cameras scan every corner of the public space and non-public space. A simple stroll around a city is enough to edit a larger-than-life documentary about any particular individual. Would it be extreme to suggest the current era is, in terms of individual control and persecution, the most oppressive in human history

ever recorded? Progressively, and predictably, technology has eroded privacy into an obsolete rarity and is poised to make jails an expensive redundancy. The system requires persistent identity. Anonymity is a sworn enemy.

The world is in the midst of a formidable authoritarian wave and probably a pandemic away from becoming a gigantic 3D printer of totalitarian regimes. People are ruthlessly spied on. Our footprints are everywhere, indelible and with no expiration date. Digitalization is the technological cornerstone of any self-respecting totalitarian society.

Many people have called this new era Surveillance Capitalism. Tristan Harris, former Design Ethicist at Google, declared: *This is capitalism profiting off of the infinite tracking of everywhere everyone goes by large technology companies whose business model is to make sure that advertisers are as successful as possible.*

On 16 March 2021 Yahoo News broke a story about the US Postal Service running a *covert operations program* that monitors Americans' social media posts.

The law enforcement arm of the U.S. Postal Service has been quietly running a program that tracks and collects Americans' social media posts, including those about planned protests, according to a document obtained by Yahoo News.

The details of the surveillance effort, known as iCOP, or Internet Covert Operations Program, have not previously been made public. The work involves having analysts trawl through social media sites to look for what the document describes as “inflammatory” postings and then sharing that information across government agencies.

“Analysts with the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) Internet Covert Operations Program (iCOP) monitored significant activity regarding planned protests occurring internationally and domestically on March 20, 2021,” says the

March 16 government bulletin, marked as “law enforcement sensitive” and distributed through the Department of Homeland Security’s fusion centers. “Locations and times have been identified for these protests, which are being distributed online across multiple social media platforms, to include right-wing leaning Parler and Telegram accounts.”

Less than a month later, on 28 April, the US Postal Service admitted to spying on Americans’ social media posts. Gary Barksdale, USPS Chief Postal Inspector, confirmed that the agency was running a shadowy operation dubbed the *Internet Covert Operations Program*, which tracks *inflammatory* posts on social media platforms.

The planet resembles a correctional facility where denizens are condemned to fit a handful of roles: worker, unemployed, retired worker and housewife. Any other role beyond the scope of these categories is considered highly suspicious and anyone can be interrogated by the custodians, at any time and for any reason, without the option of complaining or refusing. As in any given film or book, work is always the main protagonist—it legitimizes the characters and around work all stories revolve. Imperceptibly, the world has become something akin to a gigantic labor camp where almost all the inmates are farmed as a power source feeding idle elites.

The upsurge of police society—capitalist and non-capitalist alike—has accelerated exponentially over the last twenty years fueled by on-line minorities and off-line majorities that cry out for assurances. In a police society everyone is at once a prison guard and a prisoner. Present times prove Aldous Huxley right. He feared that in a world highly controlled by technology, privacy and individual freedoms would gradually disappear until each person would become their own Blockführer.

Within the social media universe any folly that thirty years ago would have been the object of ridicule and contempt, today has a chance of becoming a success. As a matter of fact, behind many

outrageous campaigns there lurk monumental scams that line the pockets of those who promote them. There is no easier prey than one who has plenty of time and a mobile phone glued to their hand. Delusion is an illusion on psilocybin.

Human existence is persistently ravaged by the acquired inability to deal with words. Not knowing how to use words constructively, most people let themselves be overwhelmed by them and feel language as a mortal enemy when they are passive subjects while turning it into a toxic weapon when they are active. Oftentimes, many more words than necessary are used and misused. This deficit rolled together with plenty of leisure time results in a catastrophic compound. The evidence is incontestable. Thus, Homo sapiens is enshrined not only as the dominant species but by far as the most dangerous.

There is no remedy against this reversal of the natural order. Man cannot escape from his own achievement. He cannot but adopt the conditions of his own life. No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience. All human progress in thought and experience refines and strengthens this net. No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face. Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself.

He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. His situation is the same in the theoretical as in the practical sphere. Even here man does not live in a world of hard facts, or according to his immediate needs and desires. He lives rather in the midst of imaginary emotions, in hopes and fears, in illusions and disillusion, in his fantasies and dreams. 'What

disturbs and alarms man,' said Epictetus, 'are not the things, but his opinions and fantasies about the things.' 5

Words confuse and ideology blinds. So much so that oftentimes we tend to create alternative realities and take them for the reality that counts. In doing so, we behave like full-blown psychos. Psychosis is the final destination of a mind taken hostage by ideology.

So, wouldn't it be better to shut our mouths, block our phones and turn off our laptops?

Why don't we get used to reading a book in a quiet room and learning how to live a decent life instead of crying out for a sadistic corporal?

Let's give it a try. It will be worth the while.

1. Sallust. The Conspiracy of Catiline
2. Roger Kimball. "Will History Survive?" The Spectator, 18 February 2019
3. Horace. First Epistle. On the Importance of Philosophy.
4. Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo. Diario El Mundo, Madrid. 11 April 2021
5. Ernst Cassirer. An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture. 1944

Real people are not Lazarus

*In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but
the silence of our friends.
Martin Luther King Jr.*

A structure is a specific kind of construction where the functionality of each part depends on the overall performance of the whole. Its integrity is contingent on the soundness of each of its components and the relationship between them. If one of the modules is damaged, the structure inevitably undergoes transformations. The socio-economic structure as we know it is an extremely complex system that took centuries to grow and thrive. Its fabric is like a mesh made of uncountable layers of present and past activities conditioned by actions and interactions prompted by a plethora of variables. The retail and hospitality sectors are strategic pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle whose size, complexity and fluid nature exceeds the understanding of even the most qualified economists, let alone government officials caught by surprise by the pandemic while they were immersed in the delicate task of improving video game scores and choosing the next spot for their holidays.

Specifically, the economic structure is a mechanism intricate to a point that nobody is capable of foretelling the full gamut of consequences of an abrupt closure, let alone evaluating the damages inflicted after the irresponsible lockdown mandates enforced in most countries of the *free world* at the beginning of 2020. The damages caused by this draconian measure are as incalculable as irreparable. Small and medium-sized shopkeepers are the main victims. In most cases their lives have been shattered forever. They are not Lazarus.

In Spain there are around 500,000 small and medium businesses. According to the Spanish Confederation of Commerce, 90,000

retail stores and 85,000 hospitality businesses have already closed. Lawsuits brought against the state are attended by more than 50,000 lawyers. However, those who caused the catastrophe will not pay a single bill.

Meanwhile, in the UK, notwithstanding the fact that according to a survey carried out by Public Health England less than two percent of Covid transmissions came from hospitality settings, *by the end of 2021 or spring 2022, the effects of lockdown and the untold damage it has wreaked will be very apparent with tens of thousands of once-thriving hospitality businesses closed*, said Harry Cragoe, hotelier. *I fear there is an economic and social tsunami heading our way*, he added. His fear was fully substantiated. A report from the Centre for Retail Research (CRR) said that 2020 was the worst for High Street job losses in more than 25 years, as coronavirus accelerated the move towards online shopping. Nearly 180,000 retail jobs were lost in 2020, up by almost a quarter from 2019, the CRR said.

When a small business closes, what follows is not the cartoonish reality presented by Big Media: A man lowers the shutters and goes home to watch television with his family while waiting for the order to reopen the shop. A small or medium business closed for months generates large expenses, including the cost of not being able to pay off loans taken. Merchants must fire employees, pay compensations, return rented premises and rescind contracts at a high cost. Ultimately, small scale businesses stop generating a profit that in many cases is the source of an entire family budget. The closing of a small business equals the closing of lives. Most of the people who have had to face this situation are definitively finished, economically and socially ruined by public officials who kept on making the same amount of money they were earning before the pandemic outbreak without risking a single cent of their assets. Needless to say, civil servants do not create wealth—their bank account is fed

with the money of people who actually work, shopkeepers among them.

Government officials along with corporate news organizations keep repeating in unison that lockdowns are aimed at taking care of people. As if people needed to be protected by them. The truth is quite the opposite—it is the working people who provide for self-proclaimed politicians that, in turn, leave whole populations in the lurch.

Draconian lockdowns are the way the survival instinct of ruling elites expresses itself; a reflex that prompts them to appeal to any kind of measure, no matter how contrary to individual freedoms it may be, when they feel that their fortress of comfort is in peril. *To preserve and to accumulate power* is their everlasting motto.

At the end of 2021 Austria became the first European country to make vaccinations mandatory. As if that were not enough, Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg also announced the fourth nationwide lockdown mandate. The call put the unvaccinated two steps away from being considered outlaws, one step away from being segregated and as *de facto* responsible not only for the new spike in cases but also for the misery caused by another lockdown. Once again the old, sinister spin was set in motion: The culprits are not those who put in force ghastly measures but those who are steamrollered by them.

Will countries implementing medical segregation send the unvaccinated to prison? Or, given the large numbers of people that have already decided not to get jabbed, are they going to be relocated in detention centers, concentration camps or remote islands in the middle of nowhere as if they were unwanted lepers? Are they also going to be fined? What about the poor and the indigent? How are they going to pay? Forced labor camps? Is the world going to witness the return of chain gangs breaking rocks and digging ditches in undisclosed locations?

Totalitarian measures like mandatory vaccination programs not only make people's lives miserable, they also pave the way to colossal lawsuits. Perpetrators do not care. For them it is common practice to leave their bills unpaid and not even a penny for the tip. They are fully unaccountable. Their only mission is to stay in power and enjoy the party while it lasts. Most people know this. But knowing is not feeling. The day vast numbers of people begin to sense in their guts what is being done with their time and money will be the day I hope to be elsewhere.

Jews are lice. They cause typhus, said a propaganda poster widely displayed in German-occupied Poland. The way unvaccinated people are treated by worldwide *leaders* reminds the way minority groups have systematically been blamed and persecuted throughout history for the most preposterous reasons, in most cases for the wrongdoings of the *rulers*.

On 24 April 1943, Heinrich Himmler gave a speech to an assembly of SS officers: *Getting rid of lice is not a question of ideology. It is a matter of cleanliness*, he told them. Replacing the word cleanliness with the formula *protecting the people* puts today's situation into the right perspective and exposes the horror in its full magnitude. Mandatory vaccination is one of the most totalitarian measures taken in the Western Hemisphere in the last eighty years while, due to their vastness, the 2020/2021 lockdowns are probably among the most criminal state-sponsored measures imposed in recorded history.

But, make no mistake, the winner of the *Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes* in this tragic farce goes to the people of Australia who managed to create a totalitarian regime worthy of the name. On 16 January 2022, Novak Djokovic, one of the finest sportsmen of all times was ejected from the former penal colony as if he were some sort of toxic detritus just because he exercised his right not to get vaccinated. Lepers were treated with more respect in the

Dark Ages. Not even the great Jesse Owens was ill-treated at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

On 3 August 1936 Owens won his first gold medal in the 100-meter dash. From Berlin, sports reporter and author Paul Gallico wrote: *There was considerable excitement in the press box when it looked as though local Jim Crow rules might be off to honor Owens' victory, and in charge of an office he was steered toward the box of Der Fuhrer, in which was also seated Herr Streicher, Germany's No. 1 hater. Everybody climbed up on benches to look over the balcony. However, Owens was merely led below the honor box, where he smiled and bowed, and Herr Hitler gave him a friendly little Nazi salute, the sitting down on with the arm bent.*

Then, so as not to give international offence and start another naval building race, Hitler received the victorious German hammer throwers in private. It seemed like a great deal of fuss about nothing. Owens didn't seem to care. He had that gold medal, the olive wreath on his brow and the little flower pot with the young oak tree that all the winners get. 1

The beauty of this story is not well known. A month after the end of the Olympic Games, Owens told a crowd that who actually snubbed him was President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Interestingly enough, however, Owens himself had no inkling of any animosity toward him on the part of the Führer. He certainly never claimed to have been snubbed by Hitler. On the contrary, on his return to America after the Games he told an audience of one thousand blacks in Kansas City, Missouri, that it was President Roosevelt and not Hitler who had shown him disrespect at his moment of triumph in Berlin. "Hitler didn't snub me—it was our President who snubbed me. The president didn't even send me a telegram." Owens also claimed that while he had not managed to meet Hitler in Berlin, he had once caught

the Führer's eye at the stadium, and that Hitler had gracefully acknowledged him. "When I passed the chancellor he arose, waved his hand at me, and I waved back at him. 2

At the heart of Roosevelt performance was, as usual, an electoral interest.

Roosevelt never publicly acknowledged Owens's triumphs—or the triumphs of any of the 18 African Americans who competed at the Berlin Olympics. Only white Olympians were invited to the White House in 1936. A number of explanations have been offered for the president's actions. Most likely, Roosevelt did not want to risk losing the support of Southern Democrats by appearing overly soft on the race issue. 3

So, muffle the drums, furl the party flags, unhang the photo of the national hero and better not rush to the rally. *Leaders* are like heroin addicts, they are there just for themselves. They do not care about Che Guevara T-shirts or about the ingenuous souls that wear them. Power and money are the alpha and omega of their lives.

Back to Mr. Djokovic with a cherry on the cake: Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, praised the deportation. *I welcome the decision to keep our borders strong and keep Australians safe.* What a cheeky little man. Let us imagine how many criminals—murderers, rapists, drug dealers and human traffickers, among others—entered the country undisturbed by *the authorities* in January 2022 alone carrying a vaccine certificate? Who can dispute that without Novak Djokovic Australia is a safer place?

Sarcasm aside, this episode showcases how once great Western democracies have taken a strong authoritarian turn. Bureaucracies used the pandemic to strengthen the grip on society. People like Novak Djokovic are a threat to authoritarian

elites, but not a threat to public health as Neo-Totalitarians claim. Individuals like Mr. Djokovic are a danger, but only to tyrannical minds as they exercise their freedom of choice, a menace that can't be eradicated with an experimental vaccine. As history shows, all despotic regimes are as cruel as they are moronic. In the age of global and real-time information they long to prevent a world celebrity from becoming an icon of intellectual autonomy by blacklisting him.

Is it not enough to require a PCR test carried out two days before entering the country? Of course it is. However, for an authoritarian mentality, things ought to be done in only one way: the regime's way. For a collectivist mindset *individuality* is a flagrant anathema.

In the *free world* the totalitarian vector became conspicuous a decade ago with the widespread growth of social media. Since the pandemic wreaked havoc around the globe, the process accelerated remarkably. Governments, via the almighty mammoth state engines, used to own just the minds of their vassals. Now, they also own their bodies, the last bastion of individuality.

Lockdowns make the poor poorer, the rich richer and whole populations miserable. Nevertheless, unaccountable elected officials use lockdowns as a cover-up in order to divert attention from their incompetence to deal with the pandemic. To put in force stringent lockdowns with the aim of curtailing a pandemic is equivalent to nuking field crops to fight a locust invasion. Meanwhile, on the Internet galaxy far more dangerous viruses are being spread by the tons and by the nanosecond: division and racism via identity and diversity politics, among other venoms. This is the underreported collateral damage of the pandemic.

According to an analysis by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, far from bringing solutions, lockdowns have disastrous effects on the economic activity and the lives of the population.

This study employed a systematic search and screening procedure in which 18,590 studies are identified that could potentially address the belief posed. After three levels of screening, 34 studies ultimately qualified. Of those 34 eligible studies, 24 qualified for inclusion in the meta-analysis. They were separated into three groups: lockdown stringency index studies, shelter-in-place order (SIPO) studies, and specific NPI studies. An analysis of each of these three groups support the conclusion that lockdowns have had little to no effect on COVID-19 mortality. More specifically, stringency index studies find that lockdowns in Europe and the United States only reduced COVID-19 mortality by 0.2% on average. SIPOs were also ineffective, only reducing COVID-19 mortality by 2.9% on average. Specific NPI studies also find no broad-based evidence of noticeable effects on COVID-19 mortality.

While this meta-analysis concludes that lockdowns have had little to no public health effects, they have imposed enormous economic and social costs where they have been adopted. In consequence, lockdown policies are ill-founded and should be rejected as a pandemic policy instrument. ...

The use of lockdowns is a unique feature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns have not been used to such a large extent during any of the pandemics of the past century. However, lockdowns during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic have had devastating effects. They have contributed to reducing economic activity, raising unemployment, reducing schooling, causing political unrest, contributing to domestic violence, and undermining liberal democracy. These costs to society must be compared to the benefits of lockdowns, which our meta-analysis

has shown are marginal at best. Such a standard benefit-cost calculation leads to a strong conclusion: lockdowns should be rejected out of hand as a pandemic policy instrument. ...

Overall, we conclude that lockdowns are not an effective way of reducing mortality rates during a pandemic, at least not during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our results are in line with the World Health Organization Writing Group (2006), who state, “Reports from the 1918 influenza pandemic indicate that social-distancing measures did not stop or appear to dramatically reduce transmission [...] In Edmonton, Canada, isolation and quarantine were instituted; public meetings were banned; schools, churches, colleges, theaters, and other public gathering places were closed; and business hours were restricted without obvious impact on the epidemic.” Our findings are also in line with Allen's (2021) conclusion: “The most recent research has shown that lockdowns have had, at best, a marginal effect on the number of Covid19 deaths.” Poeschl and Larsen (2021) conclude that “interventions are generally effective in mitigating COVID-19 spread”. But, 9 of the 43 (21%) results they review find “no or uncertain association” between lockdowns and the spread of COVID-19, suggesting that evidence from that own study contradicts their conclusion. 4

There is no one greedier than a person that knows no limits. Elite bureaucrats are not precisely Cincinnatus' spitting image—far from it. Let them play and in a flash they will turn the life of millions upside down. All of a sudden they forced everyone to carry a QR code burnt into their foreheads, or into their mobile phones for that matter. If they are not put rapidly and vigorously in their place we will one day wake up to the news that Aktion T4 is again in force. Eighteenth century absolute monarchies were infinitely less reactionary than the current Ionesco-style rulers. An enlightened despot knew the meaning of the word *honor*.

Unemployment rates increase by the day: four million in Spain—about 20% of the economically active population—and about 8% in the United Kingdom. The only ones who will emerge unscathed from this tidal wave will be the big players, favored not only by their formidable resilience but also by the induced extinction of medium and small competition.

The U.K. recorded a steeper second-quarter contraction than its peers, suffering the worst economic hit from the coronavirus in Europe as well as reporting the highest death toll there.

The U.K.'s economy is already recovering as restrictions on daily life ease and workers trickle back to factories and offices, but Bank of England officials warn that it could take until the end of 2021 to regain the ground lost during the pandemic.

The country's gross domestic product shrank 20.4% in the second quarter, equivalent to an annualized rate of 59.8%, its statistics agency said Wednesday. In the same period, U.S. and German output declined by around 10%, while Italy lost 12%, France 14% and Spain 19%. 5

The huge masses of money that governments pour into the economy as *aid* to those they helped annihilate fuel inflation, also known as a tax on the poor, and the continuation of a cycle of unpredictable consequences. As usual, governments put the blame on whatever moves or breathes. Everyone and everything is responsible except them. Bureaucrats' instinctive denial recalls the reaction of the unfaithful husband the moment his wife opens the bedroom door and finds him in bed with another woman. ***Are you going to believe your eyes or are you going to believe me?*** After over a year of confinement people start to feel that the physical presence of others is an excess they find difficult to cope with. They have a point.

It is indisputable that a person standing in front of us talking, breathing and moving parts of his body sends massive amounts of information that usually disturbs the receiver. According to a strictly functional point of view the communication via an electronic device such as a phone is not only cleaner and more hygienic but far more accurate—no digressions, no stuttering, no long pauses, no useless repetitions, no time wasted at all, no halitosis. Months of seclusion and isolationism have turned the physical body into an intimidating presence and, in many cases, a source of instinctive repugnance for the stench and, seldom, the disgusting sight of deformity and decay, uncomfortable experiences that phones and computers have helped us to avoid and forget.

From inside a jar Diogenes used to say that the goal of life is *eudaimonia* (flourishing) and lucidity against false beliefs, folly, and conceit. An honorable individual is a reflexive person who defaces the *nomos* of society—laws, traditions, wealth and many other conventions which most people do not dispute by simply taking them for granted.

Old times are waning. This is the dawn of a new era. Former practices and customs are trinkets fragrant with memories of a lost world. They will never come back. Those who do not adapt to changes will suffer like the old man who is always blaming the present while singing praises to a past that never existed or, if it did, was heavily cursed when it was happening. Memory is an impostor that confuses and terrorizes those who rely on it.

I have many times asked myself, not without wonder, the source of a certain error which, since it is committed by all the old without exception, can be believed to be proper and natural to man; namely, that they nearly all praise the past and blame the present, revile our actions and behaviour and everything which they themselves did not do when they were young, and affirm, too, that every good custom and way of life, every virtue and, in

short, all things imaginable are always going from bad to worse. And truly it seems against all reason and a cause for astonishment that maturity of age, which, with its long experience, in all other respects usually perfects a man's judgement, in this matter corrupts it so much that he does not realize that, if the world were always growing worse and if fathers were generally better than their sons, we would long since have become so rotten that no further deterioration would be possible. ... For myself, I think that the reason for this faulty judgement in the old is that the passing years rob them of many of the favourable conditions of life, among other things depriving the blood of a great part of its vitality; and in consequence the physical constitution changes and the organs through which the soul exercises its power grow feeble. ... Thus the mind as well as the body grows weak; it retains only a faint impression of past pleasures, and only the image of those precious hours of youth, when, so long as they last, heaven and earth and the whole of creation seem to be rejoicing and smiling as we look, and a gay springtime of happiness seems to flower in our thoughts as in a delightful and lovely garden. So when cold winter comes to our lives and the sun starts to go down in the west it would be well, as our pleasures fade, if we always lost the memory of them, and discovered, as Themistocles said, the secret of forgetfulness. 6

However, regardless of whether the blood has lost the heat of youth, today's older generations are brutally as well as inexcusably forced to change their established routines and trudge across a jagged terrain plagued with difficulties and obstacles. They surely have solid reasons to look back and long for a life that they will probably never live again and that surely was much better than present day hardships.

Once more, the Japanese took the lead—from the proverbial mask-wearing in the streets, to the hikikomori, a complete withdrawal from society that aspires to extreme degrees of isolation and confinement.

Solitude — how bleak. Solitude — how beautiful. Point of view is all.

The modern view is mostly — not totally — bleak. Two images dominate: hikikomori (acute social withdrawal) and kodokushi (dying alone). They merge. Hikikomori claimed mass attention a generation ago. It was a young people's issue. Time passes; age takes its toll. "8050" tells the story: children in their 50s helplessly dependent on parents in their 80s. It's not sustainable. The parents die. What becomes of the children? They face the bleakest of prospects — solitary drift to solitary death.

The Cabinet Office in 2019 estimated the nationwide hikikomori population at 1.15 million — more than half, 613,000, aged 40-64. Some have been withdrawn for 30 years, typically self-isolated in their childhood bedrooms, sometimes never seeing even their parents. The bubble economy of the 1980s burst in the '90s. Companies froze hiring. It was a dreadful time to emerge into the adult world. Many young people never did emerge.

Others did, but the unstable, low-paying part-time jobs many were forced to settle for proved a tenuous foothold. Among aging hikikomori are a growing number of relative newcomers to the ranks. ...

"It's not that I don't want to work. I can't work," says "Yoshiki Watanabe" (a pseudonym). At 51, having worked at some 30 jobs over as many years, he was mentally and physically drained. Part-time workers, comprising nearly 40% of the post-bubble workforce, are exposed to every abuse a harshly competitive society generates. Spa's list includes layoffs, power harassment, sexual harassment, overwork and bullying. Part-timers are "disposable," something they're never allowed to forget.

We're not told how long ago or under what circumstances Watanabe quit, or lost, his last job. It seems to have been

recently, and he doesn't consider himself hikikomori yet, though he fears he's headed there. He lives alone on an allowance from his parents. Helplessness feeds apathy. He may snap out of it. He may not. ...

Hikikomori in the 1980s acquired — a few lurid examples paved the way — an association with sex crime. That gave way in the '90s and 2000s to the benign otaku, alternatively translated as “nerd” or “geek.” This was social withdrawal with a wry twist, best typified perhaps by one Taichi Takeshita, who in 2008 gained some notoriety as author of an online petition calling for the legal right to marry an anime character. “Nowadays,” he wrote at the time, “we have no interest in the three-dimensional world ... I'd rather live in a two-dimensional world” — with his love, cartoon time-traveler Mikuru Asahina. Thousands signed his petition. 7

Hermitism is the loftier state to which a decent individual can aspire. It means living according to the natural and insurmountable limitations of the human species.

As long as people cannot receive the Covid shot in a pharmacy, as happens with the flu vaccine and others, it will remain in the hands of unresponsive bureaucracy sheltered inside an impregnable castle. In spite of that, or perhaps because of it, government *authorities*, acting like a cadre of autocrats, keep fueling the idea of enforcing a vaccine passport. They nourish the idea of vaccination's IDs even though they are aware that just a fraction of the world's population will get the jab, that there are as many who have decided to receive the shot as those who have well-founded reservations and decided not to get vaccinated. This is an unprecedented intrusion. If the passport policy remains in force a virtual state of perpetual persecution will follow suit. It is a measure picked from the uncharted chapters of the Totalitarian Encyclopedia.

It would not be surprising if, trapped in despair, worldwide *rulers* propose to release patents or, worse, expropriate laboratories. In that case there will be countless vaccine manufacturers but not a single vial available. It is a clever remark as well as a historical fact: Every time a government has been in charge of a desert there was a shortage of sand in less than five years.

In turn, NHS workers, the soldiers in the trenches, received in 2021 a meagre 1% rise in their wages because *it is the most we think we can afford* according to Nadine Dorries, Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety (Yeah, all that) and former nurse. From the bottom of his heart, a sentimental Boris Johnson told them: *We owe you more than words can say*. Probably he meant: *We own you more than words can say*. We'll never know.

The tragic mess which the NHS has now become is the most obvious example of this. We shall never know how many people have died or will die, needlessly, because doctors were harder to see and appointments harder to make during the great national shutdown. But there is no doubt that this has happened, and – despite the latest bucketful of money chucked into the NHS by the Government – the problem is far from solved. Yet this was done in the name of saving life, and indeed of saving the NHS.

The health service, very far from perfect, will probably continue its long decline because it is now politically impossible for any government to get a grip on it. I do not think we saved it. But there are severe permanent effects on health and society that may linger for years. The worst of these is the pervasive fear, which may yet see us engulfed in another state-sponsored panic as the days shorten and the cold weather inevitably brings more patients to surgeries and hospital wards. I see this fear everywhere, often in highly intelligent people with good education and even scientific training.

And this is good news for the Covid Hezbollah, the faction which longs to close down society and the economy again. They also dream of forcing us all into covering our faces like the devotees of some new religion of submission. And they will not need to try very hard to bounce the Government into doing their bidding.

The liberation which should have followed the successful mass-vaccination programme never happened, because of repeated warnings of supposedly terrifying new 'variants', and I suppose it is about time another one of those came along.

You can hardly listen to BBC news programmes for five minutes without hearing presenters taking sides on this issue, chiding Ministers for not wearing masks and assuming that shutdowns are actually effective in containing the disease.

Evidence from around the world simply does not back this belief up. I cannot even be bothered to discuss the, er, lack of usefulness of loose cloth masks again. If you don't get it, you don't get it.

Much of the media regurgitate statistics which they do not even try to understand. Nothing can stop them referring to supposed 'cases' which are merely positive test results, often quite without symptoms.

They cannot grasp that if you have many more such tests, as we do, you will get more positives.

Then there are the hospitalisations. Once again, it is very hard to discover how many people are actually in hospital because of Covid, or because of something else.

Have they tested positive for Covid after arriving in hospital (where it is horribly easy to catch diseases)? Or have they actually contracted Covid in hospital?

The same thing applies to death figures, where the formula seems designed to blur the distinction between people who died from or with Covid. 8

Nothing depicts in a more pristine way the scale of this universal sham than the useless, ridiculous, fake masks covering people's faces. More than two years after the outbreak of the totalitarian drive a great many people refuse to live without wearing a useless piece of loose cloth. The sudden emergence of the almost fanatical habit of using something that is more of a muzzle than a sanitary device demonstrates how an unexercised, neglected brain can be hacked and owned in a matter of weeks. Masks are a badge of political allegiance and social submission but never a serious measure, a device effective enough to make the user feel the intimate satisfaction of belonging to the proverbial pack. Mask-wearing enforced by law was a measure designed to create an atmosphere of fear, blind obedience and conformism.

Mind and body are also extremely complex structures that were severely damaged by the reckless way the pandemic was tackled. In October 2021, The Lancet, one of the oldest and most prestigious general medical journals, published a study that looks at the global prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders in 204 countries and territories due to the lockdown mandates enforced by governments during the first year of the pandemic.

At the time of writing this Article, the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing and its full impact on mental health outcomes is not known. We continue to observe shifts in SARS-CoV-2 infection rates and human mobility as lockdown and stay-at-home orders are re-implemented or eased and COVID-19 vaccination programmes are rolled out. ...

Unlike other population shocks, COVID-19 has become global, disrupting many aspects of life for most, if not all, of the world's populations. Our analysis suggests that the impacts on the

prevalence and burden of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders were substantial, particularly among females and younger populations. Ongoing and additional mental health surveys are necessary to quantify the duration and severity of this impact. ...

Recommended mitigation strategies should incorporate ways to promote mental wellbeing and target determinants of poor mental health exacerbated by the pandemic, as well as interventions to treat those who develop a mental disorder. Taking no action in the face of the estimated impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the prevalence and burden of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders should not be an option. 9

However, the gist of this imposture is what really concerns all those alarmed by the way governments keep steamrolling over business, privacy, finances, health and freedom of choice while, regrettably, most of those affected just watch on at best. On the one hand, an infinitesimal minority imposes the use of a mask by banging a fist on the table; on the other, the majority enthusiastically obeys. Both movements conclusively prove that the totalitarian condition has deeply permeated *liberal democracies* around the world. *All within the state, none outside the state, none against the state*, shouted Benito Mussolini and millions cheered *Il Capo*.

For Big Media & Associates the pandemic was their moment. Nothing pays more dividends than gory stories, the eruption of a volcano, a chain reaction collision, a mall shooting and, of course, dead people by the thousands. That is the rationale of every single member of the Big Media Club. *What matters is the impact a story makes*, TV producers and newspaper scribblers proudly repeat. What matters is feeding the mob's morbid fascination, other honchos admit. And they are right. After all, the news business is no longer about journalism. The coronavirus

was the star of the moment—one of the more efficient rating and clicks harvesting machines that ever existed. It gave the news channels the opportunity to thrive and they took advantage of the situation squeezing it until it was squeezed dry. The Covid-19 death counter could be seen flashing on the screen all day long.

If Dominic Cummings, former Chief Adviser to Prime Minister Boris Johnson, didn't lie squarely when he testified before Members of Parliament on May 2021, then Helen MacNamara, former deputy cabinet secretary, was among the very few who were fulfilling their duties as civil servants on March 2020 when the virus crisis broke loose.

According to Cummings, MacNamara, then the second most powerful official in the United Kingdom, walked into the office while members of the cabinet were staring at a whiteboard covered with indiscernible marker scribbles and said: *I've just been talking to the official Mark Sweeney who is in charge of coordinating with the Department of Health. He said: "I've been told for years there is a whole plan for this. There is no plan. We are in huge trouble." I've come through here, Helen MacNamara said, to tell you all, I think we are absolutely fucked. She was even lucid enough to make an accurate prediction: I think this country is heading for a disaster. I think we are going to kill thousands of people,* she added, according to Cummings.

Elected officials are not necessarily politicians, nor are public officers necessarily civil servants. In both cases to fulfill their mandates they must serve. Real politicians deal with real problems and have the gift of anticipation. Western top *rulers* are experts at following astronomically expensive polls—not precisely the ones published by corporate news outlets—and at desperately spinning to get the next call from TV news shows. They are all staunch disciples of George Berkeley. For them to be is to be perceived.

On the very same day that Oliver Dowden, UK Culture Secretary, said people could only meet in pairs outdoors provided they stayed two meters apart, elected and nonelected government officials held a *Bring Your Own Booze* (BYOB) party at 10 Downing Street. According to ITV News, the network that broke the story, from the Prime Minister's private office more than one hundred staffers were invited to No.10's meticulously manicured gardens on 20 May 2020 while the public at large could only meet one person outdoors. Among the attendees were Boris Johnson and his wife Carrie, *and there were long tables laden with drink, crisps, sausage rolls and other picnic food*. It was a lovely get-together, one out of a dozen held during the ruinous 2020 inside *the locale of British prime ministers since 1735*.

At the same time that more than a dozen of these gatherings took place between May 2020 and April 2021, hundreds of grief-stricken families were forced to observe severe restrictions including limits of thirty mourners at funerals and social contact with loved ones. While so-called public servants were partying surrounded by bottles of expensive wines, bereaved relatives were not allowed to touch or carry coffins *because of the risk of contamination*.

At least some of the gatherings in question represent a serious failure to observe not just the high standards expected of those working at the heart of Government but also of the standards expected of the entire British population at the time.

At times it seems there was too little thought given to what was happening across the country in considering the appropriateness of some of these gatherings, the risks they presented to public health and how they might appear to the public. There were failures of leadership and judgment by different parts of No 10 and the Cabinet Office at different times. Some of the events should not have been allowed to take place. Other events should not have been allowed to develop as they did.

The excessive consumption of alcohol is not appropriate in a professional workplace at any time. Steps must be taken to ensure that every Government Department has a clear and robust policy in place covering the consumption of alcohol in the workplace. 10

State bureaucrats blatantly flouted the draconian rules they put in place for the rest of the people. Sadly, they are not the exception that proves the rule but the rule that proves that 18th century aristocratic society may be far away in time but very close when it comes to ranks, titles, privileges and impunity. After all, what is a state bureaucrat but a person who looks with unconcern on taxpayers struggling for life in the water only to encumber them with help when they reach the shore.

Considering the behavior of the prime minister and his staff during the pandemic, is it improper to suspect that the virus was not as dangerous as they led people to believe? A rhetoric question, indisputably. *We need to end the lockdowns and declare it a pandemic of bureaucracy*, stressed journalist Bari Weiss. Indeed, a pandemic of big bureaucracy and corruption, if ever there was one.

However, the PM did not get away with it. Justice was done. He was investigated by the Metropolitan Police, found guilty and properly sanctioned. The fine was a whopping £50, a sum well within the range from £30 to £10,000 contemplated by the law for breaches of Covid-19 restrictions. Even though the investigation found Mr. Johnson guilty, he will not have a criminal record as he paid the astronomical fine. So, 50 quid, a humble apology, no record and Bob's your uncle.

Is it over the top to imagine that this culture of crime and drunkenness is a regular behavioral pattern of government officials that came to light by mere accident, thanks to the

confinement they themselves enforced with the complicity of the opposition?

Who are these people? Are they politicians or reckless adventurers? Take your prick.

An ignorant man, who is not fool enough to meddle with his clock, is however sufficiently confident to think he can safely take to pieces, and put together at his pleasure, a moral machine of another guise, importance and complexity, composed of far other wheels, and springs, and balances, and counteracting and co-operating powers. Men little think how immorally they act in rashly meddling with what they do not understand. Their delusive good intention is no sort of excuse for their presumption. They who truly mean well must be fearful of acting ill. 11

As of the end of 2021 the consequences of economic structures ripped apart by governments' inefficiency in tackling the virus situation knocked on the door of the strongest economies. Lockdown's retributions hit societies with singular ferocity. Severely disjointed production lines, labour shortages, broken transportation grids, fractured supply chains, shattered labour markets, disrupted businesses and workplaces, high unemployment, huge spikes in crime rates, soaring energy bills, increasing money supply, uncontrolled inflation and a brutal upsurge in mental health problems are some of the ways maimed structures express themselves.

Big Bureaucracy, Big Media & Associates created a B-Movie monster the great majority took for real. However, while lying its way into reality the Great Pandemic lost three letters and surfaced clad in its real colours: The Great Panic. Fear and hysteria are the favourite resources scammers resort to in order to fleece suckers.

People, especially the most vulnerable, are in dire need of politicians. Bureaucrats are to politics what spoiled food is to the digestive system. Nevertheless, even real politicians need to have on their desks a sign bearing Robert Gascoyne-Cecil's wise apothegm as a ubiquitous reminder: *Whatever happens will be for the worse, and therefore it is in our interest that as little should happen as possible.*

1. Daily News. 3 August 2016
2. David Clay Large. Nazi Games. The Olympics of 1936. 2007
3. Haley Bracken. Britannica.com
4. Jonas Herby, Lars Jonung and Steve H. Hanke. A Literature Review and Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Lockdowns on Covid-19 Mortality. January 2022
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7. Michael Hoffman. Line between solitude and withdrawal becomes blurred in Japan amid pandemic. The Japan Times. February 2021
8. Peter Hitchens. The Mail on Sunday. 19 September 2021
9. The Lancet. 8 October 2021
10. Findings of Second Permanent Secretary's Investigation into Alleged Gatherings on Government Premises During Covid Restrictions. 25 May 2022
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Montaigne in New York

Think like a man of action, and act like a man of thought.

Sallust

New York – January. It is snowing in Manhattan. The temperature is an invitation to watch television or sit gazing at the harmless ceiling, but not to go out. However, my stomach, encouraged by the gastronomic alert of a local friend, chooses to ignore the weather report and guides me to the food truck parked on 68th Street just off Lexington Avenue. *It's Yemeni*, he had warned me affably. *It makes the best falafel, schwarma and kebab, among other Eastern delicacies.*

I was about to order when, in the midst of a display of colors and smells, my eye was caught by a nearby small, out-of-place, rundown second-hand book stand against the outer wall of Hunter College, flagrantly flouting regulations, for sure. The table, a cheap oddly-angled piece of furniture, was set so that anyone who dared could reach out and take a volume. But no sooner had I stretched out my arm than a young man wearing a scrawny beard and a red cap appeared and, without so much as a greeting, asked what I was looking for. What I wanted is what has found me, I replied in a similar tone, pointing to a thick hardcover volume in perfect condition with the dust jacket still on: *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, Stanford University Press, 1958, translated by Donald Frame and almost 900 pages long.

At that moment, I remembered that unjustly famous line: *There, at my feet, was a backpack full of medicine and a box of ammunition. They were too heavy to carry both. I picked up the ammunition ...* The fable turned into a facile, fossil formula and then into a pass for a club that would never accept me as a member even if I wanted to join. My quandary, by far more carnal, more real, was: Kebab or Montaigne, but I reacted and

was able to dodge the spurious dilemma. So, after adopting the Frenchman for just under twenty dollars, I trembled with joy at the sight of the gargantuan pita bread sandwich and, like a modest haruspex, inspected its swollen entrails of meat, peppers, cucumbers, pine nuts and other ingredients that were impossible to identify in the mishmash. The two propitious events, occurring almost simultaneously, unnerved me; I felt as if I were in close proximity to the ominous shadow of blind Fortuna, the impostor that deceives men.

Assuming that the Scoville units of jalapeno peppers would soon do their job of global warming, I walked quickly down Park Avenue and turned onto 67th Street toward Madison. While waiting for the bus, it suddenly struck me that the best place to examine my new acquisition should not be on public transportation but rather in a setting that measured up to the nobility of the work and its author.

The Frick Collection

At 1 East 70th Street, one block up Fifth Avenue, stands the mansion of Henry Clay Frick, a college dropout rapidly turned merciless mogul, a partner of Andrew Carnegie in the steel business and owner of a sophisticated art collection by the old masters which he left to the city in the early 1900s.

The mansion's majestic atmosphere offers the best that money can buy, a selection of the most distinguished creations human ingenuity can produce—bronze and marble sculptures, portraits and landscapes, cabinets and commodes, tapestries, clocks, silver and porcelain. Seated before the *Bust of a Lady*, by Francesco Laurana, a 15th century master, I opened my backpack, took out the book and read:

Lately when I retired to my home, determined so far as possible to bother about nothing except spending the little life I have left in rest and seclusion, it seemed to me I could do my mind no greater favor than to let it entertain itself in full idleness and stay

and settle in itself, which I hoped it might do more easily now, having become weightier and riper with time. But I find— “Ever idle hours breed wandering thoughts” (Lucan)—that, on the contrary, like a runaway horse, it gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it took for others, and gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness at my pleasure, I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself.

Montaigne, like Rabelais, was a child of the *Cinquecento*. The craft of writing during this period, as happens during any transition, was characterized by insecurity and experimentation. However, unlike the confused and immeasurable François, and despite having had to write between the words and daggers of two civil wars—the battle of ideas of the Renaissance and the impious clashes in the name of religion—Montaigne was safely anchored in the Greek and Roman classics about which he knew so much more than many 16th century scholars, and perhaps even more than those living today.

He was a hedonic but active reader, far from escapist or narcotic reading. His higher education, necessary but not enough to produce a great author, was the master key that liberated and guided his thoughts with invulnerable efficiency.

Montaigne was born in 1533 in the Aquitaine region. He was baptized Michel Eyquem. As befits the noble customs of the times, ancestry replaced the second part of his name with Montaigne, the name of the castle his grandfather Ramon, a prosperous herring merchant and founder of the dynasty of the consecrated Château d’Yquem wine, had bought in 1477. His mother, Antoinette de Louppes (López), was a descendent of Spanish Jews who had converted to Catholicism. His father Pierre, a Roman Catholic, considered that the boy’s education should only be ruled and protected by the highest values that the classics could offer. In line with this premise, he distanced the

child from the traditional schools, a decision that Montaigne would recognize in one of his essays several years later.

My late father, having made all the enquiries a man can make, among men of learning and understanding, about a superlative system of education, became aware of the drawbacks that were prevalent; and he was told that the long time we put into learning languages which cost the ancient Greeks and Romans nothing was the only reason we could not attain their greatness in soul and in knowledge. At all events, the expedient my father hit upon was this, that while I was nursing and before the first loosening of my tongue, he put me in the care of a German, who has since died a famous doctor in France, wholly ignorant of our language and very well versed in Latin. As for the rest of my father's household, it was an inviolable rule that neither my father himself, nor my mother, nor any valet or housemaid, should speak anything in my presence but such Latin words as each had learned in order to jabber with me.

It is wonderful how everyone profited from this. My father and mother learned enough Latin in this way to understand it, and acquired sufficient skill to use it when necessary, as did also the servants who were most attached to my service. Altogether, we Latinized ourselves so much that it overflowed all the way to our villages on every side, where there still remain several Latin names for artisans and tools that have taken root by usage. As for me, I was over six before I understood any more French or Perigordian than Arabic. And without artificial means, without a book, without grammar or precept, without the whip and without tears, I had learned a Latin quite as pure as what my schoolmaster knew, for I could not have contaminated or altered it.

His lineage, not his prose, enabled him to explore, albeit halfheartedly, the world of politics, which discriminates and condemns. He was an involuntary governor of Bordeaux for four

years and a moderate mediator between two Henrys—one Catholic, the other Protestant.

Le Train Bleu

The mansion is closed its doors. I had to leave. Sunset and nostalgia for the Château d'Yquem brought to my mind the former maître d', Sebastián Villagra, a native of Paraguay, who like a devout missionary, claimed that winter is the best wine-tasting season to savor a Sauvignon Blanc. I never fully understood why he made such a daring assertion and have no interest in finding out so long as I have a bottle at hand, preferably full.

So I set off for Le Train Blue, not to Calais or the Riviera, but to the formidable dining car stationed in the heights of Bloomingdale's, escorted by the memory of a few glasses I had sipped there several years before.

Montaigne's essays reveal that he was not only a merely extraordinary reader. He also had a remarkable memory, similar to that of a savant syndrome, which enabled him to quote dozens of authors and passages in brief extracts. With Montaigne, the maxim *Every man's library is his private literature* takes on meaning.

Pierre Villey, who was a prodigious erudite and could even read the work of Montaigne with his eyes closed—in fact, he transcribed the complete works into Braille—listed the authors most frequently mentioned in the essays. At least fifty authors comprise the list, almost all Latin, Greek not having been part of his education as a youth. Cicero, appearing over 300 times, leads the group. Horace and Lucretius, both Epicureans, share second place with some 150 mentions each. Ovid, Terence, Martial, Suetonius, Propertius, Juvenal, Flavius Josephus and Virgil also compete in the ranking.

Montaigne excels in the art of evocative quotation, though not as a forced recourse for gratuitous brilliance, a pedant's means, or

an end in itself, as happens, say, with Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, a book that turns to distant corners of literature to present exotic names that would impact the careless reader. With Montaigne it is, in any case, about the beauty that springs from an organic, never mechanical, relationship with his books; about relevant references to authors, titles and passages as modules that grant competence and authority to the object of his narratives. Montaigne lived and experienced the classics as he wrote and played, avoiding the loathed tediousness of his daily chores. He sought autonomy with the help of his past teachers who attentively tendered him a friendly hand. Modestly, he said:

We labor only to fill our memory, and leave the understanding and the conscience empty. Just as birds sometimes go in quest of grain, and carry it in their beak without tasting it to give a beakful to their little ones, so our pedants go pillaging knowledge in books and lodge it only on the end of their lips, in order merely to disgorge it and scatter it to the winds.

It is wonderful how appropriately this folly fits my case. Isn't it doing the same thing, what I do in most of this composition? I go about cadging from books here and there the sayings that please me, not to keep them, for I have no storehouses, but to transport them into this one, in which, to tell the truth, they are no more mine than in their original place. We are, I believe, learned only with present knowledge, not with past, any more than with future.

I closed the book, drained my glass and bade goodbye to the motionless train.

Montaigne instituted the canon of the modern essay. He wrote about the same topics covered by Seneca and Plutarch, two of his favorites. Yet, while they used the form of the moral treatise or epistles to their friends, he referred to his digressions as *essays*. In French, *essai*, a test, an attempt, given the lack of a foreseeable scheme, no road map, but rather an ongoing search for an equilibrium between approximations and divergences, constant derivations, fluctuations, doubts and certainties. His

statement: *What do I know?* merely confirms that he chose to distance himself from any rigid system of thought.

Cruelty, sloth, fear, disease, friendship, vanity are not themes he uses to produce a collection of apothegms, so popular during his formative years. Montaigne avoids the brachylogical construction by incorporating to his essays the subjective factor in the form of his personal experiences—from the deepest to the most pedestrian.

Jorge Luis Borges could have written: *Classic is not an author that necessarily has such or such merits; it is an author that the generations of men, urged by different reasons, read with previous enthusiasm and with a mysterious loyalty.*

If Montaigne's works still prevail, despite the whims of trade and fashion, it is because they are rooted in the classic tradition, the intangible matter of which we are all made.

Sunday, 3 A.M.

Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't.

WS

On the first anniversary of the Great Lockdown, Big Media and 10 Downing chatter away lightly about the pandemic. They do so in a sort of celebratory fashion, trying to give the impression that the plague is over, patting each other's backs, posing polite questions and giving even more polite answers.

But first things first. The prime minister rushed to announce a memorial for the victims during the pandemic. He knows that nothing in the world softens a voter's heart more than sentimentality and superstition. Statues, stamps, medals and street-naming routines are at the top of the list when it comes to impressing the pack. Moreover, he declared that Freedom Day is around the corner which was a way of expressing his most secret desire: a statue in his honor not far away from the one erected in memory of Winston Churchill.

As usual, the famous dictum knocks on the door: *When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.* Inevitable conclusion: This is the beginning of a very long process without a foreseeable end.

While it would not be surprising if LDE and BLDE (Lockdown Era/Before Lockdown Era) became alternative calendar notations in years to come, civil servants turned into ringmasters celebrated a temporary truce as if it were VE Day. The imposture was so gross that it cannot be passed off for an accident or an occasional distraction. It was done in order to breathe some measure of optimism into the hearts and minds of the public they had previously squashed with regulations meant only to preserve their grip on every available lever.

With just a tiny fraction of the world's population vaccinated since mid-December 2020 the outlook is somber at best. The pandemic is a planetary-scale phenomenon while the experimental vaccine is available just for a handful. These and other questions are hanging in the air as governments have decided not to address them. To pretend and to make-believe are the main and only numbers these two-trick ponies can perform.

Last but not least: this pandemic will end only when the virus is sterilized by natural immunity—if this kind of turbo-mutant pathogen allows that outcome. Academics tend to agree that the end of the Spanish flu pandemic occurred in 1920 after society developed collective immunity to the virus. So far, the vaccine is like an aspirin. It protects the host for only a short period of time.

The virus tests the dynamics of incompetence as nothing ever did before. During the celebrations not a word was said about the degradation Covid lockdowns brought. Are we going to experience a string of lockdowns until the extinction of the human race is fully consummated? Bureaucrats, not *leaders*, as they like to be addressed, cannot care less. They know their privileges will remain immutable till the last breath and the last penny of the last survivor. Politics is a noble pursuit but, regrettably, *professional politicians*, as they proudly call themselves, have managed to demote it first and desecrated it later. They are only interested in their own welfare. Real politics has been entirely wiped out of the main stage.

This is the first time in modern history in which the healthy, rather than the sick, have been quarantined. Much worse than that: A terrifying precept has grown roots in billions of minds. From now on shutting down a whole country will be easier than ever—anywhere, anytime, for any reason. If formerly free societies submissively accepted being taken captive because of a mild pandemic, it is a no-brainer to figure out that during the next bout of mass hysteria entire populations will beg their handlers to

lock them up straight away. Needless to say, the request will be served expeditiously and unreservedly.

It goes without saying that those who do not belong in that lot where fear is the driving force should be prepared to be spied on and traced by way of their mobile phones, intrusive apps, CCTV ultra-high-definition cameras, snitches planted everywhere and of every surveillance device available in the modern handbook of police state espionage.

Modern *leaders* not only do not care about the welfare of the ordinary citizen, who actually pays for the lavish train of life they lead, but they cannot even guarantee the safety of the people who protect them in top government echelons—armed forces, intelligence agencies and the diplomatic service. As I write these lines, one of the most grotesque political and humanitarian crises is unfolding with a speed that makes the 1940 Blitzkrieg look like an amateur endeavor.

The induced fall of Afghanistan in the summer of 2021 is the greatest US foreign policy debacle ever. Compared to it, the 1979 Iran hostage crisis looks like a minor slip. The scale of the scandal is so gross that even those who fiercely oppose Joe Biden’s administration would have preferred not to have witnessed such a national shame.

As insurgents swept into Kabul, desperate Afghans, terrified about what the victorious zealots might do, chased departing American cargo planes down the runway, trying to clamber into the landing gear and inevitably falling to their deaths. The American-backed government had surrendered without a fight—something that American officials were insisting would not happen only days before. Afghans were left in such a horrifying bind that clinging to the wheels of a hurtling aircraft seemed their best option. 1

Emboldened by the negligent way the withdrawal was executed, by the overwhelming superiority over the Afghan army and by the decision of the *authorities* not to put up any resistance in order to avoid an unnecessary bloodbath, Taliban fighters, who already controlled large parts of the country, took their first provincial capital on 6 August and nine days later were at the gates of Kabul. It is not exactly going out on a limb to say that former President Ashraf Ghani decided not to resist not only to avoid a futile carnage but also to make a bold and unequivocal statement: the full responsibility of the disaster would rest with the American government. All of a sudden, the Taliban, an unsung sheriff, were calling the shots.

As of 18 August 2021, according to US President Joe Biden (pun credit: The Sun newspaper), as many as 15,000 American citizens still remained stranded in Afghanistan struggling to get out along with thousands of terrified Afghan nationals who fought alongside or aided U.S. and British troops from 2001 onward.

There is no precedent of such shame, of such a national security failure, of such colossal self-inflicted political and military damage. The decision was simply the beginning of a slow-motion massacre whose consequences will take years to be fully understood. It was a rout and persecution and extermination of the infidels, as well as other people on target lists, began on a house-to-house search basis. It was probably the greatest, most costly and most humiliating surrender in the military history of a tier one country. There may be only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous but there is no doubt also another single step from an honorable withdrawal to a shameful getaway. Mr. Biden turned the United States of America into the land of the appeaser and the home of the lame.

Nota bene: While this outrageous disgrace was taking place the President of the United States was on vacation.

An extravagant combo comprising billions of dollars in weapons and other military equipment, including the fully equipped Bagram air base, was left behind as a bountiful donation to the enemy. Most of the weaponry could have been brought back to the US or, in the case of the airfield, could have been rendered useless. None of that happened. Quite the contrary, the whole package was abandoned so that the enemy could get as much equipment as they wished from a gigantic menu, as in an all-you-can-eat restaurant. Do *rulers* care? Not at all. It is not their money but cash that flows abundantly and unstoppably from the taxpayer's pocket, a sacred cow that can be milked permanently, viciously and with absolute impunity. It was not only weapons that were handed to the enemy on a silver platter. Biometrics devices with eye scans and biographical information of the Afghan population that helped the United States for years fell into the hands of the Taliban due to a *hasty rush to the exit*, a contingency that Mr. Biden had literally and categorically ruled out on 14 April.

Confronted with a ton of hard facts, government officials only uttered nonsensical sentences, as if they had been hit with a sledgehammer right on the head and clearly wishing to be somewhere else, judging by the language of their bodies rather than by the meaning of their words. There is no way to positively spin such self-inflicted calamity.

How did an Administration led by a president with deep foreign-policy experience misjudge the situation so badly?, asked Alana Abramson and W.J.Hennigan in Time magazine (16 August 2021) after Mr. Biden delivered a defiant 19-minute speech in which he blamed the Afghan military, Afghan leadership and the former US administration for the humanitarian catastrophe that took place on his call. *I stand squarely behind my decision*, Mr. Biden said. However, just hours after the President addressed the nation, the Pentagon acknowledged that it didn't have the means to safely escort Americans in Kabul to the airport for evacuation

as the Taliban had consolidated control in Afghanistan's capital. *I don't have the capability to go out and extend operations currently into Kabul*, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin replied when asked about those who couldn't reach the gates of Hamid Karzai International Airport because they were behind Taliban checkpoints.

Moreover, this epic capitulation took place after a warning triggered by the State Department. According to the Wall Street Journal, an internal memo dated 13 July 2021 warned top agency officials of the potential collapse of Kabul soon after the 31 August self-imposed deadline. The cable alerted the officials to the dangers of the rapid territorial gains by the Taliban and the subsequent collapse of Afghan security forces. It also offered recommendations on ways to mitigate the crisis and speed up an evacuation.

In his Monday speech defending America's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, President Biden said he would not shrink from his share of responsibility.

That would include his decision to bring home U.S. troops, which was made against the recommendations of his top military generals and many diplomats, who warned that a hasty withdrawal would undermine security in Afghanistan, several administration and defense officials said.

The president's top generals, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Mark Milley, urged Mr. Biden to keep a force of about 2,500 troops, the size he inherited, while seeking a peace agreement between warring Afghan factions, to help maintain stability. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who previously served as a military commander in the region, said a full withdrawal wouldn't provide any insurance against instability.

In a series of meetings leading up to his decision, military and intelligence officials told Mr. Biden that security was deteriorating in Afghanistan, and they expressed concerns both about the capabilities of the Afghan military and the Taliban's likely ability to take over major Afghan cities.

Other advisers, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan, raised the possibility of Taliban attacks on U.S. forces and diplomats as well as the Afghans who for two decades worked alongside them. Ultimately, neither disagreed with the president, knowing where he stood.

Mr. Biden, however, was committed to ending the U.S. military role in the country. The president told his policy advisers the U.S. was providing life support for the Afghan government, which, in his view, was corrupt and had squandered billions of dollars in American assistance, according to current and former administration officials. He wanted to reorient American foreign policy onto what he sees as more pressing international matters, including competition with China, and domestic issues including infrastructure and battling Covid. "I am deeply saddened by the facts we now face, but I do not regret my decision," he said Monday.

The Taliban on Sunday rolled into Kabul having barely fired a shot. The onslaught triggered a chaotic evacuation of almost all U.S. diplomats, helped by thousands of American soldiers who were sent back to assist in the mission, sending shock waves around the world.

The swift takeover, punctuated by images of desperate Afghans gripping onto moving U.S. Air Force planes, raises the stakes of Mr. Biden's decision and the way it was implemented, for him personally as well as for the administration's foreign policy and for America's standing in the world.

His team's failure so far to mitigate the fallout of the withdrawal, including protecting thousands of pro-Western Afghans marooned in the capital, has some countries expressing concern about the U.S. as a partner, including on some of the very issues Mr. Biden wants to address.

America's allies were beginning to warm to the Biden administration until this weekend, said Leon Panetta, a former defense secretary and CIA director during the Obama administration. "I'm sure that those events are raising questions about our credibility and President Biden is absolutely going to have to deal with that," he said.

Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster (ret.), former President Donald Trump's national security adviser, who previously served in Afghanistan, listed potential consequences including assassination campaigns, summary executions and the razing of girls' schools. "This is what power-sharing with the Taliban looks like," he said. 2

Despite the advice of the top military brass, the President accomplished an impossible mission: he created a tragedy conceptually halfway between the Saigon final rout in 1975 and the hostage crisis at the American embassy in Tehran in 1979. In just a few days the situation went from chaos to catastrophe. Not even the most experienced playwright would ever have imagined a script so extreme without fear of being considered a narcissist eccentric. When ABC journalist George Stephanopoulos asked whether he had received the advice, Biden replied: *No. No one said that to me that I can recall.* Evidently, he didn't receive the memo.

On 20 & 22 August, Biden delivered speeches that once more exposed his cognitive problems. Tammy Bruce, a balanced commentator, almost flew off the handle: *After hearing his disaster of a news conference today (20 August) we can confidently conclude that the Biden White House and cabinet are*

simply members of a gang that can't shoot or talk straight. They are a basket case teeming with contradictions and incompetence. It's now clear that Biden is being kept either in the dark by his team, he is lying or he has completely lost touch with reality.

Suddenly, the White House was left without friends. In a split second the known world became a hostile jungle, posing a threat for which Democrats were not prepared. Miranda Devine presented the novelty in a much better way.

The unfamiliar feeling of universal condemnation, more than anything, is what has had his team reeling. He has lost his air cover from left-wing media allies and now sits exposed to enemy fire.

Belatedly, he has realized he can't hide away on vacation and hope that Americans won't notice events half a world away.

Afghanistan is the one area where journalists weren't willing to cover for him because most of them in the past 20 years have been to that godforsaken war zone and know the truth. The fact is that when you are in touch with reality, Biden's fantasies and glib narratives are unacceptable, no matter how partisan you are.

He kept fantasizing at the podium Sunday, as if saying something grotesquely false will make it come true.

"History is going to record this was the logical, rational, right decision to make."

No, history will record that he bungled the troop withdrawal, against all advice, and set in train a disaster that has echoes of the last disaster he had carriage for in the Middle East, when he was the VP in charge of withdrawing troops from Iraq, spawning ISIS and the Christian genocide.

No matter how he tries to shift the blame, he is responsible for the calamity in Kabul. Yet his lack of humility or reflection shows he is nothing better than a con man, trying one last time to shaft the American people.

He should have stuck to giving us updates on Tropical Storm Henri, the pretext for his address Sunday. Talking about downed cables and fallen trees is about the limit of his ability. 3

To say that President Biden is struggling under the burdens of the job is a colossal understatement.

Which brings the matter to fundamental, ontological questions: Is Joe Biden fit to be President? Can such a mistake be made by accident or, on the contrary, was it a strategic move? In this case, however, the line that marks the limit between the impossible and the improbable is blurred. Be that as it may, President Biden offered himself as a captive to the Taliban—and succeeded.

The extraordinary event was certified on 26 August during Mr. Biden's third speech, hours after a bombing attack at Kabul's airport claimed the lives of thirteen US service members and dozens of civilians. You didn't have to be Einstein to imagine what might happen if America's security were entrusted to the Taliban. After making the most unconvincing and vacuous threat that ever came out of a US President's mouth, a piece of braggadocio that probably caused more laughter than fear among the perpetrators, he revealed that the United States was engaged in friendly talks with the enemy. Only a mind gone astray, or a comedian, could produce such an oxymoron.

The White House went so far as to give the Taliban a list of names of Americans citizens, green card holders and local allies living in Afghanistan. In summary, they FedExed the enemy a methodical kill list. White House and State Department officials didn't deny having done so while President Biden said he wasn't

sure any such lists existed. They claimed that the government was sharing with the Taliban information on security issues and that the list with the names was indeed handed over in order to get people into the Kabul airport—i.e., to save lives. Delusions aside, they yielded a list of targets to the hunters and officially declared open season.

Thus, in the blink of an eye a former foe was welcomed to the conversation as a legitimate partner. It was another desperate attempt to make horror look like virtue. The 26 August speech set in stone the unconditional capitulation, notwithstanding the fact that six days before Biden had declared that *any attack on our forces or disruption of our operations at the airport will be met with a swift and forceful response*.

There is a universal principle that must always be applied to anything that at first glance is incomprehensible. It goes like this: When, from a position of power, measures which violate reason and logic are fostered then it is likely that something despicable is going on. Idiots don't go the whole nine yards.

Meanwhile, in Great Britain, top brass public masters were also on holiday, some of them getting a tan in Crete, presumably in the belief that the lame speech delivered by the US President was strong enough to shield them from the rage of the people, mainly from the relatives of soldiers and other individuals killed or maimed in Afghanistan since 2001 in defense of *democracy and freedom*. Evidently, Boris Johnson misinterpreted Winston Churchill's most famous speech. When WSC declared *we shall fight on the beaches* he didn't mean *from* the beaches. Speaking of whom, it goes without saying that if Churchill were alive today, he would wait in vain for *the New World, with all its power and might, to step forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old*.

Is the world on the verge of a new era of global, state-sponsored terrorism like that experienced in the 1970's? This is a scenario that neither can be ruled out at all nor underestimated, after United States' feeble performance in the summer of 2021.

All hope should not be lost, though. There is a strategic fact that nobody mentions, a secret device the Taliban have not taken into account, a weapon of mass destruction that will make it impossible for them to repeat the experience of twenty years ago, will make a farce of this new chapter in the biggest melodrama ever written, aka history, and trash it before it blossoms: social media. Good luck with that, Musa.

Speaking of which, it is worth mentioning the role played by major technology companies in this disgusting cavalcade. As of the moment of the takeover, Taliban spokespersons were able to post messages at will while accounts belonging to perfectly peaceful people that would not even dare to throw a stone into the water are usually suspended for *abusive behavior* or *unusual activity*, euphemisms that reveal the companies' free hand to ban whoever dares to challenge the ideological pillars that support multibillion-dollar businesses and ensure a firm grip on power to a microscopic elite. Big Tech is the stick authoritarian regimes use to exercise the banality of censorship on a massive scale.

One of the most shocking displays of government ineptitude in modern history serves as indisputable evidence that classical liberal ideas and the republican system in the Western Hemisphere have fallen prey to a cadre of oligarchs that only care for their own well-being.

The fall of Kabul and the tragedy triggered in the Southern border—a sort of a black magic trick performed by Biden & Co, custom-made to the specifications of drug lords and human traffickers as well as a social experiment that effectively uses US citizens as lab rats—unmistakably depicts the harm that can be

inflicted on average individuals when *leaders* put their feet on the table and cave in to the mob. Joe Biden is not a supporting actor. He is the main character in a cliffhanger movie where a driver suffering from narcolepsy is at the wheel of a bus speeding up a winding mountain road. A tragedy that recurrently prompts the question: Who is running the country? Tesla founder Elon Musk partially solved the riddle: *The real president is whoever controls the teleprompter*, he slammed.

Less than a year later, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. A worn out former KGB spook understood that western bureaucrats playing ball with the Multitude were not a match for his determination. It is worthy of note that none of the *leaders* that pretend to be sensitive and inclusive have not even bothered to ask Ms. Greta Thunberg to challenge Mr. Putin with her trademark question *How dare you?* Perhaps it would have worked and Vladimir would have withdrawn his troops. Sarcasm aside, the moral of this tragedy is that a single resolute autocrat can be stronger than a thousand incompetent elected officials of a malfunctioning democracy.

And on top of all that, *Voilà!*, the pandemic disappeared as if by magic. In one of the most elegant lashes at Big Media and Big Government ever given, Babylon Bee headlined: *Putin Receives Nobel Prize In Medicine For Ending COVID Pandemic.*

Human-made tragedies, whether real or a brazen fabrication, act as a cautionary tale. Suddenly, an alarmed, unseen narrator utters: *Behold! This is what happens when the Multitude takes the reins.*

When did it happen? How could it happen? How is it possible that a system that looks so good in writing is such a nightmare in the physical reality?

In his biography of Richard Nixon, author John Farrell makes an attempt to address the issue presenting an interpretation of a series of historical facts.

Some of the revelations were literally mind-blowing: the CIA had conducted drug experiments on random American citizens without their knowledge, in one case opening a string of brothels in San Francisco with two-way mirrors, where the courtesans administered LSD so the agency could observe its effects on unknowing patrons. The Kennedys had authorized the bugging of Martin Luther King Jr., and the FBI -as part of its relentless campaign to destroy the civil rights leader- had played the tapes of his extramarital liaisons to individuals around Washington.

Then there was Operation Mongoose—the CIA assassination program. There were five major CIA plots, of which at least two –against Fidel Castro and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo- reached the operational stage. ... Both Kennedy and Eisenhower officials were involved in the plotting against Castro. Some of the details were resoundingly sordid. As the CIA was engaging the Mafia to help them kill Castro, John Kennedy was sharing a mistress with one of the Mob chieftains –Sam Giancana- who was gunned down before he could testify to Congress. Before long, the reports of JFK’s sexual license yanked the gauzy cloak from Camelot.

It put Watergate in a different context: it was part of a continuum, no solo breach of faith. “The sins of the fathers visiting upon their sons”, Bryce Harlow said.*

“The whole mess fell on Nixon”, but “it had been endlessly building up until the White House was distorted and deformed. There had to be a reckoning”, said Harlow. “The White House had proven too powerful, too irresponsible, too independent, too self-satisfied and arrogant. It felt too big; it acted too big. It was dangerous. It had to be restrained.”

Nixon's predecessors earned the brunt of the vilification, but he did not escape unscathed. Tom Huston, the Nixon White House aide and author of the "Huston plan", was one the first called to testify before the Church panel. Appearing contrite, he now analyzed the dangers of the path he had once suggested. "The risk", Huston said, "was how the security agencies would invariably move "from the kid with a bomb to the kid with a picket sign, and from the kid with a picket sign to the kid with the bumper sticker." And thus was liberty eroded. 4

By building up distortions upon deformations, elected officials painted the entire system into a corner. They are absolutely clueless and in their bewilderment usually take cruel and nonsensical measures that, in turn, lead to a virtual state of rebellion. Aware that their heads are already on an imaginary block, they keep repeating irrelevant formulas as their only legacy to posterity: *All I did was to protect the people I love*, or *All I cared about was the freedom of my fellow citizens*, or *What matters most is the national interest*. It is an irrelevant matter of preference.

Regrettably, things are going to get worse. This is a global disaster created by a mixture of incapacity, corruption and sloth. Thanks to a microbe, *rulers* were exposed as what they always were, although imperceptible to most people: A community of pretenders living at the expense of the ones who have to roll up their sleeves daily in order to pay their bills. *By the sweat of their brow we will eat their food*, could be one of their catchphrases.

This is not a conspiracy theory. On the contrary, the ultimate conspiracy theory claims that governments care about people. To make believe is the key strategy deployed by *rulers* that are not. Professor Jeffrey Sachs elaborates on this.

The latest G7 summit was a waste of resources. If it had to be held at all, it should have been conducted online, saving time,

logistical costs, and airplane emissions. But, more fundamentally, G7 summits are an anachronism. Political leaders need to stop devoting their energy to an exercise that is unrepresentative of today's global economy and results in a near-complete disconnect between stated aims and the means adopted to achieve them.

There was absolutely nothing at the G7 summit that could not have been accomplished much more cheaply, easily, and routinely by Zoom. ...

The G7 is particularly irrelevant because its leaders don't deliver on their promises. They like making symbolic statements, not solving problems. Worse, they give the appearance of solving global problems, while really leaving them to fester. This year's summit was no different.

Consider COVID-19 vaccines. The G7 leaders set the goal of vaccinating at least 60% of the global population. They also pledged to share 870 million doses directly over the next year, presumably meaning enough for 435 million fully immunized individuals (with two doses per person). But 60% of the global population comes to 4.7 billion people, or roughly ten times that number. ...

The world's problems are far too urgent to leave to empty posturing and to measures that are a mere token of what is needed to achieve stated ends. If politics were a mere spectator sport, to be judged by which politicians mugged best the cameras, the G7 summit would perhaps have a role to play.

My recommendations: fewer face-to-face meetings, more serious homework to link means and ends, more routine Zoom meetings to discuss what really needs to be done, and greater reliance on the G20 (plus the African Union) as the group that can actually

follow through. We need Asia, Africa, and Latin America at the table for any true global problem solving. 5

Even arithmetic isn't safe with first class actors when it comes to pulling faces in front of a camera.

Will governments continue to destroy what is left of the countries that they have already shattered? Will Big Media continue to put the blame of the cataclysm on impossible foes like *the virus*, that *relentless, invisible enemy*, as if the tragic reality were a B monster movie, as if the virus were an alien lifeform consuming everything in its path as it gets on getting bigger and more insatiable. Quite the contrary, the virus is an ally of common sense. Its emergence laid bare the blatant incompetence of self-proclaimed *rulers*.

At the end of the eighties, while we were engaged in a back and forth on politics, Misha, a Russian citizen who had migrated to Israel, told me in his broken English: *Bureaucracy is not democracy*. The formula struck me dumb. I felt it superficial, if not completely incoherent, as if it were some sort of commercial slogan. *What does bureaucracy have to do with individual freedoms?* I kept wondering insistently without being able to understand it. But there was something, which at first I could not identify, that kept me from thinking about those four, apparently disconnected words. Much later the truth of the sentence came to light in full regalia. The man had lived for decades suffering from the Soviet machine where every single move was scrutinized, where it was necessary to ask for permission for any conceivable initiative, where citizens were not allowed to move freely even inside their own country, let alone make a trip abroad or even buy a pair of shoes that were not produced by central planning. Nothing, not even the most elementary move was free from government scrutiny. Misha was a man, as well as millions like him, that had spent his childhood and early adulthood feeling

the boot of the state on his neck twenty-four hours a day. What he said was pretty obvious—it is an axiom Kafka, Koestler, Solzhenitsyn and many others wrote about: the greater a country's state machine, the lower the chances its citizens may elect an honest, competent administration, let alone remove a dishonest one. Big bureaucracy is all about dealers and *rulers*, but not an iota about the individuals that put food on their tables.

Leaders treat people like children, they say. That's half-truth, at best. Like in a prison, folks are treated the way they ask to be treated. They want assurances. They want guaranteed education, guaranteed job, guaranteed retirement, free health care and a proper plot in the graveyard. There is nothing wrong with these claims, except that benefits always come at a cost, an exorbitant tag price that an overwhelming majority is willing to pay: a jailer. There is no such thing as loads of assurances and an independent life, even if a fortune is squandered in order to get one. If *rulers* treat people like children it is because most of them want to be treated as such. We dwell in a jail of our own making from the moment we hand over the key to our lives to a bunch of strangers. In fact, we are the prison. We are trapped inside ourselves until we decide otherwise.

Who do they think they are? People indignantly ask every time the *authorities* commit another blunder or curtail liberties. The answer is simple and lies bare before us all. Regrettably, few dare to look the monster squarely in the eye. *Leaders* are what their servants want them to be.

Any activity involves risks, from the most daring to the most innocuous. No normal person would tell his employer he wants to have a risk-free job simply because doing so would leave him jobless. This is not the case with those usually, and wrongly, called politicians. Elected officials enjoy unimaginable privileges. They lead a lubricious way of life, worthy of first-class gangsters. In addition, they are immune to any adversity,

surrounded by bodyguards, drivers, doctors, an army of secretaries and assistants, hairdressers, unlimited expenses, houses, armored cars, airplanes, advisors, and networks of intelligence agencies that don't hesitate when it comes to spying on their own fellow citizens if the stay at the ten-star hotel is threatened. Who trims the President's nails?

However, all these over-the-top benefits pale when compared with the *raison d'être* of their existence. It is not unusual that top office holders get rich by anticipating the unpredictable markets' moods, an enviable dexterity that also goes by the name of insider trading, or by brazenly evading taxes. These people are usually called *machine politicians*. Colorful as it may sound, the term is entirely wrong. A machine politician is not a politician at all but someone who usurps the public office to his personal benefit.

But, unlike the gangster who pays his expenses out of his pocket, new oligarchs pass astronomical bills on to the man on the street who have real jobs and keep to the letter of the law. Average people are forced to dance to their tune while helplessly watching how the government intrudes in their lives to the point of making them long for the world of thirty years ago, despite the fact that back then it was far from being a model of freedom. Two-bit *leaders* usufruct power but are not willing to take the risks that come with the job. They are fully ironclad. Nobody can have the cake and eat it too—except for them.

Freedom Day: Another illusion invented to buy time, to create expectations, to raise hopes, to soothe angry customers—angry citizens, as a matter of fact. Serfdom Day, instead, a fact as hard as a wall, is in full swing every day of the week as probably never before in modern times.

Civil servants turned into masters are in control, abolishing life and exterminating the calendar. There are no longer Mondays, or

Tuesdays, or Wednesdays. All days look as if they were a perpetual Sunday in the dead of night, when all things come to a standstill and the deafening silence seems endless and unbreakable.

It's always Sunday, 3 A.M. and you are in no man's land, which never moves, which never changes, which never grows older, but which remains forever icy and silent.

And the lights fade slowly to black.

1. The Economist. 21 August 2021
2. Ken Thomas and Vivian Salama. The Wall Street Journal. "Biden Wanted to Leave Afghanistan. He Knew the Risks". 17 August 2021
3. Miranda Devine. New York Post. "Joker Joe Biden can't Laugh this Afghanistan Debacle Off". 22 August 2021
4. John Farrell. Richard Nixon: The Life. 2017
5. Project Syndicate. 16 June 2021

** Advisor to U.S. Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan.*

New New Age

Truth is a ruse. It's all about perception.

By the end of the 19th century, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, occultist and cofounder of the Theosophical Society, announced the coming of a new era. Her ideas contributed to the expectation of a New Age among practitioners of Spiritualism and believers in astrology for whom the coming of the Age of Aquarius promised a period of brotherhood and enlightenment.

Like Platonism, New Age is an optimistic movement. All the systems that diminish the imperfect physical reality when compared to a perfect universe of ideas provide a suitable, ready-to-wear template that serves as a *via regia* to multiple types of illusions. Currently, Blavatsky, a scion of an aristocratic Russian-German family, has legions of accidental followers—nobody reads a book these days. Those who use the word *science* frivolously, as a credential that allows the bearer the enjoyment of the amenities of a private club are among them. We are witnessing the blossoming of a new New Age.

New Ages are not something new. Since the dawn of language the history of humanity is the history of the clash of illusions, whereby words always exercise an overwhelming supremacy over uncontroversial facts. Ideology, a gateway to a better, although gaseous, dimension, soothes anxiety and feeds the illusion of command. The pursuits of brave new worlds inevitably end with the idealists persecuting those who dare to dispute their mirages. Imaginary blueprints pave the road to hell and ideologies create fanatics. There is nothing more criminal than trying to adjust reality to the whim of an idea

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet

owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? 1

Nietzsche's famous statement, turned into a soiled cliché by promiscuity, means that a divinely ordained moral system presumably lost the favor of great numbers of believers in western civilization. The death of God would lead, Nietzsche declared, not only to the rejection of an order ruled by divine laws but also to the rejection of any other colossal building of universal values permanently clashing with physical reality.

However, far from being dead God was clever enough to survive via metamorphosis, a divine prerogative after all. The ancient almighty order that constrained every corner of human and non-human activity mutated into a completely different kind of totalitarian arrangement. The Enlightenment movement proclaimed reason, the cult of reason as a matter of fact, as a new moral regulator. From the end of the 18th century onwards, the political arena, a dimension reserved only to learned elites, has opened up to anyone who wants to make a foray and speak his mind. God is not dead—he is just deaf.

Politics, in the most nocturnal sense of the word, has become the temple of a new religion where votive candles burn permanently. It could not be otherwise. Anyone feels entitled to speak their mind, no matter how obtuse or dangerous it may be, when vacuous loquacity and promiscuity are promoted from positions of power. Rapidly, in a matter of a few years, whole populations were aligned behind new and disturbing illusions of rights, legitimacy and protection. Faith runs right over reason.

Holy books promise an afterlife reward to the just, to the meek, to the bearers of uncritical minds. Similarly, modern political

regimes, whether they claim to be democratic or not, promulgate that those who acquiesce will be rewarded, albeit in a closer location—this world: A roof over their heads, food on the table and a life as far away as possible from the nick are some of the benefits included in the incentive package.

Nietzsche's contempt for religious values as reactive toxins that stir up frustration and resentment led to his envisioning of a world devoid of God. However, in his quest he was also a victim of the hypnotic power of ideas. After all, during his formative years he was lured by the *storm and stress* unchained by the most conspicuous and incendiary thinkers of the Romantic Revolution—*spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*, a dire need for lofty goals, grand epics. Thus, he imagined a new reality and then convinced himself it was mature enough to hatch out in the near future. He, who dedicated his entire adult life to condemning Platonism and Christianity, fell prey to his own imaginings, as also happened to Marx, Engels & Co., indeed a romantic society, with the inconceivable concept of the *withering away of the state*.

It's difficult to gauge what is more alarming, whether the invention of superstitions or the way millions repeat them as if they were talismans capable of transporting their carriers to a lotus-eater dimension. Be that as it may, magic formulas that appeal to the gullibility of the unlearned are by far more profitable than sound arguments based on facts and reason. Ideologies are invisible sirens, those dangerous creatures, half birds, half beautiful maidens, who can even charm the winds and lure passing sailors aground with their enchanting music and voices.

Nietzsche believed that without a transcendent God positive new possibilities could flourish for humanity. He considered that relinquishing the belief in an almighty force could open the way to fully develop human creative abilities. The Christian God, he

wrote, would no longer stand in the way, so human beings might stop turning their eyes toward a supernatural entity and begin to acknowledge the value of the natural world. He felt sheer contempt for any way of life that simply seeks survival of the progeny. He was convinced, and the life he led is proof of it, that human beings should do more than merely preserve themselves. On the contrary, they should aim for great things seeking the exceptional.

However, what frightened Nietzsche was his realization that autonomy would come at a high price. With the demise of God, he believed, there would no longer be an authority for the moral values that had underpinned European society for two thousand years. What he was unable to surmise due to his epidermal reaction to politics and the populace was that party bureaucrats would become the visible heads of a new global order of masses. God may have died but his place remained vacant and was taken by another kind of religion—an earthly one with a way more effective unwritten dogma.

What has always made the state a hell on earth has been precisely that man has tried to make it his heaven. 2

In 1977, sociologist Robert Nisbet shed some light on the dangers of chasing chimeras.

Melvin Lasky's "Utopia and Revolution" is a remarkable achievement, covering nearly five centuries of Western ideas, symbols and metaphors—ail brought, sometimes dazzlingly, within the revolutionary fold. From the early Reformation down to the creation of the 20th-century's Communist totalitarianisms, Lasky presents us with a rich succession of personages, crises and epochs, all vital to his objective, which is to uncover the key elements of modern utopianism and revolutionary radicalism. it is a book large in size and import. ...

His treatment of the theme of utopianism is rich in detail and understanding. It begins with Thomas More's 1516 book "Utopia" and concludes with the corruption of the theme in the 19th and 20th centuries. According to Lasky, for More utopia (the good society) was something sufficiently dangerous to require setting off in the "nowhere" (utopia) and was more a variant of the Platonic idea of perfection than anything to be reckoned as strategy for action. As a practical statesman, Thomas More was committed to patient, conservative reform of government in England. But the utopian dream became something very different indeed: a motivation for direct action that could be deadly, devastating, an invitation to terror.

Much of "Utopia and Revolution" develops this theme. We see the steady evolution of the utopian idea—for a long time an object of fancy, held up only as noble ideal—to a point where it became inseparable from historical determinism, from visions of earthly perfection to be realized through whatever means might be necessary. As Lasky writes: "The utopian longing for a republic of virtue or for the 'new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' becomes irresistible, as an apocalyptic ecstasy seizes the hearts and minds of men. Thus does revolution replace reform on the historical agenda."

Utopianism and revolution are without doubt discrete ideas, but in the West, at least since St. Augustine's "City of God," they have been founded on one or another variant of the belief in progress, religious or secular. It is, I think, one of the few significant weaknesses of Lasky's book that he does not show us clearly the underlying power of this philosophy of historical development, which was itself born of the union of the Greek idea of natural growth (physis) and the Hebrew notion of a sacred (and therefore necessary) history. Not all, but certainly a great many effusions of utopianism, with all their linked coercions and tyrannies and calls for revolutionary action, however bloody and repressive, have been rooted in and given moral justification by

the conviction that some self-realizing, selffulfilling law of history is carrying mankind to its inevitable destiny, allowing men to hinder or accelerate its workings but never to stop them.

“The intellectuals of utopia and revolution,” writes Lasky in his concluding paragraph, “clever, versatile, excitable, volatile, never reforming, always transforming, have come full turn. In their end is their beginning. The King is on his way to the scaffold. The cataclysm is upon us, the globe is in upheaval. All present things will be destroyed at once. Guiltless and without conscience, they embrace an anonymous future in the name of invented but undisclosed values. The sweet dream has become inviolate dogma. The revolution remains their utopia.”

Edmund Burke, in a way, said it earlier, in 1790 in his “Reflections on the Revolution in France”: “Many parts of Europe are in open disorder. In many others there is a hollow murmuring underground; a confused movement is felt that threatens a general earthquake in the political world.” But not even Burke’s prescience enabled him to see the extent and duration of the cataclysms—and the despotisms and the terrorisms—that arose from the marriage of the sweet dream of utopia and the metaphor of revolution. 3

Collectivists don't care about individuality because individuals are not zeros. To modern mobsters persons are units functional to a summation, a means to grab power, maintain it at any cost and run a country as if it were their own hacienda. They never talk about individuals. The words they use on a regular basis, recurrent cornerstones of their vocabulary, are *society* and *people*. Both words do not refer to anything discernible outside the language domain. They are entelechies, vague generalizations used to dupe the audience and veil their real intent: to conquer, to subjugate and to corrupt. It always begins and ends the same. Collective nouns treated as political subjects are blatant

impossibilities. They are either devices used for the sake of communication or conspicuous illusions wielded for the sake of dominion. Public servants who claim they are working for *the people*, or for *society*, or for *the masses* cannot be trusted. Since time immemorial this is the classical expedient of the totalitarian mentality, whether they are endorsed by a government official or by the man on the street who blindly obeys whatever is commanded from a position of power. Real democracy is an individualist institution, as Friedrich Hayek appropriately reminds.

That socialism has displaced liberalism as the doctrine held by the great majority of progressives does not simply mean that people had forgotten the warnings of the great liberal thinkers of the past about the consequences of collectivism. It has happened because they were persuaded of the very opposite of what these men had predicted. The extraordinary thing is that the same socialism that was not only early recognised as the gravest threat to freedom, but quite openly began as a reaction against the liberalism of the French Revolution, gained general acceptance under the flag of liberty. It is rarely remembered now that socialism in its beginnings was frankly authoritarian. The French writers who laid the foundations of modern socialism had no doubt that their ideas could be put into practice only by a strong dictatorial government. To them socialism meant an attempt to "terminate the revolution" by a deliberate reorganisation of society on hierarchical lines, and the imposition of a coercive "spiritual power". Where freedom was concerned, the founders of socialism made no bones about their intentions. Freedom of thought they regarded as the root-evil of nineteenth-century society, and the first of modern planners, Saint-Simon, even predicted that those who did not obey his proposed planning boards would be "treated as cattle".

Only under the influence of the strong democratic currents preceding the revolution of 1848 did socialism begin to ally itself

with the forces of freedom. But it took the new "democratic socialism" a long time to live down the suspicions aroused by its antecedents. Nobody saw more clearly than de Tocqueville that democracy as an essentially individualist institution stood in an irreconcilable conflict with socialism:

“Democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom -he said in 1848-, socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible value to each man; socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word: equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude.” 4

Words do matter. They are not innocuous.

No one at the top of a modern bureaucratic hierarchy expressed the colossal collectivist drive liberal democracies are experiencing more clearly than Mark Drakeford. According to the First Minister Wales has a *greater attachment to collective ways of doing things* and a *powerful sense of social solidarity* compared with the Conservatives who believe that *individual freedom trumps everything else*.

As old as it may be, it is worth remembering that collectivism is understood as any type of social organization in which the individual is meant to be a slave to an imaginary entity such as country, fatherland, state, nation, race, or a social class, among other delusions that are cornerstones of any totalitarian regime worthy of the name.

And again, von Hayek:

To allay these suspicions and to harness to its cart the strongest of all political motives, the craving for freedom, socialism began increasingly to make use of the promise of a “new freedom”. The

coming of socialism was to be the leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. It was to bring "economic freedom", without which the political freedom already gained was "not worth having". Only socialism was capable of effecting the consummation of the age-long struggle for freedom in which the attainment of political freedom was but a first step.

The subtle change in meaning to which the word freedom was subjected in order that this argument should sound plausible is important. To the great apostles of political freedom the word had meant freedom from coercion, freedom from the arbitrary power of other men, release from the ties which left the individual no choice but obedience to the orders of a superior to whom he was attached. The new freedom promised, however, was to be freedom from necessity, release from the compulsion of the circumstances which inevitably limit the range of choice of all of us, although for some very much more than for others. Before man could be truly free, the "despotism of physical want" had to be broken, the "restraints of the economic system" relaxed.

Freedom in this sense is, of course, merely another name for power or wealth. Yet, although the promises of this new freedom were often coupled with irresponsible promises of a great increase in material wealth in a socialist society, it was not from such an absolute conquest of the niggardliness of nature that economic freedom was expected. What the promise really amounted to was that the great existing disparities in the range of choice of different people were to disappear. The demand for the new freedom was thus only another name for the old demand for an equal distribution of wealth. But the new name gave the socialists another word in common with the liberals and they exploited it to the full. And although the word was used in a different sense by the two groups, few people noticed this and still fewer asked themselves whether the two kinds of freedom promised really could be combined.

There can be no doubt that the promise of greater freedom has become one of the most effective weapons of socialist propaganda and that the belief that socialism would bring freedom is genuine and sincere. But this would only heighten the tragedy if it should prove that what was promised to us as the Road to Freedom was in fact the High Road to Servitude. Unquestionably the promise of more freedom was responsible for luring more and more liberals along the socialist road, for blinding them to the conflict which exists between the basic principles of socialism and liberalism, and for often enabling socialists to usurp the very name of the old party of freedom. Socialism was embraced by the greater part of the intelligentsia as the apparent heir of the liberal tradition: therefore it is not surprising that to them the idea should appear inconceivable of socialism leading to the opposite of liberty. 5

The word socialism is mentioned twenty times in the last two passages. I am going to mention it four more times as a way of letting off some steam. Socialism is neither about equality nor about stupidity, as some genuinely believe. Socialism on paper is for lazy dreamers whereas socialism in action is simply about larceny. *The pursuit of Utopia always ends badly.*

Burke believed that the attempt to apply what he called metaphysical methods in politics confuses politicians and citizens as to the purpose of politics, leading them to think that governing is about proving a point rather than advancing the interests and happiness of as many people as possible. It is not that principles do not belong in politics—quite the contrary.

I do not put abstract ideas wholly out of any question because I well know that under that name I should dismiss principles, and that without the guide and light of sound well understood principles, all reasonings in politics would only be a confused jumble of particular facts and details without the means of drawing out any sort of theoretical or practical conclusion.

Government is a practical thing made for the happiness of mankind, not to gratify the schemes of visionary politicians. Practitioners of politics should not expect precise knowledge and must accustom themselves to making prudential and uncertain judgements. 6

Theory often ignores circumstances and particulars crucial to the success of policy and the happiness of society. Theory is general and universal, but politics must always be very particular.

Government and Big Media in the United Kingdom are celebrating, once more, albeit in a restrained fashion. Celebrations in the midst of a tragedy of biblical proportions—alas, not the pandemic but the way it was mishandled—are a sign of *the excellent foppery of the world*. Top government officials are elated with the news that millions of jobs were given. Approximately half the total population of the country has already received the first half of the potion. This is great news, by any standard. Nevertheless, the way it is presented by business corporations and *rulers* alike is far from laudable.

The world is run by those who show up, someone declared. It can also be said that an x-billion tons behemoth of metamorphic matter is controlled by people sharing the same totalitarian brain.

Dr. Frederick Frankenstein: Now, that brain that you gave me. Was it Hans Delbruck's?

Igor: No.

Dr. Frankenstein: Ah! Very good. Would you mind telling me whose brain I did put in?

Igor: Then you won't be angry?

Dr. Frankenstein: I will not be angry.

Igor: Abby someone.

Dr. Frankenstein: Abby someone. Abby who?

Igor: Abby... Normal.

Dr. Frankenstein: Abby Normal?

Igor: I'm almost sure that was the name.

Dr. Frankenstein: Are you saying that I put an abnormal brain into a seven and a half foot long, fifty-four inch wide gorilla?

(Grabs Igor and starts throttling him)

Dr. Frankenstein: (Out of his mind). Is that what you're telling me? 7

Since all the absurd prohibitions and endless lists of regulations seem not to suffice, Downing Street bunglers are considering another abominable sleight of hand: mandatory vaccine passports to access shops, pubs, offices, theatres, stadiums, you name it.

The measure would create a *de facto* second class citizenship. The non-vaccinated would have fewer rights but the same amount of responsibilities as before. The certification could involve people being either vaccinated, having had a recent negative test or having previously been infected, the PM outlined. Thus, the certificate would single out not only those who are not vaccinated, but would also work as a band around the arms of those who suffered the misfortune of being smitten by the virus. Is it necessary to mention that the *passport*, as it is so candidly called, is a further surveillance device capable of tracking every movement and, therefore, of invading the intimacy of its holders?

What about those who, with well-founded doubts, do not trust a certified drunkard at the wheel? What about those who wanted to be vaccinated but were unable to receive the experimental vaccine due to a specific underlying health condition? What about those who do not want to receive the vaccine just because? According to this initiative these cases, among many others, fall into the *untermensch* category.

Will the unvaccinated not be allowed to use public transport? Will they be forced to walk regardless of the length of the

journey? Are we going to witness long marches of people who refused to obey the mandate of the Ruler? What will be the next big idea? Internment camps?

We underestimate at our peril just how grave an assault on personhood mandatory vaccination represents. To my mind, forced vaccination is such an obscenity that even justice secretary Dominic Raab's assurance that it won't happen in the UK was far too soft for my liking. 'I don't think' it will happen here, he said. Don't think? He should have said it will never happen here, over my dead body, because it would represent such an intolerable assault on the Enlightenment-derived liberties upon which our nation is built. Everyone is saying mandatory vaccination goes against the Nuremberg Code, which insists voluntary consent must be given for medical intervention. But the ideal of individual sovereignty goes back much further than that. In his Letter Concerning Toleration (1689), the great Enlightenment philosopher John Locke sought to 'settle the bounds' between the individual and officialdom. He wrote that even if a man 'neglect the care of his soul' or 'neglect the care of his health', still the authorities have no right to interfere with him. 'No man can be forced to be... healthful', he wrote.

To Locke, as to other great European thinkers whose ideas gave rise to our Enlightened continent, the desire to 'save' an individual is not a good enough reason to meddle with his soul or his body. 'God Himself will not save men against their wills', he wrote. Yet where God once failed, the EU hopes to succeed. Where even the Almighty once feared to tread, held back by the small matter of man's will, of man's right to govern his own soul and body, the bureaucracies of 21st-century Europe will now rush in. They will brush aside the apparently trifling matter of bodily autonomy, they will discard the rights of self-government hard fought for over generations, and cajole people by brute law to submit themselves to medical intervention.

This spells the end of freedom as we know it. Bodily autonomy is the foundation stone of self-government, and self-government is the thing that gives freedom meaning. If we do not enjoy sovereignty over our minds and our flesh, then we are not free in any meaningful way. And it won't just be the minority of people who feel forced to receive the vaccine whose freedom will suffer under this new regime of state power over people's bloodstreams and muscles and flesh – everyone's freedom will. The state diktat determining that only those who receive a certain form of medical treatment will get to enjoy freedom will make freedom itself contingent upon doing what the state wants you to. Even the vaxxed will not be truly free people in this world. Rather, we will be the beneficiaries of state favour, the enjoyers of small privileges, in return for our agreeing to receive an injection. We will have a license from on high to go about our daily lives. And we will know that that license could swiftly be revoked if we refuse medical treatment in the future. The redefinition of 'freedom', the making of liberty contingent upon submission to medicine, will throttle the rights of all of us – vaxxed and unvaxxed alike. 8

Basing beliefs on emotions is not only a poor guide to the truth, it can actually invert reality. The ones who ought to be safeguarded are the non-vaccinated against the not-so-remote possibility of being infected by people who received the jab and were turned into asymptomatic, invisible time bombs.

Meanwhile, in Germany, the world's fourth-largest economy, famous for its order and discipline (*Ordnung muss sein*), Berlin and other cities declared mandatory a rapid PCR test for those who want to visit a beauty salon, a barbershop and other *non-essential things*. Terror makes bureaucrats overreact with extreme and useless measures that go against the most basic individual freedoms, already systematically violated, but which, dressed up with fancy, stately words, can do the trick. *Leaders* know that people want *certainties* and *justice*. However, reality

abhors certainties, and in the current reality, frivolous assurances almost amount to criminal neglect. Make-believe is to politics what anamorphism is to painting but with the opposite effect.

If it weren't a disgraceful obscenity, this sad chapter on human involution could be re-presented as a garish operetta called *The Envy of Adolf*. Mel Brooks would surely agree. The main characters would be the global top tier office holders in a permanent state of sheer panic desperately clinging to their appalling privileges. They do not rule, they just sign executive orders and adjust their narrative with one eye on social media trending topics and the other on pollsters' tailor-made predictions. The virus has stripped them entirely.

The Emperor may have no clothes but he still holds the microphone and the magic lingo that tames the inmates: Bubbles, social pods, social distance, flattening the curve, self-isolation. Esoteric jargon knows no limits as long as the con works. The more opaque the language gets, the firmer the grip on the people. After all, the word *glamour* comes from the word grammar. Its origin dates back to a time when illiterates were mesmerized by the ability of the educated at mastering words. The pandemic rolled out the red carpet to the return of Hermeticism. Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary Hellenistic figure that originated as a combination of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth, would never have imagined it: his teachings have climbed from the filth and obscurity of underground societies to the dazzling seats of the ultimate world power.

Meanwhile, the news industry enthusiastically parrots the inane claims as if they were the corollary of solid policymaking, as if it came out of the mouth of Madame Blavatsky speaking from beyond the grave.

Two households or groups of up to six people are now able to meet outside in England again as the stay-at-home restrictions order comes to an end. Outdoor sport facilities, including tennis

courts and golf courses, have reopened. Weddings are also on again, attended by up to six people. Over.

Roger that, mutter galley slaves while they are allowed to take a breath, for a moment at least.

1. Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*. 1882
2. Friedrich Hölderlin. *Hyperion*. 1797
3. Robert Nisbet. *The Dream of a Good Society*. *The New York Times*. 15 May 1977
4. Friedrich Hayek. *The Road to Serfdom*. 1944
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians*. 1792
7. Mel Brooks. *Young Frankenstein*. 1974
8. Brendan O'Neill. www.spiked-online.com 6 December 2021

Rhinoceros

To me, the world seems grotesque, absurd, ridiculous, painful.

Eugène Ionesco

Rhinoceros is a play by Eugène Ionesco written in 1959. Over the course of three acts, the inhabitants of a small town turn into rhinoceros. The only person who doesn't undergo metamorphosis is the central character, Bérenger, an aimless everyman who is constantly emasculated by his peers for his drinking and unkempt appearance and, later, for his obsession with the mysterious phenomenon. The play is an allegory of conformity and mob mentality.

All of the characters except Bérenger talk in clichés. When first encountering the rhinoceros, all of them exclaim *Well, of all things!* a catchphrase repeated twenty-six times throughout the play. Ionesco said that the repetition of hollow platitudes expresses the impossibility of thinking critically. Likewise, once someone utters the commonplace *It's never too late!*, the other characters start to mindlessly repeat it (twenty-two times). This is the way Ionesco chose to expose herd reflexes. Today, *diversity* is one of the passwords required to get into the speakeasy of bullshitness. 1

What is diversity in the Big Media galaxy? Nothing but a noble word cleaned out like a pumpkin by laziness and greed, another colorful lollypop for those who dwell in Woke, a tepid nebula. An Urban Dictionary entry defines woke as *The act of being very pretentious about how much you care about a social issue.* Diversity is another show of virtue signalling, as the street jive goes.

Mainstream news shows promote themselves as the ultimate diversity enforcers. Every single day presenters pronounce the D word countless times with solemn faces and pompous gestures.

However, TV shows are not diverse at all. Major media corporations already work as a pool of state-controlled networks run by a military junta rather than as private-owned independent firms in a genuine democratic society. Regularly, any voices that strongly disagree with the editorial lines are quickly terminated and their supporters, long-standing contributors in many cases, disappear as if by Stalin's magic.

How many times a year does the corporate media pool broadcast a report about orphans in the Third World, or about living conditions in the slums of Niger? How often do they air reports about the plight of some of the numerous minorities discriminated against everywhere on a regular basis? Actually, the names of almost all the countries in the world are seldom, if ever, mentioned, unless a catastrophe occurs. Diversity is a mere word systematically raped and used as a dagger by TV ratings alchemists who don't believe in what they preach. In private, among friends, over wine and cynicism, they openly admit it is just babble for the rabble. It is a fact: Labelling is much easier than thinking and cheesy slogans sell better than proper journalism.

These harbingers of delusion consider they are entitled to condemn a movie because the director failed to comply with the mandate of a presumably official skin color palette. Are writers next? Are they going to be told that their latest novel is not diverse enough? This variant is possible but definitively unlikely. Writers are free from scrutiny. Nobody reads a book these days.

What exactly do diversity and freedom mean as they are presented on the social media accounts managed by this new breed of petty despots that wear uniforms and march like soldiers? What is this meaningless mania? What does this longing mean? This longing for an autocratic society where everybody uses the same hollow vocabulary, takes the same knee, among many other close order drills, and behaves like

automatons connected to the same neglected brain. What is the point of this deployment of cheap hyperbolism worthy of the worst soap opera?

But, don't fool yourself. The promoters and enforcers of *diversity* and other shenanigans of similar caliber are intelligent scammers that get rich and powerful with the money and support happily offered by millions who yearn to belong to a herd—a lot of willful dimwits defined by American author Candace Owens as *a bunch of whiny toddlers, pretending to be oppressed for attention*.

Governments and Big Media are masters in the art of synecdoche, the figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole, such as sails for ships, boots for soldiers and social media for the entire society. Despite the fact that all the detritus chucked inside a presumptive glamorous shithole goes completely unnoticed by the vast majority, governments and Big Media pass it off as representative of the views of the whole population.

Effective altruism is the name of a new mania—a new scholarly scheme, a new academic scam—a redundancy coined for the gain and fame of its creators and tailor-made for the fascination of neglected minds, a collective always eager to be fluent in the jargon that allows entry to fashionable salons. It is an emotional gimmick, a tool functional to the merchants who seek to make a profit from it. Its promoters activate the ploy in order to meet the behavioral standards of the hour for the sake of political correctness and financial advantage.

Who are these people to tell others what to do with their time and money? Why do they push this agenda so eagerly? Alas, here is the rub: Proponents of EA advocate for tax rises to fund their projects and make a killing in the process. These regressives—'progressive collectivists' is a *contradictio in adiecto*—demand

others should pay to make their toxic fantasies come true, as it were. Altruism has already been invented. History proves that displays of altruism are far greater in societies that promote private initiative while reducing government interference. Once again, behind every new rage there always lurks a bird trap to lure in the unlearned.

A free society is necessarily chaotic. In fact, those who want a neat, tidy society actually long for a totalitarian regime. Needless to say, in the course of modern history all types of monochrome experiments ended with well-known, catastrophic results. In turn, those who want to avoid getting pummelled and having their life ruined by the digital masses, need to learn how to choose the correct pronouns, blame everyone else for their problems and show the world how clever they are by selecting the right profile pictures and writing brave hashtags. Warning: It is imperative to show categorically that the user is an apt entity when it comes to ticking the boxes of intersectional absurdity as well as other kinds of nonsense.

Sarcasm aside, woke rules are nothing but the deployment of strategic guidelines to the reinforcement of ignorance and superstition—a sort of primer that makes tiny elites mighty and all their followers miserable. Its most conspicuous chieftains are plutocrats that lie for a living. Wokeism is simply the continuation of collectivism with the addition of other means.

On the other hand, what would become of the usual opinionators if it weren't for the ubiquitous wokeism? Their endless, predictable and boring rants are usually devoid of imagination and impact. Their hollow indignation is just another Big Media product specially designed for the delight of the unlearned always inclined to bow submissively to the celebrity's gibberish.

On top of everything, the diversity drive is usually based on falsehoods that by force of repetition become dogma for all those

who do not want to bother to know. A poll by data analytic firm YouGov shows that Americans tend to grossly overestimate the size of minority groups, including several ethnicities and sexualities.

When it comes to estimating the size of demographic groups, Americans rarely get it right. In two recent YouGov polls, we asked respondents to guess the percentage (ranging from 0% to 100%) of American adults who are members of 43 different groups, including racial and religious groups, as well as other less frequently studied groups, such as pet owners and those who are left-handed.

When people's average perceptions of group sizes are compared to actual population estimates, an intriguing pattern emerges: Americans tend to vastly overestimate the size of minority groups. This holds for sexual minorities, including the proportion of gays and lesbians (estimate: 30%, true: 3%), bisexuals (estimate: 29%, true: 4%), and people who are transgender (estimate: 21%, true: 0.6%).

It also applies to religious minorities, such as Muslim Americans (estimate: 27%, true: 1%) and Jewish Americans (estimate: 30%, true: 2%). And we find the same sorts of overestimates for racial and ethnic minorities, such as Native Americans (estimate: 27%, true: 1%), Asian Americans (estimate: 29%, true: 6%), and Black Americans (estimate: 41%, true: 12%). 2

Meanwhile, the situation shows a sparking resemblance in the United Kingdom.

The British public hugely overestimates the size of minorities, sparking fears 'woke' identity politics are warping views of society.

When 1,800 people were asked by pollster YouGov how many people were transgender, for instance, they thought it was about five per cent of the population.

In reality, between 0.3 per cent and 0.7 per cent identify as a different gender from their biological sex – the gap between the estimate and the reality appearing to show how the transgender rights debate has skewed perceptions.

While most Britons are white and heterosexual, the poll found many believe the UK is made up of far more racial, religious and sexual minorities than it actually is. When the survey asked what proportion of adults was white, the median answer was 65 per cent – yet the true figure is 87 per cent.

And while official figures show that black Britons make up about three per cent of the population, those questioned estimated the proportion at 20 per cent. Britons believed about 15 per cent of the population is Muslim, against the true figure of about four per cent, and they estimated the Jewish community stood at 10 per cent when it is one-twentieth that size.

The public also hugely overestimates the number of vegans and vegetarians – suggesting about 20 per cent refuse to eat animal products, when it is just four per cent. Results of the survey, commissioned by the Common Sense Campaign, have been used to gauge the accuracy of minority representation in the media. Those surveyed were asked 16 questions to work out the overall perception of the make-up of the UK. 3

Huxley was right, Orwell not quite. Kafka was their great inspiration.

Speaking of totalitarianism, the main news channels clearly comply with the industry of dunce standards. Is it an

exaggeration to say that they are to their countries what Der Stürmer was to the Third Reich.? Back then, Germany was a full-fledged totalitarian country while current regimes keep up appearances by pretending to be *democratic*. There lies the *raison d'être* of a myriad of TV and radio corporations, whether private owned or public: They owe their existence to the authoritarian fluid, the sap that circulates through society's vascular system.

This authoritarian pincer movement is poetically presented by the German director Egon Monk in his film *Schlachtvieh* (1963).

Strange things happen in the overnight express: according to a cryptic, obviously military announcement, the train's telephone link with the outside world has been cut off, access to the rear part of the train has been barred, the windows cannot be opened and the train does not stop at any station. While the train's secretary decides to get to the bottom of these ominous events, the other passengers react quietly and are annoyed by the young woman's anxiety. A young priest prevents her from pulling the emergency brake. He preaches to her about the commandment "Respect the emergency brake". One of the passengers, an industrial psychologist, delivers a lecture over the train's loudspeakers in support of the priest's demand that everyone keep quiet. It is finally found that the emergency brake does not work either, but no-one protests. Everyone laughs at the secretary and the priest explains to one old lady that the measures have been imposed by a responsible authority. Champagne is served, everyone is laughing and dancing - everything is as it should be and there is nothing to worry about. The passengers play a game to pass the time. The game is called "Animals to the slaughter". One after another, they mime the killing of an animal while the others guess which animal is being killed. Finally, a journalist demonstrates how people are killed: general humming represents an air raid, the nuclear mushroom is drawn in the air. Some of the passengers who have not joined in the game have gathered in the secretary's compartment. They

want an explanation for the mysterious goings-on. Suddenly the train comes to a standstill and for a moment the people panic, but they all calm down when the train moves off and the lights come on again. The secretary makes one last attempt to reach the barred compartments at the rear of the train, but is prevented by a “democratic” vote by the passengers. The majority do not wish to know what is going on in the train. When they reach their destination, the girl is led away by the conductor and the other passengers quietly alight from the train. 4

Schlachtvieh (Cattle for slaughter) is an accurate parable of the authoritarian/totalitarian condition—a bottom-up-top-down-bottom-up feedback loop. The film was shot less than twenty years after the National Socialism experiment, in the midst of the Cold War, with the planet cut in half by the Soviet Union and the United States.

As usual, I went back to my personal obsessions. I remembered that in the course of my life I have been very much struck by what one might call the current of opinion, by its rapid evolution, its power of contagion, which is that of a real epidemic. People allow themselves to suddenly be invaded by a new religion, a doctrine, a fanaticism. At such moments we witness a veritable mental mutation. I don't know if you have noticed it, but when people no longer share your opinions, when you can no longer make yourself understood by them, one has the impression of being confronted with monsters—rhinos, for example. They have that mixture of candor and ferocity. They would kill you with the best of consciences. And history has shown us during the last quarter of a century that people thus transformed not only resemble rhinos, but really become rhinoceroses. 5

This is all about the eternal manipulation, the eternal recurrence of the same and the shame. History is rife with examples. Let us make a trip to Germany in the late 20's.

*And since the quarrel
Will bear no color for the thing he is,
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities;
And therefore think him as a serpent's egg —
Which, hatched, would, as his kind, grow mischievous —
And kill him in the shell. 6*

On 14 February 1930, Horst Wessel, a Berlin Sturmführer of the Sturmabteilung (SA), the Nazi Party's original paramilitary wing, was shot twice in the head. He died on 23 February, after nine days of agony, due to a hospital-acquired infection. He was twenty-three years old.

His name was inscribed in the pantheon of popular idols rather than in the register of the Lumpenproletariat, the precipitate that Karl Marx defined as a parasitical group composed by criminals, vagrants, and the unemployed, who lacked awareness of their collective interest as an oppressed class and was in turn used by reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces as a tool of reaction. His murderer, the communist militant Albrecht Höhler, was sentenced to six years in prison and clandestinely executed by the Nazis once in power.

Ian Kershaw states that the homicide followed a dispute over the unpaid rent of a room; Joachim Fest attributes the murder to a fight over a woman and John Toland, who best develops the episode, says that the murder was a mixture of both motives.

Horst Wessel was the son of a Lutheran minister. When he was twenty-one, he enlisted in the ranks of the Sturmabteilung (SA), colloquially called Brownshirts, ready to join street fights against the Reds. Wessel developed a fondness for hanging around with tarts and pimps. In September 1929 he met Erna Jänicke, a 23-year-old ex-prostitute. Less than two months later she moved into his room on the third floor of 62 Große Frankfurter Straße (today

Karl-Marx-Allee), in Berlin, which he sublet from 29-year old Elisabeth Salm, whose late husband had been an active member of the Red Front Fighter Association, a paramilitary organization affiliated with the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). After a few months, there was a dispute between Salm and Wessel over an unpaid rent in which Salm claimed that Wessel threatened her. The landlady wanted Jänicke to leave but the latter refused to, so on the evening of 14 January 1930 Salm appealed to friends of her husband's for help. Knowing they needed a tough guy, they sent word to a nearby tavern in search of Albrecht "Ali" Höhler, an armed pimp, perjurer and petty criminal. At around ten o'clock that night, Höhler, accompanied by Erwin Rückert, knocked at the door of the room where Wessel and Jänicke dwelled. When Wessel showed up he was shot at point-blank range.

Joseph Goebbels, the future propaganda minister of the Reich and already a rising figure in the Nazi hierarchy, understood that the corpse of the young man who had written a song in honor of fallen comrades embodied a unique opportunity. He decided to transform the frustrated lover into a martyr of the working class sacrificed for the cause, and his life of abuse and neglect into a model of patriotic virtues.

Wessel was the vehicle that Goebbels used to defeat his direct competitors within Hitler's entourage—the brothers Gregor and Otto Strasser. The misfortune of a young man, surely enthusiastic, surely lost, like any other person who begins a life's journey, was the instrument he used to rise to the catacombs of power. An expert demagogue, he knew how to change the despair of millions of Germans into a positive force that would crown his career.

No moderately educated democrat was fooled by Goebbels' basic maneuver, or was even outraged by the death of the SA or demanded clarification. It was pretty clear that it had all been a score settling between rival gangs. Hitler did not attend the

massive public funeral. He distrusted Goebbels and feared that the staging would lead to a pitched battle with the Communists. However, majorities instinctively believed in the word of Goebbels. It is far more comfortable to buy the bald-faced lies of a sinister top thug and live like a sleepwalker than painfully trudge on a quest for meaning, truth and authenticity. Less than two years later, on 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler was sworn in by President Paul von Hindenburg as Chancellor of Germany.

When it comes to emotions, Big Tech and Big Media have a mandatory list that reminds the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, the infamous catalogue of forbidden reading regularly issued by the Roman Catholic Church from the fifth century until its demise in 1966. In order to know what kind of feelings can be expressed publicly—be it in the flesh or virtually, written or orally—without being punished or cancelled, as the authoritarian drive has it, the best thing to do is to visit the social media temple. There is no diversity there either but only emotions allowed in the name of a fake hypersensitivity— the ones associated with kindness, amiability and vulnerability. Anger is only allowed when it is directed at legitimate and certified targets. This cult of resentment is heavily promoted via a constellation of servers, the new transcendent and supernatural domain. If religion is meant to instill fear into the hearts of men, just a glance at a Big Tech data center is enough to freeze the bones of the most cynical of them all. *Cancel culture* and *cancer culture* have two characteristics in common: they are synonymous as much as they are impossibilities.

We are not actually doing what we say we do publicly, claims a confidential review published by The Wall Street Journal. The investigation shows that while social media giants pretend to be crusaders of good manners, censoring everyone who dares to make a foray into the forbidden territory of anger, callousness or contempt, Facebook shielded millions of VIP users from the

normal enforcement process. *Unlike the rest of our community, these people can violate our standards without any consequences*, admits the survey. Still, that could be considered just a hiccup compared to the findings of a research conducted on Instagram according to which the app is *harmful for a sizable percentage of them* [young users], *most notably teenage girls*. 7

Mental health is one of the many sacred bywords that constantly pester the social media universe as well as the vague, pointless speeches delivered by machine bureaucrats eager to catch up with the obtuse lingo the crowd dabbles in. Nonetheless, psychological abuse is an everyday occurrence. The number of people negatively affected and the damage inflicted are unfathomable. Social media giants should have already been held liable for creating the conditions for this to happen were it not for the spurious relationship that binds them to government's upper echelons. Social media is highly toxic not because that is their manifest destiny but because that is the way tech mastodons want them to be.

As it happens, every day billions get lost inside Big Tech's nightmarish mazes, unaware that they are undergoing a brainwashing operation of a size not even Saloth Sâr ever dreamt of. This sort of endogamic loop that always leads to the same places no matter which road the visitor takes is commonly known as echo chamber effect. By way of algorithms' brute force every time someone logs into a social media account they find information or opinions that reinforce their own. It is like being alone inside a cavern—you only hear your own voice every time you utter a word. Algorithms, a euphemism for highly efficient spywares, are the ultimate handlers of the unlettered. As if it were the Pied Piper of Hamelin during a rat infestation, algorithms drive people away from books and knowledge by luring them to the Lethe, one of the rivers of Hades that flowed around the cave of Hypnos and where all those who drank from it experienced complete oblivion.

In five presentations over 18 months to this spring, the researchers conducted what they called a “teen mental health deep dive” and follow-up studies.

They came to the conclusion that some of the problems were specific to Instagram, and not social media more broadly. That is especially true concerning so-called social comparison, which is when people assess their own value in relation to the attractiveness, wealth and success of others.

“Social comparison is worse on Instagram,” states Facebook’s deep dive into teen girl body-image issues in 2020, noting that TikTok, a short-video app, is grounded in performance, while users on Snapchat, a rival photo and video-sharing app, are sheltered by jockey filters that “keep the focus on the face.” In contrast, Instagram focuses heavily on the body and lifestyle....

“Thirty-two percent of teen girls said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse,” the researchers said in a March 2020 slide presentation posted to Facebook’s internal message board, reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. “Comparisons on Instagram can change how young women view and describe themselves.”

“We make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls,” said one slide from 2019, summarizing research about teen girls who experience the issues.

“Teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression,” said another slide. “This reaction was unprompted and consistent across all groups.” 8

When Helena Kerschner (23) was fifteen years old she started using Tumblr. She has had an eating disorder since she was much younger. She says that her attention was drawn by a lot of

messages that said that if someone feels bad about his or her body that was the proof of being transgender.

I can't change my race and I can't change my sexuality so the only thing left was to start playing with the gender stuff. So, I decided to call myself a demigirl which basically meant that I was mostly a girl but not literally a girl. After that I went to demiboy and then after that I went to gender fluid and after that I eventually went to transboy. All this took two or three years of just going through this repetitive cycle of changing an identity and changing it again. It was just never enough. There was a lot of hopelessness for a long time. The feel of regret was intense.

I consider myself lucky that I was able to get out of it unscarred medically and psychologically as well, but there are many young people who can't say the same. It is just devastating, especially from a very young age, to be lied to by adults at school and by medical professionals and told that your body is wrong and that you need to change it and need to get hormones and surgeries.

The case of Helena brutally illustrates the way social media elites dupe and swindle millions of young people, and not so young too, for electoral and commercial purposes. In many cases, by the time they are just twenty their brains have already been hacked and they have more identities than a veteran convict.

According to Kara Dansky, author of *The Abolition of Sex*, trans is not out there to shield a marginalized community of people. Instead, it is a lie and a multi-trillion dollar business in the guise of a civil rights movement that is paying the United States' medical establishment, most news media outlets, the government and schools at all levels to push the idea that the material reality of sex does not exist and that what is really important is "gender identity".

Tip I: If reading some utter rubbish online makes your blood boil, the best thing you can do is to close your laptop and, after a couple of hours, begin a search for a meditation conference or an astrology course. You will find them by the dozen. Better to be duped by a fake shaman than be bashed mercilessly by the pack or snooped on by a company associated with a cadre of lowlifes determined to ruin your life at all costs.

Tip II: You cannot expect to sleep peacefully after voluntarily relinquishing your private life to a stranger in detail. Delete all your social media accounts and be done with it.

I am an opponent of the modern infamous emasculation of our emotions, says Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887).

Nietzsche sustained that Christianity promotes self-hatred and a slave morality—a morality focused on the worst-off. The values of humility, poverty and meekness make for mediocrity. Modern societies are obsessed with the weak and put them at the forefront of their speeches and actions in order fostering pack behavior based on a dogma that erases all traces of individuality and dissolves any attempt at critical thinking into an ocean of regulations. Herd happiness is not happiness and selected emotions are overrated because they are the raw material for the success of demagoguery and delusion. Con men of all sorts, be it state bureaucrats, university gangsters or the usual fraudsters in the social media, regularly appeal to the most basic emotions in order to manipulate and control *the masses*, but only after meanings are twisted and distorted via brute force, i.e. by way of massive indoctrination processes that repeat tiresomely what deserves to be cherished and what ought to be hated.

Whether the Multitude likes it or not there is no Via Regia to success. There is no achievement of great goals without selfishness, without painstaking effort and without taking one's eyes off the weak.

There is no freedom of speech without the right to think and no right to think without the right to offend. To give and take offense is an inherited characteristic of the human nature, David Hume might have said.

In 2018, one hundred women signed an open letter published in the daily *Le Monde*. The piece, co-written by Sarah Chiche, Catherine Millet, Catherine Robbe-Grillet, Peggy Sastre and Abnousse Shalmani, was a reaction to authoritarian social media campaigns like #MeToo and its French equivalent #BalanceTonPorc (Call out your pig) conducted by well-oiled machines that regularly unleash brain hunts. A section of the nine hundred-word letter reads as follows.

Philosopher Ruwen Ogien defended the freedom to offend as essential to artistic creation. In the same way, we defend a freedom to bother as indispensable to sexual freedom.

Today we are educated enough to understand that sexual impulses are, by nature, offensive and primitive — but we are also able to tell the difference between an awkward attempt to pick someone up and what constitutes a sexual assault.

Above all, we are aware that the human being is not a monolith: A woman can, in the same day, lead a professional team and enjoy being a man's sexual object, without being a "whore" or a vile accomplice of the patriarchy. She can make sure that her wages are equal to a man's but not feel forever traumatized by a man who rubs himself against her in the subway, even if that is regarded as an offense. She can even consider this act as the expression of a great sexual deprivation, or even as a non-event.

The difference between an awkward attempt to pick someone up and what constitutes a sexual assault.

As women, we don't recognize ourselves in this feminism that, beyond the denunciation of abuses of power, takes the face of a hatred of men and sexuality. We believe that the freedom to say "no" to a sexual proposition cannot exist without the freedom to bother. And we consider that one must know how to respond to this freedom to bother in ways other than by closing ourselves off in the role of the prey. 9

Mrs. Catherine Deneuve and 99 other women are a stroke of inspiration that bluntly marks the limit between two realities: a sum of individualities that try to think freely and a horde clad in uniforms that by repeating preposterous slogans, albeit effective in an ocean of careless minds, achieve media attraction, sustain public visibility and make a fortune in the process.

The Middle Ages. Those were the days. Everyone knew their place and it never crossed the mind of anybody to question anything that was beyond the grasp of the unlearned. In a world ruled by an immutable hierarchical order, plenty of scarcity, a permanent absence of changes and abundantly lacking in options, anxiety was an inconceivable emotion. As the statesman wrote *It was an age of impulse and experiment, not controlled by any general political theory*. Thus, happiness was the common denominator, so common that even the word was an eccentricity.

Though Nietzsche claimed that God was dead, the values of the Jewish-Christian god survived and are in good health one hundred and fifty years later. God lives in a morality that rules the dynamics of the relationship between the omnipresent state and its vassals.

And here is where one of the most reactive values of herd morality makes its entrance: compassion. *A lack of compassion can be as vulgar as an excess of tears*, said a wise woman.

However, Nietzsche saw this specific emotional reaction in quite a different light.

In reality I had set my heart at that time on something much more important than the nature of the theories of myself or others concerning the origin of morality (or, more precisely, the real function from my view of these theories was to point to an end to which they were one among many means). The issue for me was the value of morality, and on that subject I had to place myself in a state of abstraction, in which I was almost alone with my great teacher Schopenhauer, to whom that book, with all its passion and inherent contradiction (for that book also was a polemic), turned for present help as though he were still alive. The issue was, strangely enough, the value of the “un-egoistic” instincts, the instincts of compassion, self-denial, and self-sacrifice which Schopenhauer had so persistently painted in golden colors, deified and etherealized, that eventually they appeared to him, as it were, high and dry, as “intrinsic values in themselves” on the strength of which he uttered both to Life and to himself his own negation. But against these very instincts there voiced itself in my soul a more and more fundamental mistrust, a skepticism that dug ever deeper and deeper: and in this very instinct I saw the great danger of mankind, its most sublime temptation and seduction—seduction to what? to nothingness?—in these very instincts I saw the beginning of the end, stability, the exhaustion that gazes backwards, the will turning against Life, the last illness announcing itself with its own mincing melancholy: I realized that the morality of compassion which spread wider and wider, and whose grip infected even philosophers with its disease, was the most sinister symptom of our modern European civilization; I realized that it was the route along which that civilization slid on its way to—a new Buddhism?—a European Buddhism?—Nihilism? This exaggerated estimation in which modern philosophers have held compassion, is quite a new phenomenon: up to that time philosophers were absolutely unanimous as to the worthlessness of compassion. I need only*

mention Plato, Spinoza, La Rochefoucauld, and Kant—four minds as mutually different as is possible, but united on one point; their contempt of compassion. 10

Ionesco, like Nietzsche, places the individual as the only possible protagonist of the human play. There is not and cannot ever be a collective subject because a group is nothing but the sum of its members, a mere number, a statistical accident. The ubiquitous clichés *collective memory, collective thought, collective responsibility* and others similar are born out of the premise that society is a singularity on which a quality can be predicated, an individual to whom specific characteristics can be assigned. They are aimed at a lazy audience with low educational training that welcomes and adopts simplifications. These pieces of merchandising are assembled in universities, the state bureaucracy and news channels for commercial or proselytizing purposes. The nomenclature industry, as it were.

Ionesco loathed the pack and taunted it in every possible way. No wonder he was condemned by the darlings of the French *intelligentsia* every time he presented a new play. He didn't bow to the dictums of the hour. His *antisocial behavior*, a blatant crime for a totalitarian mind, still scandalizes today those who reduce the human condition to a cog inside a machine.

Einstein, Oppenheimer, Bergson are true intellectuals. I do not like demi intellectuals because in Germany they were all Nazis before the war and in France they were very fascist. I don't like demi-intellectuals because they don't really think. They simply repeat slogans.

It is widely accepted that with the rise of social media platforms the public stopped playing a passive role and began playing an active one. This is a fallacy. Generally speaking, people continue to be passive. The mechanical activity of hitting a keyboard

doesn't count as an active performance, nor does it transform an intellectually inert being into an operative one.

Demi-intellectuals have a mass mentality. Rhinoceros is a play that serves as a trial. Professional intellectuals, not the great ones, are to blame for the rise of Nazism—writers, journalists, professors and the like. It's their fault.

Ionesco was right.

Meanwhile, *rulers* play ball with the populace. The fear of losing privileges outweighs the fear of God.

1. In a way, Guy Sorman's book, *Mon Dictionnaire du Bullshit*, a treatise that deals with the bullshit dimension, reminds Adolfo Bioy Casares' celebrated dictionary, a satire about the deliberately complex language used by politicians, as the trinkets used by the conquistadores to trick and subdue the Indians. *The cheat always despises the sucker*, Bioy Casares used to say.
 2. Taylor Orth. <https://today.yougov.com/>
 3. Daily Mail. 4 June 2022
 4. Anonymous. www.imdb.com
 5. Eugène Ionesco. *Le Monde*. 17 January 1960
 6. William Shakespeare. *Julius Caesar*, 2,1
 7. *The Wall Street Journal*. 13 September 2021
 8. *The Wall Street Journal*. 14 September 2021
 9. "Nous défendons une liberté d'importuner, indispensable à la liberté sexuelle" *Le Monde*. 9 January 2018
 10. *The Genealogy of Morals*. Preface, 5. 1887
- * *Human, All Too Human* (1878)

Miasma

*Abhor all common things and drive your wagons on untrodden
fields.
Callimachus*

The transition from analog to digital marks the beginning of the New Régime—imagined by Jorge Luis Borges (*El Aleph*, 1945), anticipated by Jean-François Lyotard (*Les Immatériaux*, Center Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1985) and presented as a consummate fact by Nicholas Negroponte (*Being Digital*, 1995)—and the demise of the publishing industry as a source of quality, trust and thrust.

The digital tidal wave exterminated the role of the editor, the intelligence behind authors and publications. Moreover, it was the coup de grace for LP cover art—by the mid-eighties the emergence of the CD had begun the task of annihilation—a splendid window for superior quality artworks from the sixties onward. Bottom line: rampant mediocrity roams and rules without opposition or limits.

Visual arts (plastic, cinema, theatre) are, for now, the last refuge outside the reach of the binary gravitational force; that is, they provide selection and exhibition consistent with aesthetic criteria certified by people with a competent educational record.

Currently, consumers are enduring the worst nightmare: they are helpless, naked in a supermarket as infinite as it is atrocious where chaos imposes hegemonic order. The warehouse is so vast that it is not even possible to fathom an infinitesimal portion of its size. Everything has a place but following complex, indiscernible regulations—the most egregious coexists with the most abominable. The intellectual horror makes the visitor uneasy and prompts a physical shudder as well as metaphysical nausea.

There were corridors that led nowhere, unreachable high windows, grandly dramatic doors that opened onto monk-like cells or empty shafts, incredible upside-down staircases with upside-down treads and balustrades. Other staircases, clinging airily to the side of a monumental wall, petered out after two or three landings, in the high gloom of the cupolas, arriving nowhere. I cannot say whether these are literal examples I have given; I do know that for many years they plagued my troubled dreams; I can no longer know whether any given feature is a faithful transcription of reality or one of the shapes unleashed by my nights. This City, I thought, is so horrific that its mere existence, the mere fact of its having endured — even in the middle of a secret desert — pollutes the past and the future and somehow compromises the stars. So long as this City endures, no one in the world can ever be happy or courageous. I do not want to describe it; a chaos of heterogeneous words, the body of a tiger or a bull pullulating with teeth, organs, and heads monstrously yoked together yet hating each other — those might, perhaps, be approximate images.¹

Social media could be labeled as the sick offshoot of the digital tsunami. Their components are like pieces of unknown matter exuding a stench redolent of rotting flesh and reflecting the worst the dominant species can produce. Poetry aside, in the hands of demagogues they are like dynamos used to generate an outflow of ignorance, an inflow of cash and the definitive annihilation of critical thinking into the bargain. Spreading ignorance 24/7 has ensured that hardly anyone these days is educated enough to see through them.

In those recondite alcoves where pretentious feelings of loyalty exercise overwhelming hegemony, *ruling class* specimens are on the prowl. From their positions of comfort, power and impunity, at the expense of someone else's pocket, self-proclaimed politicians no longer have even a minimum of decorum—why should they?—and spend long hours a day wasting someone

else's time and money using marvelous tools as weapons of crass destruction.

For its part, the mass celebrates the intellectual destitution of those who are supported with public funds. But the mass is not a measure of anything because it equals nothing in the universe of intelligence. As a matter of fact, majorities do not enjoy the gift of language—they barely survive on the basic level of emotions. The mob expresses itself only at biological level, via spasms: crying, anger, screaming, taking offense. *Abstraction is something alien to the Planet of Retards.* This is an incontestable truth. The majority is never right.

The majority never has right on its side. Never, I say! That is one of these social lies against which an independent, intelligent man must wage war. Who is it that constitutes the majority of the population in a country? Is it the clever folk, or the stupid? I don't imagine you will dispute the fact that at present the stupid people are in an absolutely overwhelming majority all the world over. But, good Lord!—you can never pretend that it is right that the stupid folk should govern the clever ones! Oh, yes—you can shout me down, I know! But you cannot answer me. The majority has might on its side—unfortunately; but right it has not. I am in the right—I and a few other scattered individuals. The minority is always in the right. 2

Vox populi, the famous Latin phrase, apart from being fit for literary use has no value at all when it comes to being used as a political subject. *The voice of the people* includes a noun used as a phantasmagoric subject, a full-blown impossibility that has no existence outside the realm of words. As for the man on the street, in a modern democratic system he has the right to cast his vote. And that is the full extent of his clout. Why on earth does someone need to listen to the faulty way he expresses his incompetence in every possible field? To give a microphone to someone without a clue of what they are saying is an all-time demagogic stunt that mainstream media has been pulling off

since television networks began to exercise supremacy over radio broadcasts and newspapers. Social media has elevated this inanity to previously unimagined levels of obscenity and opacity.

Meanwhile, alleged civil servants continue posting, several times a day, of course. Their comments are as irrelevant as they are unrelated to their specific areas of competencies. By pretending to be smart they play up to their electoral base. The cult of the idiotic ego is the only thing that matters these days.

Today it is more important to be someone than to do something. The Internet is a gigantic flashlight that allows monstrosities that were previously only a haunting suspicion to stand out. Endless masquerades and perpetual poses are the way of the present and the conduits through which vacuous vanities are unleashed. Irrelevant opinions adorned with plastic smiles—a macabre metaphor for premature rigor mortis. Social media is a giant magnifying glass that shows mediocrity in action, in real time, from all possible angles *without overlapping or transparency*, as it were.

In his short story *The Aleph*, Jorge Luis Borges foresaw the mechanics of Internet optics half a century before its time.

I arrive now at the ineffable core of my story. And here begins my despair as a writer. All language is a set of symbols whose use among its speakers assumes a shared past. How, then, can I translate into words the limitless Aleph, which my floundering mind can scarcely encompass? Mystics, faced with the same problem, fall back on symbols: to signify the godhead, one Persian speaks of a bird that somehow is all birds; Alanus de Insulis, of a sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere; Ezekiel, of a four-faced angel who at one and the same time moves east and west, north and south. (Not in vain do I recall these inconceivable analogies; they bear some relation to the Aleph.) Perhaps the gods might grant me a similar metaphor, but then this account would become contaminated by literature, by fiction. Really, what I want to do

is impossible, for any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal. In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive. 3

Social media is like a massive Aleph that lays bare what was previously just a disturbing suspicion: arrogant ignorance at work in real time twenty-four hours a day—the remains of what could have been thriving existences had they not surrendered submissively to the tyranny of feelings.

Universal disenchantment with what is usually and erroneously called *politics* is gaining momentum with dramatic acceleration. On 20 and 27 June 2021 regional elections took place in France. The Economist magazine reported that the turnout *was shockingly low, at 33%, down from 50% at regional elections in 2015. Only 16% of those aged 18-24 voted, according to Ifop, a pollster.*

A France24 report makes an approach to the *Génération abstention* phenomenon:

Between disappointment and rejection of the political world, millions of French people no longer want to vote, especially among young people. The parties are no longer able to generate interest while the traditional media are accused of participating in a failing democratic system. The yellow vests crisis has highlighted an unprecedented level of mistrust of institutions and policies, and the abstention rate seems to increase from election to election.

Whether it is by settling in the countryside to live in community, or by using social networks to try to reinvent political action, they have chosen different paths to challenge the system. All, in any case, have decided to no longer exercise their right to vote.

Millennials and younger generations have turned their backs on public affairs with a sneer, in France and in other well-established Western democracies.

This behavior does not reflect a disillusion with politics, a noble practice understood as the way in which honest people elected for a very limited period of time and leading a frugal lifestyle administer public affairs without breaking the law or defiling the letter of the law. Disillusion has nothing to do with real politics. Extremely low participation figures are a sign of deep discontent with marauding bands of *rulers*, chronic abuse of power, everlasting corruption in every possible form and an intricate net of geological layers of sinecures entrenched in the limitless maze of the police state, a pullulating, all-devouring monstrosity of obsession. The damage has been inflicted for so long that the subversion of meaning has become naturalized. Corrupted politics is not politics.

True politics is absent as a result of the way people, including those who are now disenchanted with the current state of affairs and their equally disenchanted predecessors, have yielded control of the house to the servants. Decades of indifference have ended up with the desecration of a civil service turned into a club of disconnected elites leading lavish lives passively authorized by people's indolence. Somewhere, at the beginning of the modern democratic process there was a huge breach of the social contract because few people were paying attention to or were distracted by garish displays of hollow words. As happens today, almost everyone was looking the other way. The majority do not care about these vulnerabilities as long as water flows from the faucets and Wi-Fi runs smoothly. There is no better way to provoke misfortune than to live like a sleepwalker.

Indolence, the mother of all vices, makes people believe that a public official, a complete stranger, will keep them away from all evils—the Stockholm syndrome by other means. The fallacy, promoted from the womb by home and school as if it were a

mathematical certainty, is the key to understanding the chronological rape of politics from Plato onwards. When we turn eighteen we are already creatures made of clay and fear. That Big Government is the solution to people's problems is one of the most deeply embedded illusions. Collectivist education has seeped into people's minds. The combination of these two titanic forces working together is what makes the illusion so difficult to debunk. While the industrial society produces collectivist disabled people, the digital industrial society breeds individualistic disabled people. Sloth and cowardice are the most notable traits of both variants.

From above, those who occupy places of privilege and those who aspire to occupy them are parts of the same staging, like actors reading lines from the same script. The pandemic, once more, proves Lord Acton's maxim right: *Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely*. There is a natural tendency for power to grab more power. In the world of make-believe some pretend to rule, others pretend to oppose and both share the same passion: clinging to the levers power.

For their part, those who have nothing to cling to, need to believe in something or someone superior who can provide for them. The new pagan faith is consummated within the confines of this top-down-bottom-up dynamics. Faith in the ruler substitutes the former faith in God. This master-slave association marks the whole history of the power relationship even after the emergence of the feeble attempt to regulate it via normative axes. Though a President is neither prince nor pope large portions of people feel quite the contrary. Nothing irritates a pragmatic person more than seeing enchanted crowds cheering approvingly while governments burn their money in the form of fireworks, the most conspicuous, shameful way of squandering public funds.

Big Government is the solution only for those who rule at the expense of the majority that work for them. Inertia is the guiding vector, the reactive force that controls and directs the world.

The vis insita, or innate force of matter, is a power of resisting by which every body, as much as in it lies, endeavours to preserve its present state, whether it be of rest or of moving uniformly forward in a straight line. 4

Social media, a sort of sea of Solaris, a mass of x-trillion tons of metamorphic plasma scheming against a group of cosmonauts, is the medium that spreads recurrent hallucinations as the basic input needed to generate profits by the billions. The machine rewards and punishes, threatens and encourages. One can imagine, unequivocally, that the world is already run, to a large extent, by a colossal Master— a computer that unrelentingly controls entire populations as if they were armies of robots.

This is an imitation game. In order to avoid the condemnation of their peers, members of the Multitude do the impossible to pass as *primus inter pares*, appealing to all known logical fallacies and torturing the language as if it were a heretic prisoner held by the Holy Inquisition. For its part, the tribunal whips keyboards approving or censoring posts. Phony politicians, judges, journalists, celebrities and anyone who yearns for power or notoriety tailor their words and actions to the preferences of the ruling class. No one wants to be touched by the blade of the idiocratic axe. Needless to say, this is mainly a hobby & lobby operation, one out of many that are rife in wealthy countries where most of the people have enough time at their disposal to put on an on-line melodramatic show in order to let the world know how concerned they are about irrelevant trends.

Consider the whim of the moment: *climate change*.

Climate has been changing constantly and naturally over the last 4.5 billion years, give or take, so far back it is impossible to gauge even for the most imaginative scientists, while the Industrial Revolution, a euphemism for capitalism, the presumable culprit in this pot boiler, began to pedal into full swing just a couple of centuries ago—the other day, as Charles Marlow correctly puts it. There have been innumerable and extreme temperature variations in the course of the earth’s inconceivable age with each change lasting not just centuries but millions of years.

Until twenty thousand years ago, just yesterday, the Laurentide Ice Sheet overlaid much of North America, covering an area of about 5,000,000 square miles. It is estimated that in some regions this vast expanse of ice was as thick as 2,400 to 3,000 meters. The ice over the island of Manhattan was about 2,000 feet high and would have buried even the tallest skyscraper. Where did the Laurentide Ice Sheet go? It melted. Shit happens, so does heat. Did its demise have something to do with human activity? Obviously not, back then there were just a handful of people wielding sticks and stones, tools that do not usually run on fossil fuels. The causes are so complex, the variables involved so numerous and the time elapsed so vast that even a hint of what took place is well beyond human capabilities.

The planet is an immensely complex structure and a big mystery as well, even for the greatest minds the human species can produce. To put the blame of such colossal changes on *human activity* amounts to a fit of extreme megalomania.

And, even if men’s fingerprints are on the murder weapon that is presumably killing life in all its forms, it would still remain to be determined whether the changes are more detrimental than beneficial or the other way around. Disclaimer: TV news shows, newspapers, celebrities and party chieftains do not have a say in this dispute.

The stop-the-gas-emissions-activity-or-else-doomsday-is-around-the-corner menace has nothing to do with saving the world but smells a lot like a bumper sticker and T-shirt merchandising campaign. Actually, it is a brazen operation against individual freedoms, mainly freedom of enterprise and of speech. The narrative is so deliberately simplistic and emotional that it easily takes hold of the hearts and minds of host of careless people. In a world ravaged by intellectual neglect there is nowhere someone with a good collection of slogans cannot penetrate and make a killing in the process. It is another layer of superstition that helps command the lives of the culturally dispossessed, many of them deprived of a proper education by their own choice. Hearing people yelling climate change slogans like *Stop CO2 emissions* is like having to endure someone talking about the meaning of life based on astrology. There are a lot of scary things in this world that even science does not understand. Global warming is one of them. Global stupidity is another.

Sensible people have to endure daily how governments and mainstream media put propaganda mechanisms in motion to make believe they are in charge of the climate. What fifty years ago would have sounded like the rantings of a lunatic is today a central topic in international forums and prime time TV shows. Needless to say, this manic fixation with police control is nothing but another ballot-harvesting scheme, another way of pandering to the customers of the social media dive. So delusional is it that it equates to the folly of flat-earthers, the only difference being that the latter have not been endowed yet with an official certificate.

It will come as no surprise when the united *rulers* of the world break the news about the invention of the Great Remote Control with which, they would claim, the planet's appropriate temperature will be set from an office. Surely, thousands of festivities all around the globe will salute the technological

wonder as well as the infinite wisdom of the Caring Fathers. The cultural decadence of the West is unstoppable. Today, even a glass of water manipulated by a shrewd ventriloquist can win a national election by a landslide.

Experience shows time and again that the old axiom is dead right: Behind every absurd, presumably righteous campaign the rationale of profit is always concealed. The whole scheme, from the moment it is concocted until it is set in motion, is about money, control and nothing more. Professional hatemongers make fortunes on the Internet with fusillades that appeal only to the most basic instincts of the Multitude and government employees that who along with everything they proclaim in order to preserve their posts. Once set in motion, the banality of vanity devours everything in its path.

Regrettably, this is the road to which self-imposed ignorance leads. Currently, the abomination is more visible than ever thanks to digital reality. At the same time, Big Media presents *climate change* as *a consequence of our actions*. Our actions? Who are *we* in this case? You? Me? No, that's for sure. But it is more convenient to address the issue using a general pronoun that does not refer to anyone in particular, especially when the elites that strategically push the agenda do not have a clue of what is really happening and the only thing they seek is their own benefit, be it book sales, academic recognition, fame, the works. All is reduced to clicks these days. Thus, lazy journalists are spared the work of talking accurately, a proper skill that demands work, study and research. Who cares? After all, comforting lies yield more than unpleasant truths.

The superstitious narrative has taken hold of every department of society. Billions have been engulfed by the gravitational force of the trend and run to the lifeboats while yelling hysterically. Even Queen Elizabeth, the epitome of discipline and self-restraint, minced no words when openly giving her support to the cause. *It is the hope of many that the legacy of this summit - written in*

history books yet to be printed - will describe you as the leaders who did not pass up the opportunity; and that you answered the call of those future generations, she said in a speech delivered via video message to the COP26 Evening Reception in October 2021. Mired in scandal by the behavior of two of her offspring, she was forced to play the fool in a desperate search for popularity. Buckingham Palace bureaucracy pulled a feat previously deemed impossible: In the last second of an exemplary seventy-year reign they managed to stain the image of the most respectable public servant in the world. 5

Corporate news outlets and governments always have at hand a childish prosopopoeia. They refer to an unfathomable vastness as *Mother Nature*, an appropriate moniker when it comes to addressing the Multitude, always eager to see the latest Disney movie. Mother Nature, they say, scolds her naughty children because they neglect her. Thus, accidentally, though organically, ideology brings things full circle. The state is father and Nature mother. Both are abusive, if not entirely sadistic, forces, which people ask to be kept on a tight leash with and gladly bow down to. It is not an accident that both creatures resemble the supernatural powers that swarm religious books. It is no wonder that people brought up as cripples spend their lives crying out for a pair of hands that force them to swallow their food. For that kind of creatures blunt lies matter.

Climate Change, as the jargon goes, is the tag behind which is hidden one of the greatest scams world bureaucracy has ever pulled. It has nothing to do with saving any planet but aims instead at sparing the heads of the incumbents from the wrath of the many fueled by elites from behind the curtains of the social media shop. Old electricity is the new totem even though it is not as ecological as it is claimed to be, no matter the device used to generate it. Horses are the best option when it comes to a 100% fossil fuel-free tool.

The consequences of the *climate change* fatuous war cry are already in progress everywhere, from Africa to Europe, from Asia to America, in the form of power cuts and food shortages. Tampering with the energy grids and forcing entire nations to adopt organic agriculture systems are not innocuous measures. The *green* superstition is causing devastating damages to the livelihood of billions of people. Despite this, it is widely and enthusiastically accepted. Its main tenets are repeated as a gospel by the functionally illiterate so as not to be snubbed in clubs, offices, bars and other social venues. As it is presented, climate change is a lie, another catch-all term for winning the support of the lazy and the unlearned.

Half a century ago people used to take to the streets regularly to condemn the capitalist system. Many among them were well-read individuals, educated enough to defend their positions solidly, with intellectual stature, regardless of whether their arguments were sound or quite the opposite. Today, participants in most rallies read only what is splashed online. To them, a book, whether analog or digital—the distinction is irrelevant—is nothing but a mere object as rare as a fork was for a caveman. It is not uncommon to learn that many of the people who attend massive demonstrations are not only adrift in the human tide but also completely unaware of the reason why they are there. For many, taking part in those stampedes is a therapeutic exercise—a way in which they can forget, at least for a few hours, the erratic lives they lead. Oddly enough, it seems that getting involved in aimless missions is easier than sitting down to read a book.

Today, by the time a person is 13 and starts reading newspapers and listening to *the authorities*, their mind has already been hacked. With their critical functions never activated re-education, if ever it comes, only occurs with great difficulty outside the mainstream of society. *The elephant rope* parable nicely illustrates the point.

Affluent and penniless alike, led by their noses by *politicians* and *social activists*, show up regularly at massive rallies dressed up in full regalia of slogans about every possible imaginable assortment of drivel. It is no wonder that after years of being uncritically wired to the news industry and the word of the *authorities*, brain hacking works heavenly. By the time the units are twenty years old, making them believe that by taking to the streets they are going to change the world is as easy as taking candy from a baby. In fact, they do not gain the public space either—they are released in a preordained way following a military pattern on sectioned-off streets in predetermined sectors of a city.

All these presumably great grandiose global gatherings are vacuous theatricals organized by and functional to fat strategists who kowtow to the crowd piled up in the social media square. In another classic example of the master-slave relationship dynamics, the people who pay with the sweat of their brows for the luxurious privileges oligarchs abusively enjoys are lectured on a daily pattern of do-what-I-say-not-what-I-do.

It has never been so easy for worldwide *rulers* to exercise abusive supremacy over their subjects. They just have to keep up with the humor of the on-line pack, caving in to their basest instincts and whims. Using the social media platforms, which they fear more than death, as an ongoing live survey, ensures the ruler peace and quiet and a stronger grip on power, but certainly not a legacy as a statesman, as if that mattered to the incumbent.

Journalism is an extinct practice. Catastrophes of all sorts are like oxygen for the television industry and newspapers. Nothing gives Big Media more pleasure than counting dead bodies. However, there are times when one corpse is worth more than a thousand dead.

The death of Queen Elizabeth's husband was followed by a whole week's bombardment of hollow platitudes and rabidly nationalistic slogans. It couldn't have been more chauvinistic. It looked more like Stalin's funeral than a tribute to the consort to the head of state of a democratic monarchy. Newspapers and TV blessed the Prince's timely farewell. His passing was like an invigorating tonic for a rather bored audience, fed up with news about the pandemic. Big Media is all about notoriety and volume. The death of a top celebrity is worth more than piles of anonymous corpses found inside a mass grave.

An honest person, a true politician, would not feel ashamed to follow, literally, the advice of Robert Gascoyne-Cecil: *Good government consists in doing as little as possible*. What is all the vapid hyperactivity about if not promotional stunts and lust for panoptic control?

Take the United States, for instance, the land of the free and the home of gigantic supermarkets, a country where it is possible to find a law for every contingency on any available shelf. The US legislative magnum corpus is composed of federal laws, state laws and local laws. Since 1789 Congress has enacted more than 30,000 federal laws. In the last five completed biennial terms (2011-2021) 1694 federal laws were passed. According to the Washington Post, state legislatures in 47 states and the District of Columbia's city council passed more than 24,000 bills into law in 2014 alone, an average of 462 new laws per state.

Of all the laws that make up this colossal mass, how many are still in force? Nobody knows for sure. It is one of the best kept secrets in the entire galaxy as well as the legacy that generations of elite bureaucrats recklessly left behind, like all those abominable, tawdry behemoths that litter the public space, made out of concrete or cement in order to intimidate whoever dares to imagine the possibility of eliminating them.

The way American political analyst P.J.O'Rourke approaches the subject reminds the city of the immortals.

Our government gets more than thugs in a protection racket demand, more even than discarded first wives of famous rich men receive in divorce court. Then this government, swollen and arrogant with pelf, goes butting into our business. It checks the amount of tropical oils in our snack foods, tells us what kind of gasoline we can buy for our cars and how fast we can drive them, bosses us around about retirement, education and what's on TV; counts our noses and asks fresh questions about who's still living at home and how many bathrooms we have; decides whether the door to our office or shop should have steps or a wheelchair ramp; decrees the gender and complexion of the people to be hired there; lectures us on safe sex; dictates what we can sniff, some and swallow; and waylays young men, ships them to distant places and tells them to shoot people they don't even know. 6

What are people going to do with these good for nothing law-making machines that only serve to hide under mountains of files the lavish life they lead? The idler they are, the greater the number of laws they produce as if they were cars in an assembly line. Isn't it time to give way to another class of representatives, a new breed that takes the lead and brings some order? This new class of people would be able to earn the noble title of civil servants by repealing thousands of laws that are not only useless but totalitarian in nature as they intrude into every corner of lives and property. Time is ripe to proceed and substitute the new Ancien Régime—lawmakers must make room for law shredders.

So when can we quit passing laws and raising taxes? When can we say of our political system, "Stick a fork in it, it's done"? When will our officers, officials and magistrates realize their jobs are finished and return, like Cincinnatus, to the plow or, as it were, to the law practice or the car dealership? The mystery of

government is not how Washington works but how to make it stop. 7

Take the US Federal Government as an example of the way governments grow not only without opposition but with the full endorsement of vocal minorities and indifferent majorities. The US Federal Government is the largest employer in the world. There are more than a hundred countries around the world whose total population are smaller.

Size and time elapsed can be a paramount hindrance to the proper performance of real politics and democracy, an obstacle which relates to a long standing ontological question: Can a set of fundamental principles that regulate the life of an entire society, intended for a population of 2.5 million, be applied two hundred years later to a completely different society of 380 million people? The lack of an edifying purpose in the lives of millions inevitably leads to a suicidal conformism.

In the introduction to the novel *Junky*, William Burroughs says that a person becomes addicted to narcotics when nothing motivates him in another direction. *The drug wins by default*, he says.

Something similar happened to Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments and War Production of the Third Reich and one of Hitler's most trusted men. There is no other way to understand how an architect with a solid intellectual and academic background threw in his lot with the Nazis and allowed himself to be slavishly functional to the Führer's designs until the closing minutes of the war.

Speer was one of a kind in the Third Reich. He met Hitler in 1933 and rapidly became a member of his inner circle. For the next twelve years both men maintained one of the most powerful and extraordinary relationships.

In his memoirs, written while serving a sentence in Spandau Prison, he confesses that he adhered to National Socialism out of

frivolity and superstition. He doesn't use those words but, in his own way, he reveals that, despite his culture and education, he was won over by the general mediocrity that prevailed in Germany during the interwar period. He, like millions of others, was lazy enough not to care or, in other words, indolent to the point of being carried away by a daydream—that someone would do the job for him without the need of control, without the need of a ubiquitous scourge.

Simplifying extremely complex issues, promising the impossible and, like a witch doctor, proposing home remedies for the cure of terminal illnesses, Hitler took advantage of the misery and ignorance prevailing in the devastated Germany of the 1920s. He thus gained the fundamental ingredient every thug needs to tighten his grip on power: time. Time to loot, time to curtail individual freedoms, time to perpetrate a genocide with scientific certification.

For a person determined to write a book there is no condition that offers fewer distractions than the quietude of a dungeon. Henri Pirenne and Boethius, among others, had a taste of the experience. In Spandau, Speer could afford the luxury of a room of his own.

While enjoying the quietness of the prison cell, Speer wrote: *Around 1931 Hitler declared: "Someone will have to do things very simply. Today the thinking has become too complicated. A person without culture, a peasant, for example, could easily solve all the problems because his mind is not contaminated, and he would also have the strength to carry out his simple ideas." For us, this sentence had the category of an oracle and worked as a harbinger of Hitler's arrival to power.* 8

The current disenchantment with premier league *leaders* polluting politics on an industrial scale is inevitable but not surprising. After all, with the passing of time any system, particularly a social one, gravitates towards a higher degree of disorder.

For the time being, impunity is guaranteed. However, daredevils should know it is not possible to promote decadence and expect not to be slashed by the barbarian's axe.

1. Jorge Luis Borges. *The Immortal*. 1947
2. Henrik Ibsen. *An Enemy of the People*. 1882
3. Jorge Luis Borges. *The Aleph*. 1945
4. Isaac Newton. *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. 1687
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXvfqUe4EFQ>
6. P.J.O'Rourke. *Parliament of Whores*. 1991
7. *Ibid.*
8. Albert Speer. *Inside the Third Reich*. 1969

Epic

There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact.

S.H.

Epic is a literary genre. As such it is not part of everyday life in the same way as danger music isn't if a car is about to hit us. However, the call for a mass gathering is always advertised as if it were the levy for Cyrus the Younger's anabasis. A vehement rhetoric, heroic overtones and a solemn pledge to accomplish lofty goals are the means usually used to attract as many people as possible. The picture is completed with spectacular deployments of assorted hyperboles, the darling of any rally worthy of the name. Along with fear, vanity and compassion are among the most primal of emotions.

Demagogues are well aware that sentimentality is the Achilles heel of the lion's share of the population. Thus, they appeal to compassion in each of their speeches and measures. They know that the ignoramus live immersed in an ocean of elementary emotions and that reason is alien to their existence.

Ambition does not weary me. I fear but few things, and I do not fear death in the least. I am but little given to pity, and I could wish I was not so at all. Though there is nothing I would not do to comfort an afflicted person, and I really believe that one should do all one can to show great sympathy to him for his misfortune, for miserable people are so foolish that this does them the greatest good in the world; yet I also hold that we should be content with expressing sympathy, and carefully avoid having any. It is a passion that is wholly worthless in a well-regulated mind, which only serves to weaken the heart, and which should be left to ordinary persons, who, as they never do anything from reason, have need of passions to stimulate their actions. 1

There are too many well-fed demonstrators in these irrelevant rallies. Instead of taking a book, as Pascal wisely suggests, they

prefer to take to the streets where they feel important, notwithstanding the fact that any person among the mob is less than one rather than a valuable individual. Mottos and missions, no matter how lavishly they are proclaimed, have nothing to do with the lives and worries of the people who have to work to put food on a table.

A crowded square, they say, is the environment that consecrates the citizenry as a political subject and each person as a soldier of a just cause. The formula hides the real reason for the gathering: the electoral benefit of the organizers. A packed plaza is just another gear of the proselytizing machine. *The world resembles a fat, soft teat people cling to their entire life. Every need is taken care of except one—purpose, meaning.* So, people go to the rally, enjoy some sweetly affirmative bullshit, take a picture and go back home. Real-life epics work miracles for an intellectually slovenly existence.

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate and countless squares filled to the brim that served no honorable purpose—imaginary battles lost in memory fissures, *like tears in rain.* Neither do the masses are the makers of history nor do five thousand sheep make a legion.

In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti states, with precision and beauty:

It is only in a crowd that man can become free of this fear of being touched. That is the only situation in which the fear changes into its opposite. The crowd he needs is the dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body; a crowd, too, whose physical constitution is also dense, or compact, so that he no longer notices who it is that presses against him. As soon as a man has surrendered himself to the crowd, he ceases to fear its touch. Ideally, all are equal there; no distinctions count, not even that of sex. The man pressed against him is the same as himself. He feels him as he feels himself. Suddenly it is as though everything were

happening in one and the same body. This is perhaps one of the reasons why a crowd seeks to close in on itself: it wants to rid each individual as completely as possible of the fear of being touched. The more fiercely people press together, the more certain they feel that they do not fear each other. This reversal of the fear of being touched belongs to the nature of crowds. The feeling of relief is most striking where the density of the crowd is greatest.

The crowd, suddenly there where there was nothing before, is a mysterious and universal phenomenon. A few people may have been standing together-five, ten or twelve, not more; nothing has been announced, nothing is expected. Suddenly everywhere is black with people and more come streaming from all sides as though streets had only one direction. Most of them do not know what has happened and, if questioned, have no answer; but they hurry to be there where most other people are. There is a determination in their movement which is quite different from the expression of ordinary curiosity. It seems as though the movement of some of them transmits itself to the others. But that is not all; they have a goal which is there before they can find words for it. This goal is the blackest spot where most people are gathered.

Massive demonstrations are the preferred pastime of idle cliques. They contribute nothing and achieve nothing. Playing Risk with flesh and blood is an anachronistic exercise and *taking to the streets* is a vain slogan that inflames the sentimentality of people adrift in the intellectual tragedy of their existence. Rally participants may overflow a large stadium but can rarely process anything that exceeds the threshold of the most primary syntactic constructions. Demonstrations are pseudo military gymnastics designed for lost souls. People with no purpose in life love to play Napoleon and when they do so they look more pathetic than they ever did, as though they were wearing a home-made Roman soldier costume at a carnival fair. In the digital era, flocking the streets has an illusory value and a stupefying function. Fake epics

are the pastime of barren minorities. Reality has become, these days more than ever, the avatar of a disproportionate, endless soccer pitch.

Soccer is popular because stupidity is popular, Jorge Luis Borges used to say.

The dictum also makes sense when it comes to the politics of make believe. As literary critic Shaj Mathew says:

Soccer is inextricably tied to nationalism, another one of Borges' objections to the sport. "Nationalism only allows for affirmations, and every doctrine that discards doubt, negation, is a form of fanaticism and stupidity," he said. National teams generate nationalistic fervor, creating the possibility for an unscrupulous government to use a star player as a mouthpiece to legitimize itself. ...

Borges did call soccer "aesthetically ugly." He did say, "Soccer is one of England's biggest crimes." And apparently, he even scheduled one of his lectures so that it would intentionally conflict with Argentina's first game of the 1978 World Cup. But Borges' distaste for the sport stemmed from something far more troubling than aesthetics. His problem was with soccer fan culture, which he linked to the kind of blind popular support that propped up the leaders of the twentieth century's most horrifying political movements. In his lifetime, he saw elements of fascism, Peronism, and even anti-Semitism emerge in the Argentinean political sphere, so his intense suspicion of popular political movements and mass culture—the apogee of which, in Argentina, is soccer—makes a lot of sense. ("There is an idea of supremacy, of power, [in soccer] that seems horrible to me," he once wrote.) Borges opposed dogmatism in any shape or form, so he was naturally suspicious of his countrymen's unqualified devotion to any doctrine or religion—even to their dear albiceleste. 2

A political rally works both ways: inwards to its lethargic participants and outwards to an inert audience that enjoys watching massive gatherings as if they were a Hollywood blockbuster or a professional football game for that matter.

In *Esse Est Percipi*, a short story Borges wrote with his friend and writing partner, Adolfo Bioy Casares, we learn that soccer has ceased to be a sport and entered the realm of spectacle. *A representation of sport has replaced actual sport*, as Mathew puts it. While physical stadiums are long gone and their ruins are just a curiosity for tourists and passers-by, the games have become virtual entities. An easily duped crowd follows *nonexistent games on TV and the radio without questioning a thing*. As a matter of fact, a character in the short story points out that the last time a soccer match was played in Buenos Aires was on 24 June 1937. From that exact time on, soccer and other sports have belonged to the genre of drama, performed by a professional announcer in a booth and by actors on the playing field wearing jerseys before TV cameras.

The story illustrates a sour critique of soccer as an intrinsic part of mass culture—indeed a blatant oxymoron—as well as of the complicity of the news industry in the creation of a spectacle that, as Mathew says, *leaves itself open to demagoguery and manipulation*.

According to Borges, humans feel the need to belong to a grand universal plan, something bigger than ourselves. Religion does it for some people, soccer for others. Characters in the Borgesian corpus often grapple with this desire, turning to ideologues or movements to disastrous effect: The narrator of the story “Deutsches Requiem” becomes a Nazi, while in “The Lottery in Babylon” and “The Congress,” small, innocuous-seeming organizations quickly transform into vast, totalitarian bureaucracies that dole out corporal punishment or burn books. We want to be a part of something bigger, so much so that we

blind ourselves to the flaws that develop in these grand plans—or the flaws that were inherent to them all along. 3

Massive mobilizations and abrasive sports' matches bear a striking resemblance to each other. Fanaticism and profit are their common denominators. The pen may be mightier than the sword but it is surely not mightier than the ball.

The rally held on 13 June 2021 in Madrid's Plaza Colón against the government's plan to pardon nine jailed Catalan separatist leaders was not the exception that proves the rule. For Pedro Sánchez, president of the government of Spain and a man with a severe ontological deficit, the massive protest was a harmless joke. Far from twisting his arm the rally was the sign he needed to confirm the course he had already set. The mass gathering was a futile massage for an ocean of egos, and a counterproductive move. It was a classic case of a Toys "R" Us epic.

Why did Sánchez want to grant presidential pardons?, swarms of pundits wondered, on television and in other inconsequential forums, while they aggressively answered their own questions so as not to listen to the interlocutor who insisted on interrupting the interrupter. Differentiating the real from the illusory is the ordeal of the would-be pragmatist. *Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence*, said one philosopher, though not exactly Karl Popper. 4

For the presidential pardon to be consummated it was not enough to degrade politics with actions that violate its nature, it was also necessary to destroy it within the domain of words. The felons were pardoned, Sánchez sidekicks said, because it was a political issue, as if politics were a twilight zone where everything is allowed and everything could be forgiven. Politics is not the rule of discretion. Genuine politics, the real thing—again, that annoying emergence that insists and persists—is quite the opposite. Precisely because it is a political issue, a scenario in

which multiple modes of arbitration maintain a delicate balance in order to mark a dividing line between the human and the herd, sentences should be final and keep out of the reach of partisan or personal maneuvers. All the rest is literature.

What is real? Real is what is in plain sight, whether it is a material or an incorporeal object. Edgar Allan Poe gives a master class in pragmatism in his short story *The Purloined Letter*. A coveted epistle written by the queen's lover has been stolen from her boudoir by a minister in order to blackmail the monarch. An exhaustive search of the minister's town house led by the police prefect and a team of detectives was unsuccessful because the party failed to see the obvious. The letter was not hidden but was actually in a card rack hanging from a wall, clearly visible, hidden in plain sight, as it were. The policemen were incompetent within reason. *Nihil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio*.

Ideology disturbs the eye but does not affect the object. What is usually filched, in the case of organized mass gatherings, is power and its byproducts—luxurious perks to which the ruling elites cling to with addictive obsession. Humanity is a huge train that encompasses a handful of engines dragging around a myriad of carriages or, more dramatically, as wit has it, *a game where an army of psychopaths call the shots and millions of psychotics follow suit*. Social media is the supreme manifestation of both metaphors.

Let us examine what the formidable Violet Crawley, one of the most distinguished individualists ever to draw breath on this erratic planet, has to say in the course of a family feud between those who are in favor of the Royal Yorkshire County Hospital taking control over the Downton Cottage Hospital and those who oppose the merger. The Dowager Countess of Grantham's brief rant works as a valuable memo.

For years, I've watched governments take control of our lives and their argument is always the same—fewer costs, greater

efficiency. But the result is the same too— less control by the people, more control by the state, until the individual's own wishes count for nothing. That is what I consider my duty to resist. The point of a so-called great family is to protect our freedoms. That is why the barons made King John sign the Magna Carta.

David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, picked up Lady Crawley's rumination and made it the cornerstone of one of his articles.

Her case against hospital consolidation reminds me of John Stuart Mill's "objections to government interference" in On Liberty:

The objections to government interference, when it is not such as to involve infringement of liberty, may be of three kinds.

The first is, when the thing to be done is likely to be better done by individuals than by the government. Speaking generally, there is no one so fit to conduct any business, or to determine how or by whom it shall be conducted, as those who are personally interested in it. This principle condemns the interferences, once so common, of the legislature, or the officers of government, with the ordinary processes of industry. ...

The second objection is more nearly allied to our subject. In many cases, though individuals may not do the particular thing so well, on the average, as the officers of government, it is nevertheless desirable that it should be done by them, rather than by the government, as a means to their own mental education—a mode of strengthening their active faculties, exercising their judgment, and giving them a familiar knowledge of the subjects with which they are thus left to deal. ... Without these habits and powers, a free constitution can neither be worked nor preserved, as is exemplified by the too-often transitory nature of political freedom in countries where it does not rest upon a sufficient basis of local liberties. The management of purely local business

by the localities, and of the great enterprises of industry by the union of those who voluntarily supply the pecuniary means, is further recommended by all the advantages which have been set forth in this Essay as belonging to individuality of development, and diversity of modes of action. Government operations tend to be everywhere alike. With individuals and voluntary associations, on the contrary, there are varied experiments, and endless diversity of experience. ...

The third, and most cogent reason for restricting the interference of government, is the great evil of adding unnecessarily to its power. Every function superadded to those already exercised by the government, causes its influence over hopes and fears to be more widely diffused, and converts, more and more, the active and ambitious part of the public into hangers-on of the government, or of some party which aims at becoming the government.

If Lady Grantham had not read Mill — her granddaughter Lady Mary said last night that aristocratic young ladies were taught only “French, prejudice and dance steps” — we can be sure that the show’s creator Julian Fellowes did. So, three cheers for Julian Fellowes and his injection of Millian liberty into television drama. 5

A dynamic crowd offers an impressive visual spectacle, always appealing to audiences thirsting for shocking images as well as to those with a knack for striking a pose on social media wearing sunglasses *à la mode*. The banality of good, as it were.

Until twenty years ago the age-old consensus was in full swing—TV news shows set the standard image of the world. Something as big and complex as the planet that not even the most illustrious scholars had been able to fit into vast encyclopedias, was suddenly presented inside a 20” box equipped with a fluorescent screen. Thus, the entire rock was reduced to a series

of strings of still photos that, edited in sequences of no more than a few seconds, structured an institutionalized narrative that might vary as to the topics but not as to substance. This was the standard that controlled the news cycle and set the basis for the illusion of a new world representation. By way of brute force—similar technique, vocabulary, wording and syntax repeated globally millions of times over the course of decades—a cutout that passed for an accurate rendering of the whole was implanted in the brains of billions endorsing and cherishing the narrative by letting it enter their homes. No matter the name of the country, no matter the language, all major news outlets followed the same pattern—a one-size-fits-all matrix that defined their agendas and the way these agendas were presented for half a century. *For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple and wrong.*

There is probably nothing more naive than buying a product because the seller sings its praises. In spite of that, a business that is nothing but mere entertainment, like the cinema, was sold, and eagerly gobbled up by mass audiences, as a serious, credible representation of the material reality beyond the TV studios. Although television no longer fits into that role—TV news shows are categorically ignored by millennials and their successors—it is worth thinking about how the world picture was engineered by mechanisms that repetition rendered natural as the wind. Major news networks as such are the rapidly fading past. Currently, their existence is inextricably linked to the Internet. The new age of the world picture is heavily defined by social media.

It doesn't seem possible that a man who owns a television network can be such a bad liar. It seems so essential to his success. The line, usually credited to Truman Capote, strikes as something pretty obvious. TV lies are as customary as children's mischiefs. Social media emboldens mainstream news corporations to acid levels of misinformation and propaganda campaigns. They have the whip hand. Today, the news industry

regime is dictated by the Multitude permanently packing the digital plaza. Corporate TV news shows are the madam who runs the bordello, but by no means its owners.

In his essay *On Television*, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu works as a haruspex inspecting the entrails of the so-called *political programs* aired by major traditional TV stations.

Even at the risk of new misunderstandings, I want to try to show how the journalistic field reduces and imposes on the public a very particular vision of the political field, a vision that is grounded in the very structure of the journalistic field and in journalists' specific interests produced in and by that field.

In a world ruled by the fear of being boring and anxiety about being amusing at all costs, politics is bound to be unappealing, better kept out of prime time as much as possible. So, insofar as it does have to be addressed, this not very exciting and even depressing spectacle, which is so difficult to deal with, has to be made interesting. This imperative explains why, in the United States as much as in Europe, there is a tendency to shunt aside serious commentators and investigative reporters in favor of the talk show host. It also explains why real information, analysis, in-depth interviews, expert discussions, and serious documentaries lose out to pure entertainment and, in particular, to mindless talk show chatter between “approved” and interchangeable speakers. ...

To understand what is said in these staged “exchanges” and, in particular, what can be said, would require a detailed analysis of the selection process for these individuals, whom Americans call “panelists”. These people are always available —meaning always ready not merely to participate but to play the game—and they answer all the questions journalists ask, no matter how silly or outrageous. They're ready for everything and anything, which means to make any concession (as to the subject under discussion, the other participants, and so on), any compromise, any deal as long as they can be “in” on things and receive the

direct and indirect benefits of “media” celebrity prestige in the media world, big fees on the lecture circuit, and so on. Further, particularly at the pre-interviews conducted by some producers in the United States and increasingly in Europe as well, prospective panelists must present their positions in uncomplicated, clear, and striking terms. Above all, they must avoid the quagmire of intellectual complexity. (As the maxim goes, “The less you know, the better off you are.”)

To justify this policy of demagogic simplification (which is absolutely and utterly contrary to the democratic goal of informing or educating people by interesting them), journalists point to the public's expectations. But in fact they are projecting onto the public their own inclinations and their own views. Because they're so afraid of being boring, they opt for confrontations over debates prefer polemics over rigorous argument, and in general, do whatever they can to promote conflict. They prefer to confront individuals (politicians in particular) instead of confronting their arguments, that is, what's really at stake in the debate, whether the budget deficit, taxes, or the balance trade. Given that their claims to competence are based more on their claims to close contacts in the political realm, including access to insider information (even rumors and malicious gossip), than on the objectivity of their observation and investigation, journalists like to stick to their home territory. They direct attention to the game and its players rather than to what is really at stake, because these are the sources of their interest and expertise. They are more interested in the tactics of politics than in the substance, and more concerned with the political effect of speeches and politicians' maneuverings within the political field (in terms of coalitions, alliances, or individual conflicts) than with the meaning of these. 6

Spoon-fed ad nauseam people behave like remote controlled, elated zealots. They jump, they sweat, they smile. They are delighted to have a father who takes them to the playground and gives them permission to shout and curse freely.

Reductionism is the sacred fire that paves the way to wellness and fuels the impulse to turn a boring life into an attractive experience, a dull existence into a fascinating trip and sad routines into exciting adventures. No plan is more attractive to an erratic existence than being part of a fake epic feat. TV and social media have the formula for happiness.

It is not unwise to view the audience of these shows in the light that literary critic Kingsley Amis shed on the protagonists of the action novel and its fans. It is about archetypal presences with mythical hero profiles, such as the Homeric Odysseus; resourceful individuals embarking on perilous personal adventures, navigating a hostile world of erotic fascination, admired from an armchair by sedentary travelers discontent with their unbearable daily burden, willing to release their sadistic impulses and enjoy amatory recreation with a varied gallery of men and women.

For decent people the new global environment is like inhabiting the worst nightmare—corrupt maneuvering instead of true statesmanship, sleazy activists in lieu of trained journalists and the mob rather than competent editors setting the standard for the printed word. An educated person feels as if he were wandering naked inside an infinite, ever changing supermarket devoid of logic where the most exalted coexists with the most abominable and where chaos mongers calls the shots. Inside it everything has a place albeit without rhyme or reason. The atrocious reality causes in the visitor uneasiness, intellectual horror and a physical shudder. An analogy that points to the ultimate ontological question: Who runs a country? The answer is simple: People do. Suppress honest working people and there is no country left, not even a village, but a nameless tract, a no man's land.

To elected bureaucrats the 2020 pandemic outbreak has never been about facts or science or the well-being of the people, let alone about an opportunity to rule as statesmen would; it has always been about aggregating power and gaining incremental

control. The virus provided them with the opportunity of grabbing as much as they could get while pressing their knees into people's necks. Regrettably, that is not the worst problem. The real tragedy hits like a thunderbolt when one realizes that people everywhere beg to have their heads smashed against the pavement. Did novelist Sebastian Faulks nail it when he claimed that the current generation is the first in human history to be stupider than the previous one? What a daring assertion.

Governments and Big Media do their best to ingratiate themselves with the crowd hitting phone screens. Clicks equal votes and sales in the era of hyper-accelerated solipsism. Meanwhile, the emergence of social media ended up destroying the civilized world or what was left of it—bits and pieces left forlornly hanging in the balance.

The *free world* was authoritarian enough before the emergence of the digital era. The Internet turned it into a humongous panopticon that not even the fertile imaginings of Jeremy Bentham could have dreamt up. From 2020 onwards, the totalitarian pulse accelerated to a level never imagined by the cruelest despots ever to set foot on the planet. The gravity of the situation lies in its bottom-up condition, in the subservient nature of the prison inmates.

However, although some cynical minds may claim there is a tunnel at the end of the light, truth is that the not-so-distant future could present a picture with many shadows but also with vigorous luminous traces.

The new generations, Millennials and Zoomers, reject the oligarchic regime sold as democratic to the laziest minds and despise rulers because they do not consider themselves cattle. Offshoots of the digital era, these newcomers are nomads who yearn for an open society with an efficient public sector -not the totalitarian degeneration called State- administered by true politicians, an extinct species if it ever really existed outside the domain of libraries and the realm of theory.

The infamous *social contracts* are falling apart the world over and none of the great political analysts seem to notice. The topic is deliberately absent. Bureaucracies, meanwhile, play blind. Like children, they close their eyes to avert the menace. In any case, the conditions are already ripe to ask the following question: What would a government be worth if it emerged from a process ignored by more than half of the electorate? The mystery is soon to be revealed.

The *democratic system*, as the current regime is globally known, has lost every last bit of legitimacy. The industrial society's finale is approaching relentlessly. Its successor, the digital industrial society, is progressing full steam ahead.

The transition will have to contend with strong turbulence, most likely with devastating consequences in many cases. Electoral absenteeism, a phenomenon that began to accelerate after the global lockdowns, is a reflection of something much more serious to come if the bureaucratic elites do not immediately renounce privileges and impunity. The unanimous consensus is that they will not.

Harsh reality is always better than false hope.

1. François de La Rochefoucauld. *Maximes*. 1665.
2. *The New Republic*. 20 June 2014
3. *Ibid*.
4. Louis Althusser. *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. 1970
5. David Boaz. Cato Institute website. 25 January 2016
6. Pierre Bourdieu. *On Television*. 1996

The End