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Beyond Fire and Fury: Trump as American as Apple Pie?

Maybe time to appreciate the dish

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Introduction

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Produced on the occasion of the response to the critical commentary of [Michael Wolff](#)

(*Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, 2018; *Donald Trump Didn't Want to Be President*, *New York Magazine*, 3 January 2018)

Introduction

This is an effort to draw together a variety of threads relating to personal and collective exposure to the Trump phenomenon. This seems appropriate at a time when many are relishing the vulnerability of Trump to the final consequences of his idiosyncratic behaviour and declarations (Abigail Tracy, *Trump's "Fire and Fury" Nightmare Keeps Getting Worse: the White House is racing to contain the damage*. *Vanity Fair*, 4 January 2018; Quentin Fottrell, *'Fire and Fury' is No. 1 on Amazon -- will Trump make America read again?* *MarketWatch*, 6 January 2018).

The current dynamics are highly reminiscent of the perverse anticipation in the closing processes of a lynch mob. There is a desire to observe his bombastic arrogance torn to shreds for all to see -- and to vicariously indulge in subjecting him to any humiliation conceivable. Is it time to give the guy a break -- or just to focus on breaking him?

The unfortunate twist to this is, as spectators in this process, the onlookers are naive in believing they are detached from it rather than deeply engaged in it to an unexplored degree. This is evident in the vicarious pleasure experienced in the culmination of any drama when the "bad guy" gets his just desserts -- however horrifically he is torn apart. The media focus to which all have been subject, and in which all have indulged, has been on Trump-the-individual. The difficulty of course is that Trump was remarkably successful in heroically navigating the savagery of the American democratic process to become Trump-the-President.

Americans can aspire to disassociating themselves from such questionable characteristics and projecting them all onto Trump-the-individual -- to the extent that they do indeed deprecate them. This is the cathartic function of scapegoats in society. It follows from the pattern of the witch hunts so assiduously cultivated by various forms of Christianity. It is celebrated in many carnivals with the mock dethroning of royalty. The pleasure is currently also evident in tearing down iconic celebrities through allegations of sexual harassment.

The accumulating deprecation of Trump is however better understood as deprecation of a major feature of the American psyche -- including his allegedly childlike desire for instant gratification. The issue could be well-framed by adapting the famous declaration by Pogo: *We have met the enemy and he is us*. It could usefully read: *We have met Trump and he is us*.

However, as a media phenomenon worldwide, observers elsewhere are also naive to believe that the deprecated behaviour can be projected uniquely onto Trump-the-individual or onto the "Americans" he legitimately represents as Trump-the-President. For non-Americans, Pogo's phrase could even read: *We have met Trump and he is US*.

From this perspective, "Trump" might be more fruitfully recognized as a behavioural complex in our psyches -- as much as are "America" and "Americans". It is indeed possible to indulge endlessly in condemnation of both in some measure -- as has been a primary feature of cafe, bar, and media commentary for many months. Whether healthy or unhealthy, this does however merit being seen as a displacement from recognition of the extent to which both characterize processes in our own individual and collective psyches. More problematic is the extent to which some commentary, by those otherwise esteemed, has become remarkably hysterical.

To what extent does Trump's wealth reflect an aspiration of many? Similarly, to what extent does his associated excessive consumption reflect a pattern in which many would be delighted to indulge -- as cultivated worldwide in the image of "America"?

Then there is the dimension of Trump-the-human-being with particular strengths and weaknesses. Is he to be especially condemned for these -- beyond the manner in which they might be condemned in an employer, in a peer group, in a dominating neighbourhood personality, or in a dominating relative? Or, dominance aside, are many of Trump's characteristics only too familiar in relationships in business, academia, the military or sport? Weaknesses may include alcohol abuse, drug abuse, gambling, and the like. Encountered in such contexts, these evoke social navigational skills -- as with an overbearing car salesperson or a drunken uncle. Eccentricities are tolerated or reframed with humour. Trump is renowned for avoiding alcohol and drugs. So framed, his most offensive statements might even be set aside as bluster -- typical of many who voted for him

To what extent is appreciation of Trump-the-human-being lost in the volume of bombast (of which he is the primary source) and of condemnation by others -- some of which regret not being in his position? How can he be more fruitfully appreciated as a human being who -- through his personality -- has indeed called into question a wide variety of questionable processes in society? History may choose to see him in that light -- to a far greater degree than can be imagined from the incitement to violence against his person by the media for our current gratification.

The following comments follow from earlier consideration of ways of reframing the experience of the Trump phenomenon (*Evaluating the Grossness of Gross Domestic Product*, 2016; *Engaging an Opposing Ideology via Martial Arts Philosophy: reframing the challenge of Trump and Jihadism as worthy opponents*, 2016; *Radical Disaffection Engendered by Elitist Groupthink? Democratic rehearsal of the final battle between the Forces of Light and Darkness*, 2016).

In the quest for a larger framework through which to appreciate the phenomenon, a few have suggested that he might be better compared to the trickster archetype (Corey Pein, *Donald Trump, Trickster God, The Baffler*, 4 March 2016). More specifically he could be usefully compared to Loki in Norse mythology, celebrated in Wagner's operatic cycle of *The Ring of the Nibelung*, as discussed separately (*Identity in question via Trump: Narcissus vs Loki?*, 2017). In the conclusion of the first opera *Das Rheingold*, Loki reveals his hope to turn into fire and destroy Valhalla -- the realm of the Gods -- and in the final opera *Götterdämmerung* Valhalla is set alight, destroying the Gods.

Such an association would seem especially appropriate at this time, given the title of the book on which attention is now so avidly focused (*Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, 2018). The title derives from Trump's threat against North Korea -- with its continuing implications for nuclear war (*Trump Threatens "Fire and Fury" Against North Korea if It Endangers U.S.*, *The New York Times*, 8 August 2017). Given the increasing challenge to his mental capacities by the "Gods", their resistance is consistent with the classical phrase: *Those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad*.

The association with Loki can also be explored further in the light of Trump's fascination with gold -- given the preoccupation of Loki with that of the *Rhine Maidens* and their liquidity. Trump's role in that respect could be said to be remarkable (Anna Giaritelli, *Trump celebrates Dow Jones passing 25,000 mark and promises more cuts to regulations*, *Washington Examiner*, 4 January 2018; *Dow Jones Surpasses 25,000 for the First Time as Stocks Rally Despite Winter Storm*, *Fortune*, 4 January 2018).

As indicated in what follows, many have recognized that Trump is as "American as apple pie". Given the potential violence with which he is now associated, any such comparison recalls the controversy aroused by incendiary use of a variant of the phrase by Rap Brown in 1967: *I say violence is necessary. Violence is a part of America's culture. It is as American as cherry pie*. Rather than being "inside The White House", perhaps this poorly understood dimension can now be more fruitfully recognized in all of us (*Global Incomprehension of Increasing Violence*, 2016). Whether consciously or unconsciously, perhaps the "Gods" that the Trump-in-us aspires to destroy are the fake values undermining progress towards a sustainable global civilization.

Trump as American as apple pie?

Trump specifically? As noted above the focus on Trump-the-individual avoids the sense in which Trump is a much-appreciated reflection of many American voters -- despite the sophistication of critical comment regarding his behaviour. It is useful to gather together comments recognizing the extent to which he is indeed as American as apple pie -- perhaps in a more incendiary manner than other characteristics with which variants of the phrase have been associated.

Zoe Samudzi: *Donald Trump is not uniquely bigoted: he's "as American as apple pie"* (*OpenDemocracy*, 26 October 2016):

In fact, Donald Trump is as quintessentially American as they come. In so many ways, Trump is the president that contemporary white America deserves: he is an amalgamation of some of the worst racism, ableism, misogyny, and anti-poor attitudes and rhetoric that collectively comprise "American values".

Lennox Farrell: *Donald Trump -- as American as apple pie?* (*Share*, 18 May 2016):

But finger-pointing is doing the easy. The hard part is deciphering what spurs on the political and cultural phenomenon he is. He flouts all the rules of civil discourse. He is brazenly misogynistic, referring to female opponents as if they were strumpets. And in a political culture in which being changeable is political poison, he actually thrives on being the unpredictable outsider, changing positions in ways that would spell the death-knell for other aspirants....

One of the earliest descriptions of American social practices being synonymous with America's uses for its apple pies, was made by the Black Panther leader, Huey Newton. In this he compared America's frequent identifying with its apple pies, with its equally frequent practices of violence against African-American communities. In short, it was comparing the frequency of apple pies on America's dinner-tables with America's equally predictable practicing violence against African-Americans: from lynchings to police shootings and acquittals; from imprisonment, unemployment and denials of voting rights, to poorly funded educational

institutions and Black children drinking lead-poisoned water.

Peter Amos: *Trump is as American as Apple Pie* (*The Imagined Thing*, 13 October 2017):

Chopping off the tuft and leaving the roots all but guarantees the weed will grow back. Ignoring the deep roots of our dysfunction lets us off easy and perpetuates the illusion that the problem will disappear with its current manifestation. The illusion that one election solves it. This is not the case and we need to reckon with the political traditions we regard as normal to ensure that we are prepared for the profound challenge that the state of the Republican right truly represents.

Violence, racism, bigotry? Some commentators have set their recognition of Trump as apple pie within the larger context of racism, hate, bigotry, and the like:

M. J. Rosenberg: *Trump Gets It: Racism Is As American As Apple Pie* (*Huffington Post*, 28 September 2017):

I've been in mourning since the election. My America is gone. Racists and "alt-right" fascists have seized control of my country. And the villain, the fiend, who made this happen was Donald J. Trump, along with various helpers, most notably the cowardly Republican establishment and the Russians. Well, I'm done with that stage of mourning. I still despise Trump but I no longer think he is responsible for this catastrophe. No, the catastrophe began a long, long time ago, even before independence from Great Britain when we built our state on the backs of the enslaved and the extermination of the native peoples who lived here....

We can't blame Trump for all that and certainly not for the racism, the Jim Crow, the lynchings, the police brutality, the sheer unending hate that African Americans have experienced from the very beginning... All we can blame him for is for understanding this country better than we do and untapping the forces of hatred that were there all along... Those people we despise, including Trump, can make at least as strong a claim to representing the real America as we can.

ShelbyCourtland: *Trump Is As American As Apple Pie And Racism!* (23 January 2016):

Donald Trump is not giving bigots more of a voice than they already have.... So, don't try and pretend that Trump is just some unknown alien species that landed here and no one knows a thing about how he got here and why he is saying such things and this is the first time that we have heard such bigoted shit and oh how disturbing it all is. You're not disturbed about a goddamn thing that comes out of Trump's mouth. How ridiculously naive can you attempt to act? ...

Un-American? Un-American? Donald Trump's statements could not be MORE American! That pompous, bloated egotistical windbag and his statements are quintessentially American and don't bullshit me about how shocked you are that he is gaining in the polls and how you thought that this "joke" would go away.

Deirdre Fulton (*Channeling Nation's Ugliness, Trump More American Than You Think*, *Common Dreams*, 11 December 2015):

Much has been made of how Donald Trump's racist remarks on the 2016 presidential campaign trail are "un-American," outlandish, and -- incredibly to some -- giving him a bump in the polls. But others say it's time for a reality check. They say Trump is merely a symptom, not the disease. That he's tapping into latent cultural currents and that we shouldn't, in fact, be surprised that his anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-"other" rhetoric is boosting his campaign and invigorating white supremacy.... The real challenge, then, is to confront not the mouthpiece, but the underlying message.

Chauncey DeVega (*Donald Trump's racism is as American as apple pie*, *Salon*, 11 December 2015):

The mainstream political class is aghast at Donald Trump's bigoted statements about Muslims, Syrian refugees, Hispanics and other people of color. They have proclaimed that Donald Trump is "un-American" and that his views do not represent "American values." No good can come when we lie to ourselves. We tell lies instead of truths because this allows us to emphasize who we would like to imagine ourselves as being instead of confronting who we really are. Shorter version: The truth hurts. Donald Trump's racism, nativism and bigotry are as American as apple pie....

Racism, bigotry and xenophobia are a core part of America's national character. We cannot defeat Donald Trump until we acknowledge that fact and own its legacy.

Stephen Prothero: *Trump's religious bigotry is as American as apple pie* (*USA Today*, 8 December 2015):

Culture wars persist because the founders never quite decided whether they wanted a Christian country like England had been or a secular one like France would become. Most basically, culture wars persist because conservatism persists, and because conservatives have from the French Revolution forward seen cultural warfare as a way to win political power by preaching a gospel of the fallen and the lost -- by lamenting how far America has descended from the glory of its founding and by promising to "make America great again."

Peter Lee: *Hate Is As American As Apple Pie. So Is Trump*, *International Policy Digest*, 20 December 2015):

When confronted by discriminatory speech and actions, some make the high-minded appeal to Americans; better nature: "this isn't us." T'aint so, unfortunately. It's more like "this was us and, apparently, still is at least some of us and maybe a lot of us." And maybe "us" isn't just anxious blue-collar xenophobes. Maybe "us" includes a big chunk of the political elite and the strategists who guide them. Trump seizes upon the implicit and makes it explicit; that's his offense. And his strength...

Long story short, various streams of bigotry continually burble along in American society. When politicians sense an opportunity in an atmosphere of crisis, fear, and dissatisfaction, they can convert these toxic sidestreams into the mainstream, normalize them and, if conditions permit, institutionalize them in the generous nooks and crannies offered by the constitution at least long enough for electoral and/or financial success, albeit at the cost of thousands of lives blighted by fear and prejudice and worse.

George J. Borjas (*The Case for Extreme Immigrant Vetting: it's a practice as American as apple pie -- and for good reason*, *Politico Magazine*, 17 August 2016)

In other words, immigration vetting is as American as apple pie... even a century ago we had put in place ideological filters against anarchists, persons who advocate the destruction of property, and persons who believe in overthrowing the government of the United States.... In view of this almost 400-year track record, is it really that big a stretch to add questions, as Trump proposes, that would expand the filtering to reflect political conditions and national security concerns *today*?...

So, regardless of what you think about the Trump candidacy, the next time you hear that Trump's proposal for immigrant vetting is un-American, the correct response is that it is American to its core. And the next time you hear that Trump's proposal is crazier than crazy, the correct response is that -- given the mess the world is in -- it is the notion that we should not vet immigrants more carefully that is certifiably insane.

Protest as American as apple pie? The association with apple pie has been extended to those protesting against Trump, however violently:

D. Watkins: *Charlottesville violence: As American as apple pie* (*Salon*, 14 August 2017):

This weekend's white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, was as American as apple pie. It's not shocking or surprising - these people have been around for a long time. The main difference is that the current administration has given them the confidence to truly express themselves.

Chris Williams: *Protesting Trump "as American as Apple Pie": Sen. McConnell, Whas11*, 11 November 2016)

But the victory is also leading to protests in cities across the country. We asked for the Senate Majority Leader's take on those marching in cities including here in Louisville. He said, *Going back to the beginning of this country, we had a pretty open ability to complain about whatever you want to, and it's about as American as Apple Pie. People are free to express themselves and I don't think we should be unduly alarmed by it.*

Mental capacity of effective instigators of social change?

Unfitness for office? Despite his economic achievements (noted above), and their appeal to various sections of the electorate, there is increasing enthusiasm for framing Trump as variously unfit, whether with respect to his organizational or psychological capacities.

David Remnick: *The Increasing Unfitness of Donald Trump* (*The New Yorker*, 15 January 2018):

A new book by Michael Wolff (*Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*) amplifies, in lurid anecdote and quotation, what we have been learning elsewhere every day for the past year: Trump believed that he would lose the election, but would multiply his fame, his fortune, and his standing in American life. To near-universal shock, however, he won. And the consequences followed. Trump has no comprehension of policy and cares about it less. He surrounds himself with aides who are either wildly incompetent or utterly defeated in their attempts to domesticate the mulish and bizarre object of their attention. There are no lingering illusions about the President's capacities: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called Trump "a fucking moron" and spared us a denial. Wolff's book, which leans heavily on interviews with Steve Bannon, makes it plain that pretty much everyone in the President's circle agrees that he is, in terms of character and intellect, fantastically limited.

Michelle Goldberg: *Everyone in Trumpworld Knows He's an Idiot* (*The New York Times*, 4 January 2018):

But most of all, the book confirms what is already widely understood -- not just that Trump is entirely unfit for the presidency, but that everyone around him knows it.... And yet these people continue to either prop up or defend this sick travesty of a presidency.

Sabrina Siddiqui: *Book revelations put new focus on Donald Trump's mental health* (*The Guardian*, 5 January 2018):

Although the White House has denounced Wolff's *Fire and Fury* as "complete fantasy", the book sheds light on concerns among

top White House aides over Trump's psychological fitness for America's highest office.... Trump's highly provocative behavior has routinely been the subject of public alarm, prompting private discussions in Washington over the potential of invoking the 25th amendment, which enables the president to be removed from office if the vice-president and a majority of the cabinet deem him physically or mentally "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office".

Ezra Klein: *Incoherent, authoritarian, uninformed: Trump's New York Times interview is a scary read* (Vox, 29 December 2017):

The president of the United States is not well.... In this cogent analysis of "societal insanity", begun before the last presidential election, Allen Frances (*Saving Normal: an insider's revolt against out-of-control psychiatric diagnosis...*2013, etc.) explores at length the many societal delusions that have given rise to Trump. The delusions include a false belief in fast, easy solutions to complex problems, such as global warming (God will fix it), guns (they don't kill people; people do), dwindling resources (there will be a high-tech fix), and so on. Exploiting this societal sickness, Trump, a *skilled snake-oil salesman selling quack medicine won power because he promised quick, phony cures for the real problems burdening the significant segment of our population left out of the American dream.*

Eliza Barclay: *The psychiatrist who briefed Congress on Trump's mental state: this is "an emergency"* (Vox, 6 January 2018):

The case for evaluating the president's mental capacity -- by force if necessary... But how unwell is he, really? Could the behavior be caused by some illness eating away at his mental capacity, or is it just bad behavior? This is a question of crucial importance, not just because the vice president and the Cabinet (or Congress) would need certainty about his mental incompetence to invoke the 25th Amendment and declare him unable to do his job -- an option that, while still highly unlikely to be used, is now regularly being discussed. Of course, the question of his mental health would ultimately come down to a medical opinion. And no doctor, as far as we know, has evaluated the president's mind for fitness to serve as president. Yet there is a growing call from a group of psychiatrists -- the best medical experts at interpreting aberrant human behavior -- for exactly this: an emergency evaluation of the president's mental capacity, by force if necessary.

Trump's mental health and why people are discussing it (BBC, 6 January 2018):

Psychologists had previously speculated about symptoms they purported to see in Mr Trump's behaviour. Several books came out on the topic within months of the Trump inauguration: *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump* by Bandy X Lee, *Twilight of American Sanity* by Allen Frances and *Fantasyland* by Kurt Andersen. Dr Lee, who is a psychiatry professor at Yale, told a group of mostly-Democrat senators last month that Mr Trump was "going to unravel, and we are seeing the signs". But it's worth remembering that none of these people have treated Mr Trump, nor do they have close-up information on his state of mind. Anyone who has treated him would be going against ethics standards and, in most cases, federal law if they disclosed any details.

Defensive response? As might be expected, given the context, even attempts by Trump to defend his fitness for office and his mental capacities are now the focus of implied mockery (*Donald Trump mounts extraordinary defence of his 'mental stability'* *The Guardian*, 6 January 2018; Peter Baker and Maggie Haberman *Trump, Defending His Mental Fitness, Says He's a 'Very Stable Genius'* *New York Times*, 6 January 2018; David Nakamura and Karen Tumulty, *Trump boasts that he's a "very stable genius" amid questions over his mental fitness*, *The Washington Post*, 6 January 2018). The latter notes:

Citing his success in business and on television, as well as his victory in presidential politics on "my first try", Trump tweeted that his record "would qualify as not smart, but genius....and a very stable genius at that!" He suggested that the "Fake News Mainstream Media" are trying to smear him by using the "playbook" on President Ronald Reagan, who some believed suffered from mental deterioration due to age in the latter years of his two terms. Reagan was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease after leaving office.

Professional assessment? Immediately after his inauguration a group of "mental health professionals" decided to express their concern at the behaviour of Donald Trump by addressing a collective letter to *The New York Times* (*Mental Health Professionals Warn About Trump*, 13 February 2017; *Mental health professionals warn Trump is incapable of being president*, *The Independent*, 13 February 2017):

Mr. Trump's speech and actions demonstrate an inability to tolerate views different from his own, leading to rage reactions... Individuals with these traits distort reality to suit their psychological state, attacking facts and those who convey them... We believe that the grave emotional instability indicated by Mr. Trump's speech and actions makes him incapable of serving safely as president.

The group excuse their previous silence on the basis of the self-imposed dictum about evaluating public figures -- the **Goldwater Rule** of the American Psychiatric Association. This was instituted following a successful law suit by **Barry Goldwater** as presidential candidate in 1964, following a published survey (*The Unconscious of a Conservative: a special issue on the mind of Barry Goldwater*, *Fact*, 1964) The latter bore the cover title: *1,189 psychiatrists say Goldwater is psychologically unfit to be president!*

Unfortunately the "mental health professionals" make no reference to their ability to determine whether anyone is capable of serving safely as president -- or whether they in particular are fit to make such an assessment, especially if they are of a particular political persuasion. Strangely those agreed on the matter were reduced to 27 -- from the 1,189 in 1964. The question is all the more appropriate if the politician to be assessed has been duly elected following a testing campaign against opposition of every kind, reminiscent of many a legendary tale.

Due process? Is the implication that "mental health professionals" should in future be called upon to provide an assessment of presidential candidates? This possibility follows from concerns expressed by politicians (*Growing number of politicians 'openly questioning Donald Trump's mental health'*, *The Independent*, 17 February 2017; *Is It Time to Call Trump Mentally Ill?* *The New York Times*, 17 February 2017). Does any such criticism imply that -- other than Trump -- those seeking election to high office (like Hillary Clinton) should be assumed to be "normal" and unworthy of the considered assessment of such professionals? Has the psychological health of political leaders of the past been the subject of equivalent professional concern -- as is more often the case in the business community? What of the considered opinion of Angela Merkel, given the consequences for Europe of her decisions on refugees?

The group's criticism is also unfortunate in that the judgment of "mental health professionals" has been recently called into question by their silent complicity in government torture programmes (*How America's psychologists ended up endorsing torture*, *The Economist*, 28 July 2015; David H. Hoffman, et al, *Independent Review Relating to APA ethics guidelines, national security interrogations, and torture*, 2 July 2015). Should those psychologists involved be considered "normal" and fit to exercise their profession -- or be "defrocked" in some way.

Torture programmes might well be recognized as designed to distort the reality of opponents. Unfortunately it also recalls the criticism of James Hillman and Michael Ventura (*We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy -- and the world's getting worse*, 1992). Is the framing currently offered by the psychological professions a greater danger than Trump? The group's criticism recalls the adage: *People in glass houses should not throw stones*.

In presenting their case, the group argued that it no longer takes a psychiatrist to recognize the alarming patterns of impulsive, reckless, and narcissistic behaviour (Jon Sharman, *Psychiatrists tell Congress Donald Trump is 'a clear and present danger' to the world*, *The Independent*, 25 August 2017). Less evident is whether any such presentation necessitated the presence of those of that profession with contrary opinions as would otherwise be required in any legal process of selection of juries or witnesses to determine unacceptable bias. What indeed were the positions of members of the group on the action of their colleagues in Guantanamo? Would those convinced of Trump's mental incapacity, relish his incarceration in Guantanamo under their "supervision"?

In the absence of a balanced presentation of arguments, it is unfortunate for the profession that in presenting their case they can be readily perceived as merely a front for partisan interests, as argued by Mike Adams (*Democrats' desperate ploy to unseat President Trump over "mental health" false diagnosis will push America to bloody civil war*, *Natural News*, 7 January 2018):

This dangerous, deranged ploy is the latest desperate attempt by Democrats who first tried to eliminate Trump by weaponizing the surveillance state to illegally spy on Trump's campaign team, then attempted to block the Electoral College from confirming Trump's election victory, then tried to block Trump's inauguration, and now are drumming up a "mental health" excuse in an attempt to depose a democratically-elected President they deeply hate. This tactic, of course, mirrors the strategies of the old Soviet Union and Chinese communists who used "mental health" as an excuse to justify the mass murder of political opponents and educated citizens who opposed their political regimes.

The beatification/sanctification process of the Catholic Church makes provision for a *devil's advocate*. Having been condemned in advance -- even as "evil" -- is there any sense that Trump warrants a corresponding *angelic advocate* to articulate appreciation of his contribution to social change in the wider sense? (Ben Linders, *Devil's or Angel's Advocate: which role do you prefer?* 23 February 2011; Thomas J. Lee, *Play the Angel's Advocate, Not the Devil's Advocate*, *Minding Gaps*, May 2010).

Normality of social change agents? Expressed otherwise, could Trump be compared with Mikhail Gorbachev in his leadership role in relation to the deprecated Soviet system of the past -- then better recognized as a *"dramaturge"* (*Gorbachev: Dramaturge?! Participative Democracy vs. Participative Drama -- Lessons on social transformation for international organizations from Gorbachev*, 1991). From that perspective it can indeed be readily argued that Trump has introduced an historically new twist to participative democracy through his extensive use of tweeting.

More generally, are change agents who embody change to be considered "normal" when they enable change "through" their unusual personality? This is the question highlighted by the famous dictum of Mahatma Gandhi: *Be the change that you wish to see in the world?* In their preoccupation with normality, do psychologists have the capacity to encompass the radical eccentricities of change agents?

Rather than Trump-as-Narcissus, as many psychologists would have it, is embodiment of change the essential role of Trump-as-Loki (as suggested above)? More generally, to the extent that the gods of mythology represent the variety of human psychological tendencies in terms of a pantheon, could psychiatrists more usefully frame their analyses in terms of a systematic association of the pathology of each deity with the hundreds distinguished in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM)?

Is Loki to be diagnosed as narcissistic, for example? Such questions can be fruitfully related to *criticism of the the DSM*, notably as highlighted by Allen Frances (*DSM 5 is guide not Bible -- Ignore Its Ten Worst Changes: APA approval of DSM-5 is a sad day for psychiatry*, *Psychology Today*, 2 Decembr 2012; *Diagnosing the D.S.M.*, *The New York Times*, 12 May 2012).

In a society which depends upon the law to obstruct change in many forms, is the purported monstrosity of Trump deemed to be

unworthy of defence -- as with Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, and the like?

Unconscious civilization and "reality distortion"?

Donald Trump has facilitated recognition of the surreal nature of global society at this time, as detailed separately (*How Donald Trump swept to an unreal, surreal presidential election win*, *The Guardian*, 9 November 2016; *Surreal nature of current global governance as experienced*, 2016). As cogently argued by [John Ralston Saul](#), there is a case for recognizing its unconscious dimensions (*The Unconscious Civilization*, 1999). Of potentially greater relevance is the compilation of views of 18 psychiatrists, psychologists, and university professors on what is going on in the collective unconscious of the USA in this period (Steve Buser and Leonard Cruz (Ed.), *A Clear and Present Danger: narcissism in the era of Donald Trump*, 2016).

Reality distortion? Especially significant is the implied criticism made of the ability of a duly elected leader to "distort reality". Effectively engendering a [reality distortion field](#), this is increasingly recognized as a characteristic of the most creative forms of leadership. Are the mental capacities of the most highly successful entrepreneurs -- most notably including [Steve Jobs](#) and [Elon Musk](#) -- to be the subject of credible criticism by "mental health professionals"?

In parallel with such criticism, as noted above, there are the remarkable economic successes with which Trump can be justifiably associated -- however questionable the consequences for some in a complex environment. The editorial in an influential journal notes: *His critics can't admit it, but Trump's crazy tactics are succeeding* (*Spectator*, January 2018):

Among the many new political maladies of our age, one has been left largely undiagnosed. This is *Trump Derangement Syndrome*, a condition whereby intense dislike of the 45th president renders sufferers unable to understand what he is trying to do or allow that he is capable of success. Trump is hard to admire, it's true, and seems to revel in his ability to appal. But therein lies the secret of his power: with a few tweets, he can set the world's news agenda and drive his critics to distraction....

Trump's diplomacy is brash, to put it mildly. Yet he delivers his message in a way that cuts through to millions of people at home and abroad. He became president thanks to his uncanny ability to amplify his point. He finds arresting, often shocking, ways of making sensible points.... Trump's opponents should have learnt by now, but the derangement syndrome stops them seeing sense. When Hillary Clinton referred to his supporters as a "basket of deplorables", she walked straight into his trap. [*emphasis added*]

In the total absence of fruitful insight from "mental health professionals", **what are the psychological characteristics of effective instigators of social change** -- as may come to be appreciated by history?

Hysteria? It is remarkable to note the hysteria evoked by Trump among those previously to be esteemed as mature voices with a suitably detached perspective. This extends to commentary in the mass media and on specialized web sites previously associated with quality content. Even the titles of their contributions since Trump took office have a strange shrill quality.

Some perspective on the process is offered by contributions such as the following:

- Samuel Moyn and David Priestland: *Trump Isn't a Threat to Our Democracy. Hysteria Is.* (*The New York Times*, 11 August 2017)
- Tiffany Jenkins: *Stop the hysteria around Trump* (*BBC*, 2 March 2017)
- Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.: *A Year in Trump-Russia Hysteria* (*The Wall Street Journal*, 29 December 2017)
- Andrew Bacevich: *The Great Hysteria* (*TomDispatch*, 8 August 2017).
- Glenn Harlan Reynolds: *Of course, Trumpian hysteria and an eclipse come together: Welcome to our crazy years* (*USA Today*, 21 August 2017)|
- Jonathan Easley: *New York Times columnist warns of hysteria around Trump, Russia* (*The Hill*, 20 June 2017)
- David Brooks: *Let's Not Get Carried Away* (*The New York Times*, 20 June 2017)
- Scott Adams: *How To Know You're In a Mass Hysteria Bubble* (*Dilbert*, 17 August 2017)
- Deal W. Hudson: *Mass Hysteria Driving Attacks on the President* (*Newsmax*, 30 August 2017)

Especially disappointing is the lack of indication from those who indulge in such hysteria that they in fact have a credible alternative to Trump. Their focus is on "Dump Trump" -- being the only agenda which they share. Some of the most eminent indulge in their own form of reality distortion by claiming that Trump did not in fact win the election since he did not have the majority of the popular vote. Setting aside the American electoral process in this way is tantamount to claiming that a football team actually won because it had greater possession of the ball -- even though it did not score more than its opponent.

Curiously no hysteria is aroused by other countries who are readily indicated as having [interfered in US elections](#). Nor is anything said of the elections of other countries in which the US is documented as having interfered, irrespective of those in which no such documentation is readily available (see *Wikipedia*, [Foreign election intervention](#)).

Unconscious appeal? Seemingly missing from the perspective of the psychological professions is more explicit analysis of the appeal of Trump's campaign slogan to *Make America Great Again*. This is only too readily interpreted as having sexual connotations which call for careful commentary by responsible professionals. Is there a sense in which Americans in general feel that they suffer from some analogue to [erectile dysfunction](#)? Would this not be a more appropriate focus for psychological analysis -- or is Trump the only adequate articulator of this anxiety?

This dimension is reinforced by the exchanges with Kim Jong-un, notably the taunting references to "Little Rocket Man" -- with the implication that the US has a bigger rocket. Strange that, despite the implied size of US rockets, the implication is that the USA (following the unprecedented investment in such defences) still feels highly vulnerable to the nuclear threat from North Korea with its "little rocket".

The UN Security Council is enjoined with the greatest urgency to act accordingly. Is the US anti-missile defence system in fact itself susceptible to "erectile dysfunction"? (Andy McDonald, *Colbert Releases Erectile Dysfunction Parody About Trump's Nuclear Button*, *Huffington Post*, 4 January 2018). Unfortunately such mockery could again be considered a projection onto Trump of a source of anxiety widely shared by Americans.

In a period of increasing dependence on aphrodisiacs (with extensive impact on some wildlife species) and rising **male infertility**, the issue is potentially all the more significant for the leadership of global civilization when the leaders of other countries adopt the same slogan -- and have similar preoccupation with acquisition of missiles. Examples include:

- Nick Clegg: *How to Stop Brexit (and Make Britain Great Again)* (Bodley Head, 2017)
- Paul Farrell: *'Make Australia Great Again': rightwing MPs delight ahead of Trump's victory* (*The Guardian*, 9 November 2016)
- Ashifa Kassam: *Make Canada great again? Conservative Canucks chart course for the age of Trump* (*The Guardian*, 3 March 2017)
- Maya Kosoff: *Peter Thiel Wants to Make New Zealand Great Again* (*Vanity Fair*, 1 February 2017)
- Siphon Hlongwane: *Make South Africa Great Again!* (*The Huffington Post*, 24 February 2017)
- Daniel Béland and Klaus Petersen: *Make Denmark Great Again?* (*The Governance Blog*, 1 December 2016)
- Nicholas Vinocur: *Marine Le Pen's plan to make France great again* (*Politico*, 2 April 2017)

Monstrous need? The most recent revelations enable Trump to be further deprecated as having a monstrous need for instant gratification. Is this not the case for many at this time (Paul Roberts, *The Impulse Society: America in the Age of Instant Gratification*, 2015)?

However there is also a sense in which many have a need for monsters onto which all they abhor can be projected? Is this to be recognized as a basic cathartic process which provides a dubiously clear rationale for American domestic and foreign policy? Obvious examples include: Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Muammar Gaddafi, Adolf Hitler, Kim Jong-un -- all people "not like us".

Arguably the notion of "monstrous need" can be recognized in the unchecked need for non-renewable resources. This is a need readily framed as non-negotiable, as declared by George H. W. Bush: *The American way of life is not negotiable*. However, given the crisis of global civilization, the sense of monstrous need (with which unchecked consumption is associated) is a condition common to all in various measures.

Rather than any focus on Trump-the-individual, or on Trump-the-President, "Trump" could perhaps be most fruitfully recognized as a metaphor -- a symptom of a civilizational disease from which all suffer to some degree (*Cognitive Implications of Lifestyle Diseases of Rich and Poor*, 2010).

Bombastic bubble? Any sense of "monstrous" can be explored in terms of the "bombastic" pronouncements with which "Trump" is frequently associated:

- Allan Smith: *Trump's most outlandish, bombastic, and eye-popping tweets of 2017* (*Business Insider*, 28 December 2017)
- Rebecca Savransky: *Sanders: 'Trump's bombastic rhetoric is not appropriate'* (*The Hill*, 8 August 2017)#
- Jon Connors: *Bombastic Trump blunders into the Middle Kingdom* (*Asia Times*, 9 November 2017)
- John Nichols: *Trump's First Speech Before the UN Was an Absurd, Bombastic Disaster* (*The Nation*, 19 September 2017)
- George Skelton: *Forget comparisons, Trump's bombastic showmanship is in a league of its own* (*Los Angeles Times*, 17 March 2016)
- David Hawbecker: *Our bombastic president* (*WestLinnTidings*, 12 October 2017)

As indicated above, the fruitful emphasis is on recognition of how "Americans" in particular employ this modality -- together with many around the world. "Trump" is but a highly visible pattern for this behavioural modality in discourse. Again, it is important to emphasize that this is "our bubble" and "Trump" merely provides a conveniently disassociated projection of a modality which "we" variously cultivate in this current period. In a fundamental sense, as leader of the most powerful nation on the planet, Trump is "our voice" -- like it or not.

As a bombastic cognitive "bubble", it invites speculative reflection on how it might be "pricked" -- given its more general implications, as explored separately (*Pricking the Bubble of Global Complacent Complicity Hyperdimensional insights from the physics of bubble blowing, bursting and collapse?* 2017). It is in this sense that it is useful to be reminded of uses of "bombastic" and "bubble" in combination:

- Edan Yago: *Why, even without China, we are at the foothills of a bombastic Bubble (after a brief correction)*. (*Reddit*, 2014)
- Nathan Olivieri: *The Newsroom: How to improve our election coverage, Aaron Sorkin-style* (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 2013): What can our media networks learn from the drama-fuelled bombastic bubble that is The Newsroom about covering an election?
- Frank Leighton: *Frayed Lifelines: A Siege Survivor's Story* (2003): The Luftwaffe had been forced to bolster up their bubble of bombastic pride. The Germans proved determined pilots, and the Mediterranean grew hazardous for our shipping. But again and again the bubble was pricked by this gallantry and equally gallant captain and crew.
- Peter Boettke: *What Can Economists Know? (Coordination Problem*, 18 April 2012): ... local optimization sometimes is not the same thing as global optimization. I live in Spain (and I saw human behavior under a bombastic bubble, all of us optimizing).
- George Soros: *The Crash of 2008 and What it Means: the new paradigm for financial markets* (2009): This crisis is not confined to a particular firm or a particular segment of the financial system; it has brought the entire system to the brink of a breakdown, and it is being contained only with the greatest difficulty.... There is not just one boom-bust process or bubble to consider but two: the housing bubble and what I shall call a longer-term super-bubble.
- Dave Pell: *Hell Yes, We Are in a Bubble* (*StartupVentureCapital*, 1 September 2015): That said, we are in another bubble. But this

time it's not a financial bubble. It's a psychological one.... The psychological bubble prevents you from seeing what role timing and serendipity play in your bombastic financial success.

- Bill E. Ormusun: *How will the sharing economy bubble burst?* (*Echo*, 4 January 2016): The growth of sharing economy companies is frequently described in bombastic terms like "exponential" or "explosive" -- reflections of the media hype which has surrounded their rapid rise to prominence.
- Philip Gerrans: *Bubble Trouble* (*Times Higher Education*, 9 July 2009): The humanities are in the same state financial markets were in before they crashed.... Everyone is wise after the event, but we need to know who is currently leading the charge into oblivion of the theory-lite brigade. The keywords are pretentious, bombastic, obscurantist, humourless, ideological. Add a complete inability to state or argue for a non-trivial factual thesis and booming popularity among those who created the last bubble, and you have the profile of a bubblemeister.

As noted with respect to the possibility of "pricking" such bubbles, this is not necessarily the most fruitful way of responding to the challenges of the bombastic modality.

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