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Public Enemy #1 as Supreme Leader?

Thinking otherwise about framing the engagement with society's worst fear

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Introduction

Donald Trump has just been elected 45th President of the USA, against all expectation by many sectors of society -- and despite every effort to prevent this outcome. Trump won according to the rules of the American democratic system, however their appropriateness may be called into question after the fact.

It is claimed by those that voted otherwise that Trump failed to win the popular vote, even though this is irrelevant according to those rules. Little reference is made to the fact that an unusual proportion of the American population failed to vote anyway. Little is said about how those who lost would have behaved had they won according to those rules -- or how they might then have denied the significance of any failure to win the popular vote.

A massive movement has been mobilized to resist the policies of Donald Trump -- as 45th President of the USA. The movement is striking in that it apparently has associated progressives of every kind (together with the intelligence community) -- "uniting together" birds of very different feather. The concern here is the seeming assumption that "Not-Trump" is a viable strategy for a society in crisis. Missing is any sense of what the protestors have to offer collectively in response to that crisis -- other than more of what had proven to be so ineffectual long before the election.

In a real sense it would seem that an unusual degree of unity among progressives and cultural creatives has been achieved only through their opposition to Trump. In the absence of that common enemy, could it be said that progressives and cultural creatives have been able to articulate policies which have attracted significant political support -- or would be able to do so once Trump has been "disappeared" in some manner? However surreal it may seem, Trump has been able to achieve a degree of support according to the conventions of the American political process.

Potentially more to the point, does the emergence of Trump suggest that progressive thinking has something to learn from his success? How is it that in other contexts cultural creatives attach great significance to learning from adversity, but that no attention has been given to the nature of that learning in the current situation? Is learning how to resist all that there is to be learned?

The question here is whether the current dynamic in response to Trump, in the US or elsewhere, signals processes to which [psychohistory](#) will be especially attentive. Societies have a long history of benefitting from the existence of enemies on which their processes can focus (Nazism, Communism, Islam, etc). The threat by another may be cultivated to that end. Threat within a society may also be recognized -- exemplified by the [witchhunts](#) of religion, those of an ideological nature ([McArthyism](#)), and contemporary efforts to eradicate terrorists.

The US and its allies have variously engaged with exemplars of such threats over the past decades -- Joseph Stalin, Saddam Hussein, Adolf Hitler, Muammar Gaddafi, Osama bin Laden, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro. It could be readily assumed that these are now to be understood as "mission accomplished". However, given the nature of the widespread preoccupation with the election of Donald Trump, does the current situation suggest that in psychosocial terms it is inappropriate to consider the threat they represented as "finished business"?

To the extent that society needs such a threat, especially the US, has failure to engage appropriately with the threats of the past now

resulted in "reactivation" of the ghostly presence of such exemplars? Is there a real sense in which society has yet to engage effectively with its own "shadow", as understood from one psychoanalytical perspective? Are the multiple crises and [wicked problems](#) faced by governance to be understood as aspects of this poorly explored "shadow of humanity"?

Could the emergence of Trump as president of the world's superpower also be recognized as a process by which "Public Enemy #1" has effectively been appointed as supreme leader -- in order to engage the collective attention? Has the unconscious collective need to engage more fruitfully with the contradictions and paradoxes of the challenge of otherness engendered this outcome? This could be a consistent with the analysis of [John Ralston Saul](#) (*The Unconscious Civilization*, 1995).

Other than the prospect of Trump endeavouring to implement policies deplored as disastrous by many, and of protestors obsessed with voicing criticism and opposition on every imaginable occasion, **is it to be expected that any strategic insight will emerge which will enable the challenge of the immediate future to be fruitfully reframed?**

In an increasingly divided society, is it to be expected that any commentary will necessarily be strategically partisan in highlighting the dangers of policies promoted by Trump? Is any other claim to insight now to be called into question as necessarily extremely suspect -- and a danger in its own right?

How can society be expected to respond to what is perceived as an unusual strategic challenge exacerbating fundamental divisions? Are there learnings for the response to the unprecedented levels of migration? What of the response to those of radically different cultural perspectives -- whether or not they can be framed as terrorists? What of the response to challenges of resources and the environment?

This comment follows from an argument made prior to the election (*Value of a Disastrous President of the World's Superpower?* 2016) and another subsequent to the election (*Engaging an Opposing Ideology via Martial Arts Philosophy: reframing the challenge of Trump and Jihadism as worthy opponents*, 2016).

Detectable positive qualities of Donald Trump?

Donald Trump is now 45th President of the USA. Most media coverage over the past year has deprecated Trump as a person and considered his style variously repugnant to an unusual degree. Such coverage typically highlights negative qualities, focusing carefully (if not appreciatively) on how these will necessarily lead to disaster and his early impeachment. He has been variously qualified as dangerous, incompetent, unfit, illegitimate, and the like.

A remarkable systematic list of Trump's negative qualities has been articulated in the editorial of a Sydney newspaper (*Faceless Man, The Saturday Paper*, 12 November 2016). The introductory sentence reads: *It happened. The United States of America elected as its president a moron.*

Having achieved what is acclaimed as the most powerful office on the planet, can it be concluded that Trump has no positive qualities worthy of appreciation? Is he indeed to be characterized by [Robert Musil's](#) classic title *The Man Without Qualities* (1930-43)? This view is consistent with that articulated by David King (*Why Trump Deserves Trust, Respect and Admiration*, 2016). The book is a collection of blank pages, as variously noted (*'Why Trump Deserves Respect' is just blank pages*, *The Daily Dot*, 30 December 2016). As noted by one enthusiastic reviewer: *I think the book is great because it's blank. Trump has no qualities whatsoever.*

Setting aside the continuing negative coverage by the progressive and alternative press -- increasingly shrill, hysterical and panic-ridden -- what can be detected by any search for the positive qualities of a person who has achieved the highest office in the American homeland? One point of departure would be recognition of Trump as [Person of the Year](#) (*Time Magazine*, 16 December 2016), and the controversial justification for doing so.

The question has been specifically asked in the *Quora* forum: *Does Trump have any positive qualities?* The responses include: determined, hardworking, supportive of substance abuse recovery programs, independence, loyalty, supportive of the poorly educated, generous, self-belief, confidence, capacity to appeal to the emotions. However some of these were cited in order to highlight their negative implications -- following the pattern of other commentary, such as that of T. A. Frank:

Even those of us who wanted to rethink the establishment consensus on numerous issues must accept that the positive qualities of Trump -- and, yes, I'd submit there are a number, including his indifference to conventional wisdom and his sympathy for people whose concerns are viewed by the establishment as secondary at best -- are outweighed by a personality as unsuited to presidential power as any nominee has ever been. (*Why Clinton Can't Shake Trump The Democratic Party runs the considerable risk of overestimating its own attractiveness*, *Vanity Fair*, 2 August 2016)

Any positive qualities recognized by some thus tend to be the focus of criticism by commentators as being illusory, as with the appreciation of the authenticity and honesty of Trump in "telling it like it is" -- in contrast to other politicians (Mike LaBossiere, *Trump and Authenticity*, *Talking Philosophy*, 27 May 2016).

A highly nuanced appreciation of his positive qualities can be discerned in the results of an early Gallup Poll (*Clinton's Best Asset, Trump's Biggest Liability: Experience*, 3 June 2016). This formed part of widespread commentary on Trump's total lack of political experience and involvement in government. This could be seen as highly ironic within American society which has traditionally valued the capacity of those who succeed without any past experience considered to be appropriate by commentators (who may have little experience themselves). It is especially curious with respect to any comparison with [Ronald Reagan](#) (an actor, previously elected to the governorship of California), or to leaders of many other countries. Cynics might suggest that Reagan had however developed a skill in following a script.

More relevant may be future comparison with an earlier American populist, as remarked by Douglas Cohn and Eleanor Clift (*TR vs. Trump: positive vs. negative populism*, *Pocono Record*, 27 February 2016):

President [Theodore Roosevelt](#) was a populist though his brand of populism, reining in the banks, going after the robber barons, and establishing the Food and Drug Administration to bring about much needed regulation, places him at the opposite end of the spectrum from where Trump is. Roosevelt's positive populism changed America for the better while Trump's negative us versus them populism is changing America but not necessarily for the better.

As argued by Sean O'Grady: *you have to concede that Trump's policies may work. His version of Reaganomics may be what America needs - and a detente with Russia makes the world safer for all of us:*

The thing always to remember about Trump is that he is not a proper Republican, maybe not even a proper politician. He is the nearest thing the American system can produce to an independent political force and, as such, is the most successful insurgent in US political history (surpassing even the legendary Teddy Roosevelt's efforts more than a century ago). He is first and foremost a deal-maker, and will never be beholden to any political party or political convention. (*There are solid reasons to be optimistic about the presidency of Donald Trump - even for liberals*, *The Independent*, 20 January 2017)

For Nathan J. Robinson (*Bad Ways To Criticize Trump*, *Current Affairs*, 14 December 2016), it is very easy to find ways to criticize Donald Trump. *Because he has so many loathsome traits of character, Trump provides the prospective critic with ample possible lines of attack.* After questioning the efficacy of many modes of attack, the author offers the unexpected insight that:

The truth is, no matter how much we may deny it, on some level many of us enjoy watching Trump defy taboos and be nasty to people. After all, the entire reason for things like the *New York Times* Trump insult database is that it's amusing. People hate Trump, but they also love hating him.

Robinson also highlights the paradox for commentators of criticizing Trump's outrageous tweets when it is precisely their reaction which ensures that attention is accorded to them. This suggests that Trump should be acknowledged to exhibit unusual mastery of the social media in engaging the attention of people -- of which many politicians are otherwise incapable.

Especially insightful is Robinson's implied criticism of the widespread progressive tendency to focus on Trump's image (which might be usefully contrasted with that of a prominent critic, Michael Moore):

But the broader principle of progressives should be: what someone looks like is of minimal relevance in evaluating them. That's what we believe. And we should be consistent in that belief. If someone made fun of our candidate's appearance, no matter what that appearance was, we would declare that as a matter of principle, image should matter less than substance. Such high-mindedness is both admirable and correct. But it has no force unless you maintain it consistently, even as applied to people whom you detest.

However, despite many words of caution and advice to critics of Trump, Robinson seems to be unable to detect any positive qualities in the 45th President of the USA. This inadequacy is presumably reflected in the book of which his article is an excerpt (*Trump: Anatomy of a Monstrosity*, 2017).

Potentially more insightful in clarifying why significant numbers voted for Trump are the results of a survey (*New Survey Shows Positive and Negative Views of Trump and Pence held by Conservative Christians*, *American Culture and Faith Institute*, 10 Aug 2016). The summary concluded:

Overall, there were five positive qualities... Those included tough (72%), a problem-solver (66%), fearless (58%), strong leader (56%), and good negotiator (54%). Four other descriptions were selected by at least four out of ten respondents. Those included worth supporting (49%), charismatic personality (45%), entertaining (40%), and effective communicator (40%). Just 5% said he is a typical politician -- which, depending on your perspective, might be viewed as a highly positive outcome.

Such results are consistent with the arguments of Freddy Gray (*President Donald Trump: political mastermind*, *The Spectator*, November 2016). Similarly Matthew Cooper noted that *Trump has positive qualities that detractors should recognize: ideological flexibility, an ability to negotiate, great communication skills.* (*What If Donald Trump Becomes President?* *Newsweek*, 16 March 2016).

Mark Mardell *Trump and Obama: Two characters in search of a legacy*, *BBC News*, 20 January 2017)

But Mr Trump is already much closer than Mr Obama to an American archetype -- the boaster, bumptious, self-confident, quick to anger, but with a confidence and optimism in his own abilities, which respect no horizons. What is attention-grabbing is when the horizons have to buckle and broaden and widen in the face of that force of will.. Mr Trump speaks for those other Americans who felt Mr Obama never did..

Whether to be considered indicative of positive qualities or otherwise, of some relevance are insights compiled by the [Readers Digest](#) of (*The 14 Most Insightful Things We've Read About Donald Trump in 2016*):

- Trump has uncommon discipline
- **Trump can feel issues deeply**
- Trump is a man of few (written) words
- Trump speaks to the long ignored
- Trump will have a presidency that resembles his candidacy
- Trump is emblematic of the American dream for many
- Trump has inadvertent benefits for ISIS
- Trump makes a strategy out of not sticking to the facts
- Trump is a believer in his gut instinct over data
- Trump uses anger to his benefit
- Trump is a brilliant role-player
- Trump has a good side
- Trump has a double standard on debt
- Trump can already declare a victory

Engaging imaginatively with a dangerous opponent

Clearly there is virtually no detectable appreciation by progressives of the positive qualities of the 45th President of the USA. They are faced with the paradox that a man without positive qualities has successfully achieved the highest office in the land -- something that those they favour have clearly been unable to do, and have little hope of achieving, whatever the hope-mongering to that end.

There is every prospect that Trump's policies will engender great harm and pain for some, if not many. It could of course be assumed that the policies advocated by progressives, if implemented as they would wish, would engender harm and pain for others. This might then be considered acceptable, or negligible, since such policies are inherently worthy in contrast to those promoted by Trump. Presumably [collateral damage](#) is a characteristic of the implementation of any strategy.

Other than complaining about the current course of events, and the prospects for the years to come, **is there any way of reframing the situation such as to elicit the maximum amount of collective learning?** Are there windows of opportunity which merit recognition and exploration?

The enemy is us? One point of departure is the critical articulation of [John Pilger](#) (*This Week the Issue is not Trump, it is Ourselves*, 17 January 2017; *The Issue is Not Trump, It is Us, CounterPunch*, 17 January 2017; *The issue is not Trump: it is us. RT*, 17 January 2017). He cites appreciatively [William I. Robinson](#):

President Barack Obama... may have done more than anyone to assure [Donald] Trump's victory. While Trump's election has triggered a rapid expansion of fascist currents in US civil society, a fascist outcome for the political system is far from inevitable.... But that fight back requires clarity as to how we got to such a dangerous precipice. The seeds of 21st century fascism were planted, fertilized and watered by the Obama administration and the politically bankrupt liberal elite.

Pilger concludes:

The obsession with Trump is a cover for many of those calling themselves "left/liberal", as if to claim political decency. They are not "left", neither are they especially "liberal". Much of America's aggression towards the rest of humanity has come from so-called liberal Democratic administrations -- such as Obama's. America's political spectrum extends from the mythical centre to the lunar right... While they "heal" and "move forward", will the [Writers Resist](#) campaigners and other anti-Trumpists reflect upon this? More to the point: when will a genuine movement of opposition arise? Angry, eloquent, all-for-one-and-one-for all. Until real politics return to people's lives, the enemy is not Trump, it is ourselves.

What indeed is a "genuine movement of opposition"? If the enemy is indeed ourselves how should this be understood? This insight is of course consistent with that famously attributed to [Pogo](#): *We have met the enemy and he is us*. **What indeed does the emergence of Trump onto the world scene say about us?** How can we begin to engage with what that might imply?

Again, the problem is not "Trump" nor his supporters. The issue is escalating, as indicated at the time of writing, by an unprecedented meeting in Germany of Europe's rightwing populist parties (*After the US, far right says 2017 will be the year Europe wakes up, The Observer*, 21 January 2017).

What are we missing? Framing any further exploration could include a recognition -- natural in many competitive arenas -- in which it is useful for the loser to question the assumptions which obscured the inadequacies and blindspots which enabled the other to win. A posture of complaint based on the claim that the other did not really win -- having cheated in some way -- is of limited value to improving one's game. More valuable is recognition of any failure to "keep one's eye on the ball".

As Commander-in-Chief, although Trump may be held by his opponents to lack any positive qualities, strategically it can be readily argued that he has valuable insights into the principles famously highlighted by [The Art of Warfare](#):

All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.

Unwittingly, it is possible that Trump made skillful use of his absurdities and irritants as distractants, perhaps best compared with use of [decoy flares as counter-measures](#) by aircraft seeking to reduce vulnerability to missile strikes. Commentators have assiduously followed the heat of the flares -- in a fruitless effort to bring him down. They "fell" for the decoys -- literally. Is there any evidence that his opponents have comparable strategic skills or recognize the need to acquire them?

Clearly the demonstrated skills of Trump in political strategy are now of relevance to any future response by the USA to whatever is

framed as an external threat -- namely radical Islam, Russia, or China. Can it be said that progressives have been able to articulate new thinking in response to radical Islam? If not, why not? Can it be said that they have been able to reframe their own disagreements in a fruitful manner? Where is the progressive equivalent to Trump's own articulation (*Trump: the Art of the Deal*, 1987)?

Eradicating the enemy? In his inaugural speech, Trump repeated his campaign rhetoric with regard to the eradication of radical Islam and has appointed [James Mattis](#) ("Mad Dog") as the person with primary responsibility in carrying out that undertaking. Whether "eradication" is appropriate, given the history of efforts to that end, is another matter, as separately argued (*Eradication as the Strategic Final Solution of the 21st Century?* 2014; *Transforming the Unsustainable Cost of General Education: strategic insights from Afghanistan*, 2009)

There is however a curious correspondence between the strategic response of progressives to Trump -- seeking his "disappearance" -- and the thinking of those committed to the disappearance of radical Islam (through the [Global War on Terrorism](#)). To what degree is the current framing of Trump by progressives a strange mirror of current thinking in response to any threat? Can this be explored as a failure of the classic [mirror self-recognition test](#)?

In terms of psychohistory, is the contiguity emergence of threats and their exemplars a consequence of a failure to recognize how habitual thinking is part of the problem, inhibiting recognition of the nature of the viable solution required? This would be consistent with the adage of [H. L. Mencken](#): *For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.*

Recognizing a higher order of insight? With respect to the challenge of exemplified by Trump, is there any trace of a higher order of strategic insight on the part of progressive thinkers -- or, again, is the primary posture one of complaint and protest?

Progressives have long cultivated the antithesis of complaint in the form of appreciative awards for initiatives heroically undertaken by individuals and groups -- notably with respect to what was previously deemed to be impossible. The [Right Livelihood Award](#) is a prime example. Appreciation for revolutionaries may be similarly expressed -- as in the case of [Nelson Mandela](#) -- but only after a period of severe deprecation, condemnation as terrorists, and incarceration, if not eradication.

Is reactive resistance to be similarly appreciated, or might more be expected of progressive thinkers in the present circumstances?

Framing Trump otherwise to offer strategic opportunity

It could be argued that through their negative framing of Trump progressives have effectively "painted themselves into a corner" offering limited capacity for any strategic maneuverability and nimbleness on their part. How an opponent is framed says as much about the framer as about the framed. The current framing has clearly placed the framers at a disadvantage, since it is Trump who now occupies the White House. Protest would seem to be the "best shot" progressives currently imagine themselves to have.

Caricature? What imaginative opportunities are there to frame Trump otherwise? Typical of an unsuccessful effort was through positioning nude statues of Trump in major cities of the US (*The Emperor Has No Balls*). Why was that strategy a failure? He did not choose to riposte by positioning nude statues of Hillary Clinton around the country.

Political cartoonists have had multiple opportunities to reframe Trump during the campaign, but such efforts would seem to have done little to reframe the debate. Many more such cartoons will now be produced -- but to what end? Progressives are similarly vulnerable to such caricature.

Appreciative reframing? More intriguing is the possibility of appreciative caricature -- perhaps in the spirit of [appreciative inquiry](#). What forms of reframing would offer new modes of communication with Trump? One strange possibility is [mixed martial arts](#) of which he has been acclaimed, and deprecated, as a sponsor. Clearly there is a sense in which he identifies with that modality -- however much his critics may deplore such combat (Alexander Reynolds, *The Mixed Martial Philosophy of Donald J. Trump*, *Vice Sports*, 20 January 2017). Could "martial arts" be framed otherwise as a mode of engagement with Trump, as separately argued (*Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats*, 2006).

In sporting terms Trump would have been laughed out of the political arena into which he threw his hat. However his trajectory is curiously reminiscent of "Eddie the Eagle" who represented the UK in the ski jump in the 1963 Winter Olympics. As with Eddie, the media were so fascinated by his innocent daring (in a discipline in which he had no training whatsoever) that the rules had subsequently to be modified to ensure that media attention focused appropriately on the stars of that discipline (who had plaintively complained of being neglected). Trump is clearly to be appreciated for his daring and skill in "giving it a go" -- against the array of odds so frequently portrayed by commentators, later to be proven wrong.

Challenging respect? Another approach to reframing an opponent is that cultivated by the Maori, namely the *haka*, most evidently on the occasion of encounters of the All Blacks rugby team of New Zealand. The style contrasts curiously with [cheerleading](#), most notably on the occasion of American basketball and football games. The *haka* is a collective challenge to another with whom a competitive encounter is anticipated. It is designed simultaneously to greet, honour and threaten. It is an evocation of respect

Such respect is arguably fundamental to honourable engagement with a threatening other (*Engaging an Opposing Ideology via Martial Arts Philosophy: reframing the challenge of Trump and Jihadism as worthy opponents*, 2016). Failure of the US military to respect the enemy with which it has engaged in recent arenas has presumably been a major factor in the surprising duration of engagements -- even over decades.

As separately argued, the tepid formal congratulations offered to Trump on his election could have been more appropriately and honourably framed by some analogue to the *haka*. Use of any analogue to cheerleading, as is the convention in greeting parades on state visits, completely distracts (disrespectfully) from the issues in play.

Aesthetically enabled engagement? A variant of performance evocative of respect is the use of poetry, notably as in the cultural tradition of the war lords of Afghan tribes. This also suggests another approach to reframing Trump in terms he could respect, as separately argued (*Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran an unexplored strategic opportunity?* 2009). How might the anguish and anger of progressives take aesthetic form, through poetry and song? Could this be done in such a way to frame a terrain of fruitful encounter with Trump -- perhaps challenged to riposte in a similar mode, as was traditionally the case of the tribes of Arabian culture?

As in chess and other games, how is it to be expected that Trump will respond to protest which seeks to pull him down? Any insightful strategist anticipates the response of the opponent to any move made. Already recognized as hypersensitive, will Trump react to mockery in a manner reminiscent of the explosive response of Islam to blasphemy?

From whom is new insight to be expected?

Where indeed is the perspective articulated that would purport to encompass the paradoxes and contradictions of the dynamics of democracy?

Clearly Trump is a different political animal than those who have immediately preceded him in a presidential role. However it is one thing to focus on criticizing him as unacceptable and deplorable, it is another to consider how the various leaders of the recent past have all proven inadequate to the challenges of the times. Is American society, if not global society, increasingly ungovernable -- beyond the coping threshold (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2011). Is any assumption by progressives that global society is governable to be recognized as inherently naive?

Psychosocial disciplines? It is somewhat astonishing to discover that disciplines from which one expect a larger framework have avoided any extensive engagement of the consideration of the phenomenon represented by Trump. From some progressives, favouring particular psychosocial models, it would be expected that Trump would be recognized as representing a particular style or "energy". Naturally this would be deprecated from the perspective of another style or energy. The crucial question is whether a contrasting energy is indeed fruitful in compensating for inadequacies in the styles of governance in the immediate past. Who might be expected to clarify such a possibility dispassionately and in a non-partisan manner?

Insights are offered by the following:

- In his review of the study by Hugo Drochon (*Nietzsche's Great Politics*, 2016), Sean Illing asks: *What Nietzsche's philosophy can tell us about why Brexit and Trump won* (*Vox*, 20 December 2016)
- The forum provided for *Philosophers on The 2016 U.S. Election* (*Daily Nous*, 10 November 2016) includes contributions by the following:
 - Elisabeth Anker (*Desiring the Pussy Grabber*)
 - Jason Brennan (*Democratic Theory for Realists*)
 - David Estlund (*One Election, One Trump*)
 - Saba Fatima (*The Fragmented Muslim*)
 - Michael Fuerstein (*A Failure of Democracy?*)
 - Alex Guerrero (*Dividing the U.S.*)
 - Adam Hosein (*Promises and Vulnerabilities*)
 - Suzy Killmister (*Betrayal and Progress*)
 - Christopher Lebron (*Decency and Democracy*)
 - Jacob Levy (*They Make Choices, Too*)
 - Luke Maring (*Looking Ahead: What does Injustice Mean for Our Teaching?*)
 - Simon May (*Beyond Contempt*)
 - Lionel McPherson (*The End of Illusions*)
 - José Jorge Mendoza (*American Whiteness and Democracy*)
 - Regina Rini (*The Emotional Labor of Loss*)
 - Gina Schouten (*Too Many In The Water*)
 - Matthew Smith (*What Now?*)

Can the results of this reflection be considered to match up to the challenge framed by Olivia Goldhill (*Philosophy once helped us make sense of our confusing, ever-changing political world. What happened?* *Quartz*, 5 November 2016). This expressed the disappointment that:

This week, Slavoj Zizek, one of the most famous living philosophers, endorsed Donald Trump for president. As someone who cares greatly about philosophy's role in the world, I was disappointed by this news, and not simply because I disagree with him. Zizek is an unusual philosopher. While he's highly controversial, he's both publicly and academically renowned and he uses his own philosophy and ideas from great historical thinkers to engage with contemporary events. As a result, he's one of the few philosophers whose political views are widely reported and listened to.

See: *Far-left philosopher Slavoj Zizek explains why he supported Trump over Clinton*, *Vice News*, 30 November 2016; *Slavoj Zizek on Trump and Brexit*, *BBC News*, 17 January 2017; *Zizek: Electing Trump will 'shake up' the system*, *Al Jazeera*, 16 Nov 2016). The pattern of reaction is illustrated by that of Andre Damon (*The Idiot Speaks: Slavoj Zizek endorses Donald Trump*, *World Socialist Web Site*, 9 November 2016).

Without providing any sense of perspective, Simona Ainar and David Egan argue only that *Donald Trump's victory shows why we need philosophy students more than ever* (*Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 12 November 2016). The need for such discourse is evident from the announced conference *Trump, Philosophy, and American Politics: Philosophical Implications of the 45th Presidency* (February 2017) hosted by The Penn Center for Philosophy, Ethics, and Public Affairs. Such debate hopefully contrasts in quality and insight with that framed by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite (*2017 Imperative: Counter Trump's Political Philosophy of Abuse*, *The Huffington Post*, 29 December 2016).

There is a necessary contrast to be recognized between the ability of philosophers to predict phenomena they frame as deplorable and an ability to recognize that the manifestation of contrasting philosophies and worldviews calls for a framing in a larger scheme of things. The latter capacity is notably absent from the framework offered by Richard Rorty, as argued by Rupert Read ([Postmodernism Helped Elect Trump](#), *TPM Online*, 22 November 2016). The need has been clearly articulated by [Nicholas Rescher](#) (*The Strife of Systems: an essay on the grounds and implications of philosophical diversity*, 1985):

For centuries, most philosophers who have reflected on the matter have been intimidated by the strife of systems. But the time has come to put this behind us -- not the strife, that is, which is ineliminable, but the felt need to somehow end it rather than simply accept it and take it in stride.

Psychology? Another potential source of perspective is psychology. Unfortunately it would appear that the focus in this case is more on the analysis of Trump and less on the dynamics which have rendered him attractive to some rather than to those alienated by his style:

- Dan P. McAdams: [The Mind of Donald Trump](#) (*The Atlantic*, June 2016) -- highlighting his narcissism, disagreeableness, and grandiosity
- Bilal Ghandour: [A Psychological Analysis of Donald Trump](#) (*Shrink Tank*, 2017)
- Jennifer Golbeck: [Trump Psychoanalyzed by Artificial Intelligence](#) (*Psychology Today*, 27 December 2016) -- highlighting what AI says about Trump's personality traits
- Maria Konnikova: [The Psychological Research that Helps Explain the Election](#) (*The New Yorker*, 25 December 2016)

One compilation focuses on the [12 Psychological Tactics Donald Trump Uses to Manipulate the Masses](#) under the following headings:

- Sowing seeds of fear
- Provoking anger and hostility
- Playing the big strong Messiah figure
- Painting everything as Black and White
- Deflection via humour
- Acting superior to opponents
- Doing whatever possible to make it *his* game
- Creating double-bind situations
- Repetition
- Social proof
- Appeals to authority
- Appealing to irrational parts of our brains

However any such list immediately raises the question as to whether these all tend to feature in any strategy, including those articulated by progressives, whether or not they might prefer to deny this. The larger issue is how to encompass a situation in which many competing social movements are all employing such strategies with greater or lesser skill -- whilst deprecating their use by others.

Martial arts? It would appear that conventional Western philosophy, psychology and psychoanalysis have relatively little to offer beyond partisan analysis and categorization, however pertinent ([Daniel Bonevac](#), [Why As A Philosopher I Voted For Trump: Trumpism and the future of the American Republic](#), *The Critique*, 20 January 2017).

It is the dynamic which is significant, not whether one set of "alternative facts" has greater validity than an other, as discussed separately ([Towards articulation of a "post-truth table"?](#) 2016). Hence the argument here in favour of insights from the Eastern martial arts and their associated philosophical underpinnings. The argument is consistent with Trump's own appreciation of one such form, and the bond he potentially shares with Vladimir Putin -- awarded black belts in several martial arts ([Putin becomes eighth-degree karate black belt](#), *CNN*, 21 November 2014; [Vladimir Putin Earns 9th Degree Black Belt In Taekwondo](#), *The World Post*, 13 November 2013; [Putin awarded 8th-degree black belt in karate](#), *USA Today*, 21 November 2014).

Missing is any more fundamental consideration of the insight from martial arts. How best to make use of the energy of the opponent in order to neutralize the threat represented? For example, [Aikido](#) consists of entering and turning movements that redirect the momentum of an opponent's attack ([George Kirby](#), [Jujitsu Advanced Techniques for Redirecting an Opponent's Energy](#), 2015).

Arguably Trump exhibited this skill to remarkable degree during his campaign. Whereas his opponents invested hundreds of millions of dollars in advertising of every kind, Trump frequently noted that he had not needed to do so ([Adam Pearce](#), [Trump Has Spent a Fraction of What Clinton Has on Ads](#), *The New York Times*, 21 October 2016). He conducted himself such as to ensure that his opponents expended resources on media coverage of his campaign to an unprecedented degree. They were seemingly oblivious of the basic marketing adage: *There's no such thing as bad publicity*.

Psychodrama? It is too readily forgotten that, like any archetype, Trump now constitutes a strange psychoactive complex in the collective imagination -- hence the daily fascination of many over months with new aspects of the drama he engenders. As a daily happening, his performance transcends the focus of conventional criticism, whether the drama is "good" or "bad".

As an archetype Trump merits exploration in terms of strange cultural traditions such as those engendering a [Lord of Misrule](#) (*Prince des Sots* in French; *Precentor Stultorum* in Latin). In the case of Europe, this was separately discussed ([Necessity for a European Lord of Misrule?](#) 2009) -- faced with the ambitions of Tony Blair ([Urgent Need for Blair as President of Europe: maximizing early collective learning in anticipation of future crises](#), 2009). Some carnival traditions involve both the mock crowning and subsequent dethroning of the carnival king (if not some form of symbolic execution). American society could well be understood as unwittingly locked into some such psychodrama -- for reasons that are as yet far from being explored.

More obvious is the manner in which the current drama has been effectively scripted around the traditional American sense of "Public Enemy No. 1" -- exemplified by cinematic celebration of "Wanted Dead or Alive" and the focus this now gives to the quest for leaders of terrorism. This frames current speculation about the probable assassination of Trump, even enabled by the traditional role of a bounty hunter. These merit reflection in the light of other cases ([List of United States presidential assassination attempts and plots](#); [List of](#)

assassination attempts on Adolf Hitler; Assassination attempts on Fidel Castro). Through Trump society is witness to a curious process of enthronement and the prospect of imminent dethronement and the psychosocial catharsis it hopefully represents through cultivated dependency on a "silver bullet".

Especially relevant to this argument is the discussion of enthroning and dethroning by [Vilma Santiago-Irizarry](#) (*Labels, Genuine and Spurious: anthropology and the politics of otherness in the United States*, 2013, pp. 78-100):

In the article whose conceit I borrow, [Edward Sapir](#) argues that we use labels, which he characterizes as "empty thrones," in a necessary attempt for ontological and epistemological reasons—to encompass and objectify intrinsically ambiguous and contradictory concepts. Our ability to analyze, or even conduct sociocultural life, is facilitated by a willful finding of commonality among these concepts and by choosing particular labels that help us fix the meaning of concepts ... Sapir's metaphor of enthroning and dethroning through the contextual choice and deployment of contending labels implicates political contingency as well as a struggle over the significance, value, and consequence of particular labels. Insofar as an ethno-racial terrain is involved, labels become polysemic sites in which difference, rather than homogeneity, is made tangible, represented, and foregrounded, as well as challenged and re-constructed. (p. 81)

Rather than Trump as a person, or as representing millions of Americans, is there a case for recognizing how he represents a set of labels variously called into question? This is consistent with the theme of the volume of which the above study is a part (Gabriella Vargas-Cetina (Ed.), *Anthropology and the Politics of Representation*, 2013).

Curiously, in the pattern of American presidents, history may come to compare Trump's dramatic eccentricities with those of Theodore Roosevelt (as noted above). His behaviour may increasingly evoke bemusement, if not amusement -- as has been more recently the case with another "larger than life" national leader, namely the Italian media tycoon [Silvio Berlusconi](#), somewhat affectionately nicknamed *Il Cavaliere*. What is the appeal of the eccentric in a period of hopelessness?

Like the famed self-publicist [P. T. Barnum](#) (to which the "bad publicity" remark is attributed), Trump has had long involvement with showmanship, as noted by the emphasis of *The Economist* on Trump as a [vaudeville impresario](#) (*The Impresario-elect*, 3 December 2016). This is clearly a role he has cultivated to greater effect than his drably conventional rivals in the presidential race. It obviously contrasts with the uninspiring performance of many grey-suited politicians and academics with a horror of the unusual. Unwittingly, as implied by Santiago-Irizarry, he is a bearer or wearer of labels (or patterns) through which unusual forms of change have been engaged.

The dramatically transformative role of [Mikhail Gorbachev](#) can be explored in this light (*Gorbachev: Dramaturge?! Participative Democracy vs. Participative Drama*, 1991). It is in this sense that, beyond the current focus on his demonisation, far greater attention needs to be given to insights into archetypes such as the [trickster](#) (Trump?), or as [psychopomp](#) -- as a catalyst unconsciously engendered and crafted to enable change.

How better to engage with him in that mode -- through a more impressive show or a more attractive new story? Perhaps in the tradition of the poetic and music duels of some cultures, as separately noted (*Evoking Castalia as Envisaged, Entoned and Embodied: the great game informed by the bertolaritza cultural process?* 2016). This would contrast with the uncreative role of the [tragic Greek chorus](#) of Antiquity -- "woe, woe, woe" -- into which progressives appear to have cast themselves as "extras" in the ongoing drama. From such a dramatic perspective, particular care is required in anticipating the time when he has been successfully dethroned -- as bearer of labels and patterns valued in American culture. Given his aesthetic preferences, he and his court might even invite comparison with [Louis XVI](#) and [Marie Antoinette](#).

Responding outrageously to the outrageous

The current period is one of outrage -- whether as articulated by Donald Trump, by those who oppose him, or by the [Occupy Movement](#). This is an international socio-political movement against social inequality and lack of "real democracy" around the world, with the primary goal being to advance social and economic justice and new forms of democracy. Its preoccupations were remarkably framed by [Stéphane Hessel](#) (*Time for Outrage!* 2010).

It could be said that Donald Trump has succeeded to date through being "outrageous". The Occupy Movement could be accused of "not being outrageous enough" -- as with the massive movement in opposition to the policies he has articulated. Moving the UN, as discussed separately, could be one example of appropriately initiatives in response to those in process of implementation by the USA (*Build the Wall -- Move the UN HQ? United Nations principles are not consistent with "America First"*, 2017).

In the spirit of this argument, **outrage needs to be met with outrage of a "higher order"** as a means of outmaneuvering the current outrageous initiatives envisaged by the USA. Initiatives might include, for example:

- castration of those convicted of rape in the USA (in some sympathy with the concerns of the [Million Woman March](#))
- application of sharia law to Muslims convicted of offences for which that law has especially strong provisions
- indexing of fines according to income as a means of engaging commensurately with the relative impunity of the wealthy when convicted
- requiring that those protesting the treatment of refugees take personal responsibility for housing them
- prohibiting those convicted of crimes from taking public office as a means of responding to the indifference in the practice of politics

Embodying the dynamics in a game

There is an opportunity to provide a more fruitful context for the ongoing divisive dynamics within a game-like simulation. This could build creatively on interaction within the social media, [open source software development](#), graphics, [sonification](#) -- and why not [virtual reality](#), as it is now emerging. Possible dimensions to the elaboration of such a game might include:

- enabling expression and juxtaposition of factual and counter-factual statements to reflect the pattern of assertion, accusation, denial, blame-gaming, and the like
- providing a means through which radically contrasting framings could be meaningfully represented, whether:
 - as the righteous sense of what is unquestionably right and just
 - or as the negative framings of opponents with contrary understandings inspired by a sense of the deepest injustice
- offering a strategic dimension to the game to allow for creative attacks and defence (reflective of higher orders of skill by which the opponent is surprised and off-footed, as characterized by:
 - the martial arts (as noted above)
 - [Knight's move](#) thinking in chess and go (*Insights from Knight's Move Thinking*, 2012)
 - the distractive skills of the matador in bullfighting (*Viable Global Governance through Bullfighting*, 2009)
- enabling trending movements within the game to be presented with striking computer graphics (perhaps echoing flocking and swarming behaviour)
- engaging familiarity with [online gaming](#) and its design to enable a high degree of group formation and participation, possibly with accumulation of points and rankings (or the inclusion of speculative betting)
- enabling new kinds of analysis of the ongoing dynamics in the light of insights into [complex system dynamics](#) and [catastrophe theory](#) (or passing pattern representation of ball games and juggling)
- incorporating a sense of drama and role-playing (perhaps recognizing the variety of roles, plots and dramatic twists)

Of particular interest would be any possibility of incorporating a surreal sense of paradox. In effect it would appear that engagement in the game necessitates framing any opponent negatively -- to whatever degree the implications of that projection are ignored as a form of mirroring. Reference to "progressives" in the above commentary is a problematic instance of this device.

A major dimension would be cultivation of the need to evolve the game design in response to new insight and emerging factors in the process of participation. In one sense it is the concept of such a game which is of value in its own right in offering a means of thinking coherently about the ongoing socio-political dynamic. In another sense it could be said that increasingly those dynamics are as much a game in their own right -- especially to the extent that they are primarily played out in the media and in representations of real events.

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