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THE NEW INQUIRY
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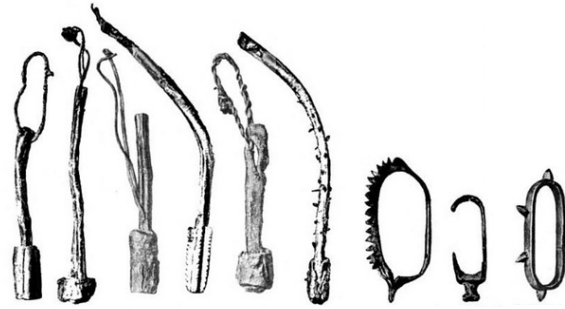
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H8 Note



“THOSE who hate you can’t win unless you hate them. And then you destroy yourself,” said not Martin Luther King Jr. or Gandhi but that gentle soul Richard Nixon. Since the death of God, hate has taken the place of sin as society’s transcendent no-no. Hatred of hate crosses political divides, deployed to justify the war on terror (“they hate our freedoms”) and to attack racist and homophobic violence. As with hipsters, few people cop to

being haters. Yet visit almost any well-trafficked comment thread and haters outnumber the rest.

The Internet has revealed, perhaps enabled, spectacular hostility. Fame especially comes at a cost. It is particularly expensive for women, who are guaranteed misogynist hate mail upon achieving any online prominence. As trolls and cyberbullies emerge as society’s new *bêtes noires*, “Don’t read the comments” is

necessary advice for the thin-skinned—which, it turns out, describes most of us. We're good at dishing it, bad at taking it. Did the Internet merely remove a few technical boundaries formerly repressing some Hobbesian truth of human nature? Is hate, one answer to the failure of net democracy, built into its very architecture? Or are haters just gonna hate?

At the front lines of this war is the comment moderator. Predominantly female, these workers delete the most malicious comments before they reach readers' eyes. In "Hate Sinks," Jason Wilson demonstrates that the uncivil standards of Internet discourse depend on the labor of young women. Even online, women can't escape their roles as affective pressure valves.

Of course, hate does its nasty work off the Web, too—especially in school, where kids notoriously learn how to be mean, if they learn anything at all. Being popular used to be a shield for a few. Yet yesterday's clear pecking order has been replaced by a tangle of affiliations and subgroups, as Maxwell Neely-Cohen argues in "Everybody's Doing It." Now everyone is a bully and everyone is a target. Don't blame peer pressure, which parents were always more worried about than kids; blame adults, screwing things up more seriously than ever. Interviewed here about her new book, *Masterminds and Wingmen*, writer and parenting educator Rosalind Wiseman has some ideas for improvement. Children and teens should be introduced to rather than protected from complexity, she says. They deserve to be treated with dignity rather than the usual condescension.

Not so the Nazis, the stock example of simpleminded hatred. Nazis haunt every conversation about hate crimes and racist violence. So why do they make such a poor showing in literary history? With "Consciously or Unconsciously," JW McCormack takes on American white supremacy's most famous novel, speculative-fiction epic *The Turner Diaries*. National Socialist fiction

makes such poor propaganda not only because it's written by talentless idiots who see society as their own private *kampf*. The disjunction between the genocidal goals of such über-haters and the humanizing nature of literature may stymie the fascists before they've even started.

And what of the banality that hate is not the opposite of love but rather its accomplice? For Mal Ahern and Moira Weigel, there's something in the structure of love that keeps breeding all this animosity. "Dating in the Expanded Field" attempts to define just what we mean when we say *dating*, and why it keeps making us so dysfunctional. A brief history of courtship and a series of structural investigations reveal that the answer is "it's complicated." In a history of a different sort of romantic hatred, Adrian Van Young connects the dots between Death Metal and Lord Byron. Like Wagner, *Wolves in the Throne Room* is meant to be played as loudly as possible. Do the anti-Enlightenment aesthetic excesses of the Romantics find an echo in the anti-Christian nihilistic violence of Death Metal? "Black Metal Is Sublime" shows that the similarities between the two can be measured in more than decibels.

Ought we to join the chorus and condemn the condemners, despise the despisers? What good will it do? Censure has hardly dissuaded the trolls, let alone the white-supremacist parties gaining traction in European elections. Yet here, as in most things, it's better to ignore Nixon than to follow him. To reduce hate to affective enemy No. 1 one is to blur the distinction between the bigoted grievance of the man who blames his failed business on immigrants and the righteous fury of the imprisoned toward her jailor. Not all hatreds were born equal. Some should be quashed; a few should be felt, with conviction. "I hate rarely," said Anais Nin, "though when I hate, I hate murderously." She was talking about penis sucking, Dutch paintings, parties, and cold weather. She was also talking about banks. It sharpens the senses to have an enemy. Hate well or not at all. **TNI**

Slugs and Snails and Puppy Dog Tails

ROSALIND WISEMAN *interviewed by* MALCOLM HARRIS

The author and parenting educator behind Mean Girls talks sex, drugs, and her new book on boys

ROSALIND Wiseman is the author of *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, *Queen Bee Moms & King Pin Dads*, *Owning Up Curriculum*, “Boys, Girls & Other Hazardous Materials,” and the new book *Masterminds and Wingmen: Helping Our Boys Cope with Schoolyard Power, Locker-Room Tests, Girlfriends, and the New Rules of Boy World*. Here, an exchange with New Inquiry editor Malcolm Harris.

Your methodology is interesting—you include as co-producers the subjects you’re writing about. Can you tell me a bit about how that works and why you choose to do it, both in Masterminds and in your past work?

I included the boys/guys because I can’t imagine writing the things I do without asking the people I am writing



about to critique my words. Because here’s what I imagine: Me standing in front of a group of high school students “telling” them what their social world looks like and how they should navigate it—and being completely wrong. I know I don’t get everything right—and I would never be able to because every teen has their own experience—but the thought of going in front of them telling them what their lives are like makes my stomach turn. Not only because I don’t think I have the right to do that but also because I have

a very deep motivation to not come across as yet another arrogant, presumptuous, patronizing adult. As I write this to you right now, I just saw that a student lit himself on fire at a high school about 20 minutes away from me. How could I possibly think I know what's going on in kids' lives without asking them?

Your concern with dignity is the bedrock for Masterminds, something I didn't expect. Outside the World Social Forum or Chiapas, you don't hear that language very often, especially as it pertains to kids (a word I use broadly and nonpejoratively). Where does your concern with dignity come from?

I chose the language I use with and about young people very carefully because I believe they deserve to be spoken to with integrity and honesty. Adults can be so patronizing and hypocritical in how they speak to young people and what about, that adults in general lose credibility. And because of that, even if they're well-intentioned, they are incompetent moral and ethical guides.

In this case, I have always used dignity in talking to young people because its definition is tied to inherent worth. As in, everyone has the right to be treated with dignity (i.e. have their voice heard) and has the responsibility to treat others with dignity as well. In contrast, I think the word *respect* is either overused or incorrectly used to the point where any true meaning is lost. Many years ago I became incredibly frustrated with how the word *respect* was used by adults with young people. For example, often when adults say, "Respect your elders," they mean, "Obey your elders."

Respect, according to its Latin origins, means to admire someone based on their accomplishments. Respect is earned, dignity is given. Having respect for someone is a choice each individual has the power to make. But what compels you to respect that person? We are often taught that respect equals obeying and/or fearing someone with more power or status than you. But if that person acts unethically or isn't upholding the dignity of those around them, espe-

cially those with less power, should a young person be compelled to "respect them?" No.

For example, why should a child respect his principal if that principal allows a student, teacher, coach, school resource officer, etc. to dehumanize or humiliate another child?

Dignity is also a touchstone for me. I constantly tell my students that even if you have every reason to seek revenge against someone else, your true character and how you choose to conduct yourself matters in moments of crisis and conflict. You don't roll over, you're not turning the other cheek, but it is the moment when you strive to treat the person with inherent worth. I remind myself of this all the time because I am certainly not immune to feelings of anger and desire for retribution. It's in these moments that your actions have the best chance of being righteous—as in just to yourself and others.

The way you write about physical confrontation reminded me of an old post by the blogger The Last Psychiatrist in which he describes the way schools discourage righteous behavior in kids. You actually offer a set of eight things boys should think about beforehand, rather than the standard "Get an adult" advice—even going so far as to suggest there are good and legitimate reasons for schoolyard fighting, like self-defense and the defense of others. Why do you think teachers and administrators are so invested in a zero-tolerance approach to physical conflict between kids?

If we don't educate ourselves and be self-reflective and honest about what our children's lives are truly like, we contribute to their alienation and we will be unable to provide insight and guidance to them. So often as adults we chose one extreme or the other (never fight or you have to fight to truly get respect) and if we really took a moment to think about what we are saying to them, we'd realize we are saying things that, even if we truly believe them, don't actually help our kids to handle themselves competently in the world.

There's a lot in the book about representations of sex and sexuality—both with regard to Internet porn and sexting—but not much on teens having sex with each other. That happens to be the case for actual teens too, with the number of 15-to-19 year olds claiming to have had sex down from 1988 to 2010 by about 10 percent for girls and about 20 percent for boys. Is teen sex necessarily a problem? What right do you think teenagers have to sexual expression and exploration? How can parents mediate between the famous Mean Girls sex-ed scene (“You will get chlamydia and die”) and the compulsory sexuality of raunch culture? How do you find a balance as a parent between the knowledge that emergent sexuality is an important part of a healthy adolescence and not wanting your kids having sex in your house?

I recently attended the Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas where I interviewed porn stars and directors. I went because I believe it is my responsibility to learn as much as I can about cultural influences on gender dynamics and adolescent sexuality. I don't think you can be a parenting expert today without educating yourself about pornography.

I have just begun to process what I think about what I've learned there, but my central focus is the same as before I went to AVN. Young people have the right to come into their sexuality without shame despite living in a culture that is constantly exploiting their sexuality (mostly girls) or giving them such a regressive constrained gender lens in which to explore their sexual desires. The bottom line is teens have the right to come into their sexuality on their own terms.

What is a problem is teens who have natural sexual curiosity looking to porn to give them a readily available source of sexual information and imagery that so often portrays the rape “fantasies” as the sex that women really want, the all-powerful male dominating the weak woman, or the good girl gone bad who wants to do whatever her sexual partner wants, game for anything. And since it's so easy to find whatever fetish you can think of online,

it's just so easy for teens and children to think of the most ridiculous thing possible, look it up, and see disturbing things without being able to process it productively. They can see people look like they're really hurting each other. Kids and teens probably aren't going to know about safe words, and even if they did (because their mom bought *50 Shades* and left it around the house), how does the parent explain that power dynamic to them in a developmentally appropriate way?

I am continuing to struggle my way through how to talk to parents and teens about porn but I do know reactionary fear never works—no matter the subject.

In the section of Masterminds on “Gray Areas” you talk about admitting complexity to kids. You imagine a hypothetical conversation with a 15-year-old about drinking at parties and suggest focusing on possible consequences rather than moralizing. You write, “If we want them doing the right thing, we have to explain the wrong choice in terms that truly matter to them.” In a society that's constantly bombarding kids with anxiety about their futures, do you think there's a danger in emphasizing social consequences like that? I remember a guy in college who wouldn't have an underage drink at 20 because he wanted to be a politician and he feared it could damage his future—is he really who parents want their children to be?

I would distinguish between career aspirations (like your friend the politician) and a calling or profession as an extension of one's passions. Yes, it's a sound bite but one of the few, I believe, that are true. One of the big challenges is to get parents to see how they speak to their children about exactly this issue beyond the sound bite. That was something I really learned from the boys. If we can get parents to get beyond “Always try your best” “Things are just going to get harder ...” “I know what it was like to be in X grade”—things could really change for the better.

On passions, how do you think parents should talk with their children about passions that are risky in one way or another? I'm thinking particularly of football, given the recent media attention, but it applies to a kid who gets really into drug-based guitar music too, or a daughter who really wants to do beauty pageants.

As a parent I want to know why my child is passionate about what he's doing, because passions driven by what the overall culture says we should value need to be challenged. Beauty pageants come to mind most easily—a girl being passionate about conforming to a rigid regressive demand of female beauty and behavior is something I would have a serious problem with. But I am just as demanding of my sons about why they're interested in the things they're into—they love pistol shooting. They love knowing about guns. My older son loves throwing a knife. I know from personal experience (it's my throwing knife he's using) why it's fascinating and the feeling that comes over you when you throw a knife, whether you're male or female, but the fantasy in his head of the all-powerful, emotionless male isn't lost on me. He also plays football—I'm not crazy about that—but I respect and trust his coaches, and he needs the physical outlet. But for all his passions, it's been non-negotiable for me and his father that he experiment with other forms of self-expression, like art. This is the reason that he is now spray-painting (freehand and stencil) his room with our blessing. In my mind, at least, it's an ode to Banksy.

How can parents offer consistent messages when the larger society can't make up its mind? Take marijuana, for example: You have the law saying it's a dangerous narcotic and then you have Sanjay Gupta on TV saying it's medicine. How do you talk to your children about laws that don't make sense or contradictory rules that they're still bound by? How do you instill honesty while also teaching the kind of day-to-day hypocrisy being alive requires?

I can answer this as a parent. Both my husband and I admit to our children that laws are often arbitrary and

unequally applied. When pot became legal in Colorado—where we live—we talked to them about the three-strikes law, the racist application of crack cocaine laws starting with the Reagan era, etc. But I believe strongly that I communicate what the laws are that could possibly apply to my sons as they become teens. If they break those laws, they will be held accountable. And more important, insofar as alcohol and drugs, it's much more important to me to talk about how vulnerable it makes them to get involved with screwed-up, unethical things going down—whether or not they get officially “caught.”

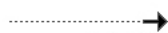
How do you think the increased social importance placed on college admissions has affected the way we think of good parenting—if you think it has at all?

One of the most important things I would change about parenting, and it's closely tied to the passions question, is persuading parents to value their child learning something that they can do throughout their life. Valuing craft, knowing how things work, and being able to fix things in the physical world should be valued highly—no differently than going to college. Now that I am living outside the D.C./NYC world, I think people do value it more highly in Colorado and you can see it in daily life. When the flood happened in September, no one panicked; people here have a sense of being able to handle things in the physical world. Everyone had the things they needed, and if they didn't, someone else did who helped them out. I now realize how important this is. During the flood there was no panicked craziness at the hardware stores. I stood in disbelief as people's houses were literally being washed away and they were calmly figuring out what was the best sump pump to use. In D.C. when there is a weather emergency, people have no idea how to take care of themselves beyond running to the market to buy milk. They shovel out parking spaces in front of their house and then put up folding chairs to mark their territory. We need competent people in the world, and that may not be about going to college. **TNI**

Dating in the Expanded Field

A pastiche, with apologies to Rosalind Krauss, by MAL AHERN and MOIRA WEIGEL

*Dating has left behind the modernist binaries that once defined it.
To survey the field we now face, we need a map.*



but don't hold that kind
of thing
against
me.



→ (introduced to symmetry)



Over the past 10 years, rather surprising things have come to be called “dating”: midnight invitations to parties-in-progress, hookups arranged entirely by email, or one-on-one excursions to movies and drinks with a friend with whom one has drunkenly slept. Some long-

term partners use “dating” to describe the relationship that each of them has to a third, who supports both as their patron, while others take “dating” to mean lying about in their pajamas and queuing up yet another episode of *Breaking Bad*.

No category could cover such a motley of activities unless that category had become almost infinitely malleable. And indeed the meaning of the term *dating*

has grown so vague that it obscures the very thing it is supposed to capture. Boomer parents bewail the hookup culture that they say has replaced dating, while their adult children stare into the abyss of Craigslist and wonder whether they even know what dating is. Yet we would submit that we know very well what dating is. And one of the things we know is that it is a historically bounded category, not an eternal one.

Dating, we propose, was courtship in what we might call its high-modernist phase. A classical phase preceded it. And in 2014, long after what many have declared a “death of dating,” we are fully within an era of romantic postmodernism. In each of these periods, courtship obeys a cultural logic that may appear inflexible. But any strict definition of courtship would be misleading. Because, in fact, each of these periods creates a field of possibility that can support a variety of romantic and sexual practices. To survey the field we face at present, we need a map.



But first, some backstory. For many centuries, the logic of middle-class courtship remained inseparable from the logic of marriage. Before the dawn of dating, the dominant form of such courtship was “calling.” According to custom, young women in the Victorian era extended invitations to suitable young men, asking them to visit their homes at appointed times. Typically, the members of the prospective couple met in her family parlor, supervised by her female relatives.

To the present day reader, this mating dance may resemble nothing so much as a kind of awkward “office hours” of the heart. But in the 19th century, the setting and rituals of calling powerfully symbolized the mar-

riage one hoped to obtain from the process. A man and a woman sat together in a domestic space that the women of her family watched over. If the call went well, more calls followed; eventually, the couple married and began to sit as husband and wife in their *own* domestic space—which she would happily manage for the rest of her life.

For a century, calling successfully produced enormous numbers of households. But these classical courtship conventions were not immutable. There came a time when their logic began to fail. In the early 20th century, would-be paramours gradually began leaving the parlor. By the 1920s men no longer accepted invitations to call on women—instead, they *took them out*. This modernist period of courtship introduced the idea of the “date”—in which “the call” lived on only as a marker. *I’ll pick you up at seven*. The essential homelessness of the date was written into its very structure: It required a departure time.

The modern date was the opposite of the call, the call’s first negation. Instead of a woman inviting a man into her domestic space, a man invited a woman out of her home and into public—where he paid for things and therefore called the shots. Rather than reproducing the domestic life of their parents, dating promised young men and women liberation. It let them loose in a separate world centered on urban sites of spectacle and mass consumption—on movie theaters and dance halls, boardwalks and restaurants. Young daters publicly traded time, company, and money. They soon realized that, even if such novel settings allowed them to ditch their chaperones, dating made its own demands.

Young men and women no longer had to play at housework, but in exchange they took on new forms of labor. They had to select the sorts of fashions, foods, and activities that would make them appear attractive to prospective mates. And, of course, they needed to earn enough money to buy those fashions, food, and tickets. Dating’s “site,” its symbolic content, was not the home

but the marketplace. It was training not for marriage, but for productive membership in consumer society. As such, dating became one of our most robust cultural forms. Through it, the field of courtship began to expand.

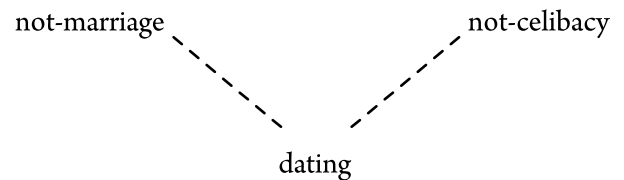
Over the course of the 20th century, dating loosened and finally unraveled the Victorian sexual mores and gender roles that had guided the 19th century middle class. The culture of calling had treated marriage and celibacy as if they stood in opposition. To be *not married* was to be *celibate*, and to be *not-celibate* was to be *married*. But as dating became the dominant form of courtship, the relationship between these terms began to shift. Promiscuity ceased to be only a mark of aristocratic privilege or lower-class degeneration. Dating made sleeping around bourgeois—respectable. It thus introduced a third term in the field of oppositions that had long defined Western courtship.

If we may borrow the terms from the original opposition, we might say that dating emerged as an alternative to the old binary of marriage versus celibacy; more specifically, it negated marriage and celibacy. Dating was the sum of *not-marriage*, and *not-celibacy*. It was before or proximate to marriage, but *not* marriage. To date was not to be *assured* of sex. But to date conventionally *was* to rule out celibacy, by which we mean the deliberate refusal of sexual romance.

However, as dating developed over the twentieth century, it gradually lost the stable repertoire of activities and spaces with which it was first associated. Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the only thing we can be certain of with respect to dating is that the *dater* is neither (monogamously) married nor celibate. More and more, “dating” refers simply to a combination of negations. The term has become a catch-all for any romantic activity that is neither marriage nor celibacy. But of course even this broadest definition of dating does not even begin to cover the spectrum of romantic experiences available to us.

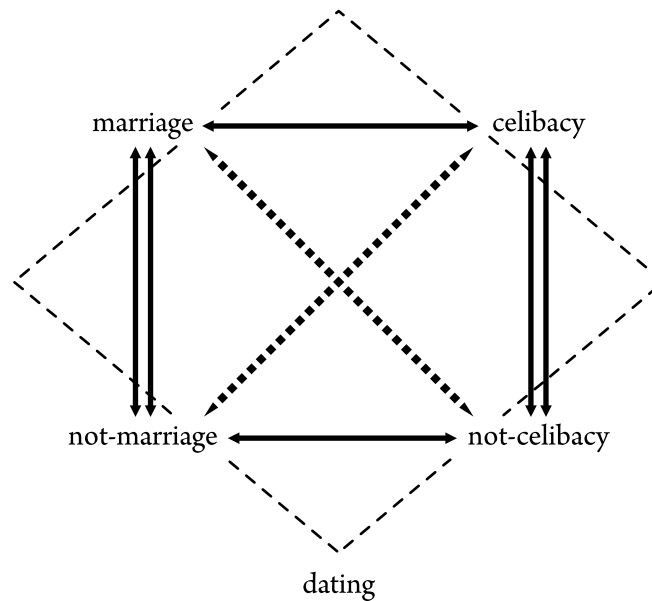


It is crucial, then, that we expand our description of romance to include the whole structural logic of contemporary romance, *beyond* dating. Using dating as our starting point, we can create a logically expanded map. We will start by illustrating dating’s most *basic, minimal definition*.

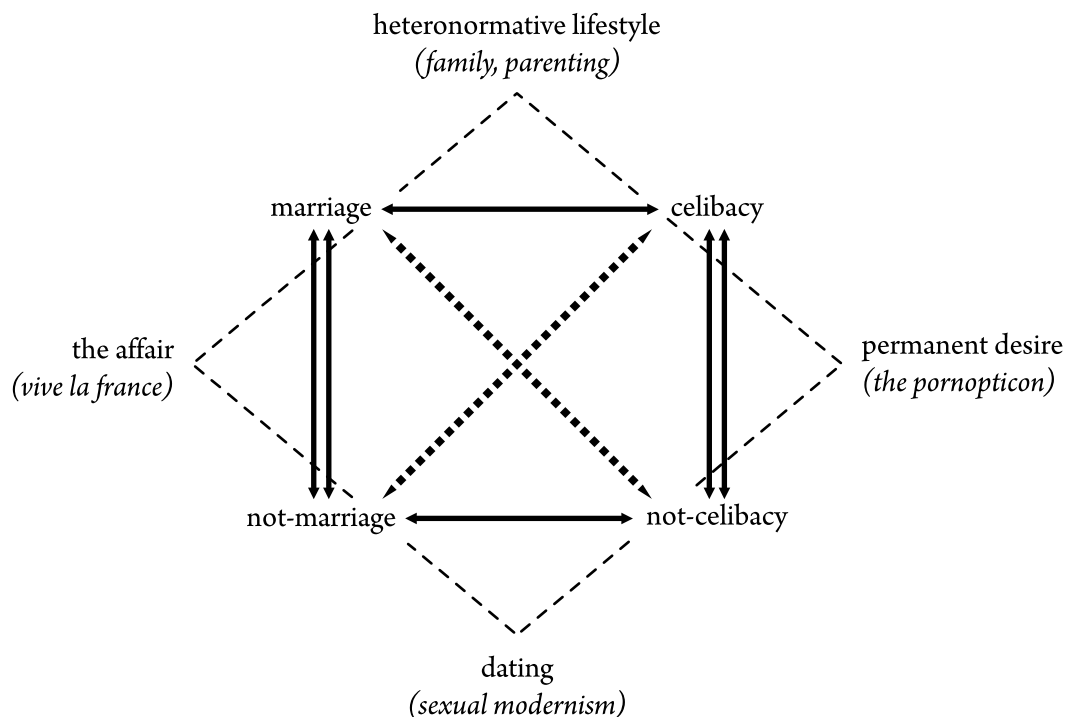


In order to expand the field of dating, we can borrow a tool that French structuralist social scientists called a Klein set or Piaget group. The Klein set uses a series of logical expansions to transform any supposed *binary* into a *quarternary* field. That is, it allows us to build upon a familiar opposition by showing that each of its components belongs to *another* opposition. For instance, the Klein set shows that marriage is not only opposed to celibacy; marriage is also opposed to *not-marriage* in all its forms. And celibacy is not only the opposite of marriage; there are many varieties of *not-celibacy* that one might live. The expanded diagram acknowledges that marriage and celibacy—as positive terms—are *also* ideas that organize much contemporary romantic behavior. But it also allows us to begin sketching in activities and attitudes that the old framework had no means to represent.

If we expand the classical marriage-celibacy opposition, we get a diagram that looks like this:



Here, *dating* is no longer only the middle term between two things that it is not. Rather, *dating* becomes one term on the periphery of a field in which there are other possibilities with different structures. The diagram enables us to envision three other categories. Each of them is a condition of the field itself, but none of them assimilable to mere *dating*. They are:



The possible combination of *marriage* and *not-marriage* yields a number of intermediary forms. For example, cohabitation is not necessarily marriage, nor is it not-marriage. One who is, or has, a mistress also sits in this quadrant. The ur-form of *marriage* plus *not-marriage* may be *the affair*: the married person's passionate commitment to betrayal. This quadrant is particularly *French*.

The addition of *celibacy* and *not celibacy* brings us to a set of social practices that lie between sex and its antithesis. *Desire* has traditionally been connected to *pursuit of contact*. But today we have many ways of decoupling the two. Innumerable technologies—online porn, Tinder, Grindr, camgirls, Chatroulette, and Snapchat—allow us to engage in forms of sex that leave the body untouched. The addition of not-celibacy to celibacy allows even the chaste, who don't get any, to get off.

The marriage-celibacy complex lies at the top of the map; it represents dating's equal and opposing force. Evidence abounds that our culture considers marriage *unsexy* by definition. The age of dating has created countless, powerful images of sexless marriage as the extreme to which dating is opposed: the life of minivans wending toward kids' soccer games, takeout, sweatpants, Netflix binges, and bed-death. Marriage is *commitment*; dating is freedom: the *freedom* to leave the domestic sphere, to define one's self by one's choices on the sexual market. Yet, for many people, marriage remains dating's goal. We recoil in horror before an eternity of sexlessness, even as we aspire to it.

iv.

The logic of modernist dating is in crisis. Perhaps this is because, despite conservative efforts to preserve them, *marriage* and *celibacy* are no longer strong cultural forms. Or at least they are not as captivating to 21st century

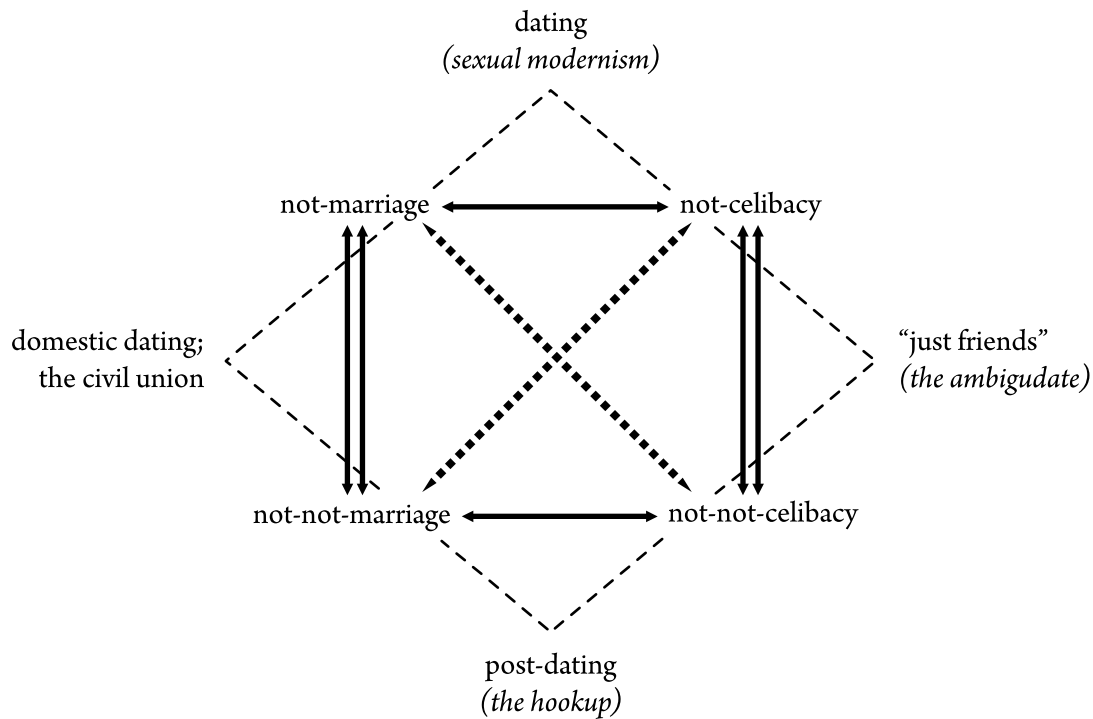
audiences as *dating*. Dating, rather than simply standing for the state of not-marriage, has become a productive cultural trope in its own right.

If we accept this fact, we can introduce *another* set of oppositions into our diagram. That is, we can *further* expand the field. *Marriage* and *celibacy* still fit into this new schema, because ideas about sex and commitment still govern our thinking about romance. But postmodern courtship subjects these terms to a double negation. Imagine, then, that the opposite of *not-marriage* is not *marriage*, but, rather, *not-not-marriage*: the state of not actively avoiding marriage. The opposite of *not-celibacy* is, similarly, *not-not-celibacy*: it is not the active pursuit of a sexual interest, but rather an openness to the possibility of sex. These doubly-negative terms can help us more clearly recognize several novel forms of contemporary relationship.

What lies between *not-marriage* and *not-not-marriage*? Those who are neither married nor actively avoiding marriage: they are the domestic daters, the cohabitating couple whose members are still trying each other on for size. Their relationship may have the feel of an expediently "shared lease" or of a dress rehearsal for permanent domesticity. Either way, it remains distinct from the French-style *affair* or *ménage*, which accepts its place outside the marriage-celibacy complex. Domestic daters live together in conflict. They do not know whether or not their arrangement will lead to marriage. Perhaps one party hopes for marriage while the other is certain it will not happen. More likely, both are ambivalent. Either way, this quadrant is very twenty-something.

The union of *not-marriage* and *not-not-marriage* also yields a newly-emergent legal category: the civil union. Many couples obtain a civil union because they would like to marry, but the state will not let them. Crucially they are *not-married*: they do not have the rights and privileges of marriage. Yet they are *not-not-married*, because they live and feel married in almost every other sense.

On the other side of the graph, there is the addition of



not-celibate, and *not-not-celibate*. This terminology is vexing, yet the situation it describes is all too familiar. We associate with many people to whom we are attracted, or to whom we could become attracted, but with whom we have decided to remain “just friends.” At least for the time being. *Ambigudates* do not promise sex, but they don’t *not*, either. Some just-friends, after trying and failing to turn ambiguous relationships into the sexual relationships they desire, begin to resent this quadrant. On innumerable Reddit threads and “Men’s Rights” message boards, angry men rail against their exile to what they have dubbed “the friend zone.” But such complaints—that one has been unilaterally banished to *friendship*—misunderstand the zone of “just friends.” It takes two to ambigudate. And two—or more!—can go on happily ambigudating for years.

At the bottom of this newly-expanded field of dating sit several of our most beguiling cultural forms: the fuck buddy, friend with benefits, erotic friendship. These forms of relationship forgo marriage’s contractual stabil-

ity, and its guarantee of sexual access. This entire quadrant may fall under the category of “postdating.” Its possibilities range from the destructive and exploitative to the passionately *new*. Rather than assimilate these relationships to the rules of *dating*, we would do well to investigate this field more rigorously, on its own terms. It deserves its own radically expanded map.

These transformations don’t necessarily represent progress toward ever better, freer modes of being. They represent changes in the structural possibilities that govern sex, pleasure, and reproduction at any given moment in time. Transformations in the field of courtship are historical *events*. A structural analysis, therefore, is not enough. A complete map still leaves us with the task of explanation. *How* do institutions uphold these structures, and *what factors* have allowed them to change at specific moments? To really understand where we are now, and where we might go from here, we don’t just need a bigger diagram. We need a history of dating. **TNI**

Hate Sinks

By JASON WILSON

The facade of liberal democracy stays clean only by putting young women in hate's way



MODERATORS bring silences to the Internet's city of words. They read everything so that we don't have to. In sites under moderation, they have filtered everything we see. It is Courtney (one of the many moderators, all given pseudonyms here, that I interviewed as part of my research on ideas of civility and changes in the public sphere), not us, who combs the threads of an Australian broadcaster's website and

social-media pages for the output of users "who will just post the word *cunt* 50 times for like three hours." It is Michelle who, daily, reads and deletes the many comments posted to news stories on immigration "calling for asylum seekers to be burned in their boats." Moderators try to keep their employers in the clear by banishing antagonism that exceeds the anachronistic limits of a deliberative public sphere.

But this means we necessarily don't see their work. Readers can't look at what goes on in the content-management system or the stream of user comments welling up in it. We can never know what has been cut or why. We may assume, but we can never be sure, what was hacked out to leave the telltale scar: "comment deleted by moderator." On the sleek surfaces of big media sites, there are no signs of the frenetic backstage efforts to staunch the hemorrhaging of their gravitas, or of the pace that Sarah sets when "you've got three hours and there's 1,500 comments to get through, and they have to be read and thought about, and you've got to check links."

We can think of moderators' bodies as being the element of an electronic circuit that dissipates excess energy

This imperceptibility means that we may not stop to think much about moderation as a form of labor that composes the Internet. But as the need to grant the audience "a voice" has become conventional wisdom, almost every media organization now needs this work done. Although the transitions are often poorly planned—Sarah complains her managers seem to be "making it up as they go along"—traditional organizations have adopted the Internet's measures of success, evaluating stories in

part by how much comment they attract. So for every story, a thread.

The promoters of this ethos, including many academics focused on the future of news, have successfully persuaded managers that comment sections are not only a way to cement the bond between reader and news brand, but are ipso facto democratizing. The online expression of voice, political participation, and democracy are smoothly, unproblematically equated.

In an earlier period of mass media hegemony, broadcasters and the press set agendas, marshaled debate, and, with other liberal-democratic institutions, defined the limits of legitimate dissent. They decided whose voice was heard in political debate and who was ignored. This meant privileged access for white men with a measure of existing authority, and views within the dichotomies—of party and approved ideology—that kept liberal democracy stable. Now these legacy institutions must contend with a larger, demand-driven and user-focused media landscape. Content is abundant, and counterpublics proliferate in spaces from which they were once banished.

Inviting the audience to comment is a way of making older institutions relevant to this changed world. But allowing the expression of popular voice carries the constant risk that what Benjamin Arditi calls the "table manners" of liberal democracy will be breached. Unfamiliar political demands might be made, conspiracy theories of power aired, defamatory imputations hurled, and publishing laws broken. The passions and unresolvable tensions of our increasingly agonistic polities jar alongside the sober, neutral register of mainstream reporting.

At the same time, the topics that promise especially bitter, polarized debate, tempt editors with the traffic and comments they can attract. Sarah rattles off a list of themes she knows she will have a long comment queue—and that editors will keep publishing: "Israel and Palestine, Gaza ... anything on climate change, the science of climate change. Anything published by one of the

climate-change skeptics. But then anything published by a climate-change believer as well. Anything about refugees, you know, asylum seekers, border control, that sort of stuff. Anything sort of what could be loosely described as a feminist article, so you know, like Slutwalk.”

This complex tension—between voice and civility, eyeballs and deliberation—is one that future-of-news enthusiasts are good at waving away, but that comment moderators must bear. Within representative democracy, we can think of moderators’ bodies as being like that element of an electronic circuit that dissipates excess energy and allows it to function. They absorb the excess affects in a period of political dysfunction, and allow institutions to appear stable and unchallenged. They maintain the semblance of civility after older infrastructures have fallen into disrepair. They suck up discursive heat so that political communications systems can keep flowing according to their archaic fantasies of civil, public discourse. If computers have such heat sinks, moderators are hate sinks.

GIVEN the contradictions they must try to stabilize, the worst fate for a moderator is to work on a successful site publishing topical material. Sarah’s employer “had no money to resource themselves properly with dealing with the success of the site. If it had been properly resourced there’d be more people working on the comments and therefore kind of, you know, one or two people having that experience not so intense.” The problem was “just the sheer numbers. You’d get to the end of the day and feel like you hadn’t done anything just because of the sheer numbers sitting there”. The work is often done with gimcrack equipment, designed in a gentler age where there was far less content to process. At Louise’s job, “the technology that we use ... it’s pretty old. It’s pretty basic. It’s been—it’s the same software I was using when I started six years ago.”

On social-media platforms, where their employers have been encouraged to develop their presence, moderators have

even less control. On Facebook, the handling of user content is determined by the limited settings that Zuckerberg’s engineers have made available. But this does not necessarily lessen the demand, from employers and readers alike, for moderators to keep pages clean and protect the brand. Social media multiplies the difficulty of the job, as many moderators are forced to divide their time between company websites and social media accounts. On organizational Facebook pages, Courtney says that they “can’t control the discussion because it’s not pre-moderated, it’s post-moderated, but we do need to be going through them and looking for things that are totally unacceptable. It just doesn’t happen to the extent that it should.” It’s impossible not to wonder whether maintaining this veneer of civility can be anything other than piecemeal and retrograde.

The sheer weight of comments—the renewable energy of opinion—becomes a source of anxiety, if not trauma. In post-moderation, long queues are invisible to commenters, who expect that their opinions will be voiced instantaneously. In trying to deal with the build-up, Sarah, with a professional past as a mental health worker, was led to a specific self-diagnosis. “I do remember at one stage feeling really quite stressed. And so realizing that I was suffering ... it sounds extreme but I did think ‘this feels like vicarious trauma to me’, because it just got upsetting. And it was just sort of the relentlessness of it because it *just didn’t stop*, you know? It just kept coming, and it didn’t stop.”

After the lean years of economic crisis, and the serial disappointments of official politics, the voice of the people is frequently raw. Caught between an angry and desperate citizenry and the inertia of contemporary politics, Courtney can only summon a queasy enthusiasm for this work. “It’s kind of like getting an injection for something. It’s not good, but I know I have to have it. It’s good but it doesn’t make it nice. Like the dentist.”

Like many of her colleagues, she consoles herself that at least, for now, moderators have work. Despite bumper enrollments in journalism and communication programs,

the news business offers few paid openings for graduates. But moderation is at least one hiring area where youth might trump experience. It helps that no one who has been around for very long wants to do it. At Louise's broadcast-news organization, "People know how painful it is, but the thing is, none of the senior producers ever have to do those shifts, none of the executive producers ever have to do those shifts." Jim, an ex-moderator now in a mid-level supervisory position, admits that "there's the acknowledgment that it's not the sort of thing that you can do for weeks on end and retain your sanity. [But] I don't think the emotional side of it is really acknowledged, or maybe it's more that when you're doing those shifts you don't really feel like you can reach out to people in a formal way."

Observing contemporary communicative and affective excess—the kind that moderators encounter daily—political theorist Jodi Dean also notes liberal democracy's enduring, systemic resilience, and names this disjunction "communicative capitalism." She thinks that the upsurge in the circulation of political content "in the dense, intensive networks of global communications relieves top-level actors (corporate, institutional and governmental) from the obligation to respond." The energies of mediated oppositional debate and activism are reabsorbed as informational commodities. The gap between "politics as content" and the workings official politics widens. As for "democratization": "the proliferation, distribution, acceleration and intensification of communicative access and opportunity, far from enhancing democratic governance or resistance, results in precisely the opposite." Comments promote not critique, but control.

But if this is true, it happens at the expense of moderators. Dean risks making communicative capitalism seem weightless. She leaves out the affective labor of that allows a semblance of liberal conversation to persist. We must add to her version of our impasse by emphasizing how this systemic resilience relies on a precariously employed and female labor force. We must understand how

they are deputized to shore up the legitimacy of institutions which have historically excluded and currently exploit them, freeing the powerful to present all of this as a democratic undertaking. Until we do, moderators will suffer in vain, preserving the facade of civility in an era of sharpening antagonisms.

In bringing this to light we will also notice that the work of moderation is gendered. It is not just that the powerful have found a way to mute our discontent, but they have done so in a way that puts a lot of young, mostly female bodies in the way of hate speech. In my qualitative research, I found that the overwhelming majority of moderators were women, and most were relatively recent graduates. This is consistent with the high ratios of female to male graduates in journalism and communication degrees in the U.S. (about 3 to 1) and Australia (up to 4 to 1 in some degrees), and also with the disproportionate number of men occupying full time and prominent positions, further up the chain. In the era of social media, this adds up to a cruel equation: Not only do women face streams of hate directed at themselves on personal accounts, they also scrub similar threads clean for their employers.

For many women, as Amanda Hess has shown, encountering hate online is an everyday reality. But if some spaces appear devoid of such abuse, it is because there are women absorbing still more negative affect in order to preserve a zombie version of liberal civility. Dispelling the lonely silences of moderation will not only let us recognize workers' labor but will also allow us to better understand how politics fails to satisfy in liberal democracies. And when we better appreciate who bears the costs of our vaunted communicative freedoms, we may be less inclined to see democracy as the ability to sound off, and more insistent on defining it as the capacity to speak together as equals. **TNI**

**All names have been changed and employers not named in order to protect the employment and welfare of the many media workers in Australia and the U.S. who so generously talked to me about moderation. In re-naming them I have given them names of the same gender.*

Black Metal Is Sublime

By ADRIAN VAN YOUNG

In their propensity for corpse paint and murder, bands like Bathory and Gorgoroth are the unlikely fulfillment of Romantic ideals: absolute inwardness turned outward

IN a now infamous interview at 2010's Scion Rock Fest, Hunter Hunt-Hendrix, the singer and guitarist of the Brooklyn-based Black Metal band Liturgy, explained why his band doesn't "play grim music" or "wear corpse paint." He said he was "sickened by reveling in negativity": "There is a fundamental substratum of chaos that is very destructive [but] also a creative force ... and I think the only way to deal with the void and the flux of chaos is to affirm it."



That is why Liturgy plays what he calls “transcendental black metal,” a posi-core anomaly in the otherwise wrathful subgenre of greater Black Metal.

“True” or traditional Black Metal—*not* what Hunt-Hendrix plays—is an operatically dissonant blend of screeching vocals, tremolo picking, and blast beats, played by musicians in spiked jewelry and the corpse paint Hunt-Hendrix disdains, with Hammer Horror-sounding stage-names along the lines of Count Grishnackh, Faust, and Nocturno

Black Metal, of course, has a penchant for Satanic aesthetics as well.

Culto, typically espousing an antiphilosophy of misanthropic individualism. In the genre’s native Norway in the early-to-mid 1990s, Black Metal spawned a culture of criminal one-upmanship that left in its wake least three documented murders, several suicides, and a swathe of burned churches and grave desecrations.

But “beneath all the grim vibes of Black Metal,” Hunt-Hendrix insists, “there’s this kind of spiritual ecstasy.” The tremolo picking creates the effect of “a string orchestra.” The great “unacknowledged influence” of the genre? Nineteenth century Romanticism.

Below the YouTube clip in which Hendrix-Hunt makes this argument, the comments range from puerile and intolerant (“what a fuck. even his band looks like they want him to shut the fuck up. hipster fag”) to analytical (“Looks like it’s time for Cradle of Filth to retire as the whipping boys of Black Metal”) to outraged (“What a bunch of PRETENTIOUS BULLSHIT”) to menacing (“I personally want to go murder HUNTER HUNT-HENDRIX”)—which, given Scandinavian Black Metal’s history, is no empty threat. Only a few of the 200-plus commenters come to Hunt-Hendrix’s defense.

This is a shame, because Hunt-Hendrix has his genealogy right. Aesthetically, artistically, and ideologically, Black Metal and Romanticism are two sides of the same scuffed coin. Indeed, right down to the cherry-pit cleft in his chin, Hunt-Hendrix—who has written an 11-page aesthetics manifesto called “Transcendental Black Metal”—is a ringer for none other than Lord Byron, the 19th century bastion of what the poet Robert Southey called the “Satanic school” of verse. *The Courier* judged Byron as having “a brain from heaven and a heart from hell”—someone who “seems to have lived only that the world might learn from his example how worthless and how pernicious a thing is genius, when divorced from religion, from morals and from humanity.”

Byron, as did many other Romantics, courted what scholars have since come to refer to as “Satanic aesthetics,” a rebellious and sinister dandyism that manifested not only in their artistic creations but also in their personalities. Romantic violinist Niccolò Paganini—whose successor Franz Liszt maintained an “unbelievable” yet strictly heterosexual “passion” for fellow heartthrob Byron—was rumored to have perfected his musical technique while imprisoned for the murder of his mistress, a skein of whose intestine had been repurposed as his G-string. The bejeweled and frequently open-shirted Bryon was the pointed inspiration for Lord Ruthven in John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), whose “Byronic look” was marked by “the curl of the upper lip, and the scowl of the brow.”

Black Metal, of course, has a penchant for Satanic aesthetics as well. In the hooded, sword-wielding visage of Rob Darken of Poland's National-Socialist-leaning Graveland we see a medieval specter worthy of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), or one that might have been conceived during the famous 1816 idyll of Byron, Polidori, and the Shelleys on Lake Geneva, which ultimately yielded Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. In the corpse-paint makeup, flowing hair, and scowling of Norway's Darkthrone or England's Cradle of Filth (whose Romantic stage antics are as reviled among partisans of "true" Black Metal as Hunt-Hendrix's manifesto) we see an echo of the red waistcoats and green wigs of the followers of French poet Gerard de Nerval, who led a lobster on a string through the streets of 19th-century Paris.

The angular tunics of Norwegian band Immortal call up the Gothic Cologne Cathedral (though Immortal themselves would probably love to see it burn), whose construction was left unfinished in 1473 only to recommence at the height of the Romantic era. And Norway's Gorgoroth, who favor spikes and bullet-belts and braided beards and livestock blood, would make fitting owners of the gem-encrusted pet tortoise from J.K. Huysman's *Against Nature* (1884), a novel whose entropic dandy of a protagonist, Des Esseintes, keeps bejeweling the poor animal until finally it suffocates to death.

Hegel describes the Romantics as prizing "absolute inwardness" realized through "sounds and images, dreams and visions"—i.e., art—through which "the gate to understanding can be opened." Black Metal has typically prided itself on a wholesale dismissal of "inwardness," and the Black Metal movement has proved notoriously deadpan when it comes to the genre's aesthetic, to a degree that verges on camp. As Joe McIver suggests in *Extreme Metal* (2000), "The cod-devilry of [Black Metal] songs, coupled with the often hammy stage shows that [Bathory and Mercyful Fate] and a host of other imitators produced, led

to mass ridicule." Whether Black Metal artists and fans are aware of this ridicule themselves, however, is an open question. Black Metalers refuse to camp, no matter how "campy" they seem at first glance. They refuse to reflect self-consciously on their practice the way Hunt-Hendrix reflects in his manifesto. Black Metal musicians play Black Metal because it's what they're driven to play. Reflection is for "hipster fags"; it's "PRETENTIOUS BULLSHIT" that invites a death sentence. I point this out not to condone the occasional intolerance of Black Metal's musicians and fans so much as to highlight the fact that the widespread resistance to gazing inward has become as innate to Black Metal culture as "absolute inwardness" was to Romantics.

The Romantics gave vent to inwardness by way of art; Black Metalers take inwardness to its illogical extreme. For "true" Black Metalers more than dabble in Satanic and heathen "aesthetics"—they externalize their hate and despair in acts of violence and defilement that achieve (for them anyway) the Black Metal equivalent of the Romantic Sublime, which, as Edmund Burke argued in 1757, appears in the person who experiences it as a regenerative humbling of the soul in the face of inconceivable terror. In Black Metal, striving toward light becomes striving toward darkness. Regeneration goes to rot.

IN 1991, Per "Dead" Ohlin, Swedish vocalist for the Norwegian Black Metal band Mayhem put a shotgun against his forehead and pulled the trigger, leaving behind a suicide note that read: "Excuse all the blood." Mayhem's surviving members not only photographed the aftermath of Dead's suicide for the cover of their album *Dawn of the Black Hearts*, but the band's founder Euronymous courted rumors that he had cannibalized portions of Dead's brain and crafted choice bits of Dead's skull into morbid talismans.

In 1992, Bard "Faust" Eithun stabbed a gay man to death in a park in Lillehammer, Norway.

One misty night in 1993, beneath the black mark of Black Metal's becoming, Euronymous himself was murdered by rival scenester, Burzum front man Varg Vikernes, in another stabbing incident for which Vikernes was locked up for 16 years. (He was released in 2009.)

Later in 1993, the founding members of German NSBM band Absurd strangled a classmate to death with a length of electrical chord under circumstances suggestively similar to Faust's Lillehammer murder.

In 2005, five years before being named "gay person of the year" at the Bergen Gay Galla, Ghaal of Gorgoroth was arrested, tried, and imprisoned for "torture-like violence" against a stranger, though Ghaal claimed he was acting in self-defense.

And from 1992 to 1996, legions of Black Metal artists and fans set fire to over 50 churches around Norway and other parts of Europe, the embers of which would disperse and flare up as far away as Southern Florida.

The churches that burned and fell to Black Metal were none of them middling, one-room affairs. Fantoft Stave Church in Bergen (torched in 1992) and Holmenkollen Chapel in Oslo (also torched in 1992) were spire-cross-and-cornice-crowned behemoths situated on densely wooded outcroppings (and according to their torchers, on the bones of pre-Christian worship sites). In many ways, they were as suggestive of Black Metal aesthetics as they were of the Christian obeisance that Black Metalers had hoped to wipe from the earth by setting them alight. And *watching* these churches burn must have been in itself terrifying, as per Burke's definition, in a way that served to bring the arsonists that much closer to what Emperor and Zyklon guitarist Samoth calls humanity's "cosmic dust" status in the "big picture" of the universe.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the myopic antihero Victor describes a lightning storm he witnesses in the Alps on his way to meet his monster as "so beautiful yet terrific," "a noble war in the sky" that lifted his spirits as "vivid flashes of lightning dazzled [his] eyes, illuminating the lake, making

it appear like a vast sheet of fire." Nearly 200 years later, Bard "Faust" Eithun of Emperor recalls of the arson of Holmenkollen Chapel: "We rode up the mountain to watch it burn. It was very beautiful and exciting—when we got back to [the record store *Helvete* in Oslo] we could hardly sleep." While Varg Vikernes says of the greater aim of the burnings: "It's a psychological picture—an almost dead fire, a symbol of our heathen consciousness. The point was to throw dry wood and branches on that, to light it up and reach toward the sky again, as a growing force."

Out of the mouths of murderers.

Both Bard Eithun and Vikernes' accomplice to the murder of Euronymous, Snorre Ruch, recorded similar sublime experiences in the act of taking or abetting the taking of another human life. Writes Eithun: "It was like looking at this whole incident through eyes outside of my body. It was as if I was looking at two people who were having a fight—and one had a knife, so it was easy to kill the other person." Of fleeing the scene of the crime in Bergen, Ruch writes: "I was sick with fever... So we drove with the heat on maximum and Dead Can Dance on the stereo real loud. It was quite atmospheric."

THE louder the better, it goes without saying. But also the louder the more terrifying, and the further one transcends one's self. You need only listen to Darkthrone's bulldozing *Transylvanian Hunger*, the mournful spikes and declivities of Angmar's *Zuruck in die Unterwelt*, the ethereal blitzkrieg of Wolves in the Throne Room's *Celestial Lineage*, the decayed invocation of Carpathian Forest's *Shining Black Leather*, or the symphony of broadswords that is Emperor's *Anthems to the Welkin at Dusk* to fully understand the aural sublimity of Black Metal, wherein—or wherefrom, as the genre would have it—you are driven to cower outside yourself in the coldest and darkest dimension of sound.

Or as the late Euronymous of Mayhem put it: "Fuck off! War and sodomy!"

What allows Black Metal to flirt with sublimity is also what tethers it back to the earth. The Romantics incorporated nature and earthiness into their conception of the sublime—specifically, the degree to which nature reigned *over* humanity—and advocated, as does Black Metal, a return to vital primitivism, which in the late-18th and early-to-mid-19th centuries meant a return to the Medieval period.

This sort of nostalgia helps explain the Romantic obsession with Gothic art and architecture (Cologne Cathedral comes to mind), as well as the overall Gothic Revival aesthetic—a melange of night and nature worship, supernaturalism, the touting of madness as a gateway into genius and, curiously, a return to clericalism. And this makes sense, given that the “Romantic Revolution,” as Tim Blanning calls it, served as a direct rebuff to the unlovely rationalism of the Enlightenment. Many Romantics, in particular from Germany, would take their anti-Enlightenment stance to Black Metal-like extremes (albeit Christian ones): Case in point, the “Nazarenes” of Vienna, a group of Romantic painters that formed a “self-consciously backward-looking ‘Brotherhood of Saint Luke’ ” in 1809, then moved to a derelict monastery in Rome where they pursued communal living.

Romantic composer Richard Wagner drew considerable horn-and-helmet inspiration from so-called heathen myths, as well—such as Germany’s *Song of the Nibelungs*, and Iceland’s *Edda* and *Volsunga Saga*. In Wagner’s *The Ring of the Nibelung*, written between 1848 and 1874, Wagner did his Teuton damndest to realize the ideals of his early 19th century countryman Novalis, a poet who yearned for a time “when the world will be returned to a life free unto itself ... and man will recognize in myth and poem the true eternal world history.”

That this notion of returning to some idealized state of Nature by way of populist myth resounds with the Valkyrian strains of proto-Fascism is no accident, especially given that Nationalism Socialism—another movement from which Black Metal borrows aesthetic motifs—is Romantic Nationalism undressed.

Nor is it accidental that Scandinavian Black Metalers would come to “throw goats” (a euphemism for making the devil-horns gesture) in the face of organized religion in a way meant to elevate heathen beliefs. For example, the Swedish band Bathory, named for Elizabeth Bathory, the “Blood Countess” who had supposedly bathed in virgins’ blood to reverse the effects of unwelcome old age and became for the Romantics a figure of interest.

The band thanked Wagner personally in the liner notes to their 1990 album *Hammerheart*. Bathory was one of the first “blackened” heavy metal bands to invoke a return to Asatru, the worship of pre-Christian gods such as Odin and Thor. Bathory’s first Asatru-worshipping album, 1988’s *Blood Fire Death*, depicts in its cover art the *Oskorei* or “Wild Hunt” of Scandinavian and Teutonic myth by way of Norwegian Romantic painter Peter Nicolai Arbo. In the painting, a horde of spear-and-hammer-wielding Valkyries and Vikings ride down out of the heavens on black horses dragging a nude woman, while carrion birds circle below. The picture is, to put it bluntly, so fucking metal it’s not even funny.

The Black Metal movement is more than allusive to Romanticism’s pet obsessions. It is the unlikely fulfillment of Romantic ideals: absolute inwardness turned outward, for lack of somewhere else to go. Given the relentlessness of Black Metal music, the showy necro-Baroque of Black Metal fashion and the hyper-masculinity of Black Metal comportment, absolute *outwardness* seems an apt characterization. The Romantic sublime gives us the soul humbled in terror before the greatness of nature or art; the Black Metal sublime shows us the terror inside us.

It’s no wonder that Black Metalers have been slow to embrace their inward-gazing ancestors. Black Metal is Romanticism’s uncanny double: It’s the face in the mirror, glimpsed dimly through corpse paint. The more that its followers try *not* to see it, the more resolutely it looks back askance. **TNI**

Everybody's Doing It

By MAXWELL NEELY-COHEN

Peer pressure has dissipated since its '90s heyday, but the adolescent flat world is harder to navigate



THERE used to be order. Not being cool in a certain way meant rejection by the pack. The flock. No one took a shot at the popular kids. When someone did try to mock teenage royalty, everyone else laughed at them. “Peer pressure no longer exists because peers no longer exist” a 15-year-old girl told me recently. She wasn’t trying to make some pithy adolescent statement about how there isn’t any “meaning” in “anything”—no

nihilistic or solipsistic or ironic tendencies intended—she meant it literally.

Peers are now just media filters, she said. Collectors. Separated from their physical forms. Social pressure no longer comes from groups made up of singular individuals confined to the unforgiving collective architecture of a specific school. Instead, the adoption of aesthetics, identities, and behaviors are filtered through countless

nodes on various networks, digital manifestations of humans and nonhumans alike.

Advertising executives are your older siblings. Aging hipsters twice your age are your friends. The affections of generations past are yours. Your music can be their music and their music can be your music. You have access to any set of tastes or styles and the theoretical ability to acquire and adopt them, to dress, listen, fuck, and/or ingest whatever you want. You no longer need a patient zero in your classroom. You don't need the older kids to show you how to roll a joint. You can be the first and only to stop eating or the first to smoke up, or a few years later the first to decide not to smoke up and write black X's on your hands and listen to hardcore. You can now discover straight edge on your browser and start a Tumblr full of pictures of Ian Mackaye and bemoan how you didn't grow up in the late '80s. And you wouldn't be alone. And yes, your "peers" trolling the hallways and cell towers might make fun of you for this or that. But they'll go after you either way.

Now, unlike in the '90s, being the dreamiest basketball player or having the right halter top from the mall pays no dividends; everyone is a target. Fair game for hatred in the schoolyard and ridicule on the wireless networks. No one is safe. The hierarchies still exist, and status still exists, but it's almost taken the life of a game. An ingrained biological response to the harsh conditions of scholastic pseudo-imprisonment.

In 2011, UC Davis sociologists Robert Faris and Diane Femlee completed an authoritative study of the social network of a single North Carolina school. They tracked the social status and interactions of every single student over an entire semester, exhaustively cataloging every single instance of abuse and harassment. While the entire study is worth reading in its own right, its most interesting conclusions were:

- Singular students were often *both* targets and perpetrators, bully *and* victim.

- That social station *increased* the likelihood of beligerence and harassment.

Faris put it to CNN like this:

Kids are caught up in patterns of cruelty and aggression that have to do with jockeying for status ... It's really not the kids that are psychologically troubled, who are on the margins or the fringes of the school's social life. It's the kids right in the middle, at the heart of things ... often, typically highly, well-liked popular kids who are engaging in these behaviors. When kids increase in their status, on average, they tend to have a higher risk of victimization as well as a higher risk of becoming aggressive.

Now that social rejection is a defining characteristic of teenage life, the threat just is not what it once was. And it used to be *everything*. Before, high school popularity (or the lack of it) meant something more than rote rank. It meant safety. The quest to be accepted, or even better, "popular," was rooted in normalized concepts of attractiveness, fashion, and sociocultural identity, creating a class apart, so often described using the language of royalty. The privileged found themselves insulated from mockery, bullying, virginity, gossip, hatred, and reproach as they dominated the lower classes. It's not that these monarchs weren't resented or even hated, it's that they were safe. There was no way to get at them, the structure itself so powerful that fighting against it with any effectiveness was solely the purview of teen films and novels. The heartwarming social breakdown of *The Breakfast Club* or the glorious revenge against the popular elite in *Heathers* were fantasies, fictions, and dreams.

The greatest unfiltered high school documentary of that era, 1986's *All American High*, presents a starkly different picture. The narrative of a Finnish exchange student at Torrance High School portrays an absolutely rigid structure of social status and popularity that would challenge any Hollywood cliché, but without any narrative of upheaval, no ugly-duckling loser magically becoming prom queen. The outsiders are so marginalized and dispersed, they are barely depicted, mentioned in passing

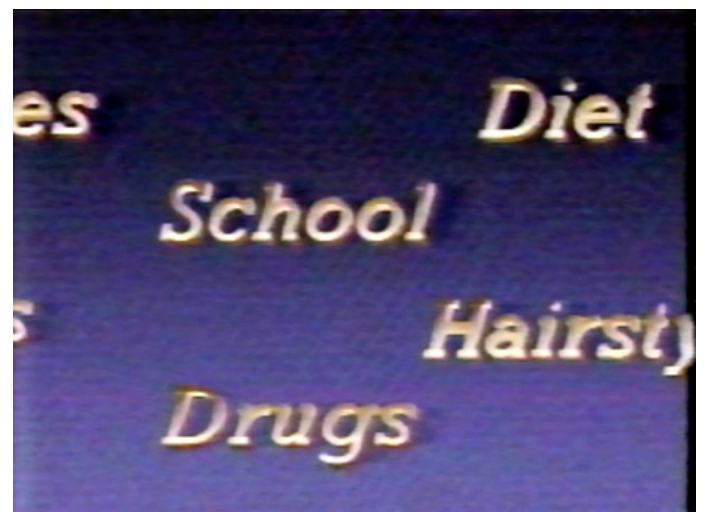
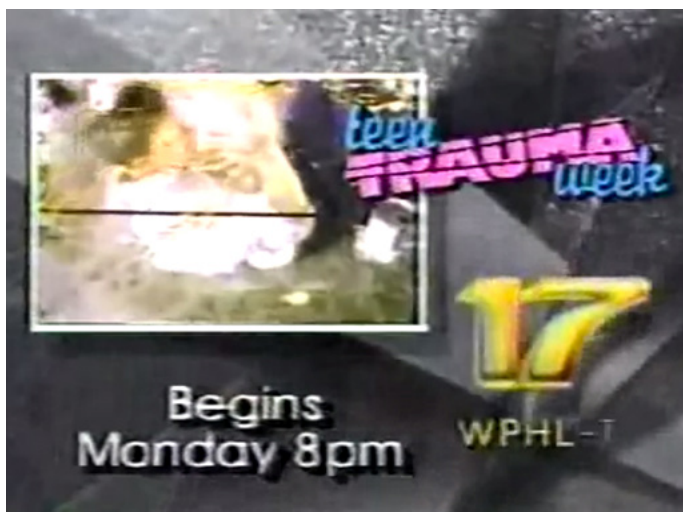
through hushed sidelong glances as the uncomplicated caste system is explored through parties and social events.

The greatest benefit to being one of *them*, to fitting into their values (and not being one of the “punkers”), was, in a sense, security. It was good to be king and it was good to be queen, and good to be just like the king and queen. But it really wasn't about them, and it wasn't really a monarchy, the starting quarterback homecoming king and the beautiful it-girl were not powerful, the system was, and any insurgent was helpless against it.

But over the next 15 years that system crumbled. The unified mass-culture started to fray. There could be multiple hierarchies at the same time. Where previously there had been single othered individuals, there grew

identifiable packs of the outliers. Tribes of punks and druggies and sluts and fags and blacks and whites and goths and disturbed kids that your mom is afraid might just shoot up the whole fucking place.

The 1996 short documentary *Dirty Girls*, which depicts a group of grungy pseudo-riot-grrrl 8th graders, shows how far the degeneration of the traditional social structure had come in a decade. The have-nots were not only multiplying, but they had formed their own independent architectures of order, conformity, and aggression. And most strikingly of all, they were engaged in open combat and competition with the entire social system. In *Dirty Girls*, everyone in the school knows sisters Amber and Harper, the leaders of the faction. They are



not the faceless nameless roving “punks” in *All American High*. They are royalty in their own right, and even if they are reviled by many, they revile back in turn.

As subcultures and possible group identities swelled in membership and variety, peer pressure became the go-to explanation for any parent concerned about the emergence of youth subcultures. My kid is smoking pot because of *those* kids in his school. He’s having sex not because he wants to, but because if he doesn’t his friends will make fun of him for being a prude or gay and that’s just *the worst*.

The circa-1998 peer pressure educational video that was repeatedly screened in my middle school was saturated with regressive racial coding and cultural paranoia. The “drug” scenario consisted of a cluster of mostly black boys pressuring a smaller bespectacled white freshman into “smoking dope” in a graffiti covered alley while a hip-hop instrumental track that sounded like an elevator music ripoff of Public Enemy’s “Security of the First World” blared in the background. The “drunk driving” scenario featured a short-haired female guitar player and an effeminate male painter trying to goad a dimpled blonde girl into “joyriding” with them. Most comically of all, the “academic cheating” scenario featured two raven-haired seniors dressed in all black at computers wearing sunglasses—what the B-movie producers clearly intended to signify as hackers—imploping a poor nerd to join them in stealing the answers for the test. The clique of self-assured girls haranguing their peer to start having sex all had large books on politics or history in front of them. The gyno-, techno-, homo-, and xenophobia culminated in a scene on “gangs” and the pressure of “gang initiation” so openly racist it must be the reason the video is unfindable on the Internet today.

This propaganda campaign against peer pressure, which peaked sometime in those late ’90s, represented nothing more than a vain attempt to harness already-existing nonconformity and direct it toward whichever

moral panic dominated the psychic landscape that week.

Peer pressure, even among adults, no longer works as well as it did. The urge to be part of the pack lurks alongside the yearning to be different. To be set apart. And in this, the children of America have become true masters, iconoclastic heathens willing to claim anything or knock down any idol.

One of the multiple narratives that make up the 2011 documentary *Bully* centers on Kelby, an openly lesbian 16-year-old growing up in Tuttle, Oklahoma. She experiences a level of hate and ostracism so extreme, not just from her peers but from the entire town, that her (wonderful) parents at one point offer to move the entire family to more friendly blue-state territory. But lost in the incredible hostility that comes with living in one of the most bigoted and antagonistic spheres in red-state America is the remarkable discovery that she is not alone. The film shows her with her cadre of friends, an assembly of LGBT kids and straight allies, existing together in her high school despite the extraordinary pressure. Their open presence in this environment demonstrates resilience in the face of not only the pressures of their peers, but of their mothers, fathers, community leaders, and teachers.

Parents have mostly given up on peer pressure as a paradigm defining element of molding their teenagers in favor of freaking out about bullying/bystanding/not-killing-yourself. Adults now do not believe in peer pressure so much as media pressure (“Miley Cyrus made my daughter a pot-smoking slut” instead of “Peer pressure made my daughter a pot-smoking slut”) or technological pressure (“My son doesn’t get any sleep because he stays up all night texting his friends”), fully embracing the awful politics of moral panics that dominated generational relations for the entire second half of the 20th century. Comic books, movies, malls, feminism, *Doom*, gay-straight alliances, Tibetan Freedom Concerts, Woodstock, Woodstock ’99, *Grand Theft Auto*, Net-

flix, sex education, Joan Jett, Livejournal, Jack Kerouac, Harry Potter, football, Facebook, Elvis, soccer, Nirvana, Cypress Hill, grinding, Miley Cyrus, *World of Warcraft*, computers, cellphones, smartphones, Jay-Z, soda, candy, sugary cereal, *Minecraft*, Ray Bradbury, Beyoncé, vegetarianism, Marilyn Manson, *Dance Dance Revolution*, the Beatles, 2Pac, skateboarding, and teaching evolution have all at one point or another supposedly so threatened the total destruction of American youth to the degree that they warranted national media coverage.

But what parents and educators so often labeled as peer pressure was actually the disease-like spread of ideas. It's a degree of symbolic freedom and movement that made adults uncomfortable. The truly horrible things that happen to teenage lives are more the result of socioeconomic reality (gang violence), the failure of the mental health state (drugs, alcohol, shooting up the school), the horrific patriarchy of larger adult society (rape), or the all-around idiotic idea of the "school" as we construct it than they ever are the sole province of a teens en masse fearing social rejection.

Serious explorations of peer pressure as a primary subject, whether works of fiction or social science, almost never involve high school. Christopher R. Browning's *Ordinary Men*, a history of Reserve Police Battalion 101's participation in the Holocaust, intimately explores the role peer pressure played in turning an assembly of "middle-aged, mostly working class" men into genocidal killers who massacred the entire populations of towns under the orders of certain quotas. They later shot captured Jews that could not fit on the train cars destined for the death camps. The men's superiors gave them the option of not participating in such acts without shame or consequence, yet almost all of them did in a mind-boggling psychological confluence of obedience and groupthink. Many claimed they simply did not want to see their peers have to commit such acts alone.

To the extent to which it still lingers in contempo-

rary parentdom, the primary parental target of the peer pressure propaganda campaign is drugs and alcohol. It remains a tool to make your teen feel safe just saying *no!* like Nancy Reagan kindly told them to two decades before they were even born. Leaving aside the absurd hypocrisy of the modern American adult having any credibility when it comes to alcohol abuse, we have reached the point where parents, teachers, and psychiatrists are force-feeding their children prescription drugs at a rate no "everybody's doing it" culture could possibly match with weed, meth, and cocaine. Not to mention the behavioral message that is sent when according to *Comfortably Numb* author Charles Barber somewhere more than 200 million antidepressant prescriptions are distributed to adults every year.

The constant economic and political warfare of the so-called adult world is impossible to separate from teenage life, yielding a landscape of volatility no adolescent culture of social rejection could produce. Peer pressures pale in comparison to these forces from above, so it's no wonder teens cluster in their own defense. Over a generation, being the outsider itself has been commodified. By the time Hot Topic started trading on the NASDAQ, the image of the outcast that the teens of the 1980s and 1990s worked so hard to create was formally rid of its primal appeal, and if there was any classical peer pressure left, it was pushing in and out in too many contradictory directions to count.

With a whole catalog of alt archetypes, it's easier than ever to be insufficient. The top-down pressure system is gone, replaced by a turbulent field of peer friction in which every identity is always vulnerable. The 15-year-old girl who told me "peer pressure no longer exists" also made it very clear in no way did that result in the perfect adolescent paradigm defined by love and respect. "They're all annoying," she said. "I hate them for trying so hard to be part of the group. And I hate them for trying so hard to be different and special." **TNI**

Consciously or Unconsciously

By JW McCORMACK

Is the infamous white-supremacist novel The Turner Diaries a real threat, or just a shitty book for shitty people?



YOU have to be pretty good at what you do to get things exactly wrong. And you have to be better than that to survive the censors. Case in point, a passage about a hundred pages into Vladimir Nabokov's dystopic fantasy *Bend Sinister*, wherein one Professor Hamm salvages *Hamlet* for the prevailing Orwellian Fascist jet-set. In Hamm's paranoid exegesis of the play's key scenes, the racially pure Fortinbras, denuded of his valid claim to the throne, engi-

needs a near casualty-free coup. The only victims are that family of pretenders representative of "all decadent democracies," in an outcome that will be seen as inevitable to the reader nimble enough to ferret out "the real plot of the play." "Whatever Shakespeare's intentions were, there can be no doubt that the keynote, the impelling power of the action, is the corruption of civil and military life in Denmark. . . . Consciously or unconsciously, the author of *Hamlet* has

created the tragedy of the masses and thus has founded the sovereignty of society over the individual.”

With that neat phrase “consciously or unconsciously,” words are divorced from their author and neutralized of their intent. Even if you are an uncommonly talented writer, a reader is within his rights to see the worst in you. *Consciously*, say the ghoulis Professor Hamms of the world, you write to contribute to the consensual humanist model of reality. *Unconsciously* you want to replace it with your own model.

Céline heads up the pack, a bona fide Nazi collaborationist beyond rehabilitation and bigot by any definition.

Consciously you desire the highest and best. *Unconsciously* you ache to lick Big Brother’s plus-size jackboots. Or as Bart Simpson’s nemesis Sideshow Bob has it, “Your guilty conscience may force you to vote Democratic, but deep down inside you secretly long for a cold-hearted Republican to lower taxes, brutalize criminals and rule you like a king!”

That the radical right rarely produces its own literature has not gone unnoticed. Part of the mean fun of Roberto Bolaño’s *Nazi Literature in the Americas* was being asked to

imagine the impossible, a corpus of right-wing loonies composing poems parallel to the existing canon, succumbing to the same torments and petty rivalries. Is it, as has been widely and perhaps naively suggested, that the liberal left is better situated to imagine alternatives to the extant order of things? Or, in the case of realism, more willing to trace social fallout back to its origins in the human heart (and not, say, the government)? Is it that the conservative right so often functions as custodian to a stiff or idealized version of truth that forbids the looseness that novelistic invention calls for? Or am I falling prey to another conflation of ‘consciously or unconsciously,’ where I instinctively equate the values of the author I admire with my own? (Nabokov’s reported anti-Semitism is surely a point for the opposition here.) Come to that, if we read printed thoughts for the length of a novel, do we eventually mistake them for our own ideas?

If this sounds like nonsense, good news: It is! There’s no shortage of unmistakably great novelists with unmistakably rancid politics. Céline heads up the pack, a bona fide Nazi collaborationist beyond rehabilitation and bigot by any definition. But we don’t read Céline for his political vision (unless you’re reading one of his untranslated anti-Jewish rants like *Trifles for a Massacre*, in which case, oh dear). We read him precisely because we recognize, seething beneath the surface of his *universalized* misanthropy—prior to its consequent transformation into actual racism—a bile we can more or less call our own, and which seems unlikely to trigger spontaneous goose-stepping on the part of the reader. Meanwhile, most contemporaryish writers spend a lot of time making themselves approachable, not so much telling you what you ought to believe as filling in what you already suspect, consciously or unconsciously. To empathize with me, you must already *be* me. For Proust—and many after him—reading books is a way into the alien worlds known as other people. Doesn’t it figure that some of those worlds would turn out to be hostile?

Maybe the question to ask at this juncture is the one ambiguously posed by J.M. Coetzee in *Elizabeth Costello*:

Are there things that ought never be written about or read? Is there such a thing as obscenity, a book whose only blurb should be “You will not learn from such an experience. It will not be good for you”? If you haven’t thought of Ayn Rand yet, by all means go on not thinking of her. Or, better, take some comfort in the fact that the single textbook case of a conservative belles-lettres inspires nothing worse than materialism raised to the status of a minor world religion. Because there are far nastier things lurking in the American ‘consciously or unconsciously,’ and things are going to get rougher from here on out.

THE *Turner Diaries* is almost unanimously reviled as the seminal novel produced in the U.S. by the white supremacy movement. Published in 1978 by William Luther Pierce, a lifelong Neo-Nazi descended from the Attorney General of the Confederacy, under the name Andrew McDonald, *The Turner Diaries* didn’t quite make the initial splash of its 1905 predecessor, Thomas Dixon Jr.’s *The Clansman*. That book more or less single-handedly revived the Ku Klux Klan following its immortalization in D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (to which we owe the hoods and burning crosses). But it became clear that *Diaries* had found its audience by 1995, when it was discovered in the possession of Timothy McVeigh. Pierce’s novel was republished in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, and has since been linked to numerous hate crimes. It is routinely identified as “the Bible of the racist right.”

Beginning in the far-fetched future of 1991 and purporting to be the found diary of Earl Turner, a member of an Aryan network called “the Organization” that seeks the wholesale destruction of that undifferentiated hodgepodge of the liberal media, police force, and Democratic government it calls “the System,” *The Turner Diaries* leaps from one vicious crackpot scenario to another in what is essentially a world takeover procedural. It is as though the fever dreams of the extremist right have taken the form of a Bond nov-

el—that only tells the bad guys’ version. Following their militia’s commandeering of California, Turner and his cohorts achieve their goals in a grisly purge of non-whites, non-submissive women, and “race traitors” that is positively giddy in its evocation of lynchings, citywide riots organized along racial lines, and nuclear war. (There is apparently no contingency plan in the Nazi playbook for dealing with Red China beyond nuking it from space.)

This, then, is the speculative fiction answer to *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols of Zion*. There is even some question as to whether it can be called a novel at all, if it isn’t more correct to view it as propaganda. Or more accurately, meta-propaganda, given that Turner views the leaflets his cell is tasked with printing and distributing with surprisingly realistic resignation: as feeble rejoinders to mass media, fringe to the norms of tolerance and equality that they rail against. Of course, the more lost the cause, the more noble the gesture in the eyes of its disciples, so we get several self-pitying tirades about Americans “marching in lockstep with the high priests of the TV religion,” the corruption of innocent youth by hippie mentality, Hitler’s bad rap, and so on. Meanwhile, the most effective propaganda doesn’t come from the Aryans’ side at all, but from the System’s attempts to appropriate public fear of the terrorist plots for their own ends, as they “cynically” deploy it towards “certain programs of their own.” It’s a fascinating moment of clarity brought to you by paranoia so pervasive it can’t help but recognize its own stratagems behind the scrim of homeland security.

In a sense, *The Turner Diaries* is a textbook case of the Utopian novel, working out its present-day manias against the future’s peerless green-screen. Like *The Handmaid’s Tale* or *Fahrenheit 451*, Pierce proceeds by extending present circumstance into a worst-case scenario, the instructive difference being that *nothing* could be worse than the Organization’s pogrom against “the Jewish-liberal-democratic-equalitarian plague.” The book perfectly fits the anxious criteria defined by Frederic Jameson in his brilliant deconstruction of Utopian science-fiction, *Archaeologies of*

the Future: a manifestation of “that fear of losing that familiar world in which all our vices and virtues are rooted... in exchange for a world in which all these things and experiences—positive as well as negative—will have been obliterated.”

The motivating fear in this case is dismayingly predictable: the rising “cosmopolitanism,” a telltale code word for Civil Rights and pro-Israel foreign policy, and the seizing of all privately owned firearms by the System (“I’ll never forget that terrible day,” writes Turner in his first entry). The Organization strikes back with a concentrated effort to infiltrate human rights councils, purchase influential lawyers, and, through terrorist acts such as the decimation of FBI headquarters, provoke a media panic that forces the government to institute draconian measures of heightened security, including internal checkpoints and overzealous police presence in the country’s shaken capital cities, “thus alienating a portion of the population and generating sympathy for the terrorists.”

If this sounds like a chilling, pre-9/11 vision of things that are, fear not: Pierce’s rendition of the breakdown of society connects the dots between every single radical right-wing fantasy in a manner so brazenly submental that it sounds like parody. It could easily have been composed by one of Bolaño’s Nazi scribblers on an unusually uninspired writing day. Of one formerly upscale Washington neighborhood, we’re told: “Most of the high-priced shops have given way to ‘gay’ bars, massage parlors, porn stalls, liquor stores, and similar capitalist ventures... Ritual torture and ritual murder are rumored to take place, as well as ritual cannibalism, ritual sex orgies, and other non-Western practices.” Turner (whose own rituals include beginning his diary entries with a cheery “Wow!” or “What a day!”) oscillates between two equally repulsive narrative modes. First, there are the exhausting lists of atrocities carried out by his colleagues (as though the burning of synagogues and slaughter of leftist newspaper editors amounted to the hum-drummiest trivialities) as their terror campaign gradually balloons from scattered assassination squads to a global conspiracy. Second are the uniformly

unpleasant set pieces that detail our diarist’s own awakening into Caucasian pride, as he is inducted into a secret society within the Organization (named, with the same dearth of imagination, the Order) and learns of the sacrifices that must be made if the populace is ever to be awakened from their somnolent liberal funk.

Hence we are treated to Turner’s disgust at being forced



to disguise himself as a Jewish print shop owner, and personal milestones like gunning down random mixed couples (“Six months ago I couldn’t imagine myself calmly butchering a teen-aged White girl, no matter what she had done. But I have become much more realistic about life recently”). Throughout, the perverse rosiness of Turner’s vision of a racially pure tomorrow beggars belief. Two scenes stand out: a batshit encounter with a cadre of freckly 15-year-old girls merrily picking fruit on behalf of the camp-dwelling families left hungry by the collapse of regular food production, and an even more telling one, in which the Order convicts a libertarian in their midst on charges of mutiny: “He was a conservative, not a revolutionary.” Worse, he is a reformer with hope that mere tax reform and the restoration of free enterprise will be enough to heal the ailing U.S. economy. Not even John Galt deserves to inherit this brave new world.

The Turner Diaries is an obsessively paranoid and re-

actionary piece of Hitler fan-fiction, unrelentingly violent, numb to irony or satire, and possessed of no literary merit. Is it just a shitty book for shitty people, or does it pose a real threat? Among the pseudo-philosophical justifications of the Organization's evil schemes appears the following:

The fact is that the ordinary people are not really much less culpable than the not-so-ordinary people, than the pillars of the System. . . . I cannot think of any segment of White society, from the Maryland red-necks and their families whose radioactive bodies we bulldozed into a huge pit a few days ago to the university professors we strung up in Los Angeles last July, which can truly claim that it did not deserve what happened to it.

It is the banality of pronouncements like the above that render *The Turner Diaries* a disposable artifact of isolationist megalomania, instead of anything resembling a practical blueprint for budding race warriors—because the attentive reader will note that Turner has just excluded *everyone* from his club. Moreover, he has condemned them to death. Borges's "Sect of the Phoenix" imagines an invisible brotherhood to which all people secretly belong. Pierce's annihilating neon-white Utopia only has room for Pierce. It is not just other races or religions that are tainted, it is *all other people*.

Pierce weeds out the enemies he perceives clustered about every rung of civilized society in a series of 'notes to the reader' from our future white overlords that get steadily creepier, defining, among other things, soon-to-be-archaic concepts like 'Women's lib' ("a form of mass psychosis which broke out during the last three decades of the Old Era. Women affected by it denied their femininity and insisted that they were "people," not "women"). Even Turner eventually goes out a martyr, strapped to a warhead aimed at the Pentagon, leaving William Pierce (or, rather, pseudonymous "Andrew McDonald") to proclaim his victory over the planet he has reduced—as reported in a hasty three-page postscript set 106 years in the future—to all-but-uninhabitable rubble. Any novelty represented by the existence of such an earnestly hateful "adventure novel," as Pierce referred to it, quickly vanishes amid the wacko wish-gratification.

Yet the violence enacted in direct response to Pierce's novel, some of it by a group of Mormon white nationalists actually calling themselves the Order, means that I'm not merely given pause by the prospect I was once so glib about—far-right literature as corrective to the unchallenging contemporary armchair progressivism that gave us the Park Slope novel—I'm inclined to run to the other side for cover.

WILLIAM Luther Pierce died of cancer in 2002. A one-man cottage industry of race hatred, he was responsible for novels, records, and even comic books on the general theme of white supremacy and government overthrow. Most of these, including an additional "Andrew McDonald" novel titled *Hunter*, appeared under the aegis of the National Alliance, a splinter group of the National Youth Alliance that in 1968 campaigned unsuccessfully on behalf of segregationist Alabama governor and frequent Presidential candidate George Wallace. But Pierce had been linked to reactionary groups as early as 1962, when he joined the John Birch Society while working as a physics professor at Oregon State University. While Black Power was picking up steam, Pierce was editing the ideological journal of the American Nazi Party. But it wasn't until he organized the Alliance in 1972 that his literary activities began in earnest. Equal parts publishing firm and quasi-revolutionary vanguard, the N.A. specialized in Holocaust denial literature, agitated against American aid to Israel during the Yom Kippur War, and, in the 90s, expanded into comic books like the nutty *Saga of White Will*, about one high school racist's journey to manhood. (An ad in the back reads "Hey, kids! Want to find out about the organization White Will plans to join when he's 18? Write today.") In the 80s Pierce even founded a zany Pantheist religion called the Cosmotheist Community Church, and married a suspicious succession of Hungarian women.

The second Andrew McDonald novel, *Hunter* (1989),

is about a B-4 Phantom II pilot who assassinates mixed-race couples. Its hero is tacitly based on supremacist serial killer Joseph Paul Franklin, best known as the gunman who paralyzed Larry Flynt from the waist down. But it was *The Turner Diaries* that sustained the N.A.'s fortunes, going strong at the time of Pierce's death, thanks in large part to the publicity that resulted from the Oklahoma City bombings and a canny 1996 sale of the book's rights to Lyle Stuart, one of the great sleazeballs of publishing, whose other properties included *The Anarchist Cookbook*, *Naked Came the Stranger*, and *L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?*

The ordinary reader is not going to be consciously persuaded into hate crime by a rushed, monotonous piece of hack science-fiction.

As detailed by the Southern Poverty Law Center in their quarterly *Intelligence Report*, a minor avalanche of far-right and explicitly racist fiction followed the *Diaries'* return to bookstores. An English translation of an early 70s French novel called *The Camp of the Saints*, written to protest the tide of Algerian immigration, was reissued by an anti-immi-

gration hate group in 1995. Several Neo-Confederate "heritage"-focused works followed suit, like the treacly Old South fable *The Last Confederate Flag* by Lloyd Lenard, and Ellen Williams's *Bedford, a World Vision* (on the subject of integrated public schools). In John Ross's *Unintended Consequences*, a brutal Fourth-Amendment revenge fantasy that follows thematically from *The Turner Diaries*, a freedom fighter takes up arms against an overreaching government infected with the scourge liberalism. The *Diaries'* science-fiction elements, meanwhile, were picked up by James McManus—not the poker writer of the same name—in his futuristic eugenics novel *Dark Millennium*, which follows one of the last surviving racists as he becomes President of Earth for life. Another Racist-in-the-Year-3000-type novel is Ward Kendall's recent *Hold Back This Day*, where the last pure white man on earth defies the all-powerful 'Chrislambindhuddhism' religion to form an all-white colony on Mars. Finally, Pat Shannan's *One In a Million* features one man's crusade to reinstate gold and silver as the only legal tender; reportedly, Shannan hoped to secure a movie deal by sending a copy of the book to Mel Gibson's dad.

Are there things that ought never be written about or read? Elizabeth Costello asks this question—and answers in the affirmative—in a lecture about a novel about a Nazi hangman. Coetzee, by critical consensus, probably intends for her argument to be flawed; but leveled against Pierce, his heirs, and their responsive audience of thugs and domestic terrorists, it is apt. Here is a book that should never have been written, that I wish I could erase, along with the mentality that made it possible. Does that mean that others should be kept from reading it? Ideally, yes. Susan Sontag warned against the fetishization of Nazi art, whose nervy outsider status inevitably make it ripe for apologism and flirtations on the part of contemporary critics. *The Turner Diaries* is no flirtation, but a slavery liplock.

The ordinary reader is not going to be consciously persuaded into hate crime by a rushed, monotonous piece of hack science-fiction—but propaganda does not only work

consciously, as Pierce was well aware. “If the protagonist learns something or comes to believe in something,” he wrote, “the reader tends to do the same thing, he changes too. So what you have is a powerful teaching tool.” Not especially complex reasoning, but not unlike the usual critical wisdom. It’s something you might hear in a writing workshop. And, to follow this argument to its conclusion, isn’t Pierce only doing consciously, and poorly, what other writers have tucked more fiendishly and artfully beneath the surface? Xenophobic hatred was the impetus for the work of H.P. Lovecraft, whose stories of New England society’s infection by the alien other have been increasingly embraced as kitsch. His catch-all term for the subhuman denizens of the Lower East Side, “Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid,” is as undiscerning in its despicableness as Pierce’s “Jewish-liberal-democratic-equalitarian plague.”

We’re equally keen to overlook, if not covertly enjoy, the militantly Fascist posturing of Yukio Mishima—who has surely eclipsed Hermann Hesse as the angry young man’s author of choice—if only because it is appealingly juxtaposed with his distinct homoeroticism. And what about writers who narratively inhabit racist brainwaves, such as William T. Vollmann in “White Knights” or Padgett Powell’s “Typical,” both stories dedicated to lending authentic voice to unrepentant superpatriots? Is ventriloquizing prejudices you don’t outwardly espouse only the difference between consciously and unconsciously?

I could go on, asking fatuous questions and intentionally misunderstanding fiction’s nominalism, sterilizing my library against the germs of the National Front or the Aryan brotherhood. Perhaps the above handwringing will suffice for a demonstration of how far-right literature *can* do us harm: by causing us to read narrowly and misread widely. And misreading, as Nabokov’s Professor Hamm illustrated, is what propagandists depend upon. Misreading is the specialty of authoritarian causes; it constitutes the bulk of their output. Original panegyrics like *The Turner Diaries* are rarer—and perhaps this

alone accounts for the lack of otherwise plentiful hate-speech and persecution in fiction—because they are, put succinctly, an embarrassment to their cause. They consciously expose an impotent stupidity, devoid of independent reasoning, that derives its aura of fear from remaining secretive, unconscious, a trope rather than a reality. The figure of the modern Nazi occupies a place of ephemeral omnipresence in popular culture. See, for example, how a gang of featurelessly evil white supremacists were spooned into the last half-season of *Breaking Bad* as last-minute antagonists, because who do we hate even more than cops or meth dealers? The human rights activist Stetson Kennedy discredited the Ku Klux Klan at their height in the 1940s by simply ensuring that their beliefs and practices became common knowledge. The fact that Stetson may occasionally have falsified aspects of his reports only enhances the value of a genocidal white nationalist like Pierce foolish enough to speak for himself. A representative literature, it turns out, is the worst thing that could happen to the movement.

Ultimately, the far right can’t survive close reading. Once we’ve seen the ideology so exposed, toothless and disfigured, tongue gnashing at modernity like a demon in a Bosch painting, it becomes clear how little it has to offer. It can only interrupt and imitate poorly, never contribute. When we have them in their own words these would-be provocateurs lose their claim on our unconscious. I began by wondering at the relative absence of radical right-wing literature—but it’s too bad for the right that there’s any at all. The goal of these books is to reinforce the idea that whole races and beliefs are less than human. This is anathema to the nature of novels, which is always to humanize. For obvious reasons, the result does not work in the Nazis’ favor. In fact, coming away from Pierce and his brood of regressive Utopians, one has a much more realistic picture of what kind of people write them. They are humanized too; but that’s only a good thing if you are not a sorry excuse for a human being in the first place. **TNI**

Kill the Philosopher in Your Head

BY ANNE BOYER

Althusserianism has always been a Marxism for those who prefer their class struggle as philosophy

Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*; Verso, 2014; 288 pages

LOUIS Althusser was upset about the cop in your head. Or rather, he was upset that the students on the streets in Paris '68 told you there was one there to kill, so much so that he wanted their slogan "Kill the Cop in Your Head" damned to what he called "the Museum of the History of Masterpieces of Theoretical and Political Error." These "anarchists," he wrote, missed the point: It was not cops, prisons, armies, courts, and other forms of state repression that sustained capitalism. To imagine them as the enemy in your head was a mistake, for according to Althusser, "everyone knows, after all," that in your head, "one can only have ideas."

A philosopher might be lousy at fighting a cop on the streets, but no worries—the cop only appears to be what is standing in the way of revolution. It is *the you* inside you who are the enemy, trained since birth to be so. What the anarchists of '68 should do, Althusser wrote, was give up their prejudice against the "authority of knowledge" and read Plato. They would then see that society couldn't run

on repression alone. Its real engine was "beautiful lies." You would be better off to imagine, in place of the cop in your head, yourself in your head. What *the you* in your head looks like is someone propelled by society's beautiful lies. Do you recognize yourself as yourself? Say hi. You are an "interpellated subject of ideology."

And what, to Althusser, was ideology? It was, according to *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, newly published by Verso, "beautiful lies," a pure dream fabricated by nothing, a condition with no history, an always-ever, an imaginary representation of imaginary relations to real conditions, that what you always believe you are outside of but always in, a bricolage of the day's residue, the "pale, empty inverted reflection of real history," where we "live and move and have all our being," ideas made material, the opposite of science, "not the gendarme," and also what all reality lies outside of—"empty, nugatory imaginary, patched together, arbitrarily, eyes closed." Ideology was not, Althusser insisted, composed of "ideas," though sometimes he slipped and said it was. If you

are confused by this list of descriptors, you might want to blame the interpellated subject of ideology in your head.

And what, to his critics, was Althusser's definition of ideology? Wrong, mostly. Each newly available work of Althusser is a new whetstone on which a generation of critics can sharpen its knives. With so many vivid works on the wrongness of Althusser his most remarkable legacy might be the way he collected the most distinguished haters and their works of most memorably lucid hate. Even Althusser, in *The Future Lasts Forever*—the memoir he wrote to explain how he came to strangle to death his wife, H el ene, in 1980—went on at length about Althusser's hatred of Althusser. He killed his wife, he said, because "I wanted at all costs to destroy myself."

Philosophy is harmless, except when it harms. It is no accident that philosophy and wife-killing are both conservative institutions with long cultural histories. In Althusser's description of H el ene's murder, it is as if he is describing not a person, but a pliant material:

I was massaging the front of her neck. I pressed my thumbs into the hollow at the top of her breastbone and then, still pressing, slowly moved them both, one to the left, the other to the right, up towards her ears where the flesh was hard. I continued massaging her in a V-shape. The muscles in my forearms began to feel very tired; I was aware that they always did when I was massaging.

H el ene's face was calm and motionless; her eyes were open and staring at the ceiling. Suddenly, I was terror-struck. Her eyes stared interminably, and I noticed the tip of her tongue was showing between her teeth and lips, strange and still. I had seen dead bodies before, of course, but never in my life looked into the face of someone who had been strangled. Yet I knew she had been strangled. But how? I stood up and screamed: 'I've strangled H el ene!'

In being unaware even if the person whose neck he is "massaging" from the front is alive or dead, Althusser inadvertently describes philosophy's fatal level of abstraction. As the wife-killer treats human as object, a passive material to be formed or unformed by more powerful hands, so too, the kind of philosophy Althusser describes makes objects of the masses, much to their own risk.

Geraldine Finn, in her 1981 polemic *Why Althusser Killed His Wife*, wrote that the murder of H el ene could not be separated from his philosophy: "The truth is that the Althusser who killed his wife is Althusser, the revolutionary ... His philosophical and intellectual practice cannot be separated from his personal and emotional practice: they are rooted in the same soil and have the same material, social, historical and ideological conditions of possibility and determinancy." Finn found the problem to be the relationship between "science" and patriarchy. That is, to Finn, "philosophers and political scientists have always killed their wives, either literally or figuratively, by reproducing the violent patriarchal social relation."

Thus it remains useful to draw a line from the problem with Althusser (his thinking) to the problem with Althusser (strangling his wife). Althusser's great fear, as he describes in his memoir, was that he would be exposed as "a trickster and deceiver and nothing more, a philosopher who knew almost nothing about the history of philosophy or about Marx." His fear was not without basis. His former student Jacques Ranc ere said it. British Historian E.P. Thompson said it over and over in his colorful anti-Althussarian screed *The Poverty of Theory*. Althusser himself said as much, admitting that the claim he wrote "imaginary Marxism" was not far from the truth. And yet it must be repeated: The problem with Althusser, apart from being a wife-murderer, was that he was bad at Marx.

Althusser's reputational fortune rises and falls often in tandem with the rise and fall of action on the streets. His work is reading for the downtime that stays down. The thing about ideas is that one's hands never have to get dirty by touching them, or as the student placards chided in '68: "Structures don't take to the streets." Verso's release, then, of this first English translation of the aborted manuscript of 1968 arrives in time to harvest the now overripe disillusionment sown by Occupy. While the promotional materials for the book promise "a key theoretical text for activists," what *On The Reproduction of Capitalism* provides is no



Hélène Rytmann, Althusser's wife, 1957 (Agence Vu); Louis Althusser (Sygma)

instruction for revolution, but a messy, contradictory first draft full of unkept promises, maddening inconsistencies, boldly unsupported claims, a priori argument, amusing tirades, some Marxishly mystified Platonism, a sprinkling of praise for Stalin, and what is generally considered to be Althusser's most useful and provocative work—what Thompson called “the ugliest thing he ever did”—the initial draft of what was to become the widely circulated and highly influential “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”

The generous interpretation of Althusser is that he wasn't bad at Marx; he was just iconoclastic: that, to borrow from Marianne Moore, his was imaginary Marxism but with real toads in it. Althusser claimed that he was “correcting”

Marx, improving him and restoring to his work the clarity and coherency Althusser believed it lacked—thus “mastering his own thought better than he had done.” Althusser also admitted to have not read too much Marx when he first began to write Marxist theory, explaining that his philosophical method was not to read philosophical texts closely or entirely but to “bore” into them and draw a “philosophical core sample” from which he would intuit the content of the whole. He was a philosopher who believed he needed “no recourse to libraries,” and when it comes to his self-described liberation of Marx (who he considered “a prisoner of the theoretical constraints of his day”), it shows.

The generous interpretation of Althusser's other

problem—that it was Althusser himself who was the victim of the murder he committed—is a more telling measure of the delirium of Althusserianism. Just as Althusser frequently described the murder of H el ene as anything but the murder of H el ene—it was, variously, the destruction of himself, the destruction of evidence that he had lived, the eradication of his own disease, the confirmation of his desire to never exist, the murder of his “castrating” mother, the murder of all women, and/or not a murder at all but an accident or an act of mercy, and also, what Helene really wanted—Althusser’s appeal is often to those who would like to think the world is what it is not. These are the Marxists of the type who differ from Marx in an important regard. Althusserianism has been a Marxism for those who prefer their class struggle as Philosophy.

Unlike Marx, Althusser believed in Philosophy. His self-described m etier was “to intervene in politics as a philosopher and in philosophy as a politician.” What Althusser did was continuously write his own job description. The philosophy that Althusser advocated was not the kind that anyone could do. To define this philosophy, Althusser turned to Plato’s presentation of “the stock figure of a philosopher who goes around with his head in the clouds or in abstraction and ‘falls down wells’... because he keeps his eyes trained on the heaven of ideas instead of the ground.” What does a philosopher need to be a philosopher? Obviously a well to fall into, and by inference, the dowsers, well diggers, water drawers, and others who in their difference from the philosopher will define him.

When these less cloud-oriented people do philosophy, according to Althusser, theirs is a small-*p* philosophy, merely “to take things philosophically”—that is, to resign to the world as it is. The capital-*P* Philosophers do “active” and “strong” Philosophy. These include, for Althusser, the stoics (about whom he later admitted sketchy familiarity), communist militant philosophers (presumably including himself), Plato (whose work he read a great deal), Marx (about whom he claimed an inconsistent knowledge), and

Lenin (obviously). If, Althusser insists, the people sometimes appear to be Philosophical in the active sense, this Philosophy does not originate among them as spontaneous mass consciousness but has been “disseminated” among them by the specialists of rational thought. This is because, for Althusser, “the philosopher knows and says certain things ordinary people do not know.”

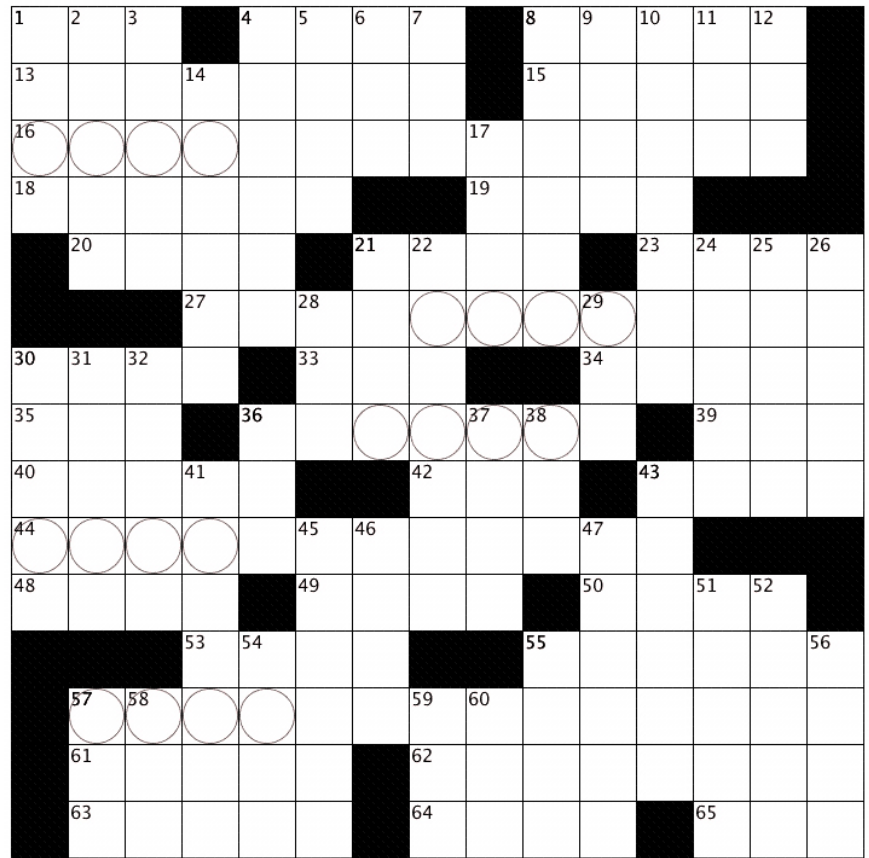
How the Philosophers disseminate their revolutionary truths into the masses from the bottom of a well is an issue Althusser does not address from the bottom of his. This is the book’s tell. Or, as Ranciere put it, “cut off from revolutionary practice, there is no revolutionary theory that is not transformed into its opposite.” One can almost get the feeling—though he scratches around this like a cat that has just used the litter box—that Althusser is about to explain to us that capitalism is happening because we need a philosopher to come along and tell us we are all in a cave watching a puppet show.

The philosopher is, for Althusser, the one who has the chance to vanquish you to save you. The philosopher is uniquely capable of a revolutionary killing of *the you* in your head. But with Althusser, of course, killing can never just be a metaphor.

As Althusser could not comprehend how strangling a person resulted in her death, or even that her death was actually her death, and not his, so also he could not see that the little-*p* “philosophy” which occurs among the people is neither as wholly received nor as wholly placatory as he believed, nor is the Philosophy of the elite who fall into wells the people dug for them as revolutionary as he suspected. Indeed, the well-digger, unlike the philosopher, is the one who with a shovel moves the earth; it is the philosopher who is always waiting for ideas to fall from heaven. Although Althusser very much disagreed with this statement, we can return to the “unimproved” Marx for a reminder: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” Philosophy can land you in a hole, but only action will get you out of it. **TNI**

A CHANGE OF HEART

5

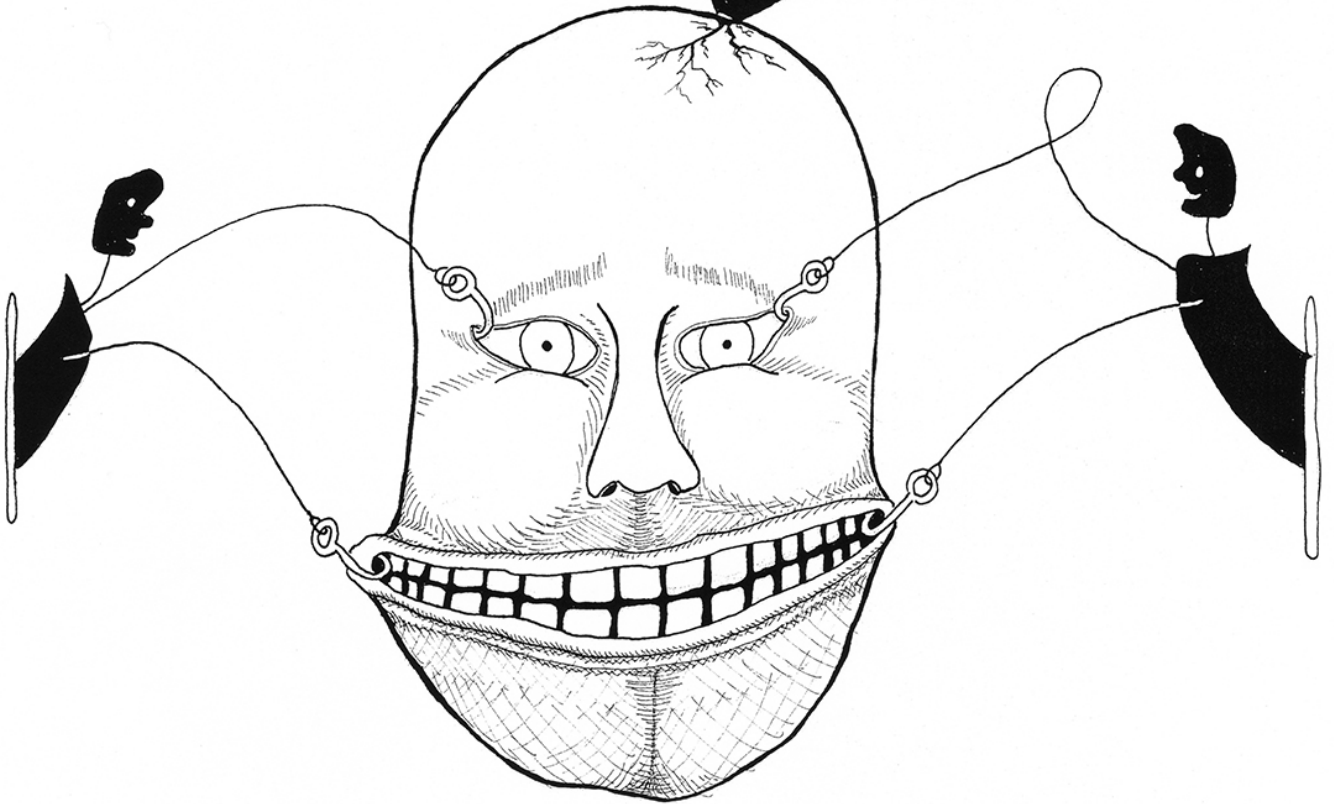


ACROSS

- 1. Belarus, until 1991: Abbr.
- 4. Nos. on a Banana Boat bottle
- 8. 1996 A.L. Rookie of the Year
- 13. Hole
- 15. Internet browser
- 16. 1977 John Paul Young disco hit
- 18. Gridiron defensive schemes
- 19. Sockdolager
- 20. Like much freelance work, with "on"
- 21. Bangalore garb
- 23. It's sometimes made with blood
- 27. 1984 Prince jam that spent 5 weeks atop the Billboard Hot 100
- 30. Signs
- 33. First name of Russian revolutionary Trotsky
- 34. Prepare to hit a mulligan, perhaps
- 35. "Savage Love" columnist
- 36. Let's dissect this
- 39. Every, in prescriptions
- 40. Video game trailblazer
- 42. "Head Like a Hole" band, for short
- 43. La ___ Tar Pits
- 44. ☺ ___ (wish on a bag)
- 48. First name in fashion
- 49. Sugars, in suffix
- 50. Spun some bangers
- 53. German discount supermarket chain
- 55. Wastes away
- 57. 2005 The Game single, featuring 50 Cent
- 61. High repository
- 62. Conspicuousness
- 63. Full of meh
- 64. The Sultan of ___ (Babe Ruth)
- 65. Sapphire mo.

DOWN

- 1. "Famous" pizza joint in "Do The Right Thing"
- 2. T.V. ads
- 3. Massage the engine
- 4. "A ___ in time saves nine"
- 5. Kisser
- 6. No tie today: Abbr.
- 7. Sun Yat-___, founding father of the Republic of China
- 8. Pope who succeeded Severinus
- 9. Deuling sword
- 10. Fragrant hybrid bloomer
- 11. Verdi's "___ tu"
- 12. Zipped file format
- 14. Gets in Shape again
- 17. Actor Benicio del ___ of "Traffic"
- 21. Lop off, in Glasgow
- 22. Wink, e.g.
- 24. James Avery, for one
- 25. HBO series set in post-Katrina New Orleans
- 26. African carnivore
- 28. She, in São Paulo
- 29. Make like Bill Buckner
- 30. It neighbors Canada
- 31. Pertaining to birth
- 32. Medieval rogue
- 36. See 59-Down
- 37. Contends
- 38. Far from the beginning
- 41. Annual Charles River event
- 43. "Holy moly!"
- 45. "Ain't gonna happen"
- 46. "Really?"
- 47. Nimble
- 51. Shangri-las
- 52. Pepper with salt
- 54. Flowery neckwear
- 55. Rihanna hook, when repeated
- 56. Michael Jackson move
- 57. Montreal Canadian, for short
- 58. Part of N.A.T.O.
- 59. Predecessor to 36-Down
- 60. How Ol' Dirty Bastard likes it, in verse



End Time
is
Fun Time



THE Internet had been draining me, and all I can say is thank you, Super Bowl. Full disclosure: I have no interest in football, and I detest the Super Bowl for reasons that don't concern us here. But it was there for me when I needed it: This overblown yearly celebration of violence and commercialism distracted the internet, rerouting it from the dark path it was dragging me down.

The mostly left-wing people that I am associated with in my social-networking orbit were rivalling their right-wing predecessors in the world of Hollywood instant justice. They condemned a man who had been found innocent of a crime, a crime so abhorrent they would like to see him tried again and again for it. But one cannot merge from the verge where self-appointed judges and juries have planted their flag.

So again, thank you, Super Bowl. I thought I would have to ban myself from the Internet and the crowdsourced rush to judgment overwhelming me. The constant passing of judgment was such that the passing of a great actor, one who had died younger than expected from a drug overdose, could not interrupt it. The group grieving soon turned from sadness to even more judgement: At first the drugs were to blame, and the user was excused. Then the demons were brought in, and even his talent was suspect as a cause of death. The

departed was now deemed to be either sick or selfish. No one suggests that maybe he just loved getting high and—as drugs are illicit, illegal, and unregulated—accidents happen.

But now comes the relief, a judgment-free oasis. No more haranguing for a hanging, no more spouted-out opinions about how a person with so much talent and a family could die from drugs. With the Super Bowl, the etch-a-sketch was flipped, and it was all cleared from the Internet in a moment, like magic. JPEGs of chicken wings dressed as their favorite '90s alt-rock grrls filled my newsfeed. Recipes for tofu chicken wings from vegan football fans appeared, and as disgusting as they sound, they replaced the bad taste of the even more unpalatable subjects from earlier in the day.

The online judges trended away from pedophilia and suicidal selfishness toward garden-variety Bob Dylan hate, and wonder at how this man who they revere so much (except when they don't) could sell out and choose to advertise Greek yogurt and American cars.

I love Twinkies, but my fear of partially hydrogenated oils keep me from chasing that dragon. Still, it's my choice, and if one day I decide to give into that sweet swirl of sugar and cream, please don't judge me. Be sad for my clogged arteries but happy for my joy. **TNI**

GET BUSY
OLD MAN.



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