



ARTHUR KROKER

BORN AGAIN IDEOLOGY

RELIGION TECHNOLOGY & TERRORISM

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Religion, Technology, and Terrorism

Arthur Kroker

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Born Again Ideology: Religion, Technology, and Terrorism

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American Political Theology Always Born Again & Left Behind

Contemporary American culture is animated by an underlying political theology. From its historical origins in the redemptive language of Puritanism and the faith-based political activism of Born Again Christians to the mass reading public (60 million at last count) for the eschatological biblical dramas of the *Left Behind* novels, American culture is always Born Again and Left Behind simultaneously.

Born Again in the sense that the genealogy of American society has its most abiding roots in redemptive, missionary consciousness and a crusading political spirit. *Left Behind* to the extent that the overall direction of American culture is enthusiastically teleological, motivating by a hectic drive towards the purifying sense of transcendence. In its technology, politics, society, economy, and subjectivity, American culture has in effect solved the riddle of Enlightenment, generating a dynamic historical singularity that is simultaneously immanent and transcendent, *a flight into and from the flesh*. Dispensing with received distinctions between technology and religion, specifically between secularism and faith as necessarily clashing world hypotheses, American political theology has succeeded in combining the will to technology with the will to religious election as God's chosen people. Call it what you will—the City Upon the Hill, the American Dream, a sacred covenant—the United States has done that most elusive and perhaps ineffable of all things—wrapped together the language of god and technology into a powerful, adventurous political experiment which is, quite paradoxically, *premodern* in its (religious) sensibility and *posthuman* in its (technological) enthusiasms. Consequently, it is not necessarily to the secular language of conventional

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politics that we should turn in order to understand the fateful implications of the American experiment in political theology, but to that other, often forgotten language of cosmology—the language of Puritans at Plymouth Rock, Born Again evangelists preaching from Sunday pulpits, athletes praying in sports huddles, the business community bonding in scriptural meditations, political leaders strategizing world domination in the epochal, military rhetoric of the “New American Century,” all mesmerized by the pilgrims tale of the *Left Behind* novels with its moments of ecstatic rapture and abandoned bodies, identities, and lives.

Born Again Ideology and *Left Behind* explore American political theology following different arrows of time—past to present in the case of *Born Again Ideology* and future to present for *Left Behind*—and with different, but complementary, critical inflections. Meeting on the common ground of seeking to understand the complex genealogy, contemporary configurations, and future implications of the fateful combination of religion and technology in American political vernacular, the two monographs brush against one another in asserting that the New Protestant Ethic is not only an essential aspect of the contemporary American mind, but has political implications for a critical analysis of the contemporary world situation.

Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* developed the proposition that at its inception American culture witnessed a momentous fusion of Calvinist theology with the spirit of (capitalist) acquisitive accumulation, indispensable preconditions for the inauguration of bourgeois political economy. *Born Again Ideology* counterpoints that for all its technical creativity, pro-business hype, and strikingly original cultural innovations, the United States is, and remains, an essentially *cosmological* society. Considered genealogically, what is really *born again* about American identity is something captured less in the exclusive language of religious fundamentalism than that optimistic spirit of personal renewal *and* dystopian spirit of panic fear which from its first enunciation in the Mayflower Compact to the contemporary politics of “redemptive violence” and “just war” represents the essence of the New Protestant Ethic. Not discounting for an instant the animating rhetoric of the American Republic nor the deep commitment to an expanding technoculture embedded in consumer capitalism, *Born Again Ideology* argues that the continuing creativity of the American idea flows its cracking

the code of identity and difference. Here, the real singularity of American culture has to do with its ability to interweave, indeed to reconcile, the opposing tendencies of religion and technology in a remarkably original historical formula—an American political theology which, slipping beyond the static language of modernist binaries, makes of itself a deeply creative twisted strand of always clashing opposites. In America, religion and technology are only *apparent* opposites. In this sense, American culture feeds on the persistent tension between religion versus technology as a creative method by which the political culture is always *born again*. Unlike cosmological societies that subordinate private and public affairs to religious fundamentalism and in sharp contrast to traditional modern societies that pluralistically separate politics and religion, the American Republic does something very different. It suffuses the question of technology with the passions of religious enthusiasm. In its most decisive moments, it mixes the informing theological language of the American covenant with new technological strategies—variously military, financial, cultural, and media—for projecting power across the (American) self, the nation, the continent, and the world. Dig beneath the surface of the (American) question of technology, and ancient theological beliefs tumble out. Being born again is simultaneously the structural mechanism and justificatory logic of the American dream.

In its essence, American political theology infuses an immanent faith in the redemptive possibilities of born again identity with a language of power which is itself always born again in the dominant rhetoric of missionary consciousness and crusading imperialism. Curiously, American political theology follows the same pathway earlier traced by the first Christian resolution of the major crisis of western secularism in the 4th century. Confronted by a classical culture in deep crisis--torn between the pessimism of Epicurean sensuality and the raw violence of Roman power—Augustine envisioned the construction from Christian faith of a new subject, namely Christian personality that would make of confessionality itself a way of reconciling an otherwise fatally divided culture. Neither a product of external power nor of purely private belief, the Christian personality made of the act of confession itself as way of expressing a newfound unity of will, intelligence and affect. To the growing sense of futility of the Romans and the gathering pessimism of the Greeks, the Christian self provided a strikingly original cultural formula. It would shift the question of identity

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and power from the outside of power and the inside of private passions to the sphere of direct experience itself. The Christian act of faith was also in the way of testifying in a deeply material way to a new possibility for unifying intelligence (God), will (God the Son), and affect (the Holy Ghost).

Stripped of its earlier Trinitarian formulation, American political theology does exactly the same thing. Refusing to justify the American Republic on purely external grounds (power) and overcoming a view of the American identity that would somehow distinguish between private autobiography and public biography (sensuality), the American covenant provides both a larger spiritual mission for the American idea and fuses self and society into the psychic melting pot of the American dream. Whether fighting for the spread of the redemptive mission of the American idea around the world or accumulating in passionate pursuit of the American dream, being American means always being born again. In America, there are no purely *private* crises since existential crises of the American self bear directly on the larger psycho-ontology of the Republic. Equally, there are no strictly *public* problems since affairs of the American state have always been struck on the hard anvil of the aspirations and fears of the individual identity of its citizens. Like Augustinian Christianity before it, American political theology overcomes the language of either *externally* or *internally* posited power to make of the complex subject-matter of American identity, with its unpredictable mixtures of private autobiography and public biography, the interior *resolution* of a larger cultural crisis to which the foundation of the American Republic was in equal measures both an important religious response and political accelerant.

It is this story of redemptive violence and panic insecurity that is rehearsed in *Born Again Ideology*. Here, the messianic rapture of end times that has so dominated contemporary American politics has its roots traced to the meeting of covenant theology and the spirit of technological innovation in the American mind. That the political theology of *Born Again Ideology* will only be successfully managed in the future by the harsher reality of the new biometric state at home and second-order globalization in the form of advanced forms of imperial cyber-warfare constitutes an important, evolving dimension of this story. But for all that, the story of *Born Again Ideology* remains deeply theological in its cultural inflections, bound up

with the paradox of faith-based information technology as part of the larger cosmological compromise of which American political theology is, in equal measures, both creator and object.

Moreover, it is this spirit of religious abandonment that is explored in all its complexity by Stephen Pfohl's *Left Behind: Religion, Technology and Flight from the Flesh*. Read often collectively as part of denominational church prayer meetings, the *Left Behind* novels restage contemporary politics from the biblical perspective of End Times with its appearance of the Anti-Christ followed by a transcendental struggle between the forces of good and evil, the second coming of a vengeful Jesus Christ, and the abandonment of flesh by the spiritually elect at the moment of rapture. Approaching the *Left Behind* novels in the context of the contemporary religious imagination, Pfohl's writing investigates the End Times of America. Here, we suddenly exit the normatively authorized world of scientific rationality and democratic secularism, entering another dimension of the American mind—a ecstatic, yet dark, psycho-geography which may be animated by visions of biblical apocalypse and anxious about the coming triumph of the Anti-Christ, but which is for all that hopeful that the light of the spiritually elect can in the end be *raptured* beyond the flesh of the all-too-human body.

Beginning “At the End of Time” and concluding “In the Beginning,” Pfohl's analysis of the *Left Behind* movement situates its analysis of American political theology in the doubled context of religion and politics. Mindful that this political theology is always deeply ambivalent in its psychological origins—simultaneously expressing a “hatred of existence” and a faith-based optimism concerning religious transcendence—Pfohl is equally alert to appeal of religious fundamentalism in a time of networked capitalism, porous borders, challenged genders, and apocalyptic technologies of control. Indeed, not satisfied with reducing faith-based politics to the status of a psychological reaction-form in the age of globalization, Pfohl actually undertakes his own public reading of the *Left Behind* novels. In his study, we are drawn deeply into the religious vision animating the feared period of End Times (“after the rapture”), immersed in the complex cosmology of dispensational theology, while all the while caught up in the complex fears and fascination of those actually predestined to be “left behind” with the coming of the Redeemer.

Less a strictly literary account of faith-based novels which have raptured evangelical religious imagination in the United States than a political thesis concerning what has really been left behind in End Times, Pfohl's analysis is as noteworthy for its hauntologies as its critical probes. For example, Judith Butler's prescient text, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, represents a critically engaged (American) mind reflecting on the homelands of her own political history with its grim themes of "Indefinite Detention," "Violence, Mourning, Politics," and "Explanation and Exoneration, Or What We Can Hear," Stephen Pfohl's meditation upon the political theology of *Left Behind* constitutes an equally critically reflexive (American) mind turning back on itself, exploring the doubled sign of American theology in the powerful language of the will to transcendence and the never mourned vocabulary of abandonment—of the flesh, cities, nature, nation, and perhaps in the future, the world itself. But if, in an unconscious parodying of an American cultural pattern which is itself always being born again in the mixed language of personal autobiography and political biography, the importance of *Left Behind* is also in equal measures personal and political, this would simply indicate that Pfohl's recounting of American political theology is itself faithful to the twisted strands of pessimism and optimism in American vernacular. Certainly, any account which begins with a genealogy of the "hatred of existence" and impassioned religious enthusiasm focused on abandoning the earthly realities of human flesh cannot escape the more enduring notes of pessimism. Rejecting the nostalgia for optimism which short-circuits much of contemporary American political discourse, Pfohl does that which is truly rare in the contemporary political climate: he actually deeply engages the animating texts of the religious right in all their complexity, contingency, and will to transcendence. That his thought enters so immediately the ecstatic spirit of rapture, engages so textually the theological labyrinth of dispensational theology, reads so carefully the core texts of biblical politics is due, in no small measure, to the fact that Pfohl's thought is itself haunted by that which has always been repressed by American political theology, namely the object of its founding act of sacrificial violence—the spirit of indigenous peoples. Itself a calling-forth of that which has been silenced by the rapturous, indeed feverish, religious language of transcendence and abandonment, it is appropriate that *Left Behind* concludes with the eloquent words of the First Nations,

specifically *A Basic Call to Consciousness* prepared by members of the Iroquois Nation for a U.N. Conference on Indigenous Peoples:

The majority of the world does not find its roots in Western culture or tradition. The majority of the world finds its roots in the Natural World, and the traditions of the Natural World, which must prevail... The majority of our peoples still live in accordance with the traditions which find their roots in Mother Earth... We must all consciously and continuously challenge every model, every program, and every process that the West tries to force on us... The people who are living on this planet need to break with the narrow concept of human liberation, and begin to see liberation as something that needs to be extended to the Natural World. What is needed is the liberation of all things that support Life—the air, the waters, the trees—all things that support the sacred web of Life.

1

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The New Protestant Ethic

One hundred years after the publication of Max Weber's classic text, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the fateful relationship between Protestantism and capitalism has been renewed in American political discourse. Except this time it is no longer the original convergence theorized by Weber between the spirit of Calvinism and acquisitive capitalism whereby Christianity was destined to be ultimately secondary to the unfolding historical project of capitalism, but the opposite. In a contemporary political climate marked by the resurgence seemingly everywhere of faith-based politics, capitalism and its historical correlate – modernism – have actually folded back on themselves, quickly reversing modernist codes of economic secularism and political pluralism, in the interests of being reanimated with the evangelical spirit of religious fundamentalism. What Weber foresaw as a primal compact between Calvinism and acquisitive capitalism – this migration, first in Europe and then in Puritan America, of Puritan attitudes towards personal salvation based on giving witness by habits of frugality, hard work, and discipline into the essentially acquisitive spirit of capitalism – has been renewed in new key. On the centennial of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the political universe is suddenly dominated by the spirit of what might be called the *New Protestant Ethic* as the ideological reflex of the age of networked capitalism and empire politics.

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Animated by apocalyptic visions of the days of wrath announcing the Second Coming of Christ, motivated by feverish aspirations to be counted among the spiritually elect in the coming age of division between the *Predestined* and the *Left Behind*, witness to the vengeful spirit of the Old Testament, literal in its biblical interpretations, monistic in its drive to hegemony among the world religions, in active revolt against secularism, in bitter rebellion against pluralism, the New Protestant Ethic is the foundational creed of contemporary American politics.

We, the inhabitants of post-Enlightenment society might have thought that the current cultural horizon was exhausted by fateful struggles between modernism, postmodernism and posthumanism, but it turns out that the past will not be denied. Out of the ashes of the *Book of Revelation* emerges a form of faith-based politics which is, in every political sense, the ascendant historical tendency in American public life. Here, putting on the policy garments of the “culture of life” movement, there waging bitter political combat against the heresy of “same-sex marriage,” now opposed to scientific claims concerning stem cell research, allying itself actively with the crusading spirit of American imperialist adventures, dominating the media with faith-based cultural perspectives, the New Protestant Ethic easily sweeps aside secular discourses in the interests of a vision of culture, society and politics which is as cosmological in its theological sweep as it is eschatological in its historical ambitions.

Understood metaphysically, it may well be that the insurgency represented by faith-based politics is the representative *political* form of what Heidegger’s Nietzsche described as the age of “completed nihilism.” In this interpretation, power in its mature (nihilistic) phase – sick of itself, possessing no definitive goal, exhausted with the historical burden of remaining an active will, always sliding inexorably towards the nothingness of the will-less will – desperately seeks out a sustaining purpose, an inspiring goal, a historical mission. Into the ethical vacuum at the disappearing center of nihilistic power flows a strong historical monism – the New Protestant Ethic – that will not be suppressed. To power’s empty formalism, to liberal humanism’s (emotionally) ineffective proceduralist ethics, to the empire’s cybernetic equations written in violence and in blood across the landscape of imperial wars, the New Protestant Ethic provides a singular historical purpose – the crusading spirit of evangelical

Christianity which is reconstructionist, resurgent, and reanimated – backed up by the semiotic purity of the foundational texts of the Old Testament. To those who would discount faith-based politics as only the most recent instance of the politics of cultural backlash, it should be noted that this fateful, and entirely original, entwinement of (fundamentalist) religion and (imperial) war technologies in the American mind may well be in the order of a great overturning. With faith-based politics, we are witness to something entirely unexpected, and for that reason, deeply ominous – an ethical reconciliation between religion and technology in which the apocalyptic visions of the Old Testament will be future-coded in the power languages of empire politics and networked capitalism. What is now only in its preparatory rhetorical stages as the “culture of life” movement may soon emerge full-blown as the essential life-principle of American, and by imperialist extension *world*, culture.

Consequently, it may no longer be *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in its original Calvinist evocation of ascetic propriety and regularity, nor capitalism any longer in its first pioneering acquisitive expression. However, it appears to most definitely be the New Protestant Ethic as the moral vision of American politics in the 21st century – intolerant, charismatic, crusading. Breaking beyond the boundaries of private religious belief, this fusion of religious fundamentalism and the instrumentalities of increasingly cyberneticized imperial forms of global warfare is, for example, the moral essence of the Bush administration’s political vision of “redemptive empire.” Here, “Reconstructionist” Christianity – aggressive, projective, fundamentalist – is streamed instantly across the spacetime fabric of American empire by a military intent both on “full-spectrum domination of space” and, as recently announced, on “metabolic domination” of the bodies of its global subjects. A dangerous fusion then of fundamentalist Protestantism and cyber-war. In his first press conference after his second-term presidential election, George W. Bush said: “I have earned political capital and I intend to spend it.”

There are intimations here: some known – the sacrificial violence directed against the cities of Iraq, recent reports of new versions of experimental weapons – poison gas and napalm – used against the citizens of Falluja, ominous warnings of adventurism to come in Iran; and some stories unknown, unreported, already forgotten at the dark edges of the real politics

of empire – the sudden death in a southern motel room of Ray C. Lemme, a private investigator, who it is reported was following the trail of *The Five Star Trust* – a secret fund out of Texas, Saudi Arabia, the Phillipines – which may have financed the widespread computer manipulation of the last American election.[1] Thinking of these events, I again allow those chilling words of George W. Bush to brush against my thought: “I have earned political capital and I intend to spend it.”

Inauguration Day Blues & the Messianic Rapture of *End Times*

History calls us.

– Condoleeza Rice, American Secretary of State

On Inauguration day, with the streets of Washington locked down tight with security, paranoia in the fearful air, ABC television commentators, probably trying to pass the time, remix visuals of John Kerry with the laconic words: “At least in this country, we don’t line up losers against the wall and shoot them.” The messianic text of the inaugural speech proclaims America to be the moral tutelary of global politics, self-appointed in a journey to bring “freedom and democracy” to the world that may take many “generations to come.” President Bush’s fateful political rhetoric – “America’s vital interests and deepest beliefs are now one” – carry with them a sense of deep foreboding: intimations of future aggressions by a rogue (imperial) state in the “name of liberty” and in the “image of the maker of heaven and earth.” *God Bless America. God Bless the American People.*

Accordingly, the question: What would it mean to think American politics from the perspective of **Born Again Ideology**? What new forms of political interpretation would result from critical reflection upon that strange, but very real, very intense relationship between the resurfacing of religious fundamentalism in contemporary American politics and cyber-warfare by which America projects its imperial ambitions across the planet – this epochal meeting in the American political mind of its Puritan religious past and its increasingly militarized version of the posthuman future? In a way that Weber could only intimate we may well be already living in the **ashes** of *The Protestant Ethic*: a supposedly dead resurrection-effect

– the Protestant ethic – hyper-moral, hyper-monistic, hyper-charismatic, hyper-fundamentalist – has suddenly come alive in the imperial language of redemptive empire. Little wonder then that Frank Rich, in a recent op-ed for *The New York Times*, can write of the cultural morbidity associated with “A Culture of Death, Not Life.” (NYT, April 10, 2005)

Mortality – the more graphic, the merrier – is the biggest thing going in America. Between Terri Schiavo and the pope, we’ve feasted on decomposing bodies for almost a solid month now. The carefully edited, three-year-old video loops of Ms. Schiavo may have been worthless as medical evidence, but as necro-porn their ubiquity rivaled that of TV’s top entertainment franchise, the all-forensics-all-the-time “CSI.” To help us visualize the dying John Paul, another Fox star, Geraldo Rivera, brought on Dr. Michael Baden, the go-to-cadaver expert from the JonBenet Ramsey, Chandra Levy and Laci Peterson mediathons, to contrast His Holiness’s cortex with Ms. Schiavo’s.

As Rich concludes: “Once the culture of death at its most virulent intersects with politicians in power, it starts to inflict damage on the living.”

Accordingly, is the “culture of death” a symptomatic sign of the psychogeography of the American mind, or does the scent of death attract such intense media fascination because it evokes a more fundamental turn in political culture, namely that (terminal) point when life itself gave up on the future, becoming born again in the ecstatic (media) signs of its own death? Understood as the cultural capstone of the New Protestant Ethic, this searing image of the “culture of death” is perhaps less an exclusively media phenomenon than a return to something autochthonous in American culture – the recurrence of 21st century America to the ruling passions of its 17th century Puritan origins. Obsessive, judgmental, moralistic, hard willed, messianic, intent on penalizing the signs of (earthly) life in the name of eternal life: Calvinism, like Christianity in general, always had about it a doubled fascination – certainly with the prospect of death as resurrection of the soul from the flesh of the sinful body; but also the strict disciplining of Christian life as a signifier of religious election. Propelled at the speed of (mass media) light into popular culture, the spirit of Calvinism is resurrected now as the scent of death which is the real attraction and psychological driver of the “culture of life.”

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Specifically, virulent as only a resurrection-effect can be, the Calvinist origins of the Protestant ethic have now successfully mutated into the redemptive fundamentalist language of Born Again Christianity. In contemporary political cartography, this is perfectly symbolized as the division of America into the chromatics of blue and red states. With this addition: perhaps the red states symbolize a certain psycho-geography in the American mind – **a massive psychological reaction-formation** – imminent, subjective, populist, faith-based – which once linked with the instrumentalities of power – cyber-warfare, militarized globalization, elite-driven, neo-conservative – constitutes what we mean now by cultural fascism. In the 20th century, the power libido of capitalist excess was politically constrained by the bi-polar opposition of the Communist Bloc. In the 21st century, the epoch initiated symbolically by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the politics of empire – capitalism triumphant – has no effective political check.

American empire, this spearhead of increasingly militarized capitalism, is free at last to be the *universal sign* – unipolar, unchallenged, self-directing. It is finally *at liberty* to stamp the political formula inscribed on American coins – **e pluribus unum (from many one)** – onto global culture. Without its Communist binary, without the necessity to maintain at least the *rhetorical* illusion of political commitment to the ideals of democratic rights and economic egalitarianism, empire capitalism swiftly backslides into the specter of cultural fascism as its chosen future. Again, the political formula is this: **an imminent, populist reaction-formation** – Born Again fundamentalism – sweeping from the southern states to the heart of the heartland of the industrial Midwest and west – combines with a right-wing elitist agenda of imperial politics – the logic of cyber-warfare, “The “American Project for the 21st Century,” “full spectrum domination” – to produce a politics of empire which is incipiently authoritarian. **Domestically**, politically threatened by the human rights struggles of gays and lesbians, this psychological reaction-formation – *this virulent political backlash against the politics of difference* – fuses emotionally around issues of same-sex marriage, pro-choice, immigration, the restriction of welfare rights and the weakening of gun control. **Globally**, it projects itself outward in the language of resentment and sacrificial violence – a Born Again Ideology as the moral energy of American empire – what the

American rhetorician and New England politician, Daniel Webster, long ago called “Our Moral Republic.” Herewith, the language of religious fundamentalism merges with the logistics of cyber-empire. Weber’s dark prophecy concerning a bleak future of “specialists without spirit midst this nullity which calls itself a civilization” is not apparently our past, but the future.

Redemptive Violence and Panic Insecurity

The year 2005 was a double anniversary. Not only the publication of Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* but also the centennial of Albert Einstein’s first publication of his special theory of relativity. These events are not unrelated. It’s my thesis that Weber’s grim vision of the “iron cage” has been projected into history at Einstein’s “speed of light.” Today, the spirit of capitalism in networked culture moves literally at the speed of life. *The Protestant Ethic* has been renewed in the redemptive, passionate language of Born Again Christianity. What has happened this year, this time, this day, is that we are witness now to a fateful crossing-over of Born Again Christianity with the power of American empire moving at the speed of Born Again light. That’s Born Again Ideology: networked imperial power animated by the disciplinary energies of a now resurrected, redemptive Christianity moving at the speed of darkness.

Long before Einstein’s scientific vision of relativity theory, America always was a **quantum country**. A culture of communication, it has always privileged the speed of light as the emblematic sign of its technological omnipotence. A culture of relativity, American political economy could gain a global empire because it learned how to transform the purely theoretical principle of instrumental activism into the pragmatic business methods associated with the “enhancement of adaptive capacity.” A culture of violence, American militarism split open the atom of colonizing power with the reactor of crusading, missionary consciousness. A culture of foundational political narratives, America’s ruling rhetoric was never based upon the modernist logic of binaries, the logic of either/or. *Politically*, America is a quantum culture because it has always only been an energy field simultaneously combining opposite changes of state. In its rhetoric as much as in its politics, culture and economy, America has always been

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both wave-form and particle. That is America's secret, its seduction, its curse.

The signs of (quantum) America as simultaneously *wave-form and particle* – opposite changes of (cultural) state simultaneously – are everywhere. *Symbolically*, it's the split visual energy field of the American flag with its star *and* stripes. *Historically*, it's the received interpretation of the Civil War as a redemptive moral struggle fusing opposing violent energy states – Confederates and Unionists – in the continuing story of the American Republic. *Legislatively*, it's the Federalist Papers proclaiming an impossible (quantum) political theory with its vision of unequivocal states-rights *and* strong central government. *Culturally*, it's the governing contradiction of faith-based political populism *and* rule by political elites. In the American official song-line, it's the unspoken contradiction of a national anthem with inspiring republican political rhetoric *and* impossibility of popular participation. Einsteinian before Einstein, American exceptionalism has everything to do with the fact that it is the *political* precursor of quantum reality – a contested style of government, a warring field of religion and technology, a violent energy field of individual subjectivity – which anticipates by several centuries the great scientific discoveries of modern times.

A nation of possibilities (“the American dream”), a country of probabilities which absorbs the difference, America is and has always been a historical singularity, a quantum culture, a spacetime fabric. Breaking with European (binary) discourse, America has always represented a fusion of pre-Enlightenment subjectivity *and* posthuman technology, just waiting to happen. **Consequently, if Einstein's** special theory of relativity could speculate that light is both wave-form and particle simultaneously, that light is *both/and*, opposite states simultaneously; that is only to repeat the political formula that has animated American political culture from its Puritan beginnings, namely that this would be *a culture simultaneously of redemptive violence and panic insecurity*. **And if Einstein could theorize** against and beyond Newton's modernist vision of an *entitative universe* (where discrete objects interact at a distance) that we live in a *spacetime fabric* moving at the speed of light, this was only to repeat what had long been established in the founding covenant of the United States. Namely, that this “good land” (in the words of the Mayflower Compact) was visualized

from its historical inception as an imminently religious, imminently unified fabric of spacetime moving literally at the transcendental speed of (theological) light. **And if quantum theorists after Einstein** could theorize that implosive change occurs in quantum culture by virtue of a “*tunneling effect*” whereby warp holes suddenly and unpredictably open up in the spacetime fabric, linking singularities from the past and the future, that is exactly what is occurring in the politics of American empire today. Here, a (religious) singularity from the past (the Puritan origins of faith-based politics) has now literally tunneled its way into the future. Fueled by the Born Again emotions of religious premodernity, the American (cybernetic) posthuman opens onto a future in which atavistic religious impulses stream across the spacetime fabric of a technoculture moving at the speed of (digital) light. If this appears contradictory, paradoxical, indeterminate, that is probably because America is the first, and definitely most singular, expression of the “quantum idea” politically realized.

Precipitated by the (symbolically) cataclysmic events of 9/11, by waves of panic fear and calls for redemptive violence unleashed by this sudden dissolution, this breaching, of the boundaries of the sovereign body politic, a warp hole has opened up in the spacetime fabric of American empire linking two singularities – religious fundamentalism and cybernetized global militarism – into what quantum physicists call a “*common world-line*.” Literally, the psychic shock of 9/11 – aided and abetted by a neoconservative regime with a preemptive plan of strategic military action already in place – ripped wide open the unitary spacetime fabric of the American mind, providing for a momentous fusion of two seemingly opposite ideas – technological futurism and religious prophecy – which, until that moment, had maintained their solitude according to the rituals of modernity. Instantly, the vengeance-seeking energies of the (religious) past poured through the psychic fissure of 9/11 to take flesh in the materiality of cybernetic warfare and crusading empire-consciousness.

We all know the enlightenment fable of the supposed death of god. But that story, the Nietzschean myth of the death of the sacred in our (enlightenment) minds and with it the supposed triumph of the rights of reason over religious sectarianism, is, it must be admitted, increasingly specific to the particularities of European late modernist experience. Like Hegel’s vision of the owl of Minerva which takes flight at dusk, the **God**

of the New Testament may have died in European consciousness in the age of progress precisely because a new incarnation of God, the **God of the Old Testament**, fusing a crusading politics of redemptive violence and a domestic tutelary of panic insecurity, was being born by way of the American political covenant.

The second coming of god then as the **real politics** of American empire: a fateful meeting of the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament with full-spectrum futurism of cyber-warfare. That's Born Again Ideology, and this time, the rulers of the American covenant intend to get it right, *far right*, with a style of political action – an **unyielding politics** based on preemptive action, a politics of hand to mouth existence, **constant** military interventions, ceaselessly **stirring up** turbulence, **media provocations** intended to provoke panic fear among the domestic population for which redemptive violence is the only recourse – a style of political action which, with its scapegoating and appeals to intolerant, charismatic leadership is hauntingly reminiscent of what Leo Lowenthal, the Frankfurt School theorist writing in exile during the 1940s, described as the imminent strategy of authoritarian ideologies.

Rapture and the American Mind

To interpret the evangelical religious vision in American politics as only a useful addendum to America's political/military ambitions is, I believe, to miss the point. The animating energy of the American imperial project is essentially religious, not political. **The ruling American mythopoetic is eschatological. It is about 'end times.'** It is animated by a strictly religious vision of 'end times,' spellbound by the imminence of the moment of 'rapture,' that moment when political crisis unleashes the violence, desolation and destruction of Armageddon prophesied by the *Book of Revelation*, enthusiastically reconstructionist, with the language of the Old Testament as its psychological horizon, the emotional horizon, of American imperialism. This is why it is of more than anecdotal interest that a recent Marine assault operation south of Baghdad was code-named "Operation Plymouth Rock," why American soldiers go into battle with camouflage bibles, and why the poignancy of that recent television image of Marines creating an impromptu baptismal fount out of spent artillery

shells in order to be anointed in their terms “in the spirit of the Lord” during the fighting for Falluja.

When the first Pilgrims – the Massachusetts Bay Colony – crossed the waters of the Atlantic Ocean in the 17th century, their historical self-consciousness was truly ancient, not modern; informed less by the constraints of economic necessity than by biblical scripture: Matthew 5:14 to be exact, which provided the scriptural basis for John Winthrop’s famous shipboard declaration of the Mayflower Compact during that “great migration” wherein he spoke of the colony’s collective destiny as the creation of a ‘City upon a Hill.’ These were a people of a biblical migration whose psycho-geography was a fourth-order simulacrum: a virtual symbolic reality which had no reality referent other than its own closed scriptural tautology – literally a *universal sign* populated most deeply with the voices of Daniel and Matthew, the *seven-headed beasts* of the *Book of Revelation* and the *four beasts rising from the ocean* of Daniel.

Listen anew to the Mayflower Compact, this early rhetoric of empire which is literally burned into American governing political rhetoric, from Daniel Webster’s reinvocation of the spirit of Puritanism as the essence of the American “Moral Republic” on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the “first encounter” at Plymouth Rock,[2] to Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address to John F. Kennedy’s inaugural speech to the political rhetoric of Nixon, Reagan, and Bush, father and son and probably the next son too.

For we must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our god in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world, we shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of god all profess for God’s sake; we shall shame the faces of many of god’s worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whether we are going.[3]

Not just the yearning to be a City Upon a Hill, but something else too, something little remarked in the inspiring glow surrounding the phrase

a “City Upon a Hill.” Consider again that ominous sentence: “If we deal falsely with our god...we shall be made a story and a byword through the world” – a fear of failure, an imminent self-doubt, a sub-text of potential shame and evil and potential curses.

There are two Americas present in the rhetoric of the Mayflower Compact: the much-remarked utopia of the **rise** of the American Republic, but also the hard-scrabble, bible-belt, unforgiving psychological territory of the **fall** – a feared world of shame and curses, an apocalyptic vision of desolation accompanying the withdrawal of God from this “good land.” With this, the familiar story of the American Eden – America as a religious covenant signified by the image of itself as a “City Upon as Hill” – flips in the first instance into the cruel, imaginary country of the American Gothic. Tainted from the very first moment of its articulation with just the barest hint of panic insecurity, the political rhetoric surrounding America as a “City Upon a Hill” has an undetectable crack just beneath its psychic surface, namely, an imminent fear of the catastrophe awaiting a “chosen people” unfaithful to the terms of the religious covenant.

Consequently, even before the Puritans came out of the sea at Plymouth Rock, the American political code was firmly set in place. This would be a political culture dialectically bound by the rhythms and tensions of the master codes of the rise *and* fall, redemptive violence *and* panic insecurity, spasms of the “war spirit” *and* inertia tinged by a melancholic sense of fatalism.[4] But if this is the case, isn’t the story of the American covenant a continuation of the much older story of the rise and fall of cosmological experience? Doesn’t the Puritan invocation of the Mayflower Compact signify that the real historical project of America would rise and fall with the adequacy of its response to the problem of salvation? In this case, the resurgence of faith-based politics in the 21st century would represent less a moment of rupture with America’s self-conception as a secular technoculture driven by the speed of business than a faithful return to the generative political problematic underlying the American dream – the more ancient dream of the desire for salvation leavened by fear of banishment. And if the United States has never managed to escape its genealogical roots in the salvation myths of cosmology, this would indicate that its political future may well unfold in accordance with the more enduring metaphysics of cosmological experience, mediated through the

specificities of contemporary American culture: its ontology (salvational), its epistemology (faith-based), its political organization (theocratic), its aesthetic (the “culture of life”). In current American political vernacular, issues of globalization and its consequences for a multinational world are eclipsed by the specter of cosmology.

Curiously, the United States, this self-proclaimed, immensely confident spearhead of technological modernity supposedly born, as the Canadian philosopher George Grant said, in the age of progress, has its mythic roots in a form of consciousness that is biblical, intensely spiritual, disciplined, given over in the first instance to frugality, moral uprightness, disciplined labor, and later to all the excesses of redemptive violence and panic insecurity, consumer ecstasy and bouts of economic over-indebtedness. Perhaps like Foucault’s theorization of the death of representation in *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*, the Puritan Pilgrims never really crossed the Atlantic. Perhaps in their minds, they were always one with the children of Israel fleeing the evil Pharaoh: not the Egyptian Pharaoh, but the royalist restoration in England and with it the collapse of the Anglican Church into the apostasy of ceremony and the reinstallation of religious hierarchy. These were refugees from Babylon intent on reenacting in the New World what the historian, Barbara Tuchman, has described as the essence of English Cromwellian religious enthusiasm – the power of the “bible and sword”. [5] What came ashore at Plymouth Rock was, I believe, the premonitory shadow of the “last man” of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* – a fully armed spirit of Nietzschean resentment: an exiled religious community fleeing persecution in England and indifference in Holland, separatist, infused with the crusading spirit of the religiously elect, and most of all sexually perverse in its relationship to the body. The founding of America never really was (exclusively) about capitalist political economy, **but about libidinal religious economy**: an obsessive, disciplinarian attitude to the body which read Old Testament phantasmagoria into the body’s desire, aggressively policing the bodies of women, parishioners, indigenous people. Separatist, resentful, hardened in the bitter anvil of European religious struggles, filled with the spirit of the spiritually elect, obsessed to the point of sexual perversity with suppressing the body’s libido, the Puritans came ashore as an *eschatology* – a hard, cold vision of end times – just waiting its chance for full historical expression.

Now much has been made of the capitalist origins of the American experiment, but less so of the origins of **American exceptionalism** in the psycho-geography of the Old Testament. The very terms which trace the horizon of the so-called American dream – the ‘American covenant,’ ‘City Upon the Hill’ – indicate that governing American rhetoric is steeped in the ancient binaries of the Old Testament. Everything else is, I believe, at present derivative: blasted away in the contemporary fundamentalist turn to that primitive vision of the spirit of Puritan nihilism which came out of the sea in Plymouth Bay. George W. Bush’s appeal for the “expansion of freedom in all the world” is the emblematic rhetoric of missionary consciousness, just as much as the “culture of life” movement awakens in the American mind a Puritan habit of mind which is intolerant and disciplinarian in equal measure.

It is as if for one brief historical moment which has now been effectively eclipsed, the light of political reason, hard won from religious persecution and the exhaustion of Europe’s unending religious wars, dims again as the apocalyptic language of religious eschatology asserts itself anew. Thought from a critical, liberal perspective, the Puritan tradition represents that continuous, but episodic moment, in the American mind wherein the forces of reaction break out from the silence of many hearts fueled by resentment into the public passions of zealotry and scapegoating – witness the deep continuity of America’s historical experience of “culture of backlash” politics – the ideological specter of McCarthyism, the politics of race-baiting, union-baiting, sex-baiting, or the recent anti-terrorist campaigns codified into law by the US Patriot Act. Understood from the liberal side of the dialectic of reason, this may well be the case, but in terms of diagnosing the genealogy of the politics of American empire, I do not believe this to be an adequate theorization of the times in which we live.

We should listen anew, listen intently, to what the Puritans had to say, for theirs is, I believe, the foundational creed of contemporary American politics. Not in its specifics – their calls for frugality and self-discipline and bodily sequestration have disappeared under the surface of consumer capitalism and the society of the spectacle. Today, Nietzsche’s “last man” runs on digital empty: electronically interfaced by iPods, IM, and consumer prosthetics; hooked on porn, soaps, cosmetic surgery, and Fox TV; bunkered down in front of big-screen TV, surround sound pumped

up full; silently fascinated by media reports of terrorists hunted down, captured, and imprisoned, perhaps tortured; and morally gratified with scenes of military violence visited upon an always accidental enemy.

But for all of this, the founding codes run deep: the spirit of Puritanism has not disappeared. Provoked by the classic psychic symptoms of Nietzschean resentment – “someone has to pay for my feeling ill” – the spirit of Puritanism may even have intensified. The rhetoric of exceptionalism – America as a City upon a Hill, bonded in the beginning as in the present with a predestined religious covenant with God – is the essence of American political self-consciousness. Call it what you will – the American Dream, the Founding Covenant, the “Redemptive Empire” – this is an animating rhetoric of **moral exceptionalism** which if it does provide (faithful in advance to the later political theories of Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben)[6] a justification for the **moral rightness** of the cold power of the executive imperial state in determining who is and is not subject to the language of the exception, this should not distract our vision from the essentially *religious nature* of the American calling, nor from its uniqueness in linking together in the experiment of a “Moral Republic” an essentially Old Testament version of Christianity with a New Republican version of neo-conservative politics. Appeals now for faith-based politics, faith-based public policy, faith-based governance, commerce, science, and education do not represent something strikingly new in American political discourse, but constitute a return to an original *unity* of essentially missionary discourses – science *and* religious belief, governance *and* faith – which is the very essence of the new Covenant that is America. In American discourse, there are no real opposites, only clashing patterns in creative tension.

With the re-election of George W. Bush, the Puritan vision of America as a City Upon a Hill finds its articulation in a renewed interest in the language of a morally recharged, historically projective, militarily crusading Christianity. For example, in the American (electronic) homeland, theological visions of “Reconstructionist Christianity”[7] suddenly proliferate with endless salvational spin-offs, from specific religious theorizations of “theonomy”[8] and “denominationalism”[9] to the apocalyptic vision of the *Left Behind* armageddon. Politicians, most of all, get into the (theological) act. *Literally*. With Pat Robertson of the 700 Club, President Bush is said to be

a self-proclaimed ‘**premillennial dispensationalist**.’[10] As opposed to other warring camps in what is described as “Reconstructionist Christianity,” (*reconstructionist* because it believes in the power of Christian belief and action to dramatically transform both personal identity and the course of history itself by imposing the biblical strictures of the Old Testament upon American society) President Bush is held to believe that the moment of Rapture – the 2nd advent of Christ will be brought about by a certain constellation of political events prophesied in the Old Testament, most famously the reunification of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple of Solomon on the Temple Mount. In combination with his closest White House advisors, he is held to affirm his unique *executive* historical position to realize in present-time the long-prophesied history of the 2nd advent. President Bush is, in fact, viewed by some Born Again Christians as God’s chosen sign of the elect, the long-anticipated sign of the coming of moment of Rapture, with its prophesied division of the transcendent Christian elect from the vast multitude that will be “left behind.” The psychosis of these new pagans occupies the highest offices of the politics of empire.

Which is why, I believe, in the present circumstance there can be so little public protest at the suppression of traditional constitutional guarantees of civil rights in favor of faith-based politics and disciplinary power. With Born Again Ideology, the secular rhetoric of American exceptionalism has been disappeared as something superfluous to the essentially religious essence of the American mind. Here, the Kantian project of universal freedom is displaced in American political discourse by a vision of salvation which, refusing to express itself in strictly religious terms, merges perfectly with the political vocabulary necessary to the extension of empire.

If it be objected that this is a temporary phenomenon, I would note that the spirit of Rapture has always been the enduring song of the American homeland. Call it what you will – the steely belief of the original Puritans that they were less founders of a new political colony than a moment of redemptive renewal, a reinvocation in the wilderness, of an ancient religious compact (America literally as the new Jerusalem); evangelical revivalism in the backwoods religious tents of 18th and 19th century America; or those appeals to empire from the litany of Manifest Destiny to contemporary visions of Redemptive Empire – America has always been an essentially religious cosmology, wrapped in the shell of technology.

Consequently, could it be that in the contemporary political juncture, American exceptionalism is less understandable in terms of traditional political imperialism than a violent effort to breed the objective worldwide crisis necessary to biblical revelation, to the *moment of rapture*?

Vampire Puritans

Here is a stone which the feet of a few outcasts pressed for an instant; and the stone becomes famous; it is treasured by a great nation; its very dust is shared as a relic.

– Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*

In his brilliant study of American classical philosophy as a moral quest, *The Wilderness and the City*,^[11] the political theorist, Michael A. Weinstein, proposed this discerning thesis about the foundational logic of American society. For Weinstein, the American mind has always oscillated between two extremes – between the “war spirit” and spirit of “acedia.” Here, American exceptionalism is rooted in classically split consciousness veering between a **raging “war spirit”** (which, as de Toqueville noted set out to conquer the continental wilderness with a bible in one hand and an axe in the other); and **panic fear** (tempered by melancholic self-doubt) concerning the imminent dissolution of the boundaries of the self. Exploring the fundamental tension between American naturalists – John Dewey and George Santayana – and American vitalists – Josiah Royce and C.S. Peirce – with William James’ will to pragmatism as their philosophical mediation, Weinstein asks whether the essence of American experience is not an ontology of “hatred of existence” – covered up by aggressive displays of a veneer of frenzied activism over the reality of panic fear. As Weinstein states:

The challenge for the modern spirit today is to pass through Nietzsche’s trial of world-sickness. American culture, which is the last outpost of Western individualism, has evaded Nietzsche’s insight into the hatred for their own existence when the veils of piety have been lifted from their awareness. Among the American classical philosophers only William James came close to the Nietzschean

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phenomenology of the spirit, but he drew back in horror from reflection of his panic fear and chose to stimulate in other people a will to believe.[12]

The gravest of ills today is the massive aggregation of the weak into organized complexes that trample on the disorganized weak... There is a near universal sense of injury in America today, a will on the part of many to “get even.” This sense of declining life, as Nietzsche’s analysis predicts, a bitterness that is often overt but that even more frequently hides a brittle piety.[13]

Reflecting upon Weinstein’s understanding of the moral basis of American exceptionalism as “brittle piety” and “hatred of existence,” could it be that the Puritans of the Mayflower Compact with their intense self-consciousness as Old Testament prophets, engaged in their own terms in a “Great Migration” across the waters of the new Red Sea – the Atlantic – fleeing an evil Pharaoh (the royalist restoration in England) brought to the shores of Plymouth Rock something very different, more chilling in its implications for its vision of “end times?” Before the “bitterness” and “brittle piety” that have come to typify Nietzsche’s last man in the contemporary age of “declining life,” I wonder if the Mayflower Compact was not the language of **vampire-speak, spirit possession**, a strange extra-terrestrial, extra-historical, extra-juridical language of the Old Testament, steeped in strong emotions of exile, resentment, vengeance, and optimism. Did the Puritans cross the Atlantic Ocean *or* the Red Sea? What was the Great Migration? Did they ever really settle America the land, or was America for them always something intermediary, spectral, a material instrument, a Great Migration, on the way to a final homecoming with the righteous god. With the Puritans, are not we suddenly time-warped to the psycho-geography of strange aliens?

We do know this. Social theorists such as Max Weber might later speak of the convenient convergence of Puritan habits of work – self-discipline, frugality, hard work – with the moral qualities necessary to support capitalism as a historical project, once liberated from the ethical anchor of religious worship. This is most certainly the religio-capitalist territory of Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. However, with the advantage of 21st century cultural hindsight, perhaps we can

now add a small, but important, *vampire* modification to Weber's famous thesis. Could it be that American capitalism is a direct extension of an *earlier* religious impulse, namely the *double* necessity of first making of everything a **great migration** (what Nietzsche would later call a "crossing-over," a "gamble," a passage over the "abyss"); and a **will to nihilism** energized by the 'hatred of existence' which was the essence of Puritan psycho-geography – hatred of the body, hatred of nature, hatred of Europe, hatred of the reinstallation of Catholic ceremonial rituals in Anglicanism, hatred of life itself. Long before the post-structural reflections of Barthes, Derrida, Irigaray and Lyotard, the Puritans of the Mayflower Compact were the first semioticians of American experience, prophetic embodiment of what is meant by a society of the "universal sign." The collective identity of Puritanism was so fused, closed, self-reinforcing, tautological, so circular in its symbolic exchange, so sexually perverted in its disciplinary obsessions, so fetishistic and cosmological that it could have only one possible result – *expand to fill the fabric of spacetime, or perish from this earth*. In the imaginary of Puritan eschatology, there is to be discovered the fundamental grammar of the American way – *either succeed in the will to empire*, whether the sacred empire defined by the religious compact or the "Redemptive Empire" of decidedly more recent imperialist ambitions; or suffer the catastrophe of *vanishing from the face of the earth*. No mediation is possible between redemptive violence and panic fear. In Puritan futurism, America would either subordinate the recalcitrant matter of earthly space and bodily flesh to the eschatological language of end times or it would disappear.

Indeed, it was with good evangelical conscience that Puritan morality justified the extermination of indigenous peoples and the appropriation of their ancestral lands. As self-proclaimed founders of the New Jerusalem, Puritans established what would quickly become the American colonial pattern of demonizing indigenous peoples as radical negation itself – nothingness – before relieving them, first of their territories, then of their lives. While the Wampanoag Nation[14] in Massachusetts was the first victim of the Puritan crusade, what might be called the Puritan model would soon be applied with clinical savagery by the American military against all indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island. Ironically, redemptive violence and panic fear may have bred that most European of all nihilisms – Blake's "monstrous consciousness" – in the Puritan mind and heart.

With the Puritans, what Nietzsche would later diagnose as the distinctly European disease – “Man” – crossed the Atlantic to take its revenge on the New Canaan of the Americas. On that day in 1620 when the Puritan spirit rose from the sea at Plymouth Rock, something very ancient in the story of human rage, something very bitter, recalcitrant and viral, just aching for revenge, forced itself upon the unsuspecting peoples, animals and land of Turtle Island. Beyond their specific religious cosmology, Puritans were also, I would claim, the unwitting carriers of an important particle of European metaphysics – the spirit of vengeance-seeking nihilism – which, in the crusading, salvational language of evangelical missionary consciousness, they injected directly into “this good land” of America.

Consequently, John Winthrop’s vision of America as a “City upon a Hill” may well be viewed as comprising the very essence of the American dialectic – a metaphysics of the war spirit and panic insecurity – conquer or perish. Here at last was a migrant people in flight willing to stake their existence on a metaphysical gesture – the spirit of the Puritan vampire – who were not European, decidedly not wholly human, never feudal nor modernist, **strangely posthuman perhaps**. Similar to Augustine’s *Confessions* in the garden at Cassiciacum where the will to believe finally fused the Christian trinity of will, emotion and intellect in the flesh of his own subjectivity, the Puritan confession has burned its way into the American personality: life itself as a great migration – a “going across” the natural body to the biogenetic body, but also crossing the bodies of economy, nature, society, politics, these libidinal territories of an expanding empire, in pursuit of the saving grace of redemptive violence. What came out of the ocean at Plymouth Rock was a psychic precursor of faith-based American political culture: a biblical spirit infused with feelings of discipline and revenge, as implacable in its hatred of existence as it was motivated by yearning for salvation from a sinful world.

It is, I believe, the primal spirit of the Puritan Vampire – redemptive, violent, extra-terrestrial in its spiritual ambitions, steeped in the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament – it this spirit of the Puritan Vampire which issues again through the political rhetoric of faith-based politics. Here, “brittle piety” is swept away by feverish faith. Individual “bitterness” is collectively masked as the “culture of life” movement. “Hatred of existence” is transformed into the missionary consciousness of the “redemptive empire.” *Signs of*

the Puritan vampire are legion: from fundamentalist faith in the vision of “premillennial dispensationalism” to the new Covenant of the Mayflower Compact; from the current language of crusading imperialism to Puritan beliefs in the necessary application of redemptive violence against the body, particularly the unruly bodies of outlaw women, witches, and sorcerers. *Signs of the ecstatic spirit of disciplinary Puritanism are everywhere:* from the military’s obsession with sexual perversion – Abu Ghreib rethought now in the words of a Texas defense lawyer as normal “cheerleader sports” to an almost fetishistic obsession among the “organized weak” with purifying “traditional marriage” of the perceived “social contamination” of gay and lesbian love. From delirious White House ecstasy with visions of Armageddon to the Puritan rapture of the New Protestant Ethic, public life embodies a sense of time curving backwards, with the spirit of the Puritan Vampire as the future of faith-based politics.

Here is the moral essence of American triumphalism. Here is why American empire, which may be **objectively** – *strategically* – already in rapid decline from economic over-indebtedness, military over-expansion, media hubris, could also only be in its **infancy**. Nietzsche once remarked of that strange creature we call a human being that for all its resentment, cruelty, paranoia and fetishes, for all of its panic fear of the inner abyss and desperate struggles against the cage of its own moral conscience, it was a will, it was a going forth, and “nothing besides.” Stopping for a moment from their game of wagers, the pantheon of gods took notice that with this birth of the “human, all-too-human,” something fundamentally new was happening. But then Nietzsche was always the first philosopher of the American mind. If he could prophesize that he would only be understood posthumously, perhaps it was because his reflections on the “last man” as the final outcome of the will to power would only really take hold in the shadows of American empire in the 21st century. Equally, Nietzsche’s philosophical twin, Rene Girard, could write so eloquently and truthfully about “sacrificial violence”[15] because he too sensed the advent of the desolation of redemptive violence with its cruel episodes of “scapegoating” and “sacrificial violence” as the “end times” of Armageddon. Strangers in their own times, migrants of the darkness of intellectual imagination, Nietzsche’s “last man” and Girard’s “sacrificial violence” remain strong psychic pulsars, pointing the way to the social apocalypse of Puritan eschatology once resurrected in the form of faith-based politics.

Born Again Ideology

2

Twisted Strands Covenant Technology and the American Mind

The (American) Spirit of Technological Innovation

Why is the United States the spearhead of the technological future?

Beyond its massive power as the leading empire of 21st century political economy, what explains the remarkable historical situation that since its Puritan origins America has actually *innovated the future* thanks to a seemingly singular cultural genius for innovation, creativity and (patent-driven) consumer practicality? Here, seizing upon the language of technological innovation as its primary means of expression, what might be described as the discourse of technology and the American mind has become both the essence of American drive towards the fully realized technological future and increasingly, due to its hegemony as a dominant political power, the dominant cultural code of global society.

Value-driven by missionary consciousness first articulated by Puritan pilgrims, *enabled* by the rhetoric of (property) freedom enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, *implemented* by a creative spirit of (technical) innovation, and morally *legitimated* by the justificatory claims of redemptive empire, the discourse of technology and the American mind represents the speed of light interfacing the national project of the United States. Breaking with the slow movements of exclusively *social* history, migrating beyond land-based agriculture, factory-based industry,

and now even beyond *human*-based interactivity, the spirit of American (technological) innovation may well constitute that moment when two ancient cosmologies – *religion and science* – finally conjoined as twisted strands at the advancing tip of the once and future history of the 21st century.

Technological pilgrims swept along in the slipstream of technology and the American mind, we, the inhabitants of the contemporary planetary epoch, have come to know its mediations and contradictions as our very own. Refusing to be silenced by the spirit of technological enthusiasm, we turn to the most enduring counter-practices of critical thought. Namely, if we cannot assent to the ascendant technically-driven future, we will critically probe the granularities of history for clues concerning how best to navigate the civilizational crisis that is the world today. In the unfolding story of technology and the American mind, the act of counter-thinking against the currents of technology delivers thought to strange shores. Software, wetware and hardware as competing world-philosophies; the biological model of the “double helix” as perhaps culturally anticipated by the political logic of the American Republic; Harvard Puritanism as an important migration point for the crossing-over of religion and science in the American mind; and the twisted strands of rapture and imperialism as key threads in the technological project that is the United States today. Like all counter-histories, this act of brushing critical, speculative thought against the technological blast is epistemologically relativistic. Faithful to its origins in the quantum philosophies that launched the postmodern era, there can be no pretence that the act of thinking the question of (American) technology does not somehow disturb the field, making of the discourse of technology and the American mind both the (anterior) subject and (imaginary) object of its focus. But then, more is at stake here than the historical fate, narrowly conceived, of the American Republic. If technology is the name given today to the ancient language of metaphysics, then what transpires in the technological framing of the American mind is also a larger story of the history of being itself. Ironically, the counter-practice of thought which asks of the discourse of technology and the American mind only that it reveal itself in its history and its practices, may also be the method by which the spark of being crosses over to a future discourse, yet undiscovered.

Clashing World (Techno) Projects

Hardware, software, wetware are the three forms which the human/machine can take in the New World Order. This trinity possesses its own geographical and historical coordinates. The hardware on which we play out all our culture and communication comes from Japan. The programs which make it possible for us to read, see and hear all this precious data come from the United States. And finally, the role of Europe is to deliver the necessary cultural products for shipment. Wetware's task is to cough up culture, which will be run on the Japanese hardware with the help of American software. In this international division of labour, what is expected of Europe is that she properly administer the legacy of Bach and Beethoven, maintain the paintings of Rembrandt and Van Gough, and extend the Shakespeare-through-Beckett theatre tradition into the future. This is just as true for the media art which has appeared over the last few years. The Europeans must figure out what things of beauty can be coaxed out of all this new equipment, for there is little pleasure to be derived from the functional use of the technology.

– Geert Lovink. “Hardware, Software, Wetware.” [1]

Following Lovink's analysis, while Europe has, in effect, a brilliant *wetware* tradition of critical cultural reflection which has thought deeply about the cultural genealogy and social consequences of the universal technological state, and while emergent nations of the east – China, Japan, Taiwan, India, Singapore, and Malaysia – have political economies specializing in the production of technological *hardware*, the United States is the world's leader in *software* culture. Not software culture in the exclusive digital terms of Windows, Dreamweaver, Final Cut Pro, Tiger and Java, but America as a software culture in the more *inclusive* sense of specializing in a style of thought and habit of (technological) creativity which literally grabs illusive scientific concepts from the mental vapor of the times, materializing them in a stunning series of technological inventions which come to represent the architecture of daily life in the contemporary century. *From* the Pony Express and the wagon train to jumbo jets, container ships, and the International Space Station; *from* typewriters and telephones (Edison's vision of “talking with electricity”)

to xerography, integrated circuits, zipcodes, microprocessors and ArpaNet; *from* flash bulbs, phonographs, and “talking motion pictures” to MS-DOS, hypermedia, and wireless mobiles; the endlessly inventive American mind has literally challenged the boundaries of the new, the innovative, the transformative.[2]

In a global culture which typically adopts the second law of thermodynamics – the tendency towards entropy – as its default position, the United States is different. Its historical vocation – its singular energy-force – is transformative, technological, teleological. *Transformative* because its unfolding history of sheer technical inventiveness has created not only a new economy, but the boundary conditions for a new (biogenetic) body, new (mobile) media; and new (communicative) politics, indeed for a propensity for continuously reinventing itself under the rubric of “newness.” *Technological* because, dispensing with the necessarily solitary routines of cultural introspection as well as the economic routines of manufacturing, it has made of itself a constitutively technological nation-state, and then cyber-empire. And *teleological* because the American project of technology is not separate from the quest for religious salvation, but represents that historically momentous cross-over point where religious salvation comes to be expressed in the double language of technological rapture and technological violence.

Beyond both Isaac Newton’s discovery of light as divisible into a full-color spectrum and 20th century quantum physics with its universe moving at the speed of light, the singular gift of the American spirit of technological innovation has been to quickly transform epochal scientific insights into accessible, practical consumer products that literally light up the future. Einstein’s theoretical splitting of the atom might have produced most immediately the post-nuclear wasteland of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but it also unleashed the creativity of networked communication. In America, the long (European) history of photography extending from the pinhole camera and the *camera obscura* to the “magic lantern” has been blasted into global popular culture by disposable cameras, cell phone videos, and web cams. What was once only of speculative interest to mathematical theorists is now the everyday communicative world of complex computer search engines literally driving the knowledge-base of future human intuition. Taking its place in the ancient history of writing – from Sumerian

cuneiform writing and the Phoenician alphabet to Egyptian hieroglyphics and papyrus rolls – American digital innovation has written the world anew in the rhetoric of the Electronic Word.

While the human nervous system might well have been *extended* by electronic technologies of communication in the 20th century, in the contemporary era we have actually *put on* the new (wired) nervous system generated by the American spirit of technological innovation as our *electronic exoskeleton*. In ways more pervasive than Marshall McLuhan could predict, America's spirit of technological innovation has literally transformed its gift for invention, its cultural predilection for "killer apps" into the ruling world environment. Inhabitants of technoculture we have Microsoft (security) upgrades; Fox vision; Intel routines; space shuttle dreams; Hubble visions; Entertainment Tonight gossip; Entourage comedy; iPod, iTunes, iSight, iChat creativity. Indeed, who today can say with any confidence that they are exempt from the three most dynamic tendencies unleashed by software culture – *invisibility*, *miniaturization*, and *the question of the interface*. When the (consumer) gifts of the American spirit of technology are tattooed onto the skin of (global) culture, it is the *object* of the gift – the individual human subject – who is rewritten by the silent, but pervasive, software codes – becoming an increasingly *invisible* part of the network of technoculture; becoming an economic *interface* between machineries of production and advertising; becoming *miniature* in its social and political power in the face of massive technologies of surveillance, databasing, dissemination, and automation.

Covenant Technology

Accordingly, these questions: Could the lasting cultural importance of the United States be that of a great *transitional* phase, marking that point where centuries of human diversity and cultural singularity have finally been successfully channeled into the historical project of technology, sometimes by killing, sometimes by fun? Could American (technological) creativity and innovation have in the end less to do with the accelerating force of an expanding political and commercial empire, than constitute a great *retrospective* movement attracting the dark mass of the (missing) social into the arid residue of technoculture? While the world has

never experienced an empire generated under the sign of what Martin Heidegger has described as “completed nihilism,” we do know this in advance concerning the likely fate of American empire. The key feature of “completed nihilism” as the final, most mature phase of the historical project of technology is that it will be characterized by the coming to be of a society which is simultaneously *subject and object* of the technological dynamo. It will be *subject* of the historical project of technology because it will adopt as its deepest autochthonon the language of technical striving. And it will be *object* of the completed technological experience because it will make of its rhetoric, government, economy, media and social institutions shining examples – a “City Upon the Hill” – of the fully rationalized, yet intensely sacrificial, future of technological willing.

Consequently the proposition: What makes America *America*, what really animates the discourse of technology and the American mind, is that its political culture represents a dynamic historical expression of Heidegger’s concept of “completed nihilism.” Not nihilism in a solely negative sense, but American nihilism as possessing a double meaning – the twin drives to *technological imperialism and technological rapture*. Co-present, deeply entwined, clashing yet interdependent, the drive to technological imperialism may express the relentless logic involved in delivering individuals to the lip of the data(net) by strategies ranging from mass consumption to ubiquitous surveillance, but the moment of technological rapture is different. Here, the spirit of nihilism manifests itself in a culture continually reinventing itself from nothingness in creative, transformative directions. Not content with subordinating the question of technology to strictly materialist ambitions, American discourse ultimately resolves its (technological) fate in the direction of religion, broadly understood. From the *media rapture* in minor key of advertising-driven consumption and the *body rapture* of successful cosmetic surgery to the *digital rapture* of all the Silicon Valleys of the mind, what differentiates the American project of technology is its deep implication in the overall political eschatology of America’s redemptive covenant. To speak of technology and the American mind is also to rapidly move beyond the strategies of elite-driven political economy involved in technological imperialism to an understanding of *covenant technology*.

Covenant technology? That's the fusion of covenant theology and the will to technology as the essence of the American Republic, from its religious origins to its technocratic future. Here we are in the presence of a momentous alliance of two great historical forces – evangelical theology and technological experimentalism – which, putting aside their traditional differences, fuse the fierce ontological vision of covenant theology with the equally dynamic epistemological drive towards technological mastery of nature – human, post-human, and physical. Sworn on the bible at the time of the Mayflower Compact, emboldened by the successful political rebellion represented by the War of Independence, sanctified in sacrificial blood by the Civil War, hardened by the territorial conquests of the Indian Wars, brutalized by a long succession of colonial conquests, strategically confirmed by the extraordinary economic domination of the American empire of advanced capitalism, the American covenant was never a narrowly religious or even ideological affair, but emphatically techno-religious. *Animating faith in the moral rightness of the American Republic powered by the spirit of technological innovation is the essence of what might justifiably be described as American-ness.* While covenant theology is the ontological condition necessary to kick-start the “American dream,” brilliant technological innovation is the epistemological condition required to translate the terms of the covenant into the imaginary of the American Republic. Fear of the wrath of a righteous god mingles with inspiring visions of redemptive empire from the very inception of the American mind.

America as a Shining Body Upon a Hill

In a very real sense, American cultural history might be viewed as a vast, long-range eugenic experiment implicating the American public as an active test-bed for producing experimental prototypes of future bodies. Understood as a cultural as opposed to simply an economic phenomenon, mass consumer culture has since it gained escape velocity post-WWII literally grown a new American body: equipped with mobiles, interfaced by the Net, possessed by electronic media, alternatively splurging and purging in its dietary patterns, veering between individual self-help/self-loathing books and collective support for aggressive foreign policy, medicated, mediated, and (ideologically) interpellated.

While other nations might exceed the United States in sheer speed of technological innovation (wireless Philippines, Japan's early adoption of mini-DVD's), American culture excels in the transformation of new consumer peripherals into products of mass consumption. For example, consider contemporary triangular trade patterns among Japan, China and the United States. China is heavily dependent on Japan for new machinery and advanced electronic hardware. Japan is consequently co-dependent on China as its major trade partner. As for the United States, its imports of inexpensive consumer items from China have left it with a \$60 billion monthly trade deficit, with China, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea as America's key creditors.[3] Quite literally, if global political economy is not to sink into a potentially catastrophic deflationary cycle, prevailing patterns of American consumption must be maintained, if not intensified. Japan as a specialized *hardware-function*, China as an inexpensive *labor-function*, and the United States as a *consumption-function* represent the lynchpins of contemporary global economic triangulation according to the logic of advanced capitalism.

However, beyond the strictly economic considerations underlying the logic of consumption (specifically inexpensive labor and cheap imports), America's psychological preparedness to play the role of mass consumer – to wrap the mantle of consumption around American identity – is, I believe, fundamentally about *metaphysics*. From its very beginning, the invention of the American self is a classic example of the medieval philosophy of *creatio ex nihilo* – creation out of nothingness. After all, that is what a covenant is. *It is a creation document*, detailing the terms of the collective agreement, ostensibly in the name of god, but ultimately with the chain of metaphysics delineating the terms of creation. While America's *political* destiny will be linked to the redemptive vision of the collectivity as a shining example of a "City Upon a Hill," American *individualism* places its faith in instrumental activism: from *reinventing* the self and *repurposing* the Republic to ultimately *restrategizing* the empire. Of the great trinitarian triad at the basis of all metaphysics, secular as well as deeply religious societies – will, intelligence, emotion – the American covenant is signified by faith in the language of the will.

How could it be otherwise? The Puritans that struggled to the shore of Plymouth Bay already had the spirit of (technological) willing burned

into their flesh. They had made of their bodies, intentions, desires a great migration – a tremulous sign of something else that was to come. Consider the immense discipline imposed on the body by their religiously inspired belief in rules, orderly conduct, frugality, doing good works. Before they set about reworking the land, Puritan pilgrims had already reworked the body by imposing a disciplinary strategy upon its desires and appetites. While they were quick to speak of indigenous peoples as “savages,” they were themselves the first of all the *technological primitives*, primed to impose on anything that stood in their way the same redemptive violence that they had already experienced as the essence of their existence. Unlike Europe which would finally liberate itself from the bitter internecine struggles of Protestantism and Catholicism, Reformation and Inquisition, by a growing belief in the death of god and which ever since has had to reconstitute its cultural identity in the ashes of non-belief, America has *never* experienced the death of god. Its foundational logic has always been *pre-modern, pre-Enlightenment, pre-rational*. Ultimately, this would be a culture haunted by biblical primitivism yet open to all the instrumentalities of the (technological) future; wed to an enthusiastic, affirming belief in the eventual triumph of the sacred, yet accelerated by advanced technologies of communication, finance, genetics, and power. Whether adopted as the ruling rhetoric of official ideology with the dutiful genuflection of presidential candidates to the words “God Bless America,” “God Bless the American People;” experienced as the animating faith of religious communities, both evangelical and regular church; or expressed in popular culture as a seductive mixture of technocratic savvy and unshakeable optimism of the will, faith in the redemptive power of the will is the essence of American self-confidence.

Literally created out of nothingness – born out of the willful determination of the original Puritans to create a religious society in strict covenant with biblical scriptures, the American experiment can always only go forward, extending the power of its essentially messianic vision of the will upon the land, its inhabitants, and ultimately upon itself. Bonding fervent acts of individual faith with rapturous visions of redemption from a sinful world, Puritanism made of radical negation the “right stuff” of American being. Here, there could be no going back – to hierarchy, to priestly mediations, to ceremonial rituals. There could only be a going forward – to the “City Upon a Hill,” to individual redemption, to the

heroic image of the American frontier “taming the wilderness,” to the creative act of reinventing the self. Like the dramatic originality of the American covenant itself, each individual would also constitute a “new beginning,” later commonly struck on the political anvil of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” but fashioned in the founding terms of the Mayflower Compact as an imminent sign of covenant logic. Of course, in the absence of the assertive language of the (crusading) will, the American experiment is always under imminent threat of instantly retracting into the *spirit of radical negation* from which it first emerged. Courageously rebelling against British colonial domination, mindful that a commercial empire was waiting to be gained in the western lands, nourished by dreams of harvesting the natural energies of the “wilderness,” Americans truly were the first republican citizens of the New World. Not simply by virtue of historical chronology, but metaphysically.

Europe was truly the Old World because it was the world of the *broken will*, divided initially between the nostalgia of Greek lament and the pragmatism of Roman power, and later between Kantian aspirations to universal community and Sadian visions of the triumph of the irrational. Never capable of fully absorbing the consequences of the death of god into its political philosophies, Europe could be the land of the *broken will* because successive European political experiments failed to create a *directly experienced mediation of the will*. Here, the fundamental division of reason and passion in the wavering of the human heart – so presciently identified by the great thinkers of the Enlightenment as the “dialectic of reason” – would be forced to find an *external* principle of unity: from the cruelty of the Inquisition and the counter-discipline of the Reformation to the failed experiments of fascism (populist counter-reactions) and communism (totalitarian bureaucracy) and thereupon to the new political artifice of the European Community which, for all of its aspirations to replace the American dream with the European social alternative, is probably only the latest manifestation of a continuing *metaphysical* crisis that is the true European legacy. Ultimately the death of god in the European heart and with it Europe’s increasing disdain for the messianic logic of covenant theology carried with it a heavy philosophical, then directly political, price. When Christian confessionality lost its emotional hold as an internal principle of European identity, when the European history of will disconnected from the holy trinity of intelligence, will and

emotion under the sign of god, then power was forced to play its political games on the outside, to find in alternative spasms of overbearing (state) reason or (individual) psychological counter-reactions a way of restoring the lost unity of the Christian confessional. Lacking an *internal* cultural principle of mediation, swinging randomly between a politics of democratic universalism (disconnected from the harsher vicissitudes of life) and the upsurge of the irrational (unchecked by the moderating claims of reason), the modern history of Europe is that of an endlessly deferred civilizational crisis. Its future surely lies in its past. A political chronology of the broken will: a political culture radically divided between the political artifice of imposed social unities and radical political expressions of the irrational.

Not so America. For better or worse, the United States has evaded the deferred cultural crisis haunting Europe because the founding of the American republic brought together two clashing ideas, previously separate and mutually hostile – the messianic *passion* of covenant theology and the new frontier *reason* of the will to technology. Refusing the European post-Christian model of a solely *external* mediation of reason and passion, the New Republic did something strikingly different. It made of the *felt subjectivity* of the individual American citizen the directly experienced ground for mediating (technical) intelligence and (missionary) emotion. From its Puritan origins to its wireless future, *Americanness* would come to represent a stunningly original form of identity – *a fused will* – in which passionate commitment, whether progressive or conservative, to the ideal of the City Upon the Hill would mix in equal measure with loyalty to the spirit of (technical) innovation. Consequently, what was experienced in Europe as antitheses – the death of god and the age of progress – was literally reconfigured across the Atlantic as the reanimated god of the American covenant fused with a breathtaking cultural openness to innovation, enterprise and creativity in the leading form of contemporary subjectivity known as Americanness. Once blended with both a national mission (the founding of the Republic) and personal ambitions (innovation in science and technology driven by acquisitive capitalism), technology ceased to be a project external to the question of identity, becoming something *internalized* with the deepest formation of American identity itself. Once released from its European constraints and connected with the salvational language of the founding political covenant, it was as if American identity could finally express itself fully *only* in the language of technology. In the

Born Again Ideology

American mind, there is always only a new (technological) frontier: the early colonial crossing of the western lands of the Mississippi River, the shores of the Pacific Ocean cresting on the beaches of California, the Space Race, the first “Man on the Moon,” the projected manned exploration of Mars. Here, the meaning of the frontier in the American mind is not something that can ever be *physically* achieved, representing instead an always receding possibility. Chase this possibility across the American land mass to the Pacific Ocean, conquer a whole planetary world of the American empire, whereupon it immediately disappears into the stars – an illusive new frontier of deep space to be pursued anew across an infinity of dark galaxies.

The first of all the essentially technological subjectivities, Americanness refers now, as much as in its historical origins, to an incipient form of identity waiting to be mobilized, activated, ordered: in effect, prepared for full participation in the greater historical (technological) project of imposing its framework of (missionary) understanding upon the world. Self-confident in its moral correctness, measuring its success by its degree of mastery of a universe always understood as imminently hostile, threatened by any resistance to its hegemony, critically paranoid to the extent that it uses panic fear as a way of confirming the ethical necessity of the next crusade, Americanness fused religion and science into a dramatically new form of (technological) willing. Possessing no (European) home to which to return, this lonely, aggressive band of American pilgrims also had no future except for their own ability to blend the vision of a righteous god and an innovative cast of mind into a winning political formula. Subjects, who by virtue of intentional exile had freed up everything of themselves to be mobilized, ordered, repurposed, reconfigured, they were held together less by the gathering dreams of federalist democracy than by a covenant which was as intensely personal as it was inspiringly collective. Viewed historically, the great American advantage is that this is less the story of a political culture born at the very inception of the age of progress and thus capable of leapfrogging ahead in industrial technology, than a more enduring discourse concerning the formation of American identity as *born again technology*. Theirs was a unique world-character type for whom the otherwise chilling Heideggerian terms of “setting-upon,” “standing-reserve” and “injurious neglect of the thing” could be immediately experienced less as ethical inhibitions against the language

of (technological) progress than pragmatic descriptions of the world-view necessary for disciplining the self in the age of acquisitive capitalism and, in the process, acquiring an empire through a culture of permanent war.

Ultimately Americanness is the necessary cultural outcome of a society which wagers its fortunes upon the metaphysics of the will. Created as a powerful, but necessarily imperfect, expression of the *fused will*, (American) technological willing synthesizes strong personal ambitions, commercial calculations and immense technical creativity into a distinct style of instrumental activism – at times strictly capitalist, at other points militaristic – which comes to be known colloquially as the *American way*. In its early aggressive moments, the American expression of the will can win the War of Independence, the Civil War, Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War, and from the ruins of WWI and WWII garrison the world with the complex military apparatus essential to American (commercial) empire. Indeed, more than simply winning wars on the field of military struggle, American war culture takes Heidegger's concept of "harvesting" to a new extreme. For Heidegger the language of (technological) harvesting refers to the reduction of all sources of energy – human, animal, and nature – to passive "standing-reserve," always on-call to be ordered, mobilized, drained of energy by the historical project of technology. When applied to an understanding of American war logic, Heidegger's harvesting has an added cynical twist: namely the active digestion by first colonial, later post-colonial, and now the American imperial empire of the warrior spirit of the conquered as a way of animating the machinery of harvesting anew. From sports teams to military divisions, the landscape of American culture is populated by the ghostly specters of defeated Indian tribes just as much as the messianic spirit of southern confederate forces during the Civil War continues to deeply inform the crusading political strategies of the contemporary Republic. With its twofold political logic of scapegoating and parasitism, sacrificial violence is the real psychological nomenclature of Americanness.

Yet for all its outward materialist accomplishments, the underlying metaphysics of the American expression of the will cannot, in the end, be denied. At some indefinable point in its cultural history, possibly bored with its accomplishments, fatigued with its obligations, perhaps contemptuous of the ease with which it has conquered a colony and then

an empire, the American will inevitably folds back on itself. Thus begins the era of *soft decadence* when the will, dispensing with extrinsic objects as ultimately unsatisfactory forms of satisfaction, begins to feed on itself. Literally, America begins to make itself sick as a way of energizing the next phase of its historical project. While the American will in its political infancy is nourished by the language of expanding capital – the aggressive construction of a coldly functional empire of social, economic, cultural and political power – the fully mature expression of the American will does just the opposite. In these desolate, skittish days at the end of empire, American power feeds on the eschatology of postmodern phantasms: the death of the social, the end of politics, the virtualization of capital, the disappearance of culture. Reality shows on television are practical substitutes for social capital. Dense networks of expressways linking gated suburbs to downtown financial skyscrapers represent the architectural remainder of urban capital. Breast augmentation as the leading present by parents to graduating high school women constitutes the real language of body capital. Evangelical preachers, stock manipulators, and powerful vested interests feeding on the “common” body of the government perfectly express the death of politics as itself a way of renewing the language of power. While conservative political rhetoric appeals to the unity of American community and progressive thought continues to dream of social justice, the real driving force of American popular culture champions the death of the social. Exclusionary politics, political scapegoating, collective anger directed against the weak, posses of middle-class self-described “vigilantes” on the Arizona border with Mexico, drinking rates among some high school students declining because they are reported as spending more time popping prescription pills from their parents’ medicine cabinets, television news of mass outbreaks of syphilis among the children of Baptists in Atlanta suburbs, newspaper chronicles of monster homes, abandoned families, and vacant relationships. A pleasure dome and a torture chamber, the *Body Upon a Hill* increasingly takes delight in its own humiliation. Its mass entertainment from CSI to the galaxy of reality shows can be death-oriented because in its last decadent phase power always prefers to speak in the language of *thanatos*. With a thin veneer of piety covering an inner reality of political cynicism, scenes of torture, death, accidents, mass plague, natural catastrophes are transformed into entertainment spectacles. In the mass media, false prophets abound while false gods are proclaimed just before being debunked. In its foreign policy, America throws off the

legitimizing language of democratic freedom, revealing itself to be a cold-eyed will to power, subordinating when necessary the (domestic) rhetoric of freedom and democracy to doing what's necessary to preserve an increasingly hegemonic world empire. In its domestic policy, the leaders of the Republic encourage its population to make a media spectacle of the spirit of negation within. Violence becomes the essential moment of rapture in the last decadent phase of American empire, with panic fear and panic deflation as oscillating moments in the public mind.

Or perhaps something more psychologically complex as the American boundary condition: a strange combination of activism and panic fear, transformation and negation. Which explains why, for example, there can be such violent counter-reactions against any breaches of the closed boundaries of the American covenant. This is a political system wound up so tightly in a twin logic of violence and negation that the slightest hint of catastrophe threatens to draw out the panic fear within. Long before the projection of American power harvests the world in the pursuit of its imperial ambitions, the terms of the original Puritan covenant – codified by the language of the American Constitution and sanctified by the official rhetoric of the Civil War as sacrificial violence in the interests of an indivisible Union – specify that the American self will be a sacrificial offering – *a will and nothing but a will*. Later, during the decadent days of empire, when the strategic interests of American power have been achieved and the middle-class population assured of the practical successes of the high-intensity consumer marketplace, it is difficult to rearticulate the original animating vision of the burning will that is the essence of American exceptionalism. More profoundly a metaphysical rather than a narrowly political rupture with its European origins, what really migrated with Puritans first, and waves of immigrants later, was a fundamentally new expression of the language of the will – a will to survive, to create, to conquer, to dominate – which carried in its path both a new form of (technical) knowledge as power as much as a new form of (crusading) emotion motivated by unbending determination American-style.

The Double Helix

A transformation matrix, the dominant American cultural pattern holds direct opposites in creative tension. This is the source of its fierce internal political debates, its messianic militarism, its scientific creativity, its dynamic capitalist experimentation, its often visionary art. Simultaneously pious and cynical, philanthropic and war-like, manipulative and generous, proselytizing and fearful, American culture intensifies extremes and laughs away the difference. Long before the science of evolutionary biology envisioned the model of the “double helix” as the basic building block of human life, American culture emerged full-blown as a society of twisted strands. Refusing to be enframed by the frozen binaries of Enlightenment logic, blasting away the philosophical obstructions between a vengeful god and an optimistic science, always in creative tension, always on the move towards the next frontier, the discourse of technology and the American mind was a brilliant scientific idea first experienced as a daring political project. For example, while the biological model of the double helix could be brilliantly proposed fifty years ago as the basic (DNA) building block of all life, perhaps in a strange case of science lagging behind life, Crick and Watson’s discovery (with the unacknowledged, but indispensable X-ray photography by Rosalind Franklin) was anticipated by the political history and cultural logic of the United States.

The American Republic of Bio-Power

Sometimes, scientific consciousness articulates a vision of the future which, while ostensibly emergent from the physical universe actually represents a fantastic crystallization of a ruling idea, that had until that point been suspended in the cultural atmosphere. Like an intangible idea, floating everywhere, expressible nowhere, the double helix could perhaps be received with such instant global acclaim because it gave voice to a dynamic cultural representation which until that moment was unrecognized as the “building block” of modern (American) culture. In the same way that Lewis Mumford could note that the industrial model of the factory was anticipated by medieval practices of the monastery with its strict division of time, disciplining of labor, and specialization of work function,[4] so too the biological model of the double helix was

anticipated by the singular way of being that is American identity. Could it be that what is most exceptional about American exceptionalism is that this was a culture which, from its inception, had somehow stumbled upon the language of biology as its ruling metaphysic? In this case, we might conclude that while Europe could rightfully be the originating continent of physics, the United States would be the culture born under the sign of genetic biology. When Michel Foucault spoke so eloquently about the movement from “power over death” to “power over life” as the essence of power/knowledge, he might well have been rehearsing in his thought the political creed of the United States: namely that this would be a culture where power would wager itself on the invention of a distinctive style of life itself, what is described colloquially, not without a certain sense of national pride, as the “American way of life.” The passionate combination first of Puritan missionary consciousness and scientific experimentalism, and later of mass consumption and electronic gadgets, that would come to characterize the American eruption in an otherwise hostile, if not indifferent, world found its formula, and appropriately so, in the famous “Declaration of (Technological) Independence” with its bio-political rhetoric of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

What finally appeared in the 20th century language of genetic biology as the famous image of the double helix – two twisting strands of nucleotides, strictly anti-parallel, connected by four base pairings – is, I believe, but a scientific expression of a bio-political revolution that occurred much earlier with the founding of the American republic. Here, like a cultural precession of the scientific imagination of biotechnology, the dominant pattern of American discourse is structured in the form of a double helix whereby two great curving strands of cosmology – *faith-based religion and scientifically authorized reason* – follow a twisting, spiraling path from past to future: co-present, bound together in creative tension, decidedly not binaries, determining in their oppositions and continuities the specific codes of American political culture. Always running anti-parallel to one another (religion versus science, liberalism versus conservatism, individualism versus collectivity, nature versus culture, faith versus reason), the genetic memory of American discourse is connected by four base pairs: economy, politics, society, and culture. Like DNA, the base pairs of American culture – its seductive model of political economy, social logic, media networks, and cultural values – can be easily clipped and transplanted into colonized

(alien) bodies. It was not for nothing that Marshall McLuhan described the United States as the “world environment.” With a strikingly original “building block” of *political* life (the constitutional theory of the American Republic), genetic *social* memory (the “American dream”), great twisting strands of *thought*, and clashing *ideological* currents which run deep and always run anti-parallel, America was fated by its origins in genetic logic to be the ascendant ruling empire of the 21st century. More than its own imperial leadership may suspect, America was literally engineered for world power from its inception. In this continental nation, in this global empire, a dynamic genetic idea – the building blocks of life itself as twisting strands of great codes, anti-parallel, connected by base pairs in constant motion – somehow jumped from the sphere of biology to the world of political theory. Imprinting itself deeply in the language of American identity, arming itself with the religious fervor of the American dream, structuring a whole society with its biological rhythms, the double helix finds in the American Republic a way of coding that which is most vital, most powerful, most eschatological into a resilient, always expanding, body of (imperial) politics.

As a nation the history of which begins not only with a fateful rupture with Europe but with a dynamic will to create a new society out of the twisting strands of fierce religious conviction and equally determined pilgrim energy, we are dealing here with the sudden eruption in the “New World” of an evolutionary break in the building blocks of (European) political and social life. Breaking with the fetters of monarchy, refusing the land-based fatalism of feudalism, placing its confidence in the bible and the axe, pushing westward, then global, then galactic, towards an unattainable imagination of the American spirit, the “New Republic” is possessed by the language of bio-politics. Ostensibly, we are dealing here with the *social* construction of American identity, the *political* constitution of mixed government combining executive, legislative and judicial powers in equal, measured proportions, the *ideological* formation of the American colonizing project from “Manifest Destiny” to “Redemptive Empire,” and the invention of a style of *capitalist initiative* that is as creative, inventive, and transformative in its entrepreneurial energy as it is harsh, cold and calculating in its drive to quarterly profitability. All this may be true, but still there is something else, more subliminal, harder to detect, practically invisible because it is so omnipresent; and that is, the actual genetic

constitution of the sustaining spirit of America as a *way of being*. Here, each person, each identity, each animating political idea, each cultural image, each entrepreneurial project, each cybernetic vision will either be a twisted strand containing clashing, brilliantly anti-parallel possibilities, or, as Puritan futurists declaimed: “it would perish from the face of this good earth.” Catastrophe and rapture are the twisted song-lines of American being.

Catastrophe and Rapture

Who could have conceived of a society which would structure principles for its own undermining, for itself as a brilliantly creative accident – always about to happen, always happening, always in the process of being redeemed – for the auto-destruction of any tendency towards permanent stability, into its deepest constitutional principles? It’s one thing to speak with awed reverence at the supposedly flawed Kantian marvel that is the United States where the (modernist) vision of universal human community of freely acting citizens invested with inalienable natural rights is somehow held to be threatened by faith-based, bible belt political insurgencies running straight from the pulpit to the White House, from Fox News to the deepest subjectivity of the inhabitants of the new middle class gated communities of this good (suburban) land. But it’s quite something else, when taking off the blinkers of conventional modernism, to realize that with regard to the question of American *being*, something genuinely unique is happening here, that this is one culture which is structured by a very singular social history, namely that the only national constant in American history – economic, political, social and cultural – is the capitalist equivalent of Maoist “permanent revolution.” Call it what you will – Schumpeter’s principle of “creative destruction,” Reagan’s “New Morning for America,” Microsoft’s competitive software scorched earth policy symbolized by its “Windows on the World,” the tabloids’ daily spectacle of the dramatic burnout and eventual redemption of celebrity icons, or small business entrepreneurs who get up everyday with gritty dreams and mission statements to deconstruct, derail, and devolve what has gone before in order to reconstruct, realign and repurpose enterprise economy into something absolutely new, absolutely profitable. American rhetoric might wear the symbolic garments of Kantian universal freedom

to the altar of political respectability in the community of (democratic) nations, but the essence of American identity lies elsewhere, precisely in the almost ecstatic collective pleasure taken in accidenting the future, crash-testing the economy, accelerating the body, abandoning culture, evacuating the social, harvesting the brain by new sciences of neuro-genetics, vicariously sharing in the rise and fall of celebrity icons. *Fear Factor* and *Entertainment Tonight* are not just prime-time TV shows: they also capture something of the element of radical deconstruction central to the American *geist*.

The spirit of permanent revolution at the heart of American identity might be explained away by Rene Girard's concept of sacrificial violence – namely that this is one culture which, perhaps exhausted with sacrificial rituals carried on at the (media) edges of its colonial borders, finally makes a sacrificial wasteland of itself, finding in the moment of sacrificial expenditure the real social capital of an advanced technoculture dying of its own boredom. But perhaps there is something about American identity that is post-Girard, that the ecstasy of sacrificial expenditure – the insatiable drive to transform, undermine, innovate, create, destroy – is not the empty symbolic ritual of an exhausted culture which desperately requires sacrifices (of always accidental others) as a means of internal moral cohesion, but the essential genetic logic of its historical drive to empire. This dynamic fusion of sacrificial logic and natural rights into the same political body, investing American identity, business, war, culture, knowledge, media with the twisted strands of different futures – order and chaos – always anti-parallel, always threatening to implode, to reconfigure, to instantly field-morph into a radical change of state is the essential creative energy driving the American dream. Neither exclusively political nor biological, American being is born *bio-political*. Here the future always accidents itself – destabilizing, conflagrating, deconstructing – in order to give rise to something greater: that is its energy, its creativity, its innovativeness, its undeniable seduction, its dark charisma. Reluctant to slow down sufficiently to develop a stable (modernist) Freudian ego, this is one culture which operates at the speed of light between a full-octane id and an aggressive cultural superego.

Three Twisted Strands

USA: An Open, Closed or Flat Universe?

After the Big Bang precipitated by the meeting of covenant theology and the spirit of technological innovation in the American mind, what is the future of the United States? Is it an *open universe* rushing outwards in ever expanding concentric circles, radiating its implosive energy at the speed of light, burning up its material base until at some point in the indefinite future it will be left floating among the planets as an empty remainder of that which once was the leading 21st century empire of spacetime? Or is it a *closed universe* violently collapsing into itself, the infinite curvature of its spacetime fabric compressing into the dense, dark material of a black hole from which no light can escape? Or is the American future that of a *flat universe* with no real expansion nor necessary contraction, only an indefinite struggle between inflationary and deflationary forces, a prolonged political stalemate punctuated by violent event-horizons.

Understood as an *open universe*, the secret of American power is that it always seeks to inflate beyond its controlling codes. The military projection of the American will to empire by sea, land and air always exceeds the more constrained political vision of the founding constitutional order. The political economy of advanced capitalism that has come to be known as the logic of globalization is always functionally bankrupt, incorporating a permanent liquidity crisis of over-indebtedness as its necessary motive. The greater the expansion of American influence off-shore, the more severe the internal legitimation crisis undermining American authority. The more universal the declaration of American values, the more intense the domestic debate concerning the ends of American political morality. In its expansive, inflationary phase, the fabric of American culture expands to consume the universe, investing societies seemingly everywhere with a unitary fabric of (American) spacetime linking together imperial power, capitalist profitability, media influence and messianic vision.

Viewed as a *closed universe*, American culture is in the process of violently collapsing into itself, like a dead and dying star attracting into its dense, twisting spiral all the passing material of the social universe. Here, the language of redemptive empire can be revived as a way of signaling the

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swift contraction of the American experiment into its base elements of physical power, primitive capitalism, crusading morality, and imposed influence. Massively deflationary, inward looking, mistrustful of outsiders, increasingly paranoid about breaches of its (political) bodily boundaries, America as a closed universe has only one certain future. When the liquid growth of the symbolic media of power, money, influence and values are forced to contract towards their controlling codes, a critical tipping-point is quickly achieved. Here, America becomes a quantum singularity: a crushing density of political energy around which light-waves from other stars are forced to bend, disappearing into such an infinite immensity of darkness that America henceforth will only be known at second-hand by the astronomical signs of what is missing when other planets cross between outside observers and its violent event-horizon.

Envisioned as a *flat* universe, America is a culture of twisted strands struggling to stabilize clashing pressures towards full (political) inflation and total (cultural) deflation. Possessing neither the pure energy of an open universe or the dense matter of a closed universe, the flat universe of America is something different. It is that moving point where the centripetal energies of an expanding (political) universe fold back into centrifugal matter of a deflationary (economic) culture to create an event-horizon that is known as the *American singularity*. Positioned on the outer edge of the spiral, marking a threshold between the black hole of the American religious past and the white hole of the American technological future, the American singularity is a warp hole between history and the present. Enter the American singularity, fully immerse yourself in the fusion of *closed universe* covenant theology and *open universe* technological innovation that is the American field of spacetime today, and you will find yourself instantly *tunneling* between religious time and technological space.

Following the lessons of quantum physics which hold that every quantum singularity is accompanied by an event-horizon, could it be that America in all of its violence and seduction is the unique event-horizon which emerges from the convergence of covenant belief and creative technology, in North America first, in world history later, and perhaps in the deep space explorations, migrations and colonizations of the future?

The New Puritans: Twisted Strands Take Root on American Soil

Harvard University, which celebrated its 350th anniversary in 1986, is the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States. Founded 16 years after the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, the University has grown from nine students with a single Master to an enrollment of some 18,800 degree candidates, including undergraduates and students in 10 graduate and professional schools. Six presidents of the United States – John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Rutherford B. Hayes, and John Fitzgerald Kennedy – were graduates of Harvard.

Harvard College was established in 1636 by vote of the Great and General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and was named for its first benefactor, John Harvard of Charlestown, a young minister who, upon his death in 1638, left his library and half his estate to the new institution.

During its early years, the College offered a classic academic course based on the English university model but consistent with the prevailing Puritan philosophy of the first colonists. Although many of its early graduates became ministers in Puritan congregations throughout New England, the College was never formally affiliated with a specific religious denomination. An early brochure, published in 1643, justified the College's existence: "To advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches." [5]

While the mythic Puritan story of the 'first encounter' at Plymouth Rock is a familiar part of the American foundational narrative, what is less remarked, but of probably greater lasting cultural importance, is that there was actually a *second* 'first encounter' in American discourse: this time not between Puritans and indigenous peoples, but between *faith and reason*, between Puritan missionary consciousness so necessary to the immediate development of born again ideology in the American mind and scientific reason so vital to its future ideology of technological liberalism, and all this within the famous brick walls and ivy-leaved square of Harvard University. Here the missionary zeal, disciplinary energies, and crusading

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spirit of the Puritan moment would meet up with a style of (Enlightenment) thought which in its rationality, pragmatism, and pluralism would soon seemingly best it to become the *official* intellectual core of the American mind. There the story might have ended except for one curious eventuality. What emerged as the liberal side of the American mind was, I believe, always deeply touched by American covenant theology. God is not a passive witness to the unfolding story of American power, technology, and liberalism, but a co-present, anti-parallel, and much called upon, active partner. Definitely post-Enlightenment in its ruling scientific epistemologies and creative technological innovations, America is equally, and this most definitely, pre-Enlightenment in its popularly subscribed messianic vision. Here the high tech marvels of the 21st century are always in the way of hurrying back to resolve the original terms of the 17th century Puritan covenant. American culture was born with a (covenant) debt which it can never satisfy, and on behalf of which it is fated to be that most singular of all nations: *simultaneously part-quantum/part-confessional*.

Now I do not mean this in a reductive sense implying either the subordination of the Puritan outlook to the world-vision inspiring the American liberal imagination or, for that matter, the reduction of technological liberalism to its Puritan foundations. America has always had about it the barely discernable hint of enigma: namely that what would set it apart as a colonial, then national, and now empire, project, is that this would be a culture of *twisted strands*: the twisting together in an ascending spiral of two conflicting motivations – religious and secular, puritan and scientific, born again and pragmatic – which, taken together, constitute the core code of what for some is the *rapture* of the American dream, but for others the apocalypse of American *imperialism*. Long before 20th century quantum physics would envision the physical universe as always composed of opposite changes of state – a world of both/and, not either/or – American political reality would build, from its Puritan origins in the 17th century to the crusading military spectacles of the 21st century – a society, culture, and political economy firmly based on the basic quantum principle that in life, as in science, only contradictions are true, that the ineluctable differences between religion and science confirm their necessary partnership in the deepest (political) affairs of the American mind.

So then, to return to the original question concerning the Puritan roots of Harvard University. The question of technology and the American mind begins with what, at first, appears to be a historical curiosity, but upon further reflection reveals itself to be a cultural puzzle, then a still unresolved political predicament. The *historical curiosity* is this: What explains the fact that the Massachusetts Bay Company – the emblematic sponsor of crusading, disciplinary Puritanism, shortly after the so-called “First Encounter” at Plymouth Rock also established Harvard University, now in its own publicity terms the “oldest corporation” in the New World. The *cultural puzzle*: Is the genealogical relationship between Harvard University, widely viewed as the intellectual spearhead of what might be viewed as technological liberalism in the United States, and the missionary spirit of Puritanism simply a historical coincidence – what might be called a discursive situation in which the religious foundations of American knowledge migrated with the slow passage of time into a style of thought – rational, experimental, pragmatic – in short, scientific? Or could this meeting of the religious foundations of the American Republic and the epistemological model grounding its scientific future represent something more world-historical, more metaphysically convulsive, in its cultural importance? Was this meeting of Puritan faith and liberal thought a great metaphysical fusion of the divided European will? Were what might be called the Harvard Puritans a New World solution to a metaphysical problem which, while it may have had its historical origins in a European culture marked by the absolutist wars of religion and the creative, speculative dreams of the Renaissance, could not be solved within the closed orbit of European thought? And the *political predicament*? Once having come to full maturity as the historical embodiment, not only of a new (republican) political idea but, more importantly, of a new expression of the metaphysics of the will – technology and the American mind – what will impede the present American experiment in playing out the inevitable end-point of that story, what Heidegger described as “completed nihilism”?

In seeking to understand the question of technology and the American mind, one fact is dramatically clear. Namely, that what truly distinguishes American thought, what really lies at the roots of American exceptionalism, is that this is not, and never was, a traditional European story of warring binaries – faith versus reason – but a complicated fusion of these two master narratives into the cultural idea of the American Republic. Even

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in its most eugenic, rationalist, and clinical manifestation the driving force of the American mind has always had about it the animating spirit of missionary consciousness, the epistemological activism of a moral crusade and the tangible smell of imperial rapture. Unlike other societies where understanding technology is a learned method, American culture *is* a technology. From the war technology research of MIT, the pioneering developments in genetic biology at Harvard University, the information technology of Stanford University to the leading-edge neuro-science of UCLA, American technological reason has always operated in active alliance with covenant theology. Certainly not in the simplistic, reductive sense of reason as passively subordinated to proselytizing religious sects, but definitely in the more invidious sense: namely that the overall historical project of the official American knowledge enterprise has deeply aligned itself as the level of value-preference and epistemological direction with the moral ends of covenant theology – the creation in “this good land” of a form of thought which in its brilliantly vivisectionist-logic will universalize the American future.

Consequently, regarding Harvard’s Puritan origins: are we presented here with a simple case of intellectual coincidence – the migration of two great master discourses, one religious, the other secular, wherein Harvard University itself is simply symptomatic of the greater passage of American society from its faith-based origins to its scientifically envisioned future? In this case, the story of Harvard University would be a representative case of the comforting discourse underlying America’s received (official) culture, namely that what we have here is a fateful contestation over the space of four centuries between two warring discourses – religion and science – with the technological primacy of the scientific imagination gradually eclipsing the Puritan foundations. This is a truly comforting discourse because it would confirm the essentially binary character of American thought – reason versus passion; nature versus culture; science versus religion; individuality versus collectivism – which has always structured progressive (liberal) political thought in America, sustaining it in the present in the midst of the current resurgence of the religious right.

But what if we were to consider another possibility? Could the Puritan origins of Harvard possibly be a story of the injection into the bloodstream of American thought, politics and culture of a *new metaphysical virus*:

the folding together of faith and reason into the governing framework of American consciousness? In this case, if there can be such a peaceable shift from the founding Puritan spirit to the contemporary secular spirit of Harvard, could it be because there is no essential difference between the founding spirit of Puritanism and scientific knowledge, only a subtle shift of discourse as Puritanism ceases to wear its crusading (religious) spirit and takes up the garments of reason – nominally secular, rational and (eventually) liberal, but in essence the epistemological spearhead of the civil religion that is America? In the genealogy of Harvard University are we really present at the birth of the discourse of technology as religion, replacing the original religious origins of American consciousness with pluralistic, rational, but competitive and always *epistemologically* redemptive knowledge?

Again, this is not an argument for a narrow understanding of religion and technology, but something more constitutive. Namely, that what happened at the moment of Harvard University's Puritan origins was a dramatic rip in the space-time fabric of American culture, instantly linking the redemptive language of the covenant theology with a (rationalist) epistemology of discovery, invention, dissecting research logic. Understood in quantum terms as a warp-hole in the space-time fabric, the cultural importance of Harvard University was that it was the specific historical site where the past of religious enthusiasm and the future of epistemological discovery somehow fused on the common ground of (technological) knowledge as a key aspect of the civil religion of America. Here, the strictly Puritan religious creed could gradually disappear in the 18th century because an arc of intellectual electricity had already passed between the religious eschatology of the Puritan founders and intellectual Puritanism as a distinctive form of American thought. What might be described as the original Puritan habit of mind – disciplined, vivisectionist, morally righteous, convinced of its redemptive singularity – migrated easily and without a murmur of discontent into the ruling self-consciousness of American *technological* knowledge. Consequently, the project of technological reason, of which the scientific imagination is its leading epistemological spearhead – could be viewed as the leading contemporary expression of religious enthusiasm. Conversionary, probing, proselytizing, tautological in its founding assumptions, powered by its moral self-confidence and linked to human (scientific) redemption in the name of

technological freedom, Harvard University's lasting cultural importance is as the first historical *singularity* – the original tear in the space-time fabric where (Puritan) ontology migrates into (technological) epistemology. Here, the twisted strands of faith and intelligence – covenant theology and the rights of reason – first took root in American soil, and while they would never be fated to find common ground in the surface clashes of Church and State, their common eschatological aspirations for the founding of the New Republic in a hostile world would definitely have common purchase in their strange alliance as twin vectors – one a faith-based electorate, the other reason-driven science – in the American imperial project. In American culture, god comes to wear the mask of reason, just as much as the spirit of religious enthusiasm is projected globally by a discourse of (technological) knowledge which is the culturally genetic expression of the American war spirit.

The Double Helix as American Identity

Understood as a quantum culture, American identity thrives on instant, total changes of state.

Technologically, the intense digital euphoria of the late '90s was instantly replaced post- 9/11 by the hard politics of the "War on Terrorism." In *finance capital*, the speculative bubble of the new economy was washed away by an American political economy which went to ground in earthly energy resources, with oil commodities leading the way. In *politics*, just as the economic conservatism of the Bush administration replaced Clintonian social liberalism, so too the contemporary wave of evangelical Republicanism will undoubtedly be succeeded by a moderate Democratic regime focusing on the valorization of social capital and solutions for the approaching crisis of over-indebtedness. In *space exploration*, the Columbia Shuttle can explode across the empty skies of Texas while the Hubble Telescope can fade away with the passage of time, but still the International Space Station approaches its moment of architectural realization and plans are well underway for manned missions to planet Mars. In *music*, Seattle-based grunge, itself the death-note of '80s psychedelia, can be blasted away by the street rap of hip-hop with its seductive combination of fourth-world inner city violence and a first-world gated community iPod audience.

In *architecture*, the tragic days of 9/11 with its spectacular glimpses of suddenly vulnerable New York skyscrapers quietly gives way to the fluid, configurative, free-floating architecture of Frank Gehry. A culture operating under the sign of the double helix, America always oscillates between the referential extremes of hyper-deflation and hyper-inflation – between the expansive world of *code* and the deflationary forces of *value-principle* – in culture, finance, architecture, art, politics, and maybe even in life itself. This is one country that will only be *all ground or all figuration*, with absolutely nothing in-between.

Ironically, like the space-faring nation that it seeks to be, America succeeds in playing the extremes of inflation and deflation because of a stunning, but reliable, astronomical manoeuvre. Like a space ship on a voyage to deep space which seeks out distant planets only to immediately sweep around them, using their gravitational fields as a way of accelerating towards the next galactic destination, the American mind uses the gravitational forces of cultural extremes as a way of animating its collective energy. The (stock market) excesses of the last great wave of tech euphoria taken to its logical (virtual) extreme reverses field, with the business world imploding into the grim scarcities of a commodity-based economy. The real estate bubble will likely collapse in the direction of a chronic crisis of consumer debt. Shuttle disasters inspire the sacrificial fervor of unlimited galactic explorations. Opposition to the moral relativism of liberal politics instantly mutates into bible belt visions of a redemptive empire. The psychic shock of 9/11 flips *within the same week* into proposals for the high-tech security apparatus of the new biometric state.

Again, *all ground and all figuration* with no stabilizing mechanisms to split the difference, the American mind has only always known the logic of the double helix as deepest identity. Indeed, if it is possible to speak meaningfully of a social identity like Americanness, it would inaccurate to reduce its immense diversity to either of its extremes. America has never been exclusively fundamentalist or relativist, rock ‘n’ roll or country & western, biblical or scientific, suburbs or trailer parks, the working culture of bars, strip malls, and Wal-Marts or the professional culture of law firms, ad agencies, and exclusive consumer brands. *Americanness* means being always in motion, in competition, in flight, in careers – moving fast from one change of state to another, perhaps caught up in traffic jams, plane

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vectors, taxi runs or high-speed trains, but always making of the speed of a single life a brilliant metaphor for the velocity of the entire culture. *Americanness* means actually making a double helix of your personality, ambitions, career, identity, relationships – always being prepared to flip to the other side in the game of life: rewarding those who have succeeded in morphing the poles of American culture, whether in space, business, entertainment, sports; bestowing fame upon those who have failed most spectacularly; admiring those adept enough to have instantly changed states in order to survive, perhaps to play another day.

Today instrumental activism refers to the expression of the scientific logic of the double helix in the cultural form of American identity.

3

The New Biometric State

Strategies of Bodily Purification

In the new biometric state, your history is embedded in a card; your future is scanned; and your life is imprinted. Biology is security. Framed by a dialectic of security and terrorism, set in motion by a technological alliance between biology (biometric identifiers) and digitality (database surveillance), and circulating through the body in the form of bio-power, the new biometric state is the decisive product of the war on terrorism. Sweeping aside traditional protections of privacy and civil rights in the name of combating terrorism, the new biometric state takes full advantage of the spectre of terrorism to install a fundamental regime change in the future of political culture. Populated by biometric subjects, tracked by electronic scanning, and invaded by the sign of biogen, from food to surveillance, the new biometric state represents that epochal moment when the language of biology, fleeing its previous association with the history of epistemological struggles, allies itself with a form of power which speaks in the name of absolute security in a dangerous world.

Today, different regimes of bodily purification are at work: the “**trusted traveler**” program at American airports with its pre-scanning of frequent business travelers in the telematic form of iris identification and fingerprinting; the immunization of the body politic from the threat of domestic and foreign **terrorism**, with state orchestrated campaigns of mass hysteria directed at the scapegoating of any signs of difference, Muslims

and political dissidents and civil libertarians and artists; the protection of the “American homeland” from the threat of **viral contagion**, with the bunkering down of America from the always threatening “outsider;” the proliferation of “biometric identifiers,” as *the* newly emergent form of surveillance in the culture of preventative security. In each instance, the libidinal politics of panic security attempts to immunize two orders of bodies: the national-symbolic body of the “American Homeland” which now finds itself beleaguered and threatened by transparently politically orchestrated fantasies of “alien” attacks: from radioactivity, chemicals, atomic bombs in suitcases, airplanes as missiles; and the apparently threatening body of the individual citizen which is viewed as requiring preventative certification in advance as to its safe security status.

The Biometric Subject

Could it be that the rhetoric of the war on terrorism may ultimately prove to be a convenient *trompe-l'oeil* hiding from view the rapid ascendancy of the *new biometric state*? And perhaps, not simply hiding from view, but something more. Is it not probable that the discourse on terrorism is the objective political preparation necessary for setting the stage for the appearance of the biometric state? Here, the dialectic of security and insecurity sets in motion a closed circle of action and counter-reaction: biometric identifiers, full body scanning, data tracking, biogen data bases, full spectrum surveillance have the real consequence of calling into existence the spectre of terrorism as both their fatal object and ultimate justificatory condition. Not limited to politics, the discourse of the war on terrorism is deeply biological. Dominant markers of the new biometric state, viral war and viral terrorism channel the perception of the anxious body, directing its feelings, anticipating its fears, monitoring its behavior, certifying its trustworthiness, provoking its deepest worries, and limiting its modest ambitions. Once begun, the dialectic of security and insecurity can never be unraveled to its primary origins. Once activated by the war on terrorism, the biometric state quickly justifies in the name of state security a sweeping ideological agenda effecting a decisive change in democratic institutions. In the United States, the new biometric state is established by the *U.S. Patriot Act*; in Canada by the *Anti-Terrorism Act*; in Britain, by the *Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill*.

Slipping into the Bloodstream of the Body Politic

In the new biometric state, the body, whether collective or individual, is the object of a double anxiety: intense fear about surprise attack from an always threatening, imminently dangerous *external* world; and ideological fantasies concerning the psycho-ontological threat *within*, whether in the form of unidentified political dissidents who have managed to slip undetected as sleeper cells into the bloodstream of the American body politic; or individual bodies of the traveling public which can never be absolutely eliminated as security threats because fantasies of uncontrolled mayhem, destruction, and apocalypse are so indigenous to the production of the spectacle of the nomadic traveler. The sign-system of panic security has its privileged fetish objects – scissors, shoes, belts, nail files – just as much as it has an impossible dream: bringing out of concealment the hidden intentionality of the potentially threatening body by hyper-technological methods ranging from electronic pre-screening, biometric scanning – humiliating, probing, stripping, and imaging. **Maximal preventative deterrence for a guaranteed minimum of public security.**

The State of Suspicion

“If you suspect it, report it.”

– Message on podium at press conference
by British police, July 23, 2005

With this, we enter the era of the new biometric state: a form of bio-governance which systematically links primitive collective emotions of fear and anxiety with postmodern technologies of surveillance. While the aim of the new biometric state is to immunize itself from direct internal and external challenges by means of the creation of a *bunker society fused together by fear*; its ideological method is to foment in the mass psychology of the population a constant *state of suspicion*, both by reporting any “strange behavior” of others, and monitoring our own suspicious thoughts for possible signs of imminent subversion. In the citizen’s army of the new biometric state, individuals are thus expected to play the role of the *policeman without* as well as the *policeman within*. Not content with the

relative passivity and defensive nature of the bunker state or the state of suspicion, the new biometric state also goes on the attack: it engages in preventative wars as ways of destabilizing potential sources of viral terrorism; and, finally, it becomes a bio-terrorist itself – garrisoning the world; creating zones of extra-judicial, extra-constitutional incarceration; installing secret torture prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, Diego Garcia; seeking to “Git-moize” the outside world now, and probably the domestic population later. Quite literally, we live now under the terrorism of the sign of (absolute) security. Possessing no definitive limits because of the objectively limitless character of the psychological projections of fantasy, illusion, and anxiety upon which the dream of perfect security is based, the signs of panic security can only expand in the future, exploding in relationship to the perception of imminent danger; taking possession of every orifice of the anxious body, collective and individual. So it is that we enter into the feverish, inventive imaginary of panic security where viral war replaces cold war, where the threat of terrorism substitutes for the menace of communism, where preventative security measures are presented as protection from surprise attacks, where traditional ideology is eclipsed by fears of viral invasion, and where Homeland Security is the new Body McCarthyism of the 21st century.

The Seduction of Terrorism

But if the terrorism of the sign reaches its moment of apogee in the desperate search for the state of absolute security, this political totalization cannot be sustained for long. Mythologically, it is in the deepest nature of any sign-system to always seek to cancel itself out, to collapse into the welcoming arms of the sign-slide that is its forbidden, transgressionary side. Power is seduced by chaos; sexual purity by perversion; absolute order is energized by secret dreams of crash; technological prowess is confirmed by its fatal accident; the inversions hinted at by the god of nemesis trace a minimal element of ruin within the otherwise solid spectacle of the absolute referent. As in mythology, so too now in contemporary media history. Consider the following stages of rapidly evolving media rhetoric as panic security shifts from being the universal signifier of a symbolically unified American homeland to the present state of high security satire: that is, as the sign of security reverses from absolute primacy as the universal sign of a deeply

unified American population to the satires and comedies and policy divisions that mark the recent entry of the sign of security into the fascination of absolute insecurity. First, under the sign of 9/11, the American political community, and most of the world, was momentarily symbolically unified by pervasive images of the flag as the universal signifier of the moral desire for absolute security. Second, as a symbol of public acceptance and civil passivity before the power of the sign of security, dominant media symbols became those vaunted images of pervasive surveillance at every chokepoint in the system of social circulation. While images of the flag morally ground the sign of security, images of surveillance transform the symbolic exchange of the sign of security into the deepest materiality of culture, society, politics and economy. Here, the sign of security is literally reincarnated as the flesh and blood of civil society. At this point, we are suddenly in a state of viral security, wherein technologies of surveillance attach themselves as probing, invading parasites to host-bodies. However, at some point, perhaps under the pressure of failed foreign military adventures or uncontrollable internal changes in political economy and domestic politics, the sign of security begins to falter as an absolute serial signifier. It cannot totalize the social field. It runs up against the bedrock resistance of television satire, viral cinematic critique and increasingly bitter policy divisions among elite planners of the neo-imperial state. Or perhaps, as in the mythological dissolution of all sign-systems which strive for absolute hegemony, the eye of total security, bored with the ease with which it has attained absolute hegemony over civil society, finds itself one day seduced by the until now suppressed signs of its own undoing. The new biometric state begins to undermine itself. Panic fear mutates into panic anxiety. What acquires real fascination in mass media are stories of broken borders (immigration), militarized border patrols, and the spectre of imminent global viral epidemics, with the much-anticipated bird flu epidemic leading the way.

Tactics of Stereotypy, Scapegoating and Ressentiment

In each case, political tactics of stereotypy and resentment are deployed for purposes of scapegoating targeted populations. What emerges is a domestic population mobilized around the thematics of **panic security**: distrust of the threatening Other; belief in the moral necessity of the high-

Born Again Ideology

security state; intense anxiety concerning breached (territorial) boundaries; fear about any threat to order; deep psychological receptivity to officially directed campaigns of mass hysteria; and the perceptual division of the world into the until now superceded binaries of good and evil. Confronted with the fluidity, indeterminacy, and mobility of postmodern capitalism, panic security represents a sustained psychological reaction-formation aimed at the resurrection of the binaries.

Moreover, as in the halcyon days of the dot.com bubble with its double ideology of facilitation and control as ways of solidifying the popular reception of virtual ideology, the ideological agenda of panic security is also doubly secured: **first**, by facilitating smooth circulation within the system for those members of privileged elites (professionals, military, business travelers, etc.) who, in return for surrendering certain rights to personal privacy, are eliminated in advance as security risks; **and second**, by an ideology of control whereby what was once presented as a special privilege available only to the new elites of the high security state quickly becomes a practical obligation of political citizenship. Now it is considered a privilege to be a “trusted traveler” in order to facilitate business travel. The business class actually feels privileged – in TV images, business faces become giddy with the status differential of iris scanning and fingerprinting – to give up certain privacy rights to speed up business. Perhaps the “trusted traveler” is the prototype of a new ideology of bio-control. In the near future, could it be that everyone will be obliged to be certified in advance as trustworthy? What was introduced as an experiment in facilitating business travel would thus culminate as a control mechanism over nomadic bodies.

In essence, the ideological apparatus of the new biometric state depends on a twofold moment: **normalization** (whereby one is authorized as a speed body fit to travel through the circulatory systems of the social); and **criminalization** (whereby the act of being certified as a speed body moving through the gateways of the high security state requires background security investigations, iris scanning, fingerprinting, declarations of loyalty). That the new biometric state is capable of orchestrating the movement of domestic populations as a whole through this double movement of normalization and criminalization depends, in the first instance, on surfacing the “fascist within” which is always imminent to the bourgeois ego.

Cold Security

Thus begins the era of **cold security** whereby the search for an always unattainable state of security purges its way through the coded passages of the system, setting impossible standards of proof of (security) origin, establishing permanent security garrisons in the portals of power, economy and culture, channeling individual anxieties through the carefully orchestrated gateways of mass media, here refusing entry to immigrants, there hunting down perceived internal security risks: now scapegoating artists, dissidents, activists; in the future, applying the science of biogenetics to the maximal security demands of the high security state. Based on a language of preventative deterrence, the liquid sign of cold security knows no limits. As the dominant sign-form of the high security state, cold security freezes the normal circulatory movements of culture and life at the speed of surveillance. Indeed, as the epochal sign of panic security, cold security signifies that the long-suppressed crisis of the bourgeois ego has broken out again. The immediate historical precursor of the collapse of the bourgeois ego supported the triumph of Nazi Germany. Here, the ontology of the “fascist within” formed on the basis of a double psycho-political alliance: fear of loss of class privilege in an era of global economic depression; and anxiety concerning the loss of identity in a crisis-situation wherein the bourgeois ego, having no confidence in the foundational identity of liberalism, quickly follows the fascist path of ethnic scapegoating and charismatic “strong man” leadership. In the new era of cold security, the double alliance necessary to activate the fascist within reappears in historically new form: fear of loss of class privilege in an empire economy which has suddenly been challenged by the until now successfully suppressed resistance of the vanquished; and very real psychological anxiety, particularly in the case of the United States, at the realization that the until now unchallenged belief in the “American dream” as *the* universal signifier has met its limit in a form of viral terrorism that is contemptuous of American claims to sovereignty in the theatre of freedom. Consequently, while there may be no actual security crisis, there is most definitely a crisis of panic security: a cold crisis of contagious proportions where security and terrorism are the mirror of power in the postmodern state, both only superficially antagonistic, both always requiring the other’s presence as the necessary sign of its own existence, authorization, violence.

Ideology, Terrorism & the Body

Seemingly everywhere now, the threat of terrorism has quickly justified the security regime of the new biometric state. What were once only dystopian warnings concerning the slide of the liberal-democratic state from the protection of civil rights to police-sanctioned despotism has quickly taken place. Most remarkably for all the public discussion concerning multiculturalism, the redivision of society along racial lines has taken place instantly. Not only among the extreme right, but among the majority of the population.

One thing is certain. Under the double impact of the war on terrorism and its political resistance, the very meaning of the body is in play again. In the closing years of the 20th century, there was much discussion of the supposed disappearance of the body – into signs, simulacra, images, screens. Culturally, it was maintained that in the age of simulation, the body had outlived its usefulness, its future fate that of a passive appendage of a cyberculture moving at the speed of light. Politically, it was argued that the body was nothing more now than an empty text across which would be written all the signs of dominant ideologies. Aesthetically, it was maintained that the body now splits into a radical semiurgy of images: half-data/half-flesh. What a surprise then that at the precise moment the passing of the body is most mourned that trickster history has suddenly flipped the poles, foregrounding the born again body as the essential battleground of contemporary politics and culture. Specifically, within the context of the new biometric state, the born again body is suddenly the object of two very different strategies of power: one exported by the new biometric state for use only outside the borders of the United States (Bodies & Torture); and the other internalized by the new biometric state as the political basis of its domestic tutelary (Rings of Saturn/When Technology Crashed to Earth). In the latter, information technology itself becomes a terrorist – a body invader tracking the circulatory movements of its increasingly biometric subjects by technologies ranging from data mining to RDS mobile chips.

Globalizing the Biometric State

Bodies & Torture

Consider what might be called the torture documents, the lengthy series of legal opinions which circulated among the Attorney-General of the United States, White House and State Department debating the pros and cons of the use of torture in the cases of detainees, first at Guantanamo and later as we now know at many American military prison facilities, from Iraq to Diego Garcia. Far from being hidden, the torture documents are accessible on the Internet, the legal theorization governing the administration of American power literally externalized for witness by a watchful world. Far from being silenced, the author of the most chilling of the torture briefs – Alberto Gonzales – now serves as the Attorney-General of the United States.

To read the torture documents is to be in the presence of talented legal theorists, the spearhead of official American justice, whose concerns have to do with protecting not only the President and his cabinet but also interrogators in the field from future war crimes trials. Haunted in advance perhaps by future memories of themselves as Pinochet-like figures accused of human rights violations, the authors of the torture documents are concerned with preempting future legal proceedings. There are human rights codes lurking in the background and sometimes even in the foreground of legal inquiry: provisions in the Geneva Convention protecting combatants from undue physical and psychological force, worries by the Bush administration concerning, in its terms, “rogue prosecutors” from the world court. What is silent in the documents, but present to thought, are the physical bodies of prisoners effectively disappeared under the weight of the simulated sign of “unlawful combatants.” “Lawful combatants” fall within the legal jurisdiction of officially authorized human rights. The Geneva Convention focuses on the jurisprudential status of “states.” The legal solution is straightforward. American official discourse will now only speak about Afghanistan and Iraq as “failed states.” In the simulated language of the torture documents, “unlawful combatants” from “failed states” fall outside the protective provisions of the Geneva Convention. The bodies of detainees in the so-called “War Against Terrorism” are held to be legally available for torture. From the perspective of power, it’s really

only a question of semiology. Once excommunicated semiotically from the body of law, once signified as “unlawful combatants” from “failed states,” the physical bodies of officially designated “terrorists” are transformed into a sacrificial field of torture. About this the torture documents are explicit, almost painstaking.

What the torture documents do not discuss is why this is so acceptable, not only to the Bush Administration but also to the majority of the population. Are we witness again to a reenactment of medieval traditions of Christianity which justified bodily torture as a way of liberating souls from the fallen matter of corporeal flesh? Or is this a violent spasm of revenge-taking, fueled by panic insecurity and widely publicized by the media as a warning to dissident elements in the domestic population? Like Germany in 1933, how did it happen so quickly and with such prosaic normalcy that the United States changed so quickly from a self-proclaimed beacon of democracy and civil rights to an assertive defender of the instrumentalities of torture? How did the language of freedom mutate so seamlessly, so suddenly into the vocabulary of torture?

This is not meant naively. Politically, there is always only a rough calibration between formal cultural values and actual political practices, between democratic rhetoric and the hard, cold necessities of the struggle for power. The administration of power operates in an actual material context of class divisions, political inequalities, and social justice strained through the uneven language of human prejudice and cultural stereotyping. To speak of power is to know cruelty at first hand. To think of exceptionalism is always to recognize that the state speaks first and foremost in the cold language of Nietzsche’s “blond beasts of prey.” But for all of the formal hypocrisy necessary to sustain at least the illusion of human justice in the context of a politically-driven society that yearns to be a universal empire, it must be said that there was always about the United States the promise of something better – a lingering, recalcitrant spark of human hope midst the gathering darkness that America truly would seek to realize its visionary dream of what Lincoln’s political rhetoric once described as the “better angels” of its nature.

Of course, it could be that the legitimization of torture as official policy may be viewed by the American mind as a necessary instrumentality of

power. Here we would have to think like a medieval Christian churchman, obsessed with the application of fire and the rack to the confessing body, convinced that the death of the body was ultimately necessary for the liberation of the soul. However, I am not convinced that this is the case. The Protestant language of Rapture explicitly excludes the Catholic hope of universal salvation. The language of exceptionalism outlaws the body of the unlawful combatant as an alien other. The torture documents are not a struggle between fallen flesh and the redemption of the unlawful soul. The body of the “unlawful combatant” is not viewed as a negative binary. It is acted upon as *pure nothingness*: no rights, no self, no identity. With the torture documents, we are in the presence of the completed logic of nihilation.

Could it be that the body of the tortured victims of American power, of redemptive violence, are being made to pay the price for America’s own panic fear? Panic fear has no necessary object because it has no objective enemies. Panic fear is about the dissolution of boundaries – the boundaries of sexuality, marriage, immigration, religion, ethnicities. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche said of the *last man*: “I’m feeling ill. Someone must be to blame for this.” Is Nietzschean resentment perhaps the reason for the routinization of torture in American military justice: a displaced sign of the revenge-taking necessary to pacify panic fear – someone’s going to pay for America’s feeling ill about itself? I do know this: de Toqueville’s *Journals* concentrated upon the prisons of the United States as the emblematic sign of a political culture where control would have everything to do with the disciplining of communication. For example, Alcatraz could be situated so prominently, and so perfectly, in the San Francisco Bay since its presence also served as a mute warning to the American population of its political origins in the logic of the carceral. Equally, those so-called “unlawful combatants” in Guantanamo Bay can be so publicly paraded from their torture interrogations of stress positions, sexual tauntings, cigarette burns, strangulation, sensorily overwhelming lights and sound, because, like de Toqueville’s prison walls before them, they are also a silent, but effective, media sign of the punishment to come for dissenters from the moral tutelary of the Republic. Which is perhaps why today in its otherwise liberal media and even in its great universities, a silence of very real fear has fallen upon the twilight shadows of the American dream. For the rest, there’s always the yearly bonfire of all those

Superbowls of the American soul where pathos runs deep and true, where simulated patriotism is all the rage; and where all the last men at all the last tail-gate parties in the parking lot outside the stadium celebrate their way, the American way, as just that tiny, fleeting moment of Rapture under the Jacksonville sun.

Domesticating the Biometric State

The Rings of Saturn

Why the immense media fascination with the Rings of Saturn? Simply a fascination with technological prowess in navigating from the near-time of earth to the deep-space of Saturn, or awe at the sheer beauty of the amazing ultraviolet optics of those perfectly formed rings circling a gigantic gaseous planet. Perhaps. Or maybe it's what astronomers immediately announced as the perpetual lure of deep-space travel to Saturn: namely that in exploring this gaseous planet at the distant edge of the solar system, we are actually time-traveling to our past, to an earlier earth history when gaseous space had not yet congealed into earthly matter.

Or could fascination with the Rings of Saturn have its origins less in scientific or historical reasons than in a mode of world-attentiveness that is subliminally mythological? Are the Rings of Saturn really an astronomical story of our past or future? After all, we do know this about those concentric rings horizonizing Saturn against the cold darkness of the void of space: first, that their incredible aesthetic symmetry follows from, and perhaps is almost preordained, by the normal laws of gravitational physics. The Rings of Saturn crystallize in the always night-time sky of deep space the immutable theorems of quantum mechanics having to do with gravitation, velocity, and the chromatics of light. In the artificial form of our technological prosthetics – ultraviolet cameras, deep-space exploration vehicles – we find ourselves deeply linked to the fate of Saturn by a common scientific framework. Consequently, while our earthly gaze upon the Rings of Saturn can express “astounded surprise” at the elegance of its aesthetic symmetry, there is another part of human consciousness which finds itself oddly comforted by this preternatural gift of astronomical confirmation of the magic of science. But there is also something more to the

seduction of the Rings of Saturn; this having more to do with dark futurism as the dominant mood of earthly spacetime. From a strictly observational viewpoint, the famous Rings of Saturn are permanently frozen signs of decay and ruins, splayed out orbits of lost worlds. In this account, the rings are most probably the remains of lost moons, which having at some point in the recesses of the past been imploded by proximity to the immense gravitational pressures of Saturn, now circle its sky in thin, flattened ice sheets stretching indeterminately into the darkness. Not really only a fable of our lost past of perfect aesthetic symmetry, the Rings of Saturn evoke a more primal, and quintessentially human, emotion: namely an ineffable tension between symmetry and decay. Consequently, looking towards the Rings of Saturn we can find a mythological story of presence and loss, aesthetics without and ruins within; but is it really so different from another story, a story this time of the tension between postmodern intimations and posthuman realities as the Rings of Earth? Once again, the astronomy of light-through space and light-through time lights up the cultural imaginary to reveal a more abiding story of the strange entwinements of our past and future.

When Technology Crashed to Earth

Or something else? Could fascination with the Rings of Saturn be a displaced sign of a more imminent political tension between symmetry and decay, lucidity and irrationality as the essence of the contemporary human condition? Today the human condition is the war on terrorism. The spectre of terrorism is the media air we breathe, panic alerts punctuating the daily rhythms of life, the transformation of the circulatory systems of the social into zones of intense surveillance, biometric identifiers tagging the orifices of the body, spyware tracking our electronic footprints, the proliferation of the vast machinery of cyberwar, the bunkering down of the privileged citizens of digital societies behind the walls of the high-security state, the resurfacing, on a global scale, of the politics of scapegoating, the resurrection of ancient memories of the fatal clash of cultures, religions, ethnicities.

Accordingly, to the question concerning the relationship between technology and the human condition, I would hold that information technology, in the

contemporary (techno)political context, is not understandable outside the rhetoric of the war on terrorism of which IT is both its most indispensable ally and active agent. Increasingly placed at the disposal of the militarization of civil society, viral in its cybernetic logic, and potentially dangerous in terms of its radical implications for facilitating the political suppression of traditional freedoms of speech, privacy, gatherings, movement and now, even videotaping, information technology has quickly become the permanent framework of the war on terrorism. IT enters the bloodstream of the social in the form of technologies of surveillance; invades the privacy of the body in the language of bio-power; overwhelms private perception with new media technologies of liquid propaganda; and facilitates attempts to seize global power with all the hyper-weaponry of cyberwar. Inseparable from the real world of politics, the question of technology is permeated with the language of terrorism. I do not mean this only in the sense of instrumentality. Technologies of optical surveillance, electronic tracking, computer guns shooting chips into the flesh of demonstrators for later harvesting by state security agencies, iris scanning, and media manipulation: these remain instrumentalities of information technology – ethically disturbing in themselves but still not the essence of the problem of information technology.

However, what happens when stimulated by the viral logic of the war on terrorism, IT becomes a digital terrorist itself probing, harvesting, scanning, humiliating human flesh? What happens, that is, when IT, understood in the actual political context of the war on terrorism, no longer remains simply an instrument of policing – a means of domination – but is transformed into a technology of domination so powerful in its pure technical superiority, so closely ideologically aligned to the prevailing language of power, so superior to the vulnerabilities of human flesh, so interventionist in the human condition in the name of upgraded security that IT becomes an emblematic sign of the spectre of terrorism itself? If it be objected that technology is only instrumental – a means controlled by the vicissitudes of power – I would call to mind Martin Heidegger’s elegant insight that in the society of “completed nihilism,” which was his term for the last phase of the historical project of technology, everything now has become a means to the will to technology, the wielders of power in the era of the war on terrorism as much as the increasingly objectified remains of the human species. Is Heidegger’s dark vision of “completed nihilism” a premonitory

Arthur Kroker

shadow, announcing in advance the rapid emergence of the new biometric state as the real product of the war on terrorism?

Born Again Ideology

4

The End of the New American Century

The United States is the world's only superpower, combining preeminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world's largest economy. Moreover, America stands as the head of a system of alliances which includes the world's other leading democratic powers. At present the United States faces no global rival. America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible.

Further the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catalyzing event – like a new Pearl Harbour.

– *The Project for a New American Century*,
“*Rebuilding America's Defenses*” (Sept. 2000)

In the real world of consequential events, this has been the “product” thus far of the *Project for a New American Century*. While the United States spends \$500 billion dollars per year on “rebuilding” its military establishment, it has been twice effectively defeated, first on the battlefields of Afghanistan, then in the deserts and cities of Iraq. Although its politics are aimed almost exclusively at “homeland security,” its border defenses have been easily punctured, first by the spectacle of terrorism that was 9/11, and then by the hard winds of Katrina. While American political preeminence is based on its historical self-consciousness as the

world's leading economy, it runs at the recessionary edge of massive over-indebtedness, with the east Asian societies of China, Japan and Taiwan as American bankers of record. In the aftermath of the revolution in business affairs that is globalization, the manufacturing basis of the United States is in ruins; its outsourcing of software development undermining its claims to technological leadership; its scientific elite challenged at every populist turn by growing support for the spurious fictions of intelligent design and faith-based education; its domestic economy now expanding only of the basis of remortgaging an increasingly speculative future; and its most popular television shows obsessed with the cult of death. Paradoxically, the United States is that anomaly of an "empire" that eclipsed before it ever really began to shine. Making its presence felt with light-speed at the end of the twentieth-century, the American empire is now in the process of collapsing at the speed of darkness. While the 1990s was dominated by the capitalist rhetoric of globalization and the beginning years of the 21st century have been ideologically spearheaded by the language of empire, the near future may well witness the specter of imperial decline, if not economic collapse.

Why did the New American Century end so quickly?

As in ancient mythology so too in political history, the laws of eternal recurrence will not long be denied. In the age of feudalism, power rested on the control of *absolute time*: the labor time of serfs, the ceremonial time of masters, the warrior time of knights. In the industrial era, power invested itself in the control of *absolute space*: the territorial space of colonial conquest, the wage space of the factory, the bureaucratic space of public administration. In the digital era, power coincides with the control of *relative spacetime*: the spacetime fabric of electronic media of communication, the spacetime of the high-intensity consumer marketplace, concept of spacetime which is the real object of the Pentagon's aggressive vision of "full spectrum domination." Consequently, while feudalism could be defeated by a radical shift from (agrarian) time to (industrial) space, the industrial age was itself undermined by a sudden change from the modernist framework of space and time as isolated categories to the immanent, unitary vision of global society as a spacetime fabric at light-speed.

In the digital era, control of the spacetime fabric is the essence of the politics of empire. Fittingly, the fall of the Soviet (industrial) empire was perfectly captured by that haunting image of imprisoned space – the Berlin Wall. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 it not only symbolized the collapse of the Soviet Union as an empire based on the coercive control of spatial extension, but the free movement of peoples and crowds and cultures which it unleashed literally pointed the way to the world itself as a spacetime fabric of electronic communication traveling at light-speed. If not McLuhan's joyous vision of the "global village," the new world of electronically mediated politics, culture and society would be at least a digital commonwealth, where as McLuhan prophesied every margin was a potential centre, and every emergent technology radical psychic surgery on the human sensorium. More than a singular historical event, the fall of the Berlin Wall could memorialize the end of the Cold War because it represented a tear in the fabric of political spacetime itself – that precise moment when the age of dueling superpowers collapsed in favor of the unipolar world of American Empire. Born a Republic at the dawn of industrialism, America became an Empire in the new quantum age of singularities.

The Quantum Dividend

However, very traditional habits of (strategic) thought have persisted in the American mind even as the United States has successfully thrown off the political attributes of a democratic Republic in favor of the power of empire constructed for the new post-Cold War era of a globalizing political economy and an equally universalistic imperial military strategy. Haunted by the dueling antagonisms of "mutually assured destruction" which flash-froze American strategic theory during the fifty year interregnum of the Cold War, the United States inherited what might be called the "quantum dividend" of power under the sign of the spacetime fabric only to immediately reverse-course by theorizing its military strategy in terms of absolute space, and its political economy in terms of absolute time. Unintentionally following McLuhan's insight that every epoch understands itself in terms of the backward vision of the "rear-view mirror," the American empire has in the few, short years since the end of the Cold War, wasted the quantum dividend in favor of an aggressive,

but ultimately futile, attempt to reinstitute the hegemony of power over absolute space and absolute time. In its military doctrine as much as in its monetary policy, the quantum singularity that is American empire prefers to rule by looking in the rear-view mirror of the Cold War.

Consider these two examples: the *military* strategy proposed by *The Project for a New American Century* (“Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century”) which is now the keystone of American strategic theory; and American *monetary* policy in defense of the hegemony of the US dollar as the dominant international reserve currency. While *The Project for a New American Century* is aimed at absolute control of territorial space, US monetary policy is directed at absolute control of the liquid flows of monetary exchange. In effect, having inherited an empire by default, the United States now proposes to transform itself into the rigidity of an absolute singularity. However, the laws of quantum politics are not so easily dismissed. Once having gained political and cultural power by the singularity that is American society, relativity theory, uncertainty fields, strange attractors, light-speed, power moving sideways, the curvature of time – are no longer simply scientific concepts, but the force-field of power itself today. While leading neo-conservative theorists prefer to speak of the self-declared “War on Terrorism” as WW4 – the Cold War representing WW3 – the greater truth is that American strategy for a New World Order in the service of perpetual “security” is patterned on the industrial model of the Cold War. Here, territorially based power is viewed as trumping viral power, and the speed of international monetary exchange is visualized as capable of being successfully quarantined by hegemonic political interests. Unfortunately, as in quantum science so in political life. As vividly demonstrated by post-9/11 events, the world of real globalization will not be denied. The War on Terrorism witnesses territorially-based power (American Homeland) being constantly threatened by the viral power of suicide bombers – power which is nomadic, liquid, intent on undermining the body of the host by strategies of mimicry, infiltration, and spontaneous attack. To the light-speed of the new empire of American hegemony, viral power responds with the more ancient tactic of the bodies of martyrs eager to sacrifice themselves for a greater eternal reward. To the light-time of American empire, real globalization responds with the impossibility of Katrina, again and again. In this race between the light-time and light-space of

American empire and the real time and space of real globalization, power can only be maintained by applied violence. Violence, speed, and escape then as certain signs of the collapse of American empire as it bends against its will in the direction of the seduction of real globalization. Presenting itself historically as the limit condition of modernity, American empire has forgotten the basic insight of all postmodern political theory, namely that limit conditions exist only to be transgressed. The game of challenge and counter-challenge between limit conditions and transgression is precisely what animates both the absolute power of (American) empire and the viral resistance of its many challengers.

Second-Order Globalization

The years following the collapse of Soviet empire witnessed the unprecedented hegemony of the logic of advanced capitalism. With its contested double – socialism – having seemingly vanished from political history, advanced capitalism was no longer content to confine itself to the “merchant capital” of early capitalism, nor to the “industrial capitalism” of the age of manufacturing age or even to the “finance capitalism” of the post-industrial revolution. Once having effectively defeated socialism in the political figure of the Soviet empire, capitalism now was free to spread its ideological wings, to speak of its historical development as simultaneous with the innate will of world history itself. With this consequence: triumphantly discarding its previous manifestations as merchant, industrial or finance capital, capitalism now thought of itself exclusively in terms of globalization. Fusing together the promotional strategies of brand marketing, communicative computer networking, and a ceaseless search for cheap sources of labor, globalization seemingly fused the world together for a brief historical period as a unified enterprise economy. Politically articulated by the policy specialists of the Reagan/Thatcher era, economically adopted by the newly sovereign societies of Eastern and Central Europe, blending together the computational principles of William Gates’ *Business at the Speed of Thought* with the rosy nostrums of Jeremy Rifkin’s *The European Dream*, the language of globalization imprinted itself as the historical successor to the bipolar (political) universe of the Cold War.

Nonetheless, despite the triumphalism associated with the planetary drive to globalization, all it really took to let the air out of the brand bubble was a timely combination of the anti-globalization movement of the mid- to late 1990s together with the millennial tech crash in all the Silicon Valleys of the cyber-world. Contested politically by an insurgency of global popular movements which insisted on making visible the costs associated with real globalization, and challenged for its utopian virtuality by the quarterly market cycle of capital itself, the rhetoric of globalization suffered a decisive cultural defeat. Its self-confidence shaken in the financial stability of digital economics, and its ideological growth having been effectively limited by the angry specter, seemingly everywhere, of anti-globalization forces, the rhetoric of globalization immediately went into sudden political eclipse.

As the American political theorists, Michael and Deena Weinstein, succinctly summarized the fate of globalization:

Within living memory (less than two years ago), the god-term was GLOBALIZATION. Throughout the '90s, we were taught to believe that the fall of the Soviet Bloc had ushered in a world-process that would bring about a new age of market democracies, interconnectivity and cultural synthesis. The dawning era would spell the end of that inconvenient little detail, history. Nothing could stop globalization; it was too big for anyone to control. Indeed, nation states and sovereignty would eventually dissolve in a wave of free trade and internet populism. As William Jefferson Clinton interminably insisted, military conflict had given way to economic competition. We know what became of that utopia. [1]

From the ashes of globalization rises the starlight of empire. Brought back into media vogue by an influential stream of contemporary intellectuals from Francis Fukuyama to Michael Ignatieff who quickly discovered in the logic of (American) empire the working out of the moral code of enlightenment culture, the military command rhetoric of empire has now replaced the consumer utopia of globalization. With the eclipse of globalization and the rise of empire, American power effectively based on a working alliance of zealous Christian fundamentalists, visionary military strategists, corporate capitalism, and technocratic intelligentsia

takes power to ground in the codes of applied violence. As the Weinstens note: "The revivalist and triumphalist ideology of empire boils down to a simple proposition; if the world doesn't bite at the bait of globalization on its own accord, America will have to shove in the hook itself." [2]

The military card was going to be played; it always is when technocorporate interests and power are threatened. The only question concerning the auspices under which force would be exerted. Since the United States has overwhelming weapons superiority, the choice was really between putting a fig leaf of collective security over American leadership or proclaiming American dominance with brutal frankness. The same scenario that has attended the "war on terrorism" and the Iraq intervention had already played in the war on Serbia over Kosovo: if the UN won't go along with US policy, go to NATO; if NATO won't cooperate, do it yourself. In that case NATO folded. In the more recent cases, the US simply exerted itself. [3]

In terms of military strategy, everything follows from this. According to the key doctrine of the Project for a New American Century – "Rebuilding America's Defenses" – the core mission for U.S. military forces include:

- *Defend the American homeland;*
- *Fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theater wars;*
- *Perform the "constabulary" duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions;*
- *Transform U.S. forces to exploit the "revolution in military affairs" [4]*

Several years later, this war manifesto reads as the hubris of a failed utopia. Waves of panic terror regularly convulse the American "homeland;" multiple wars (from Afghanistan to Iraq) have been fought and effectively lost; "constabulary" duties associated with the national security state have met very real juridical resistance from the European Union, and intensifying political resistance from the rest of the world; and the "revolution in military affairs" itself has turned out to be a cybernetic version of imperialism redux. Perhaps unintentionally predicting its own demise, the report notes: "Yet no moment in international politics can be frozen in time; even a

global Pax Americana will not preserve itself.”[5] Predictably, intellectual apologists for the founding of the American empire have been among the very first to abandon the project. Francis Fukuyama, who once argued that the rise of American empire is equivalent to the “end of history,” now publicly disavows the Bush Administration for its abuse of the conservative values associated with the founding of the American Republic. Michael Ignatieff, who once wrote eloquently about the necessary “burdens of empire,” has now retreated to his once and sometime homeland of Canada where, confronted by vocal criticisms of his vigorous defense of the War on Iraq, he now speaks equally passionately about the necessity of liberal internationalism, although not yet ready to abandon the torture tactics of “coercive interrogation” in pursuit of “information.”

Less for strategic than metaphysical reasons, the dream of Pax Americana was fated to be eclipsed by actually existing history. Like the 19th century jingoist vision of Pax Britannica before it, Pax Americana is perhaps best understood as the logical conclusion of that peculiarly 20th century tendency to insulate (technological) power from the necessary turbulence of real world events, sometimes by moving fast at light-speed, and at other points by freezing the force-field of real globalization in the military matrix of a controlling simulation. Here, it is not so much that the model comes before the territory, but that in the ruling cybernetic strategies there is no real territory at all, only “surges” and “pulses” of military power, theater wars, and the administrative abstractions of “security environments.” With the abandonment of the rhetoric of the (territorial) Republic in favor of the universal empire, the United States has committed itself to a form of power which would be all sign, no metastasis; all model, no real territory; all code/no flesh. This explains why, for example, the American historian Chalmers Johnson in his important book, *The Sorrows of Empire*, can detail so vividly the “garrisoning” of the world as the key military strategy of American empire.[6] Known in the popular military vernacular as “lily pads,” American permanent military garrisons, from the deserts of Iraq to the mountains of Bosnia, not only map themselves onto key oil, shipping and critical control points across the geography of global politics, but distinguish themselves by complete independence from their surrounding environment. Literally, these are lily pads in a pond, floating military abstractions, independent of local populations, instantly mobilized to suppress insurgencies in the border regions of empire, disconnected from

their embedded nation states in terms of sustenance and shelter, permanent outposts for an American military model that knows only the logic of cybernetic abstractions, not historical particularities.

Art of Warfare

Speaking from the perspective of aesthetic, not military, theory, the artistic imagination of Ted Hiebert speaks directly to the fallacy immanent to the mapping of the world through the optic of military garrisons. Following Baudrillard's perceptual insight that "the objectivity of facts does not put an end to [the] vertigo of interpretation,"[7] Hiebert argues:

We may think that the real persists despite the accuracy of our contemporary maps, but a simple question reveals the fallacy here: *which real?* No longer is the map simply the size of the territory. In contemporary times, the map is itself much bigger, much more detailed, a magnified map that forever reveals minutia of the territory that it never even knew existed – charting everything from the microscopic to the telescopic, crossing virtual as well as material territory, including myths and imaginings and narratives, from media reports to political campaigns, genetic composition to historic and familial lineage, weather patterns to electromagnetic radiation. In short, we face precisely a map so detailed that one *single* reality can no longer be invoked as its source. Instead, here we find an *excess of realities*, a map so precise that it precludes the possibility of any *singular unified perspective*. [8]

It is precisely the "excess of realities" that precludes the possibility of the "singular unified perspective" necessary first to the successful prosecution of battle plans for *The Project for a New American Century*, and later to its cybernetic offspring: stealth warriors equipped with night-vision goggles and GPS helmets; permanent military garrisons existing in the "real" of the spacetime fabric of American military power; and what the Navy likes to call "network-centric warfare as opposed to platform-centric warfare." [9] But for all of that "the revolution of military affairs" is creative in its visualization concerning how best to achieve "full spectrum dominance." In terms as blunt as they are futuristic, *The Project for a New American*

Century will meet the “excess of realities” with the reality of excessive violence:

Although it may take several decades for the process of transformation to unfold, in time, the art of warfare on air, land, and sea will be vastly different than it is today, and “combat” likely will take place in new dimensions: in space, “cyber-space,” and perhaps the world of microbes. Air warfare may no longer be fought by pilots manning tactical fighter aircraft sweeping the skies of opposing fighters, but a regime dominated by long-range, stealthy unmanned aircraft. On land, the clash of massive, combined-arms armored forces may be replaced by the dashes of much lighter, stealthier and information-intensive forces, augmented by fleets of robots, some small enough to fit in soldiers’ pockets. Control of the sea could be largely determined not by fleets of surface combatants and aircraft carriers, but by land- and space-based systems forcing navies to maneuver and fight underwater. Space itself will become a theater of war, as nations gain access to space capabilities and come to rely on them; further, the distinction between military and commercial space systems – combatants and non-combatants – will become blurred. Information systems will become an important focus of attack, particularly for U.S. enemies seeking to short-circuit sophisticated American forces. *And advanced forms of biological warfare that can “target” specific genotypes may transform biological warfare from the realm of terror to a politically useful tool.* (italics added) [10]

A military utopia, then, which wagers its success on full spectrum dominance, migrating beyond land, sea, and air into the materiality of the body itself: targeting “specific genotypes” as “politically useful” forms of futuristic biological warfare. With this, a fully sinister imagination with its own unpredictable and unknown realities is mapped onto the human condition. Unmanned aircraft, fleets of robots, information warfare, micro-robots “small enough to fit in soldiers’ pockets,” targeted genotypes: we are in the presence here of something more ominous than simply “military” strategy for the 21st century. It is as if the “will to power” first articulated by Nietzsche, meditated deeply upon by Heidegger as the grisly abstraction of the “will to will,” and lamented by Hannah Arendt as the “will to total

negation” has finally found historical expression in *The Project for a New American Century*. Everything that would constitute Heidegger’s prophecy of a coming culture of “completed nihilism” is present: the “harvesting” of genotypes; the reduction of human beings to passive “standing-reserve;” the “objectification” of cyber-space; the global ordering of the human condition itself according to the unfolding of a greater “process of transformation in time.” And all this less as a military strategy strictly speaking than something deeply aesthetic – an “*art of warfare*” – which proposes to culturally redesign the future of humanity.

But if *The Project for a New American Century* is the spearhead of an “art of warfare,” this only means that resistance to the planetary drive towards the fully realized (American) empire will adopt the counter-strategy of an “art of insurgency.” To the garrisoning of the empire with “lily pads,” the art of insurgency replies with a violent metastasis of urban suicide attacks. To the “network-centric” warfare of the military under the sign of “code,” the art of insurgency replies with the centrifugal pressure of car bombs on city streets. To a future of “micro-robots,” “information warfare,” and “unmanned aircraft,” insurgency today suddenly abandons the domain of codes for real materiality, witness the renewed importance of bodies of flesh and blood – those spectral bodies of hostages, terrorists, prisoners, criminals, suicides, celebrities. Everywhere today the “art of warfare” has only a single assured success. It has unleashed a powerful counter-drive towards the material, the bodily, the *decoded* realm of the historically consequential.

Definitely not wired, contemporary political history is increasingly militant, random, and eruptive. Improvised home-made bombs on all the roads of the many provinces and cities of Iraq; a resurgent Taliban existing in the interzone of religious fundamentalism and Pakistani intelligence services gone pirate; daily secret executions by hanging ordered by the Iraqi government bunkered in the safety of the Green Zone; counter-hangings in the full sunshine of Baghdad streets by insurgents and Iraqi security services alike; suicide bombings along the archipelago of cities – Madrid, London, Bali, New York; rumors of new terror attacks on the American homeland, by ship, air, car, and martyred bodies. To the excess of applied violence, real globalization always responds with an “excess of realities.” So much so, in fact, that there is no longer a useful distinction

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to be made between the model and the real, or the map and the territory. When full-spectrum dominance can be challenged by a microbiology of viral insurgencies; when the garrisoning of the reality-principle is instantly undermined by an uncontrollable reality of excessive political, cultural, and religious tensions, then we are living at that historical moment of the *folding of time and space* – the folding of the model and the real into one another as indistinguishable elements – simultaneously limit condition and transgression – as epochal signs of the end of the New American Century.

Every American citizen knows this already. The twisting of code and real has always been the animating energy of the American Republic – the essence of the American dream. It's the twisted logic that can somehow, somewhere bind together a society running from the beckoning poetry of the Statue of Liberty – “Bring me your poor, your huddled masses” – to angry posses of middle-aged, white male, new age “Minutemen” patrolling the “outlaw” borders of the southern United States and Mexico. It's enacted everyday, sometimes in violence, rarely in peace. Like the recent slaughter at the Zombie Rave in Seattle where peaceful sentiments of PURL (Peace, Understanding, Respect, Love) by all the local ravers was met with murderous vengeance by the most recent iteration of Nietzsche's last man. Or the recent insurgency of millions of “illegal” immigrants who took to the streets, the media, and the pulpit with demands to finally have their “excess of reality” recognized for its labor, its struggles, its (human) worth. It's that twist in all of American music where hard-driving, upbeat tunes are accompanied by downbeat lyrics; in American cinema where the question of good and evil – in detectives, marshals, politicians, soldiers, killers – is always ambivalent, always a strange force-field of opposite attractors; and in American writing where the song-line of Burroughs and Walt Whitman can play word rhapsodies at the fires of the death of western lands.

Misinterpreting the twisted spiral of power, the lasting legacy of *The Project for a New American Century* is fated to be that of an elegant tombstone marking the end of the new American century. While power in the age of classical imperialism was something accumulated through the violent possession of lands, peoples, and time itself; “network-centric” power is the opposite. Here power exists only in circulation, projected through the

light-stream of full spectrum exchange – of commodities, ideas, design, images, goods and services. This is a point brilliantly understood by Thomas Freidman's *The World is Flat* which, theorizing with all the confidence of an apostle of capitalist uber-development, understands deeply that the digital implosion has unleashed a new multilateral world of economic competition, where the eventual victors will be those societies which digitally *enable* their futures in the new languages of the (technologically) mobile, the animated, the wireless.

Consequently, if the model can be blown apart by the excess of the real, the reality of territory has also been blasted away by the proliferation of all the circulating signs of power. Perhaps we are already deep into the wastelands at the dark side of power, with only the brilliant residue of remainders lighting the way to the future. Oil multinationals prefer to describe these times as an increasingly desperate global struggle for "Peak Oil" – an epoch, that is, where the predatory will monopolize diminishing fossil fuels in the interests of the rich and powerful. But perhaps it's more than that. Not simply Peak Oil, but also Peak Power (*The Project for a New American Century*) with all its ideological reflexes, illuminating a future in which there will be increasingly savage contests for ever diminishing resources. But then, the United States has always been an empire of lost remainders – a society which progressed quickly over the span of only several centuries from Republic to Empire precisely because it has always specialized in living off its waste, pulsing most brilliantly as the scene of its own sacrificial violence. Not an enlightenment culture, America's special twist of power has involved liberally absorbing the energies of the world, and creatively reconfiguring them – certainly without prejudice towards possible objects of appropriation. Neither map nor territory, Republic nor Empire, pure code nor material reality, America is the third term, the fold, the torque, unleashed by the violent fission of all the opposing binaries. This is why the end of the new American century is now accompanied by the wild specter of competing futures, all mapping the excess of reality that is the United States today.

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5

The Cosmological Compromise

‘We are witnessing a fundamental sea change in American politics,’ said Allan Litchman, a professor of political history at American University in Washington. “The divide used to be primarily economics – between the haves and the have-nots. That’s changed now. The divide in American today is religious and racial... The base of the Republican party is not necessarily the ‘haves’ anymore – it’s the white evangelicals, white devout Catholics, white churchgoers. The base of the Democratic Party is not necessarily the ‘nots.’ It’s African Americans, Jewish Americans, those without any religious affiliation. Our politics revolve around a new cultural polarization.

– Joe Garofoli, *San Francisco Chronicle*,
March 22, 2005

The foundations of modernity have always been based on an underlying cosmological compromise. Confronted with the incipiently antagonistic relationship between science and religion, western societies have in the main opted for the safer, although definitely less intense, option of splitting the faith-based difference. Under the guise of political pluralism, freedom of religious worship has been consigned to the realm of private belief, whereas the arena of political action has been secured not only for the protection of private rights, but more importantly, for forms of political participation, educational practice, and scientific debates which would, at least nominally, be based on the triumph of reason over faith.

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If the cosmological compromise overlooked the inconvenient fact that the origins of science specifically, and modernity more generally, were themselves based on a primal act of faith in secularizing rationality, it did contribute an important cultural firewall against the implosion of society into increasingly virulent expressions of religious fundamentalisms. While modern society would no longer aspire, at least collectively, to the ancient dream of salvation, it would have the indispensable virtue of providing a realm of public action where faith-based politics would be put aside in favor of the instrumental play of individual interests.

Consequently, while Max Horkheimer, an early critic of European modernity, could revolt in his writings against the “dawn and decline” of liberal culture, his criticisms were tempered by the knowledge that left to its own devices, the forces of fully consolidated capitalism were as likely to tip in the direction of politically mediated fascism as they were to recuperate the divisive passions of religious idolatry. Like a beautiful illusion all the more culturally resplendent for its ultimate political futility, liberal modernity seemingly represented a thin dividing line between a history of religious conflict and a future of authoritarian politics. With the problem of religious salvation limited to private conscience, the history of western society was thus free to unfold in the direction of a regime of political and economic security. It was as if all modern history, from the bourgeois interests of the capitalist marketplace to the politics of pluralism, were, *ontologically speaking*, a vast defense mechanism whereby both individuals and collectivities insulated themselves against a resurrection of the problem of salvation in human affairs.

With a false sense of confidence, perhaps all the more rhetorically frenzied for its approaching historical eclipse, the discourse of technological modernism – western culture’s dominant form of self-understanding – has over the past century confidently predicted the triumph of secular culture and the death of religion. Indeed, when the German philosopher, Heidegger, remarked that technology is the language of human destiny, he had in mind that technology is both present and absent simultaneously: *present* with ferocious force in the languages of objectification, harvesting, the reduction of subjects to “standing-reserve”, and the privileging of abuse value as the basis of technological willing; but marked by an *absence* as well, namely the retreat of the gods into the gathering shadows

of a humanity that has seemingly lost its way in the midst of the frenzy of technological willing. If Heidegger could write so eloquently about a coming age of “completed nihilism” as the key element of technology as our historical destiny, he was only rehearsing again in new key the fatal pronouncements of those other prophets of the future of technoculture: Nietzsche, Weber, and Camus. For example, in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote not so much about the death of god, but about a more primary death, namely the death of the sacred as a resurrection-effect capable of holding in fascination an increasingly restless human subject in open revolt against the absolute codes of metaphysics. With Nietzsche, the modern century resolved to make of itself a fatal gamble – a “going across” – with technology as its primary language of self-understanding. Impatient with the slowness of the modern mind to grasp the truly radical implications which necessarily flowed from stripping the absolutes of theodicy from an increasingly instrumental consciousness, Nietzsche went to his death noting that as a philosopher “born posthumously” his intimations of the gathering storm of nihilism would be the historical inheritance of generations not yet born.

Equally, Max Weber, Germany’s leading social theorist during the fateful storm years preceding the Weimar Republic was perhaps the first to grasp deeply into his thought what it meant to live in the shadows of Nietzsche’s prophecy. When Weber wrote so chillingly about the approaching “disenchantment” of the modern age populated by “specialists without spirit,” he was only echoing in the language of social theory the image of impoverished (technological) being first glimpsed by Nietzsche. But it was left to another writer, the tragic sensibility of Albert Camus, to produce the capstone of the vision of technology as destiny that was the modern century. For Camus, modern subjectivity is the historical product of two great revolts of the human spirit: not only Nietzsche’s *metaphysical* rebellion against the sovereignty of the sacred; but also a more explicitly violent, and necessarily, *historical* rebellion in the name of ideology. With a sense of the indeterminacy of an absurd universe always proximate to his political consciousness, Camus was in effect the last Nietzsche. In Camus’ writings, Nietzsche’s dark vision of modern subjectivity as a melancholic mixture of active resentment and passive nihilism was summed up into a searing literary account of the human price to be paid for the age of absolute ideology with its cleansing drive to purity without limits and

justice without reason – state-sponsored mass murder, and a culture of exuberant, populist irrationality.

After the prophetic visions of Nietzsche, Weber and Camus, the politics of technological secularism have generally been translated into the sanitizing language of liberal pluralism. Perhaps mindful of these earlier warnings concerning the gathering technological darkness as it penetrates human subjectivity, a pragmatic political settlement of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was quietly achieved: in effect, postponing the metaphysical crisis in human affairs unleashed by the eclipse of the gods by the practical expedient of splitting the question of science and religion. With religion secured in the confessional of private conscience and science increasingly assuming the position of sovereign arbiter of questions concerning power – in technology, market capitalism, culture, and public policy – the question of theodicy was safely bunkered in the quiet suburbs of private faith, leaving the “question of technology” to be the spearhead of western historical destiny. This was a perfect historical compromise which, if it didn’t measure up to the soaring certainties of the language of the sacred, was, nonetheless, a powerful check on the violent excesses of absolute ideology. In retrospect, we might say that the twentieth-century was, at least in part, a long drawn out struggle between two fatefully opposing ideas – *absolute ideology* and *absolute technology* – both of which were posthumous products of Nietzsche’s understanding of the death of god, and each of which was by definition a monism studiously unaware of its limits. For example, definitely more metaphysical than purely technological, the digital euphoria which marked the twilight days of the twentieth-century represented in hindsight the simultaneous cultural triumph of pure cybernetic reason and the eclipse of the sacred in human affairs.

There the matter stood until, that is, the triumphant resurgence of god as the essence of twenty-first century political history.

The Flat World of Technology Has Just Been Thrown a Religious Curve

Viewed from a conventional progressive political perspective, the emergence of religious fundamentalism in contemporary politics represents

a powerful reaction-formation against the forces of secular change, from the stresses accompanying technological innovation to the boundary disturbances in race, class, and gender variously symbolized under the signs of postmodernism first, and posthumanism later. In this scenario, the triumph of science, and with it the claims of reason, have provoked in their wake a powerful counter-reaction by those with the most to lose, whether materially or symbolically, by transgressions against the fixed borderlines of the dominant signs. While this thesis is chromatically illustrated by the division of the United States into a media psycho-geography of red and blue states, it also provides for a more global perspective, pitting, for example, the (digital) winners and losers of Thomas Friedman's persuasive mapping of *The World is Flat* against a threatening world of religious fundamentalism, made all the more potent by the latter's contribution of suicide martyrs, sleeper cells, and other spectacular expressions of viral terrorism to the media spectacle. It is as if the most recidivist tendencies of the middle ages have mysteriously risen from the dead to prevent the creative technological blast of the twenty-first century.

However, as with all tidy binary divisions of the world into two warring camps, this explanation has for all its compelling rhetorical force, the singular weakness of seriously misinterpreting the historical facts. For example, from country to country – from the professional workplaces of the American middle class to the new economy software portals of India, Canada, Israel and Australia – adherents of evangelical politics often represent less the losers in the “flat world” of digital innovation than the leading professional classes of society. Coders, designers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, military leaders, politicians, policy experts: the born again world of evangelical politics knows no strict borderline of the human heart. Strictly agnostic in relationship to race, class and gender, the world of the born again represents, as all powerful religious movements before it, a sudden, irreversible, rupture in the fabric of human belief. Definitely not a counter-reaction in the traditional sense, evangelical politics can be so charismatic, circulating today so effortlessly at the highest levels of politics, economy, media, and the military, because its formative sensibility is not simply reactionary, but *transformational*. When religion reanimates the solitude of a single life as its source of informing passion then we are suddenly present at the shattering of the closed episteme of modernist rationality, with the emergence, again and again, of the much rebuked

problem of salvation. Irrespective of its particular religious expression – born again Christianity, Islamic fundamentalism, Israeli Zionism, Hindu fundamentalism – the reappearance of passionate religious conviction, simultaneously and across so much of the globe, represents a decisive challenge to the dominant ontology of contemporary technological society. To Thomas Friedman’s enthusiastic, but ultimately dismal, vision of a flat digital world of cutthroat global economic competition, the ontology of salvation opens up just the opposite: a transcendent world of delirious intensity and life-affirming meaning – in effect, a decidedly *unflattened* world involving individual participation in the deeper questions of life – life and death, judgment and rapture. From Pentacostal Inuits and Born Again Christians in the heartland of American empire to the fast currents of Islamic Jhihad, the problem of salvation is the dominant singularity haunting the twenty-first century.

Faith-Based IT

Consequently, the question: Why in the opening moments of the twenty-first century has what might be described as the cosmological compromise between the privatization of religious worship and an increasingly secularized global political economy been so abruptly pushed aside in favor of the resurrection of evangelical politics which paradoxically, rather than warring with the spirit of informatics, allies itself at a fundamental level with the historical project of the will to technology? Why, that is, is it possible to speak today about the rapid emergence of faith-based information technology as the spearhead of power, specifically the power of American empire? Could it be that under the *double* pressure of increasingly technological forms of secularism which inject elements of uncertainty, indeterminacy and undecidability into the posthuman condition, and the rapid emergence of right-wing expressions of religious fundamentalism anxious to transform essentially theological visions into global political projects, the mask of secular culture has been quickly stripped away, revealing underneath not so much the return of a recidivist religious past but something different, something more ominous and ethically disturbing – the resurrection of god as the spearhead of the technological future. Contrary to liberal-humanist ambitions which privileged the necessary opposition of reason and faith, is the second coming of god the final heir

of the legacy of Enlightenment? Is the last ruse of the triumph of the age of reason that it was god after all who has been waiting all this time, patiently and not without a sense of humor, as the varied drama of the posthuman comedy rode the beam of (digital) light to a technological future fused with the energies of faith-based politics? It may well turn out that god never really died but has only been endlessly deferred by the hubris of Enlightenment.

Consider the following example. As the dynamic spearhead of the will to technology, the United States has resurrected the traditions of imperial empire not in opposition to faith-based politics, but precisely because its evangelical fusion of the textologies of reason and faith, from Sunday pulpits of bible readings to prayer meetings in the suburbs, boardrooms, and fields of sport and entertainment, has in the ambitious ideology of the *Project for the New American Century* globalized the unique fusion of faith and technocracy that is what we have come to know as the civil religion behind the American dream. Governed by a Republican Party which declares itself to be one with god in the form of Christian fundamentalism, its public policy increasingly faith-based, its machinery of cyber-war intent on mapping an essentially cosmological vision of good and evil onto the skin of an unruly global village, the United States projects into history a new code of informatics: one which finds no essential difference between the ancient cosmology of Christian fundamentalism and the posthuman instrumentalism of cyberculture.

And not only the United States. Until recently, Indian politics has been dominated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a party of Hindu fundamentalism bitterly opposed to the warring cosmologies of Muslim and Christian faiths. Less a counter-reaction than something fundamentally new in political history, the BJP was most strikingly the author of India's pro-informatics movement: the *India Shining Movement*. Hindu fundamentalist on one side and actively allied with the global networks of the technocratic class on the other, the BJP, in a way which is remarkably similar to the Pentagon's *Project for the New American Century*, represents a fusion of cosmology and secularism, this time in the monistic vernacular of Hindu fundamentalism. Equally, how to explain the essentially faith-based politics of contemporary Israel which has about it the historical singularity of fusing Zionism with the technological instrumentalities of cyberwar,

seamlessly collapsing the ancient religious energies of messianic Judaism into the deployment of leading-edge informatics, including war, medicine, agriculture and aerospace. Finally, although nomadic, stateless, without fixed territory or officially authorized context, Islamic fundamentalism with its origins in the fundamentalist doctrines of the Wahibi sect, is deeply implicated in global networks of informatics. Working in the language of viral terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism reverses the logic of power against itself. Confronted with the predatory power of globalization, Al-Qaeda adopts the viral strategy of the parasite: seeking to move undetected within the circulatory systems of the social, silently embedding itself in the form of sleeper cells in the body politic, making missiles of civilian aircraft, always aiming for maximal effect in the specular universe of the mass media.

If we were only speaking about the second coming of god as an alibi for the formation of powerful right-wing coalitions, that would be both simpler, and certainly more comfortable in terms of the dialectics of modernism. But this is different. Definitely not a counter-reaction to the loss of an irrecoverable religious past, the cosmological projects of the *Project for the New American Century*, the *India Shining Movement*, the eschatological ambitions of the Likud, and what one commentator has described as the “Islamofascism” of the Wahibi sect represent, each in its own way, the spearhead of the technological future. Drawing from leading elements, sometimes disaffected, of the technocratic class, working within, and against, the discourse of globalization, faith-based politics is perfectly allied with the dynamic unfolding of the will to technology. Basing its economic hopes now on the possibility of outsourcing code work for the virtual class and, in the future, projecting the creation of a distinctively Indian virtual class, the BJP spearheaded the project of informatics in the Indian imaginary. So too in the cases of faith-based politics in the United States and Israel. **In the former**, evangelical belief can fuse so easily with the missionary consciousness of American empire precisely because religious faith provides the historical project of armed globalization with a renewed sense of purpose, a goal, a self-validating belief in its own moral rectitude. Having achieved maximal velocity in the 1990s with the virtualization of global political economy, could it be that in the 21st century informatics, moving at the speed of light, is itself tracing a fatal curvature, arching backwards to a fateful reencounter with its originating

religious ambitions? **In the latter**, the messianic dreams of Likud steeled in the burning fires of monistic moral politics are less the past of a forgotten politics than one possible future of a rearmed (Israeli) technological future. If the story of informatics is, in essence, metaphysical, having more to do with the “question of willing” than with the triumph of the code; then the resurgence of faith-based politics in technocratic form has everything to do with relieving the fatal absence at the heart of informatics: namely substituting absolute theodicy for the necessary uncertainty, undecidability and indeterminacy of technological willing. Fatigued with the imminent stresses of its historical project, bored with its logic of triumphalism, and perhaps alarmed at its own nihilism, the will to technology yearns to relieve itself of the burden of undecidability. Ironically, cybernetics, etymologically the language of the steersman, wants a goal, a purpose, a direction. In the political form of the BJP, Likud and evangelical American Republicanism, the will to technology cloaks itself in its own resurrection-effect. The will to technology welcomes the second coming of god as shelter from the posthuman storm of its own making. And al-Qaeda? It represents a fatal curvature in the logic of informatics: that point where the open field of IT as the ruling host is suddenly invaded by the counter-logic of viral terrorism, its circulatory systems reversed against itself, its data streams infected with fear, its “chokepoints” invitations to viral penetration, and consequently, increasingly armed bunkers of surveillance.

The Double Cone Theory of the Propagation of (Political) Light

Everything’s relative. Speed, mass, space and time are all subjective. Nor are age, motion or the wanderings of the planets measures that humans can agree on anymore; they can be judged only by the whim of the observer. Light has weight. Space has curves. And coiled within a pound of matter, any matter, is the explosive power of 14 million tons of TNT. We know all this, we are set adrift in this way at the end of the 20th century, because of Albert Einstein.

– Frank Pelligrini, *The Time 100*, March 29, 1999

The alliance between the second coming of god and IT is not understandable in the modernist, which is to say Newtonian, certainties of absolute time

and absolute space. Perhaps more than we realize, we are now living out the radical implications of quantum mechanics first stipulated by Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity. What was originally presented as a decisive overturning of the dominant *scientific* discourse of Newtonian physics has now become the *cultural physics* of the posthuman condition. Quite literally, the lasting lesson of the historical project of informatics has been to map the speed of light onto our bodies, economy, politics, culture, entertainment and religion. We live now in the universe of the *special theory of political relativity* where power accelerating at the speed of light reaches its maximal velocity, distance expands, gains (ideological) weight, and just as suddenly reverses, time-traveling to the supposed past of religion and mythology. In this new universe of political relativity, light-through power is both wave and particle, globalization is another name for the *spacetime fabric* of electronic politics, only opposites exist simultaneously, and the "science fiction" of wormholes and warp speed becomes the normal political reality of power, which under the influence of informatics, approximates the cultural physics of the Special Theory of Relativity. In the century which followed the rebellion against the Newtonian episteme that was constituted in all of its intellectual daring by the Special Theory of Relativity, the symbolic iconography of absolute space and absolute time has dissolved into a more fluid field of 'worldlines' and 'wormholes' and 'spacetime fabrics,' and light that slows down and distances that shrink, and sometimes stretch, the greater the acceleration of the universe.

Thinking about the radiating matter of religious fundamentalism seemingly everywhere now which has suddenly reappeared from the supposedly buried past to form the essence of the unfolding (technological) future, I know that physicists today privilege the "double cone" theory of the propagation of light waves: namely that the immense whirlpool of black holes populating the spacetime fabric of the universe are accompanied by corresponding white holes – singularities through which the light-through past slipstreams through to the future riding the beam of light. And I speculate: Could it be that history today is not understandable in the Newtonian terms of absolute time and absolute space, but should be reconceived as a unitary fabric of spacetime, where the light-time and light-space of power moving at the speed of Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity can be stretched and bent and reversed and twisted? And if this

is the case, then why can we not think of the fabric of political spacetime as filled with galactic singularities: intense centers of centrifugal political energy, such as ancient religious cosmologies, which suck the passing matter of politics, identity, culture, and society into the dark immensity of the act of faith? Myth breaks through into history. Religious fervor renews its long forgotten affiliation with the art of politics. Understood through the prism of Einstein, immensely dense blackholes of religious belief follow worldlines which burst into the future through corresponding whiteholes of technocratic ideology. Having reached its maximal velocity with the triumph of the virtual class in the 1990s, the speed of light-through power instantly reverses course, slows down, goes backward, double-cones its way into that more abiding source of energy: religious faith. Which is not to say that ancient religious epiphanies suddenly appear on the technocratic horizon as images of a faded, idealized past, but as immensely energetic religious projects intending to get it right this time. No longer the separation of Church and State, but *wormholing* religious cosmology directly into the eye of power, hooking theology to the unfolding spacetime fabric of the future. Viral, recombinant, creative, powerful, essentially religious eschatologies such as the *Project for the New American Century*, *India Shining*, and dreams of a *New Jerusalem* are variations on a common theme: the resurrection in the distinctively posthuman vernacular of IT of the vision of the Second City of God, this time in alliance, as in the American situation, with the New Rome. In the contemporary historical epoch, conservative discourse is intent on getting it right: the Christian project as the essence of the New Rome – taking over the reins of government, infiltrating the administration of public policy, filling the airwaves with the Christian project of historical redemption masked as “war on terrorism”, installing evangelical Christians in key positions of executive power, and using every instrument of IT in support of the creation of the new surveillance state. In the Einsteinian spacetime fabric of contemporary technoculture, *mythic time breaks into historical space*. And it is only now beginning: the first, tentative stages of recovering the missing mass of god on behalf of the project of technocracy.

The historical project of technology generally, and the utopian revolution of information technology specifically, have always represented an extended period of mourning for that which has been lost in the rationalist triumph of modernism. We are at the end of a period of sacrifice which has had its

own historical periodicity – Nietzsche, the first witness to the freshness of the sacrifice; the bountiful years of reaping the materialist rewards of splitting open the horizon; literally vivisecting earth, animals, planets, the common genetic heritage; and resequencing the sky, the body, gender, class and race with new codes of informatics. But for all its ecstasy, the project of technology remains a mourning ritual, an indefinite deferral of the sacrificial absence at the core of the will to technology. Or perhaps something more psycho-ontological: a massive cultural displacement of the language of sacrificial absence – the death of god – into sublimated expressions of the will to technology. In this case, the language of seduction is the wormhole between the rationality of the sign and the forbidden language of symbolic exchange. Sexual puritanism is haunted by the spectre of debauchery. Violence is instantly undermined by the slightest trace of peace which is why, for example, military machineries so deeply fear the reappearance of the symbolic language of peace in the form of human rights workers, nuns and priests spilling vials of their own blood on the awesome silence of missile silos, or student protesters at the School of the Americas in Georgia who were arrested recently for reenacting rituals of mourning for victims of death squads. So too, the modern project of technology began with a primal symbolic murder – the death of god. In the curious, but predictable, mythology of the sign, it is the absence marked by this sacrificial act of genocide which haunts the story of technology, and, on behalf of which, information technology once released threw the light-through physics of the Einsteinian universe, draws closer, almost irresistibly, to the tangible sign of its missing origin: the primal act of religious faith. When the missing mass of god touches the full spectrum dominance of cyberculture then we are suddenly launched into the closed universe of posthumanism, into a strange spacetime fabric which is simultaneously mythic and historical, past and future, technocratic and religious.

Paradoxically for all its technological pretensions, the twenty-first century is coded by all the signs of *Born Again Ideology*, from the “cosmological compromise” in its past to the “twisted strands” of religion and technology in the controlling rhetoric of American empire. While Nietzsche could only think posthumously about a future time oscillating between passive and suicidal nihilism, our present time, this specific historical epoch, witnesses the gathering storm and offers its theoretical diagnosis: The American

Arthur Kroker

Republic moving at the speed of light towards the gathering shadows of an ominous darkness.

Born Again Ideology

The Future Always Born Again, yet Left Behind

The swift convergence of religion and politics as one of the defining tendencies of our times has resulted in an unpredictable and confusing global politics, one which is *ethically* contested by Christian fundamentalists imbued with missionary consciousness; *technologically* typified by ubiquitous surveillance cameras in buildings, streets, borders, skies; literally *physically* burned apart by suicide bombers; *politically* driven by Islamic religious warriors with visions of divine ecstasy; and *culturally* signified by a bitterness of the heart that represents an early sign of a coming worldwide counter-reaction on the part of the dispossessed against the excesses the spectacle of consumer capitalism. Today events are moving as the performance artist, Laurie Anderson, once said at the “speed of darkness.”

But, for all that, some things are definitely finished. For example, the 20th century experiment in the politics of later modernity—the illusion of a bipolar world—frozen in the hegemonic framework of communism versus capitalism, American versus Soviet empires--ended decisively with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, Berlin can now rise once again as a major cultural capital of the West because on that night in 1989 the *political* history of the twenty-first century effectively began. This would be a future not bipolar but multi-polar not capitalism versus communism, but one driven by the specter of capitalism triumphant which, finally liberated of its clashing binary of socialism, was finally free to be seduced by its dark underside—fascism. Ironically, whatever the future of the West will be, it is likely that its key tendencies will be first anticipated in the art, the architecture, the streets, and the politics of Berlin. Hegel’s owl of Minerva

has finally returned to the history from which it first took flight.

And something else is finished as well. Between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the violent events of 9/11 in New York and Washington, another world historical project—the much trumpeted new world order of globalization—quickly rose and just as suddenly disappeared. Perhaps it was because of the the global protests of student activists, workers, feminists, and environmentalists who revolted in the late ‘90s against the policing regime of the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. Or maybe it was the mass revolt from the south-- the electoral rebellion of popular forces in Bolivia, Peru, and Venezuela—which rose against the “manifest destiny” of US imperial control. Or maybe it was the counter-gift of bodily death by Islamic religious martyrs—the gift which, as Bataille said cannot be refused-- which finally broke the will of the politics of empire. Whatever the reason, the world historical project of globalization has already begun to fade away as a successful and seductive totalization of a hegemonic capitalist economy. In its place, the ideology of globalization with its vision of networked capitalism, fungible labor practices, and hyper-consumption has instantly been replaced by the politics of unilateralism, with the United States as its historical spearhead. For all the discussion today concerning the wonders of information technology and the information economy, what increasingly prevails is the logic of primitive capitalism and predatory power.

Consequently, political paradoxes proliferate. For example, at the same moment futurist bio-labs are dreaming up android, transhuman successors to the human species, the remainder of the all-too-human species lives in a growing archipelago of radical destitution and despair—Mike Davis’ *Planet of Slums* with its one billion occupants denied the most minimal forms of recognition and reciprocity. Or consider the daily situation of *panic terror* which afflicts the administrative apparatus of homeland security of all western countries. Panic Terror? That’s the contemporary counter-reaction of hegemonic binaries with its strict normative logic of inclusion and exclusion. In a culture devoted to public policies of intensive “securitization,” the system of power itself seems to be increasingly haunted by paranoiac fears of revenge by those who have been excluded from the feast of consumption. A hauntology of the dispossessed, the excluded, those violently excommunicated from the western ethical order of the “human”

remains the most pervasive psychological feature of contemporary power. Often unnoticed to public view, it is also the reason that there now takes place the active criminal prosecution in the United States of over one hundred artists. Their crime? In a time of heightened security, control of the symbolic framework is everything. In these terms, postmodern artists are always necessarily *sign-criminals*. By its very aesthetic nature, art works to disturb dominant frameworks of understanding—transgressing boundaries, privileging the complex, the hybrid, the incommensurable. When the specter of an art of complexity haunts power, then we finally know that we are living in the final days of a fully nihilistic power.

In these dark times, a sense of apocalypse surrounding the triumph of Nietzsche's "last man" is everywhere. After five hundred years of technological abuse—making of nature what Nietzsche said would be a future of cruel experiments and vivisectioning—nature has finally rebelled. In the twenty-first century, this great rebellion of nature will likely be played out in the increasingly catastrophic scenarios of global climate change. And for all the predictions of the fast disappearance of the body at the behest of cybernetic technology, images of the very material body are everywhere—*hostage* bodies, *suffering* bodies which are genocided, *bio-power* bodies which are tagged, bio-chipped, surveilled, and electronically scanned.

But for all that, bodies always incarnate a wayward heart, an irrepressible spark of individuality which is capable always and anywhere of suddenly rising to seek a greater truth. Born Again, yet always it seems Left Behind, we are witnesses today to the greater paradox of an American empire which is both in its (political) infancy and perhaps at an advanced stage of (ethical) decline. In either case, a critical imagination which would aspire to some purchase on its times must surely reflect on that strange meeting of religion, technology, and politics which is the actually existing history of born again ideology and the inspiring religious enthusiasm surrounding the Rapture.

Empire and Religion

The Second Coming of God in the Age of Terror

Seemingly everywhere, the unilateral language of American empire with its secular measures of power and wealth has been compelled by the sheer force of political events to share the stage of history with the cosmological visions of religion. For a technological culture which prides itself on the accelerating speed of communication, the seduction of escape velocity, and the transformation of the accoutrements of wireless culture into brands of personal identity, it is not a little ironic that traditional religious passions underlying the clashing cosmologies of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism are now at the epicenter of global political debates, representing at once the limits of (economic) globalization and perhaps the future of the human condition. What this implies is that the second coming of god in the age of terror cannot be reduced for its explanation to either a psychological counter-reaction on the part of the victims of predatory schemes of capitalist accumulation or to the resurrection of atavistic impulses in the human condition, but is perhaps a fatal sign of a more epochal crisis of contemporary society.

First identified by Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the crisis to which the rise of religious fundamentalism is simultaneously symptom and accelerant has everything to do with the metaphysical history of the will. If we were, in effect, to read Nietzsche in reverse image, understanding, that is, the *Genealogy* as less a book about a two hundred years prophecy from 1887 into the future than a fateful talisman carrying a hidden message from the ancient past, well if we were to read Nietzsche in this way, looking with Nietzsche not in the direction of the present but seeking out what is most authentically past in his writings, looking in the direction of the genealogy of Christian culture, thinking in new key of the doctrinal debates of Augustine against the abiding heresies of Manichaeism and Donatism, we would discover by this method a constitutive crisis in the language of the will to which the secular remedy of technological prostheses and constant motion represent in the end a *postponement*, definitely not an overcoming.

All of our writings on *Born Again Ideology* and *Left Behind* represent, each in their own idiom, an exploration of the manifestations of this crisis

of the will, from the will to be raptured of the Left Behind to the will to be Born Again of the faith-based elect. The sheer dynamism of religious fundamentalism testifies to the fact that a strictly technological, exclusively secular, resolution of the broken will has itself broken down. In the end, the truth-sayer of Weber's disenchanted world is not his much cited vision of "specialists without spirit," but the rise of brilliantly instructed technological specialists motivated by the faith-based spirit of the Lord. In effect, into the vacuum of the empty will rushes the most singular, and certainly most passionate, of religious cosmologies—faith-based visions which stake the question of identity itself on the more transcendently ambitious terrain of rapture. When religious cosmology wraps itself in the skin of technology, we know that we are finally living once again at that fateful interregnum before *On the Genealogy of Morals*, when the will, forsaking in advance its secular closure, flirted with the language of the gods. Martin Heidegger might have gone to his death with the dark knowledge that ours would be an age of "completed nihilism," but even Heidegger did not anticipate that out of the wreckage of completed nihilism would appear a morally reanimated language of the will, that moment when the will would not only have once again a redemptive purpose but also a transcendental foundation for its activities.

With this, the crisis of 21st century culture becomes fully constitutive. Experienced everyday in its full velocity as the rush of contemporary events, there is a sense in which the future is caught in the grip of a larger and more ominous theological, indeed metaphysical, current. The fatal tension evoked by the Born Again and Left Behind allude to a culture which has staked its future on satisfactorily resolving the riddle of immanence and transcendence, making of human identity itself a simultaneous moment of confessionality and transcendence. The seduction of a faith-based culture and, indeed, of a faith-based politics is not only that the language of revelation takes up residence in the nomadic matter of human subjectivity, but that this form of subjectivity always seeks to make of itself its own self-overcoming. That this is not a new crisis but one which is constitutive of the deeper logic of modern society is signaled by the fact that the otherwise paradoxical rise of the second coming of god in the age of terror represents the resurrection of an unresolved theological problem to which putatively Christian societies have sought, but failed, to satisfactorily resolve. Ironically, the conflation of technology and

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religion as the basic theological language of the times in which we live probably means that the future of increasingly cybernetic societies will be marked by the rise and fall of clashing religious visions. Technology may now be the form of empire politics, whether cyber-warfare or cyber-economies, but religious conviction is very definitely its abiding content, its informing passion. What will emerge from this strange meeting of empire and cosmology is as yet undecided, with the exception that “faith-based” and “technology-based” are no longer bitterly contested signs, but complementary symptoms of contemporary psycho-ontology.

With *Born Again Ideology* and *Left Behind*, welcome to the clashing cosmologies of 21st century culture and society.

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- [2] Daniel Webster's *Plymouth Oration*. Available online at: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~dwebster/speeches/plymouth-oration.html>
- [3] John Winthrop's *City Upon a Hill*, 1630. Available online at: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/winthrop.htm>
- [4] For a brilliant account of the migration of American political thought between the war spirit and acedia, see Michael A. Weinstein, *The Wilderness and the City: American Classical Philosophy as a Moral Quest*, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.
- [5] Barbara W. Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1984.
- [6] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, translation, introduction and notes by George Schwab, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1976. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. By Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- [7] For an excellent account of the vision of Reconstructionist Christianity, see: Robert Parsons, "Christian Reconstruction: A Call for Reformation and Renewal." Available online at: <http://atheism.about.com/od/reconstructionist/>
- [8] For an affirmative account of the religious tenets of theonomy, see: Jay Rogers, "What is Theonomy?" Available online at: <http://www.forerunner.com/theofaq.html>. For a critical account of the politics of theonomy, see: "What is Theonomy?" Available online at: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/2850/Theonomy.html>
- [9] D.G. Tinder, "Denominationalism." Available online at: <http://mb-soft.com/believe/text/denomina.htm>
- [10] For a critical reflection on the political implications of premillennial dispensationalism, see: <http://www.gsenet.org/newsstnd/rch.php>
- [11] Ibid; Weinstein, *The Wilderness and the City*. For a compelling account of American classical philosophy as a continuing response to the "death of God in the West," see Chapter 7, "American Philosophy and Modern Individualism," (pp.129-156) where Weinstein argues that American thought, substituting the collective ideal of 'society' for God, is expressed in "successive appeals for deliverance to the community and ... parallel

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critiques of the war-spirit,” (p. 136).

[12] Weinstein, p. 154.

[13] Weinstein, p.155.

[14] For a contemporary account of the Wampanoag struggle which continues to this day and which most recently involved a majority US court decision that the Wampanoag were “not a tribe” for land repatriation purposes see: <http://www.inphone.com/seahome.html>

[15] For his theorization of sacrificial violence under the sign of the “scapegoat,” see: Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. By Yvonne Freccaro, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

Notes to Chapter 2: Twisted Strands

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[2] For an extensive survey of the history of technological innovation, see the Business and Finance section of “The History of the Telegraph and Telegraphy”

[3] The triangular trade relationship among China, Japan and the United States has, for example, been the focus of special business reports in *The New York Times* since 2004.

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[5] For an extended account of the Puritan origins of Harvard University, see: <http://www.news.harvard.edu/guide/intro>

Notes to Chapter 4: The End of the New American Century

[1] Michael and Deena Weinstein, “The Ruse of Empire,” *Newtopia Magazine*, *a journal of the new counterculture*. (<http://www.newtopiamagazine.net/archives/content/issue12/features/ruse.php>)

- [2] Ibid; p.3.
- [3] Ibid.,
- [4] "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century," *A Report of The Project for a New American Century*, September 2000, p.iv.
- [5] Ibid; p.i.
- [6] Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, Henry Holt and Company: New York, 2004. See particularly Chapter 6, "The Empires of Bases," pp.151-185.
- [7] Jean Baudrillard, "The Murder of the Real," in *The Vital Illusion*, Julia Witwer, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p.63. Quoted in Ted Hiebert, "SuperModels: Maps from the Imagination Machine," Open Space, Victoria, Canada, April 2006, p. 1.
- [8] Ted Hiebert, "SuperModels: Maps from the Imagination Machine," Open Space, Victoria, Canada, April 2006, p.1.
- [9] "Rebuilding America's Defenses," p.66.
- [10] Ibid; p. 60.



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